

Analysis of the Underlying Reasons Behind the Fall of the Spanish Empire

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"The Spanish Empire eventually collapsed because of its expensive taste for warfare and conquest."

-Robert Kiyosaki

Outline:

- Introduction: Ineffective economic and political decisions and strategies are the reasons behind the fall of the Spanish Empire
- Double decline of the empire: A theoretical perspective of different historians and researchers
- Rise of Empire: Emergence of the Spanish Empire as the greatest power on the face of the earth
- Political rise: Wedding of monarchs Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon and other accomplishments
- Political fall: Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, separation of Netherlands, and other factors
- Disastrous condition: Unstable conditions of states and defeated wars
- Devastating effects: Impact of wars and conflicts on the Spanish Empire and its political system
- Economic fall: Silver and gold supply from Americans, inflation, wasted industries, taxes, and absence of middle-class
- Economic fall: A war's perspective and dwindling trading opportunities through the port of Seville and America, loss of credibility and confidence of merchants
- Conclusion: A brief reflection of overall position

Evidently, an empire is based on a fundamental state that is subject to the control of vast and numerous territories along with the diversity of the populace. Empires expand and indulge in rise by spreading the span of their influence and power; on the other hand, any lurch in controlling approach can cause a sudden fall of an empire. Historians and chronological annals analyze the processes and underlying reasons for the fall of different empires to generate a better comprehension of the subject. An empire practices political control over a huge territory comprised of many diverse groups of people.

Empires are generally addressed as a solo unit, and when historians talk about the fall of an empire, it means the decrepit condition of the central state, which can no longer exercise its vast span of authority. Such falls occur because states quit their existence or eradicate their power because some

of their territories and parts claim independence and autonomy. Empires are huge and complicated and therefore historians underline the decline of an empire in the context of an elongated procedural, instead of elaborating a single reason. Some major factors that can bring the fall to the fate of an empire are economic problems, societal and cultural matters, political issues, and environmental factors. The following paper analyzes the fall of the Spanish empire, which was apparently caused by the implication of ineffective political and economic strategies.

Scott Eastman (2014) affirms that the Spanish empire was not established enough long before its actual decline. Eastman quotes Matthew Restall and underlines that “surely the notion of Spain as an empire in perpetual decline long ago became a paper tiger.” (Eastman, 2014). For this reason, historians and annals assert that Spain encountered double failure. According to this posit, the Spanish Empire never developed synchronization with the alignment of other successful Western states. Moreover, the empire never heeded the need to adopt political and economic models in the region. Regardless of flawless success and triumphs and establishment of a broad realm, Spain never produced advantages from imperial growth and expansion as its competitors did. The similar flaws of Spanish strategies are pointed out by many other contemporary researchers, including Nicolas Masson de Marvilliers and Voltaire (Eastman, 2014). Both affirm the ignorant conditions of Spain and agree that it was the most unaware and uninformed nation throughout Europe, and for this purpose, several African-savaged regions did not even know about its existence of it.

The ignorant and not-so-popular Spanish Empire continued to remain like this till the dawn of the sixteenth century. The lack of natural resources and other flaws suddenly “and even miraculously, to have been overcome” (Elliot, 1970). Spain, according to a historical perspective, was just a geographical implication that all of nowhere turned into a chronological marvel. The alteration and transformation were significant and precisely observable. The subject change is stated by Machiavelli as he says, “We have in our days, Ferdinand, King of Argon, the present king of Spain, who may not improperly, be called a new prince since he has been transformed from a small and weak king into the greatest monarch in the Christendom.” (Machiavelli, 1532) Subsequent to the sudden transformation, diplomats from the court of Ferdinand indulged in great esteem, and people feared the armies of the king.

The marvels of monarchy persisted for a few tremendous decades, and throughout this era, Spain turned into the greatest and most powerful kingdom on the planet. Apparently, Spain was not the only nation in Europe that developed an international realm; “that honor, if honor it may be called, belongs to the Portuguese.” (Maltby, 2009) However, the Spanish Empire was different and unique from other worldwide empires in many aspects, which include an explicit span of command and sovereignty across and over huge lands as well as diverse civilizations that comprised millions of non-European populations. Along with diversity and hierarchy of commandments, the Spanish Empire also paid additional attention to its cultural, lingual, credibility, and other similar issues to a great extent. Through this epoch, fortune was kind to Spain and helped it inscribe an impressive expression on the face of the earth. Spain experienced both economic and political rise during this period Spain could become the master of European region, it had unshared opportunity to develop vast colonies and

conquer great territories overseas. There was an utter need to devise some smart strategies to administer the governmental system to manage the diverse and widespread empire. Only through a unique strategy of civilization could Spain have made an unmatched contribution to the cultural and traditional backdrop of Europe. But it never happened, and the Spanish empire fell down eventually.

