

To what extent did the English relationship with France and Spain change during the period 1558 to 1603. (45)

Since the end of Elizabeth's reign in 1603 historians have debated her foreign policy and how successful it was. There were two main countries that involved Elizabeth's foreign policy, France and Spain, with the state of the Netherlands being the most significant factor when it came to determining the relationship with both. There is no doubt that the relationships with both countries changed dramatically over the period. P.S Crowson states that 'the 45 years of Elizabeth's reign was a time of pessimism, of insecurity and of agonising national danger under the overshadowing power first of France and then of Spain.' This quote, although a reasonable undermining view, shows us the chronology of how relationships with France and Spain changed during the period. First, France was seen as the biggest threat but as the reign continued and moved into the 1570s we begin to see a shift towards deteriorating relations with Spain.

At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign in 1558 England was already at war with France as part of an Anglo-Spanish alliance. This war ended in 1559 and will mainly be remembered for the loss of Calais. Calais was given back to the French for a period of 8 years under the Treaty of Cateau - Cambresis. However, Calais was never returned as Elizabeth's military intervention during the First War of Religion in 1562 broke the terms of the treaty. This war shows obvious friction with France and better relations with Spain.

The most significant factors for poor relations with France in the early stages of Elizabeth's reign was firstly the religious differences and secondly Scotland. The religious differences stemmed from the Guise family who were devout Catholics and had been handed power when the 15 year old Francis II became King in 1559. In 1562 England signed the Treaty of Hampton Court which stated that they would support the French Huguenots during the First War of Religion, this furthered poor relations.

Scotland was traditionally apart of the 'Auld Alliance' with France against England. When King Henry II of France died in 1559, fears of the past started to become reality as Francis II was married to Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland and was brother to Mary of Guise who was Regent of Scotland. As you can see, the French influence over Scotland was reinvigorated. William Cecil feared a Catholic Crusade against England, led by France, and having persuaded the Council he sent financial and military aid to the Scottish protestants. This ended in 1560 which saw both French and English troops removed from Scotland and Mary Stuart recognised Elizabeth as the Queen of England. This turned out to be a success for Elizabeth, who herself didn't like the terms as she had hoped for the return of Calais, however it did protect England against an attack from Scotland and established protestantism north of the border.

Due to the Spanish presence in the Netherlands in 1566, Elizabeth changed her stance on France and began to form bonds with the French Crown as she was terrified of a Catholic Crusade against England involving both France and Spain. She began marriage negotiations with Henry, Duke of Anjou and then when these looked to be breaking down she moved to his brother Henry, Duke of Alencon. These negotiations were held mainly for diplomatic reasons to improve relations with France for protection against Spain. Although neither marriage occurred the two monarchs signed the Treaty of Blois in 1572 which was a huge turning point in Anglo-French relations. The Treaty of Blois committed both countries to aid one another militarily and navally should another country attack. This meant that Elizabeth had successfully allied the French against the Spanish, preventing a large threat to national security.

However, relations with France took a large set back in 1584 when the Duke of Anjou died. This spelt the end of England's attempts to use France for military intervention in the Netherlands. Most significantly though, was the signing of the Treaty of Joinville between the French Catholic League and Spain. This spurred Elizabeth into action as she believed a Catholic Crusade on England was

imminent. Therefore, she began support for Henry of Navarre who would later become Henry IV in 1589 and cement good relations with France for the remaining 14 years of her reign.

John Guy believed that Elizabeth's policy towards France was an attempt to reconcile conflicting strategic, religious and commercial interests at minimal costs. I feel that this view is correct, especially when you consider the support for the Huguenots, the French support against Alva in the Netherlands and the small amount of expenditure on foreign policy with France over the period.

As I have discussed previously, relations with Spain began well but rapidly declined into war by 1585.

One of the most significant factors for the was the Spanish presence in the Netherlands. Alva had 10000 men in the Netherland by 1567 and this soon increased to 50000. This posed a huge threat to national security as from the ports in the Netherlands the army was a days sailing away from the English coast, thus constituting a real possibility of a Catholic Crusade. Furthermore, the Netherlands contained the port of Antwerp where much of the English woollen cloth trade passed through. The cloth trade was one of the largest parts of English exports and D.M Palliser said that 'cloth accounted for 78% of all English exports.' The fact that Spain controlled the ports meant that they would harm the English economy massively as they did by placing embargoes on English trade in 1563, 1568 and 1586.

Furthermore, in 1568 the issue surrounding the capture of the Genoese Loan further deteriorated Anglo-Spanish relations. It caused the seizure of Spanish ships and a trade embargo was placed. According to Charles Wilson, Elizabeth's and Cecil's actions were 'costly and senseless', which considering the financial trouble of the Crown at the time seems to be a fair accusation.

As England approached war with Spain there were many internal plots that seem to contain Spanish influence. The Ridolfi Plot in 1571 suggested that there was an international catholic conspiracy against Elizabeth that originated largely from Spain and the Netherlands. Furthermore, many of the plots, most notably the Babington Plot in 1586 relied upon Spanish support coming from the Netherlands.

Moreover, another reason for relations worsening with Spain were the actions of John Hawkins in the New World. He led three expeditions to the New World to purchase slaves in Spain's world territories. These acts broke the Spanish control of trade and angered King Phillip.

War raged from 1585 after the signing of the Treaty of Joinville between the French Catholic League and the Spanish. This forced Elizabeth to commit to intervention and this was done in the Treaty of Nonsuch in 1585, where England promised to support the Dutch rebels against Spain. War was fought mainly in the Netherlands and Ireland through the Earl of Tyrone, however this was defeated in 1601 at Kinsale by English forces led by Lord Mountjoy. Further expeditions were launched in 1596 and 1597 but were prevented from landing by bad weather. Alan Smith expresses the religious importance of the Anglo-Spanish wars, he says they were 'a decisive event in Counter Catholic Reformation to suppress the reformation. Elizabeth's intervention in the Netherlands and later in France made sure that neither Catholicism nor Spain would win a complete victory.'

Over the whole of Elizabeth's reign we see an improvement in relations with France coinciding with a deterioration in relations with Spain. Wrexham argues that 'National policy was shaped as much by circumstance as any other factor.' This can be seen by the reaction to events like the Spanish presence in the Netherlands and the Treaty of Joinville, which are both huge turning points for Spanish and French relations respectively.