

“Matters Extern” 1558 - 85: International Developments and the Foreign Policy of Elizabeth I

Introduction

During this period, there are three CONSTANT THEMES:

1] Overarching THEME - DUALITY of **OCEAN** ⇔ **CONTINENT**

OCEAN dominant in times of PEACE; CONTINENT in times of WAR

That is, one of the Great Powers [SPAIN and FRANCE] tipping over the balance brings back fears of invasion and domination.

2] ‘*A Bone between Two Hungry Dogs*’

ENGLAND, being a middle-weight between the two GREAT POWERS, underwent 2 serious attempts by Spain to subjugate her between 1545-58...

Neither Great Power could afford to cede complete control of England to the other: France would then become totally encircled; Spain would be effectively cut off from the Low Countries. RESULT:

3] **TUDOR SHIFT** - from the time of Henry VIII to ER:

SPAIN goes Ally ⇒ Foe; FRANCE [& Scotland] go Foe ⇒ Ally

General Considerations

ER’s FEARS upon her accession to the Crown [Irrational?]* were basically twofold:

1] REBELLION: in her lifetime, there was a] 1535- Pilgrimage of Grace, b] 1549- coups against the Duke of Somerset, c] 1554- Watt’s Rebellion; then, *in 1569- the Northern Earls.

2] FRANCE: “(whose king is) bestriding the realm, having one foot in Calais and the other in Scotland” [Calendar of State Papers Domestic]; whose heir-apparent is married to Mary Stuart [so-called “Queen of Scots”].

COMMUNICATIONS

DOMESTIC - speedy and reliable [compared to ...]

OVERSEAS - dependent upon winds and waves: example- westerlies can delay messages from the Low Countries up to 2-3 weeks; patrols of the Catholic League on French byways, highwaymen, and other hostile interferers.

AMBASSADORS

1570 - the only RESIDENT one is in Paris.

1583 - Constantinople, but paid for by the TURKEY CO. [LEVANT Co., but after ‘92]

1585 - another added to the UNITED PROVINCES (Prot. Low Countries).

Most Embassies, like the one to SPAIN were short-term and [personally] costly for the Ambassadors.

Longer-term, economic missions were sent to the HANSE Ports, DENMARK, and

POLAND.

WAR COSTS

[troops, ships, supplies, subsidies] rose 3 times from 1550 to 1588 [£ 420k].

ER's "ordinary revenues" were never more than £ 250k [per year]: Crown lands, feudal 'incidents' [i.e. duties and rents], customs duties, 'duties of justice' [licenses]; but not taxes raised by Parliament.

The Gap was bridged by the Crown's "cheded treasure" [past savings and returns from investments in privateer exploits], sale of Crown lands, increases in taxes raised by Parliament, local offices that were not filled by officers, troop levies that the localities financed themselves, and the sale of monopolies* [with substantial license fees to the Crown]. *[Leicester invested in copper: alloyed in brass - ship fixtures, wool carding]

ER "CONTROLLED" Foreign Policy...

...rather than 'set' or 'implement' it. She had the final word: on the "Marriage Question", as she was using herself as a 'game-piece' therein; on the definitive use of England's treasure and martial might. In the main, she relied upon her Privy Councilors to interpret her will, fashion schemes accordingly, and execute them.

The Earlier Years

[Map, Wernham, p.24]

Strategic Situation

SPAIN,

with its influence and possessions [NOT even counting the HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE and the NEW WORLD] virtually surrounds England as ER takes the throne [1558], with a POPULATION 2 - 3 TIMES that of England.

By now, even though the flow of American gold is slowing, the SILVER mines of POTOSI are coming into major production.

BEGINNING IN the 1560's, ER had been URGED to orchestrate INTERCEPTION of the Spanish SILVER FLEET at the AZORES [by the time she ordered it, the '88 ARMADA soon became the priority]. Earlier, INDEPENDENT expeditions - sea and land - had taken on their own sense of legitimacy, and WASTED THE CROWN'S VALUABLE time, RESOURCES and 'political capital'.

FRANCE and her client state SCOTLAND

complete the total encirclement of England.

With a POPULATION 3 - 4 TIMES that of England, France constitutes the nearer and, therefore, greater danger:

under Mary Tudor, England LOST CALAIS, and the one-time Queen of France [Mary Stuart] also reigns over Scotland; many Roman Catholics in England as well as throughout Europe see her as the rightful Queen of England.

1559-'60: Principal Secretary CECIL assists the PROTESTANTS to throw the FRENCH OUT OF SCOTLAND; therefore, no more fear of French invasion through the "POSTERN GATE".

A newly REVITALIZED and AGGRESSIVE PAPACY [after the Council of Trent] becomes especially dangerous if it could channel the 2 GREAT POWERS' natural jealousy into an alliance against a radically PROTESTANT ENGLAND.

