PART TWO

“FALTA DE CABEZAS:” THE MILITARY REFORMS AND POLICIES OF THE COUNT-DUKE OF OLIVARES, 1621–1643

Introduction

The renewal of the war with the Dutch Republic in the summer of 1621 brought into sharp focus the internal problems of the Army of Flanders. That year the Spanish army blockaded Jülich into surrendering but failed to capture Watervliet. In July of 1622 it invested Bergen-op-Zoom but three months later disease and desertion, the failure of the cavalry in pushing back sallies by the garrison and the frustrating inability to prevent supplies from entering the city, forced Spinola to raise the siege to the jeers of the Dutch.1 The army, exhausted by the effort, did not campaign again until 1624, and though there was consolation in successes in northwest Germany and the Palatinate as well as in a partial victory over the renegade Protestant commander Ernest of Mansfelt at the battle of Fleurus, this early reverse hinted that the tercios would face major difficulties and the war itself, hailed only a year earlier as the dawn of a new era of Spanish power, came to be seen by some (perhaps prematurely) as a dangerous mistake.2

Meanwhile, a new King, Philip IV, (r. 1621–1665) had just begun his

1 For the Spanish view, AGS E 2139, 221, don Iñigo de Borja to Philip IV, 25–9–22, Ibidem 225, don Iñigo de Borja to Infanta Isabella, 2–10–22, and Ibidem 237, CCE 23–10–22 as well as Malvezzi, Historia de los Primeros Años, 100, 120–124. The perspective of the besieged is in Lambert de Rycke, Nathan Vay and Job du Rieu, Bergues Sur le Soom Assiégée, (Brussels, 1867 originally published in Middleburg, 1623) in Collection de Mémoires Relatifs a l’Histoire de Belgique, XXXIV.

2 For the impact of the defeat at Bergen-op-Zoom in Spain see Jonathan Israel, “A Conflict of Empires,: Spain and the Netherlands, 1618–1648,” Past and Present, 76 (1977) 34–74 and his Dutch Republic, 102–105. Israel’s “Garrisons and Empire: Spain’s Strongholds in North-West Germany, 1589–1659,” in Conflicts of Empires, 23–44 argues that the early Spanish campaigns, at least in this theater, were successful. For two contemporary Spanish narratives of the battle of Fleurus see Cánovas del Castillo, Estudios, II 411–419, and on the 1622 campaign in the Palatinate and the Low Countries see “Correspondencia de don Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba…sobre la Guerra del Palatinado, Hecha en 1622” in Codoin LIV, 5–367.
reign. His two major advisors don Baltasar de Zúñiga and his nephew don Gaspar de Guzmán, Count of Olivares, (Duke of San Lucar after 1625 and thus “Count-Duke”) were advocates of broad reform for all of the monarchy’s institutions including its largest and most expensive, the Army of Flanders. Their express aim was, as Zúñiga put it, “to restore everything to the state it was during the reign of Philip II and to abolish the large number of abuses introduced under the recent government.” Clearly this aspiration to return to the days of the Prudent King would lead to a re-examination of post-Alba policies in the Army of Flanders. The moment seemed ripe for such an undertaking. As a prominent counsellor observed, the death of Archduke Albert in July of 1621 had at last opened the door for a thorough structural reform of the military administration in Brussels.

It was natural for Olivares to have a special interest in the Army of Flanders. His connections with the Low Countries were long-standing and close and military reform had been a kind of family project for many years. Both an uncle who had died fighting under Alba and his father had served in the Netherlands, while his cousin don Diego Mejía de Guzmán was an officer in Flanders. In addition, don Baltasar de Zúñiga had been a Captain in the tercios and had spent years in Brussels as representative of Philip III in the court of the Archduke where, together with his kinsman and friend, Cavalry General don Luis de Velasco, he had been a persistent voice in favor of reform.

Although he had no experience in war, the role of military leader and reformer was one very dear to Olivares who regarded himself as a fine strategic thinker and planner and who has been appropriately described by his psycho-biographer Gregorio Marañón as a “frustrated General,” possessed with “the passion to command.”

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3 Quoted in Elliott, *Olivares*, 82.

4 AGS E 2035, 94, CCE 30–7–21.

5 For Zúñiga’s critical views of the Spanish general staff see AGS E 620, 150, don Baltasar de Zúñiga to Philip III, 1–9–02 and Ibidem 152, don Baltasar de Zúñiga to Philip III, 31–10–02. On the Flanders connections of Zúñiga and Olivares see Elliott, *Olivares*, 11, 38, 67, as well as the genealogical table of the houses of Guzmán, Haro and Zúñiga in 18–19. Olivares was related by marriage to the Velascos. His wife was doña Inés de Zúñiga y Velasco. See also Coloma, *Las Guerras*, 149. For the death in battle of don Félix de Guzmán, Count of Olivares see Alba, *Epistolario*, III, 160–163, Alba to Philip II, 18–7–72.

6 Gregorio Marañón, *El Conde-Duque de Olivares. La Pasión de Mandar*, (Madrid, 1992), (first published in 1936), 133. A member of his cotterie, Virgilo Malvezzi stated that “war was his greatest inclination” and attempted to flatter his patron with a very positive assessment of his talent in that field: Malvezzi, *Historia de los Primeros Años*, 89.