THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

This Seat of Mars:

Catholic Propaganda and the Coming of War in Elizabethan England

By

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**Abstract:** In the autumn of 1585 Queen Elizabeth signed the Treaty of Nonsuch with the Estates General of the Low Countries. By pledging to send English troops and supplies to aid the Estates in their rebellion against Philip II of Spain, Elizabeth’s actions were seen as a declaration of war. Such action was incredibly risky given that Philip’s power far outclassed Elizabeth’s. This thesis will answer why it was that Elizabeth elected to enter formal war to aid the Dutch in 1585 given that such a dangerous prospect had been avoided at all costs in the years prior. It is argued here that a crucial factor in the Privy Council’s, and consequently Elizabeth’s, decision to enter a formal war against Spain was the Catholic propaganda campaign of 1584, a factor absent in previous answers to this question. In this campaign exiled Jesuit priests made calls for religious toleration. The Elizabethan regime, increasingly paranoid by the revelation of the Throckmorton Plot and the assassination of William of Orange, interpreted this Catholic campaign as the subtle roots for rebellion. They thus it necessary to enter a formal war in the Low Countries as a means to outsource war which they considered inevitable.

**I[[1]](#footnote-1)**

In August 1588 Queen Elizabeth I rode out to inspire her troops gathered at Tilbury near the Essex coast. There they gathered, ready to defend England and their queen from an invasion preparing just across the Channel in Dunkirk. Walking amongst her people, Elizabeth inspired her troops with her famous ‘Tilbury Speech’; “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman” she said, playing to the stereotypes of the day, “but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too.”[[2]](#footnote-2) The irony of course is that by this point, the Armada had been forced around the Essex coast and was limping its way around Scotland. Nonetheless Elizabeth’s speech sparkles to this day in the historical imagination, a hallmark of the ‘Golden Age’ of Elizabethan England.[[3]](#footnote-3) Staring down the prospect of annihilation, England had weathered the storm against Europe’s greatest power, a force far outclassing her own. It can be hard at times, then, to remember just how close England came to being invaded and possibly conquered, how uncertain the future must have looked in the days before the Tilbury Speech, how risky and uncertain an open war with Spain was. Elizabeth and her contemporaries, of course, knew all of this. So why then was it that, three years earlier in the autumn of 1585, they had elected to enter an open war with Spain? Why not earlier in the 1580s or why not avoid the situation totally?

The main theater of focus driving English foreign policy at this time was the rebellion of the Low Countries, today the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Belgium. Rebellion had broken out in this Spanish territory almost two decades before in 1566. By 1576 the Pacification of Ghent had united the provinces of the Low Countries against their Spanish overlords as Protestant and Catholic alike declared themselves independent from Philip II. This peace however fell apart in 1579 as the northern and southern provinces split on mainly confessional lines with the southern provinces reaffirming their loyalties to Philip in Spain and the northern provinces maintaining their independence behind their leader, William of Orange.[[4]](#footnote-4) Whether the English ought to help their Protestant neighbors rebelling against Spain and in what capacity was a question that dominated English political discussion in the early 1580s, leading to an intense factional disputes. Some, like William Cecil Lord Burghley, the Lord Chancellor, opposed entering into open war. Pragmatically, Burghley and those in his camp saw war as an uncertain strain on national resources and revenues. Elizabeth herself was rather inclined to agree with this assessment.[[5]](#footnote-5) Others like Sir Francis Walsingham, the queen’s Principal Secretary, and Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester, the queen’s favorite and one time rumored lover, favored war. They were the more ‘forward Protestants’ who thought it best that Elizabeth guide England by a sort of moral politik to champion the Protestant cause internationally.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The ever-shifting dynamics of the Low Countries through the years 1580-1585 are vital to understanding why England would go to war with Spain but they do not account for the whole answer. As important and, occurring in tandem with the foreign developments, was the domestic struggle. The major touchstone of domestic politics during the Elizabethan period centered around anti-Catholic fears focused on the activities of one woman in particular; Mary Stuart the Queen of Scots. Mary was Elizabeth’s cousin, a descendant of Henry VIII through his sister Margaret. Tall, intelligent, and endlessly charming the Queen of Scots stood posed a perpetual danger to the Protestant regime as the obvious Catholic candidate to replace them.[[7]](#footnote-7) The anxieties surrounding Mary’s very existence and the prospect of a Catholic uprising in England accompanied by a foreign invasion of Europe’s Catholic powers loomed over the Privy Council. The prospect of such an invasion and uprising seemed perilously close following the revelation of the Throckmorton Plot of 1583.[[8]](#footnote-8) This paper, though it agrees whole heartedly with the centrality of those events, claims that there was more to it than that.

