

Why did Elizabeth's relationship with Spain deteriorate due to political challenges?



The Netherlands

Background

During **Elizabeth's** reign, **King Philip II** of Spain ruled over a vast European Empire. This included the Netherlands. Although Spain was a Catholic country, the majority of people living in the Netherlands (The Dutch) were Protestant. Protestant ideas had spread and grown throughout the Netherlands. King Philip became determined to crush Protestantism. In 1567, he sent a large Spanish army under the control of the **Duke of Alba** to the Netherlands to crush Protestants with violence. The Dutch rose against **King Philip II** in rebellion.

Impact on England

Elizabeth I was concerned by this conflict in the Netherlands. England relied heavily on trade from wool and cloth in the Netherlands and these events disrupted trade. She was also concerned about the growing power of Catholic Spain in Europe and was under pressure from her councillors to help the Dutch rebels, as fellow Protestants. However, Elizabeth did not want to take any direct action to help the Dutch rebels, as she feared provoking all out war with Spain.



Reasons for and against intervention in the Netherlands

Reason	For or against?
1. King Philip II may retaliate and support Catholics in England against Elizabeth I.	
2. The Netherlands is a close neighbour to England. If Spain continue their control of the Netherlands, it will be easy for them to invade.	
3. Action against a Catholic country like Spain may provoke other Catholic nations like France into forming an alliance against England.	
4. Giving help to the Dutch Protestants would be expensive.	
5. The Netherlands was a Protestant nation like England. Helping them could help reduce the power of Spain in Europe.	
6. Elizabeth's councillors were putting pressure on her to help the Dutch.	



Elizabeth's decision to intervene

Background

Although **Elizabeth I** was concerned about taking any action in the Netherlands that would trigger all out war with Spain, in the 1570s she pursued a policy of non-direct intervention. This meant she would help the Dutch, but only in a way that it was not obvious to Spain.

Impact

One way that Elizabeth I tried to help the Dutch against Spain was by licensing **privateering**. Privateers such as **Sir Francis Drake** to attack Spanish ports, colonies and ships and steal their treasure. This would help the Dutch by damaging Spain's finances and their navy. Elizabeth also focused on improving relations between England and France. She did this by offering a marriage alliance to the heir to the French throne, **the Duke of Alencon**. France and Spain were enemies and she believed that Spain would be so scared of an alliance between England and France that they would give control of the Netherlands to the rebels.

These actions angered **King Philip II** as he saw privateering as a direct attack on Spanish interests and disliked the prospect of a marriage alliance between England and France. However, Elizabeth's actions did not at this point, provoke all out war.



The Pacification of Ghent, 1576

Background

In 1576, the Spanish government was bankrupted after years of fighting the expensive and ongoing war against the Dutch. The Spanish troops who were stationed in the Netherlands had gone without pay as a result. In response, the Spanish troops mutinied and pillaged the city of Antwerp in the Netherlands. This event was known as the **'Spanish Fury'**.

Impact

This display of violence shocked the Dutch and as a result all of the provinces in the Netherlands united together against the Spanish. They drew up a list of demands called the **'Pacification of Ghent'** which they wanted Spain to agree to. Firstly, they wanted Protestants to be able to practice religion freely. They also wanted Spanish troops to leave the Netherlands and a restoration of political freedom.

Elizabeth I responded by sending the Dutch £100,000 to support the demands and ensure Spain followed them. In February 1577 the brother of King Philip II, **Don Juan**, arrived and agreed to the **Pacification of Ghent**. It appeared to Elizabeth that this would lead to an end of the conflict in the Netherlands.



Spain reconquers the Netherlands

Background

Although at first, Spain appeared to agree to the demands of the **Pacification of Ghent** in 1577, **King Philip II of Spain** sent a new Spanish army to the Netherlands to try and re-establish control there. **Elizabeth I** wanted to help the Dutch, although she was still concerned about provoking war with Spain. She could not send an English army in her name to help the Dutch, as this would be an act of War against Spain. Instead, she sent a **mercenary army** of 6,000 volunteers to help the Dutch.

Elizabeth's **mercenary army** was unsuccessful in pushing the Spanish out of the Netherlands. In 1578, The Dutch Rebels looked elsewhere to France for support in their fight against Spain. This force lead by the **Duke of Alencon** was also unsuccessful against the formidable Spanish forces led by the **Duke of Parma**. Later that year, Alencon withdrew his French forces from the Netherlands.

Impact

By 1579, Spain had successfully defeated much of the Dutch resistance. However, Elizabeth I was still reluctant to directly intervene to help the Dutch.



The Treaty of Joinville, 1584

Background

By 1580, it was clear that Spain was winning in the fight against the Dutch in the Netherlands. Spain's position was made even stronger when in 1580, Spain was able to expand its empire by gaining Portugal. This allowed **King Philip II** to grow the size of the Spanish navy.

Impact

Elizabeth I was now deeply concerned about Spain's growing success. In 1581, she gave the French **Duke of Alencon** £70,000 to resume his fight against Spain in the Netherlands. However, Alencon's campaign was unsuccessful and he withdrew his forces in 1583. In June 1584, he died. Later in July 1584, the leader of the Dutch rebels, **William Duke of Orange** was assassinated by the Spanish.

The Spanish were now more determined than ever to crush the Dutch Protestant rebels and reassert complete control over the Netherlands. Later in 1584, King Philip II made an alliance with the **French Catholic League** who were determined that another Protestant would not become heir to the throne. This alliance was sealed in the '**Treaty of Joinville**'. France and Spain were now united in their aim to rid the Netherlands, and Europe, of Protestantism. Elizabeth I now could not delay in taking action against Spain. In 1585 she signed the **Treaty of Nonsuch** with the Dutch to intervene in the Netherlands directly. This was interpreted by Spain as an act of war.



Comprehension Questions

1. What did Elizabeth I do in the 1570s to help the Dutch in a way she hoped would avoid war with Spain?
2. What were the consequences of the Pacification of Ghent which the Dutch rebels issued in 1576?
3. What were the consequences of the Treaty of Joinville signed in 1584?
4. How did Elizabeth I give support to the Dutch rebels between 1577 and 1584?
5. **Challenge question:** How did Elizabeth I's actions in the Netherlands make relations with Spain worse?



Glossary: Page 1

Privateering - The act of attacking enemy ships at sea with the license to do so from the government.

The Duke of Alba- A Spanish noble and military commander. King Philip II sent him and his army to the Netherlands in 1567 to halt the spread of Protestantism.

The Duke of Palma- A Spanish noble and military commander who was sent to the Netherlands by King Philip II of Spain in 1579 to establish control over the Netherlands.

Don Juan - A military commander and half-brother to King Philip II of Spain.

The Duke of Alencon- The heir to the French throne and suitor of Elizabeth I. He was sympathetic towards Protestants.

The Spanish Fury- In 1576, Spanish troops mutinied and pillaged the city of Antwerp.

The Pacification of Ghent- A set of demands issued by the Dutch in 1576.



Glossary: Page 2

Mercenary army- A private army which fights for those who employed them.

The Catholic League- A group of powerful French catholics who wished to end Protestantism in Europe.

The Treaty of Joinville- An agreement signed in 1584 between Spain and the French Catholic league to end Protestantism in Europe.

The Treaty of Nonsuch- An agreement Elizabeth signed in 1585 agreeing to help the Dutch in their fight against Spain in the Netherlands.