1562-'64: LEICESTER'S assistance of the HUGUENOTS proves ineffective, so ER never again really trusts "Protestant Rebels" again.

ENGLAND

maintains its place in this balance of power through the threat of its MARITIME ABILITIES, a matter of skill vs. sheer numbers.

England can be said to have the BEGINNINGS of a PROFESSIONAL NAVY, with an identified corps of seafarers as EXPERIENCED sea-fighting CAPTAINS, and a permanent, REGULAR naval ADMINISTRATION as part of the GOVERNMENT.

Although Spain and France can put afloat MORE sea-going HULLS, their naval enterprises are almost always under the COMMAND of nobility whose combat EXPERIENCE, if any, is USUALLY LAND-BASED warfare.

From the start,

ER'S GOVERNMENT was intent on DEVELOPING A SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN ARMS - naval guns, artillery, powder, and military subsistence stores - independent of any allies, trade, or her own powerful nobility.

Albion in Play

PHILIP II of SPAIN PERSUADES

a succession of POPES NOT to EXCOMMUNICATE ER [yet; in hopes that he would eventually be able to take her by marriage or conquest], so as to lessen the chances of French aggression against a militarily unprepared England

CARDINAL GRENVILLE

Philip II's Foreign Minister saw ER's Scott and French interventions as PROOF of her involvement in an INTERNATIONAL PROTESTANT CONSPIRACY, with the LOW COUNTRIES as the next TARGET [with the MERCHANT ADVENTURERS' outposts at Antwerp and Bruges being the first steps].

He used the 1563 London plague as pretext for the EMBARGO on English WOOL CLOTHE; but it only lasted till he was dismissed [for that reason?]

England had ongoing frictions with the HANSEATIC LEAGUE until the 1567 pact with HAMBURG.

Fall 1567

Spain's DUKE of ALBA creates the **BIGGEST** and best **MILITARY** force in **EUROPE**: an army of 50K in the **LOW COUNTRIES**, 90 miles from **PARIS**, 30 miles from the coast of **KENT**, little more than 100 miles from the **THAMES ESTUARY** and a **STRAIGHT**, water-borne **SHOT** to **LONDON**.

This causes the **FRENCH** army to **CONCENTRATE** towards the **NORTH**, so the **HUGUENOTS REBEL!!!**

ALBA NEEDS MONEY to keep his force intact and ready to react to all **STRATEGIC NEEDS**; so...

Philip II gets a **LOAN OF £80K** in **SPECIE** from the **GENOESE** bankers and sends it to **Alba**. The shipment, **FORCED** by **STORMS** and **HUGUENOT PIRATES**, toward **ENGLISH** ports, is brought **ASHORE** 'for safety', but...**WHO OWNS IT?**

The loan transfer being in dispute, **ER ASSUMES THE LOAN**; **ALBA** then begins to **SEIZE ENGLISH SHIPS**; **ER RETALIATES**, [after giving back the **HULLS** in question] attacking **Low Country** coastal shipping and defenses.

1569 - The REVOLT OF THE NORTHERN EARLS

MARY STUART sought refuge in **England** from her own **PROTESTANT REBELLION**, but had entangled herself in schemes that would marry her to the **DUKE of NORFOLK**; instead, he is **BEHEADED**, and she becomes **ER's "GUEST"**.

1570 - 'Regnans in Eccelcis'

Papal Bull [originally intended to lend support to the **Northern Earls'** cause, but published too late] declares **ER HERETIC** and her absolves subjects from allegiance to her. Results in **England's** military modernization during the **1570's** and **'80's**.

1571 - BATTLE of LEPANTO

TURKISH FLEET was **DEFEATED** by **Spain** and the **Catholic Alliance** [vice **League**]; the need for long-term rest/refit results in '73 treaty with **England**.

1572 :

MARCH - the SEA BEGGARS ['independent' **Calvinist Dutch nobles** and **privateers**] are **EXPULSED** from **England's** **Southeastern** ports [they go to **FRANCE**]; but there is **NEVER** any expulsion of the **WESTERN-based** privateers.

APRIL - TREATY of BLOIS made with **FRANCE** [but cut out **Mary of Scotland**]to protect **Low Country** Protestants, but **ER** wanted more parties involved.

So **ER** supports a force of "volunteers" in **FLUSHING** under **Sir Humphrey Gilbert**.
BUT...

AUGUST - ST BARTHOLOMEW'S DAY MASSACRE in **PARIS** and other major **French** cities plunges **FRANCE** into a 5-year **CIVIL WAR**, which effectively takes its strategic focus off of **England**.

The Path to War

“...secure that neither the French possess nor the Spanish tyrannise in the Low Countries”.