At the center of the Privy Council’s, and subsequently Elizabeth’s, decision to enter an open war with Spain was an intense and, in the eyes of the regime, terrifying Catholic propaganda campaign in the summer of 1584. From Rouen, Robert Parsons, John Leslie, and Cardinal William Allen produced a series of three books aimed at making a pitch for religious toleration for Catholics in England. Parsons and Allen were English Jesuits in exile and, in the eyes of the regime, two of the realm’s most active enemies pursuing the re-Catholicism of England from abroad. Leslie, a Scottish Catholic priest, was a close ally and personal friend of Mary Stuart. He had acted as ambassador between the Queen of Scots and the pope previously in 1575 and was a fierce defender of Mary’s ominous claim to Elizabeth’s crown to the chagrin of the Protestant regime[[9]](#footnote-9). Efforts of re-Catholicization such as the English Jesuit Mission of 1580-1581 (of which Parsons had been a leader) had predated this printed campaign and had cost priests like Edmund Campion their lives.[[10]](#footnote-10) In the eyes of the regime, these attempts to re-Catholicize England were tantamount to undermining Elizabeth’s authority as a monarch and they feared ceaselessly that such attempts would coincide with efforts to replace Elizabeth with Mary Stuart. It is then when we follow the advice of recent scholarship and place the voices of England’s most marginalized group, those English Catholics exiled on the continent, at the center of the narrative does the whole picture become clear.[[11]](#footnote-11) The end of the Privy Council’s factionalism in 1584 regarding the Low Countries was as much in response to this Catholic propaganda campaign as it was a response to the Throckmorton Plot and the assassination of William of Orange. This again is not to say that theories which have highlighted those two events are necessarily incorrect. Indeed the Throckmorton Plot and Orange’s death are axial pieces of context. They are however incomplete. It is only when we put the actions of English Catholics where they belong, at the center of the narrative, do we understand the entire picture. In this sense, given its centrality in explaining the decision to go to war, the Catholic propaganda campaign seeking a sort of religious toleration for peace had ironically tragic results.

This paper will proceed by exploring previous answers regarding the causes of the Anglo-Spanish War and will then offer a new take placing English Catholics at the center of the narrative. Section II will begin by exploring previous scholarly answers. There it will be explained how these previous answers are insufficient given that the Catholic Propaganda Campaign plays no role. The following sections will then shift away from historiography to elaboration and analysis of the regime’s considerations from 1580-1585. Section III will show how, between 1580-83 the Privy Council came to uniformly consider Spain to be England’s most dangerous foe as compared to France, how the Council thus sought to check Spanish power committing England to war but rather by funding the Duke of Anjou as a proxy, and how this strategy failed. Section IV will explore how the aftermath of Anjou’s failure prompted recalculations from the Privy Council in late 1583, why again they decided to avoid open war at this juncture and instead tried to sue for peace, why this peace failed to materialize, and what affect the death of the Prince of Orange had on the Privy Council’s considerations. Section V will highlight most what is novel in this paper; that the Catholic Propaganda Campaign of 1584, when placed at the center of events and viewed through the paranoid lens of the Elizabethan regime was a crucial part to the eventual decision that Elizabeth would need to enter war against Spain, an entity whose power and wealth far outclassed England’s. This campaign, following the revelation of the Throckmorton Plot and occurring in tandem with Orange’s assassination, frightened the regime so much that they concluded war was absolutely inevitable. They feared seriously a simultaneous invasion launched up the mouth of the Thames from the Low Countries accompanied by domestic rebellion amongst English Catholics behind Mary Stuart. In order to prevent this certain calamity, the Privy Council concluded in late 1584 that England had no choice but to check Spanish power abroad and, in so doing, outsource the upcoming conflict to a foreign rather than domestic theater.

**II**

As will be argued, the centrality of the Catholic propaganda campaign of 1584 is axial for explaining why Burghley and Elizabeth came to see a formal war as necessary. This is not to say that the campaign can explain the coming of war independently. The Throckmorton Plot and the assassination of the Prince of Orange are vital pieces of context for explaining the deterioration of Anglo-Spanish relations but they themselves are not the whole picture though they tend to be portrayed that way in previous answers to this question.