The dwindling Empire of Spain got a chance to establish its condition by sustaining its political status through the wedlock of monarchs. The subject's wedding took place in October 1496, within the premises of the Valladolid, in a private residency. According to this ceremony, Sicily's King Ferdinand II, who was also the rightful heir to the throne of Aragon, became legally married to Isabella, the rightful heiress of Castile. Both Isabella and Ferdinand were second cousins and belonged to House Trastamara. The marriage is conducted in a secret manner because of several threats posed by Isabella's brother. The marital relationship of both heirs became the substantial reason for the unexpected rise of Spain. Through this wedding, Spain got funds and financing to support foreign military ventures. Moreover, through this knot, they both became capable of protecting the borders of their regions. Evidently, the wedding of monarchs connected the entire Spain and established its reputation as a strong catholic-based Christian country. Throughout the epoch of its political rise, Spain claimed its supremacy all across the Mediterranean region. The funds and adequate financing fueled up the armies in foreign lands, and they conquered the Turk's Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, Spain subjugated Portugal, and this triumph was so influential that it allowed Spain to take control over India and Africa.



It was the year 1492 when Christopher Columbus arrived back and brought the news about the existence of America. According to Columbus, he first considered it as an alternative path to the Indies, but eventually, he realized that it was merely a misjudgment. In short, the existence of a new place evoked a desire in the monarch couple to conquer that. It was a fashion in that era to keep conquering new lands. However, the Spanish empire believed in the most brutal ones. It was the beginning of a series of Spanish wars that lasted for about thirty years, and wrong and ineffective decisions and strategies brought decline to the great empire of Spain. It was the year 1588 when the Spanish Armada gathered and embarked to raid England. At that time, Philip was the king of Spain, and he commanded the dispatch of about one hundred and thirty ships for the subject invasion. However, regardless of their magnitude, England battleships undermined the Spanish war crafts and utilized their mighty long-ranged cannons to bombard the Spanish vessels. Consequently, the defeat marked a crippling effect on the Spanish dominance over seaways. Along with external blow, Spain encountered perplexity internally. The Netherlands claimed independence, left Spain, and started to fend for themselves. After these circumstances, Spain had to cope with independence because it was entirely reliant on the Netherlands to continue Catholicism as the underlying religion of the region.



The elongated series of unfortunate events and catastrophes led Spain to the colonial wars of 1898. (Balfour, 2011) It was the period from 1809 to 1810 when Buenos Aires, instead of Asuncion, opted as

the capital of the new viceroyalty of La Plata. The matter, in turn, evoked a surge of defiance in Sucre, and in due course, Bolivia was declared the first American province to generate insurgency against Spanish authorities. To support the rebel cause, a young Caracass officer named Simon Bolivar played an imminent role in the coup and attained control over Venezuela by snatching it from Spain. (Musicant, 1998) the ineffective battling strategies and impractical decisions of the Spanish Empire led it to tackle an uncompetitive war with Americans, which consequently ended in the defeat of Spain. The most basic reason for the subject's defeat was wrongly implicated in war tactics that dispersed the army within the battlefield. On the contrary, the American High Command handled all the troops very effectively and directed them to particular points according to the strategic planning that was formulated through information acquired by local rebels. American troops depended largely on the insurgents' army, particularly in Cuba. These rebel armies had already won the war virtually in the eastern region, engaged the Spanish stronghold at this point, and provided American forces to move forward in the direction of Santiago (Belfour, 2011).



The disastrous effects of the wars and defeat burst the bubble of Spanish supremacy, and unfortunately, this illusion was the pillar of the traditional and national cultural identity of Spain. Consequently, the trouncing of the last elegance of the Spanish Empire evoked an extreme post-imperial disaster among different fragments of Spanish societies. The political system of Spain was taken as the national character, which became questionable and uncertain even for the Spanish nation. The side effects of defeat were immense because it was the apex point of the Age of Empire. It was the era when conquest and ownership of different colonies, territories, and new lands were considered benchmarks of stability and success for a nation, which in turn allowed for their survival. As time passed, most of the nations of state merged with other European countries, and therefore, the nation-state of Spain became more and more vulnerable to the forces of centrifugal. Historians believe that this fadedness was the reason for the bumpy ride of modernization. On the other hand, several Spanish parts encountered swift procedural societal and economic alteration; meanwhile, the other broad regions of the realm were totally unmodernized. Consequently, the gap between the two parts of the empire generated an economic gap and augmented the cultural and political discriminations and differences, which in turn developed more complexity in resolving the crisis of the political system. In this way, ineffective decisions and strategies dragged the Spanish empire into the pit of decline.

Similarly, the ineffective and impractical strategies and tactics on economic grounds play a prominent role in the demise of the empire. Spain indulged a Golden Age which came with power and expansion of wealth. Throughout the golden age, Spain promoted different artists, playwrights, and poets. However, Spanish authorities allowed Americans to fuel the economy with their endless supply of silver and gold. This supply of valuable metal from America continued for about a full century and caused terrible and dreadful inflation. The phenomenon destroyed the Spanish industry to a great extent because, in the presence of foreign gold and silver, it was convenient to buy goods from outside of the country instead of producing goods within the state. Consequently, with each passing

year, Spain lost its capacity to meet the production demands even of its colonies, and as a result, most of the wealth was exchanged to the European marketplace to obtain desired manufactured products.