-Thomas Radcliff, Earl of Sussex

This concern dominates English foreign policy throughout the 1570's and into the early 1580's.

During this period, LEICESTER and WALSINGHAM push for ARMED INTERVENTION in the Low Countries, hoping for their eventual [Protestant] home rule and Philip II's acquiescence thereto, as the best outcome for all.

ER resists, yet lends MONIES to the ESTATES GENERAL [Brussels]; and then promised even more, when the GUISES threatened to INTERVENE for DON JOHN. Also during this period there is an INCREASE in OVERSEAS Economic VENTURES:

1578 - trade to the LEVANT; 1579 - EASTLAND COMPANY [Baltic and Danzig];
1581 - TURKEY COMPANY; 1583 - VENICE COMPANY

WAR AT SEA

For ER's ENGLAND, this was mainly a privateering, commerce-destroying endeavor. “[The English] are good sailors and better pirates, cunning, treacherous, and thievish.” [German visitor Paul Hentzer, 1598] Drake's circumnavigation is described [KR Andrews] as a “maritime voyage of a predatory kind.”

Thus, a COORDINATED, government-directed maritime STRATEGY was as yet difficult to implement...

AND the potential concentration of forces would lead to a WIDER DIVISION of what had been individual SPOILS.

1576 - “SPANISH FURY”

The name given to the mutiny by unpaid Spanish troops who sack the city of Antwerp, which results in the REVOLT by the UNITED [Netherland] PROVINCES; these form a government, calling itself the ESTATES GENERAL.

The revolutionary ‘new order’ is plagued with INTERNAL STRIFE: urban CALVINISTS, RC nobles, and a “PARISH - PUMP OUTLOOK” [Wernham].

1578 - DON JOHN TROUBLES the ESTATES GENERAL

with a massive military build-up, so ER sends help: GERMAN MERCENARIES, under JOHN CASIMIR of the Palatinate, BUT...

...as a CALVINIST - a “STIPENDING WARRIOR” - he is not welcome in the Southern [I.e. RC] PROVINCES.

1579 - The South reconciles with SPAIN; The E.S. [now only the Northern Provinces] agree to a pact with FRANCE [more precisely, in fact, with ANJOU].

ER believes ANJOU's CLAIM

only to be the DEFENDER, not Sovereign, of the Low Countries' liberties; not a little due to her being intrigued by his proposals of marriage.

As time and events unfold, ER and the Privy Council grow to see ANJOU's UNSUITABILITY as agent and ally: his ACCEPTANCE of a tentative offer of SOVEREIGNTY over the LOW COUNTRIES, lack of leadership and accountability to England's designs, and the IMPOSSIBILITY of the MARRIAGE prospect, due to his RELIGIOUS demands.

1580 - [Summer] ALBA marches on DON ANTONIO [King Sebastian killed fighting the Moors] and TAKES PORTUGAL and its EMPIRE and its ocean-going NAVY for PHILIP II, his Fleet thus almost EQUALING that of ENGLAND.

He sends 800 SPANISH and ITALIAN soldiers to IRELAND, to reinforce the Papal garrison at Smerwich: anti-papist English command there order their MASSACRE.

1584 :

ANJOU DIES, CATHOLIC LEAGUE/GUISE start another WAR OF RELIGION.
DECEMBER - TREATY OF JOINVILLE:

The LEAGUE ACCEPTS PHILIP II as PROTECTOR and paymaster; thus, a major French faction [anti-NAVARRÉ] no longer fears Spanish interference if they choose to move against ENGLAND over support of the HUGUENOTS.

PRIVY COUNCIL [MISTAKENLY] believes the Treaty is DIRECTLY AIMED at England. ER authorizes: ATTACKS on the GREAT BANKS FISHING Fleets; and DRAKE to gather MORE STORES and press more MEN.

SUMMER 1585 - TREATY OF NONSUCH

ER DECLINES SOVEREIGNTY but takes up PERSONAL PROTECTION of the LOW COUNTRIES; sends LEICESTER, an ARMY and £7K, against the Duke of PARMA in what - legally, at least - constitutes an ACT OF WAR.

BY THIS TIME, ENGLAND IS STRONG ENOUGH MILITARILY

for a 2-PRONG WAR against SPAIN:

LAND - small, yet WELL-EQUIPPED ARMY, experienced Leaders; PLUS [due to Regular TRAINING since '73] 11,000 TRAINED troops and 62,000 ARMED men for HOME DEFENSE.

SEA - From 1573 on, heavy SPENDING on SHIP CONSTRUCTION, both in numbers and improved design: The DREADNOUGHT was the first of the 'race-builts' - sleek lines and longer gun-decks result in greater speed and maneuverability, and increased firepower.

Private Papers, Timothy E. Duncan, 2011, 2016. Adapted from:

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