Similarly, the subject royal strategy to tackle the economic matters ruined the flourishing and profitable silk industry of Spain, which was established by Castile and centered in the Granada. Likewise, the imprudent governmental intervention wasted the agricultural fruition through the sixteenth century. Moreover, Spain practiced brutal and unfair practices throughout the 1500s and consequently banished thousands of Moors, Jews, and Muslims, and in due course, Spain lost the valuable treasures of artisan and business entities. Furthermore, the unequal implications of taxes freed rich men to pay governmental taxes, and phenomenally, all the burden of state-wide taxes laid heavily on the feeble shoulders of lower-class people. The Spanish government never permitted these people to commence their own businesses, and for this reason, Spain did not have a middle class. Furthermore, the import of unchecked gold and silver from America created severe inflation. Because of the abundance, the value of silver decreased in the local markets. On the other hand, Spain faced an increasing pattern of population growth. All these factors smoothed the pavement for the ultimate price revolution, which in turn strained the governmental budgets to a great extent.



The epoch of Castile was the most flourishing and prosperous era in Spain's history as it established economic stability to cater to Spain's requirements through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Nevertheless, the elongated and tiresome thirty-year war, along with Spanish squabbles with France, exhausted the financial potential of Castile. (Elliot, 2002) The tax rules and other relevant factors made it tougher to aid the material needs of armies on every front. As mentioned in the above content, the economic position of the Spanish was not very good because of their dumb policies, and the only sustainable trade source that was imperatively connected Seville with America was also facing downfall. Historians assert that it was the major fault of Spain's then-finance minister Olivares; his ongoing confiscations of remittance and involvement of silver through American trade led to destructible outcomes of ultimate failure. In due course, the trading faculties shed their trust because, with every passing day, the shipping of Seville depicted a perishing effect, and consequently, by the year 1640, the Spanish remittance of silver stuck suddenly because there remained no fleets of silver. As a result, the prolonged established confidence and credibility of Seville trading came to a halt and gradually crumbled the Spanish monarch along with it (Elliott, 2011).

By analyzing the above content, it becomes evident that the historical decline of the Spanish Empire was the outcome of many amalgamated factors, among which ineffective economic and political decisions and strategies were most prominent. Money and economic factors were in a fit through the seventeenth century, and regardless of tons and tons of imported American gold, the situation never got better. The lesson one can learn from the rise and fall of the Spanish Empire is that triumphing over an empire is one thing, and effectively and efficiently managing and organizing it is quite another thing. Conquerors' populace sometimes refused to accept the conquest of winners because of

unfair, brutal, and selfish practices of authorities, as happened with Spain and separated many populaces, including the Netherlands. In turn, such situations lead to wars and conflicts and require a big deal of money to tend to the needs of ammunition and fending weapons that, in turn, cause adverse effects on the economy of a kingdom. Such incidents, either minor or major, have the worst impact on the overall performance, reputation, and continuity of a realm. Take the instance of 1898's disastrous events, which damaged the remnants of the Spanish empire and pulled it into the dark pit of darkness.

Even after many decades subsequent to that disaster, the impact lingered within the field of armies and military and became a reference for reprimand. The ending of the Spanish monarchy as a systemized legend can be said to have taken place only when despotism ceased its vague and absurd financial and [economic policies](#), which was adjacent to the elongated notion of modernization in the augmenting tinge of progress and development through the 1960s to 1970s. The unfortunate conclusion of the Spanish imperial was substantially interconnected with the universal idea of secular and democratic values that were associated with the notion of modernization. It was the point when the Golden Age Spanish Empire lost its last colony in the year 1973, which was known as the Spanish Sahara, which, subsequent to its independence, pursued the path of democracy.

All the misery, misfortune, and disintegration of the great Spanish Empire gives a bottom line that not everything is perpetual and everlasting in this world, and like a business organization, great and mesmerizing empires, too, have to watch their steps before taking any substantial decisions. An empire, country and state consist on several little factors which require a cautious deal of handling smartly, otherwise no one can evade the peril of eternal demise of the entity, because through reckless decisions and strategic implications failure is inevitable one way or other. Spanish Empire was a country that elevated to the apex of success and then abruptly drawn to the hedonic depths, a realm that attained almost everything but also lost every bit of its achievements; it triumphed over the planet just to get vanquished in due course. Elliot says that the fruition of Spain was no doubt a wonder of Castile, but the failure and downfall of the great empire of Spain were also certainly caused by Castile. Elliot says, "Castile has made Spain, and Castile has destroyed it." (Elliot, 2011)

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