It has been argued that Elizabeth, in the absence of Orange, rather begrudgingly acquiesced to the whims of her hawkish advisors who had been pushing for open war for years.[[12]](#footnote-12) Though naturally prone to avoid war and guard the spending of her money conservatively[[13]](#footnote-13) the “the facts were too strong for her”[[14]](#footnote-14) to ignore as the shape of a Catholic vs Protestant conflict seemed to form itself. Other historians have agreed in emphasizing a feeling of desperation from regime’s perspective. This was, they claimed, a time in which England was watching the situation on the continent go from bad to worse in ways that seemed, despite their efforts, tantalizingly outside of their control. Eventually when the decision came for war, Elizabeth was moved by the desperate state of the Low Countries following Orange’s death. The fallout of Elizabeth’s own failed policies (such as Anjou as proxy) and inactions to the list of factors that brought England to war. For better or for worse, then, Elizabeth receives more of the blame or in these accounts.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Other explanations have been even divergent. Rather than the desperate act of a helpless or desperate state, some portray England on the ascent as Spain descended claiming that “when at last war came, in 1585, Elizabeth, Burghley, and Walsingham had brought their country to such a strength and into so favorable a position that England could take on and defeat the greatest power of the day.”[[16]](#footnote-16) This answer does grant that Elizabeth was caught between the determination of Catholic Europe to overthrow her and the determination of her own people to defend Protestantism by defending herself and England. She was then “doomed to lead a war of religion”[[17]](#footnote-17) though powerful enough, in these estimations, to certainly succeed.

More recent explanations have re-highlighted the centrality of Orange however they place more emphasis on revelation of the Throckmorton Plot and the wider history of Catholic conspiracies in general in their answer. In this account, the Privy Council agreed unanimously on the danger that Spain presented after 1572 and the attitudes of the council regarding Spain are discussed in a way that makes them seem universal.[[18]](#footnote-18)

While most of these explanations[[19]](#footnote-19) have a fair deal of truth to them they are not the whole truth. The portrayal of a religious war misses how painstakingly the regime sought to make absolutely clear that their martial aid in the Low Countries was not for religious reasons but rather reasons more related to secular interests i.e. the maintenance of trade and the preservation of national security. Other accounts hits closer to the mark however the claims of the Privy Council’s unanimity regarding Spain doesn’t seem to account for the intense factionalism between the pro and anti-war parties especially present in the summer of 1580. As will be show the Privy Council would come around to such a view of an overwhelmingly dangerous Spain, but not until much later in the fall of 1584.

It's clear that these previous scholarly answers vary rather significantly. They do, however, have one thing in common; the Catholic propaganda campaign of 1584 is absent as a major focal point in any of their explanations. The following sections will lay bare the context within which the Catholic propaganda push occurred, the context that has dominated the scholarly explanations addressed above, starting in 1580 and concluding in 1585. The Catholic mobilization of the public sphere will then be contextualized and analyzed from the regime’s point of view, demonstrating how vital that campaign was to the decision of the Privy Council to advise open war. Only then will the answer for England’s entrance into war with Spain be totally complete.

**III**

The first step in England’s coming to war against Spain revolved somewhat obviously around the Privy Council coming to view Spain as the larger threat to England as opposed to their ancient enemy, France. Throughout much of 1580 there was a split in the Privy Council on this question. This section will address why it was that some members of the Privy Council saw Spain (as opposed to France) as the lesser of two evils regarding the Low Countries, why it was that their minds were changed, how they advised Elizabeth to proceed following this reevaluation and to what effect their actions unfolded. It will emerge that by the early months of 1583 Spain was still and would remain the main enemy to English security though it was not yet an unyielding one and thus open war, despite significant failures of English foreign policy, was not yet necessary in some minds.

On July 10th 1580 the Privy Council met at Nonsuch to discuss the situation in the Low Countries and determine how they should best advise Elizabeth to proceed in that region. At this point the situation, in the eyes of the Elizabethan regime, to be avoided at all costs was not the Spanish annexation of the Low Countries but rather a French annexation. Burghley recorded that “by advertisement it seemeth that the Prince of Orange and the States of the Low Countries are disposed to commit themselves and their countries to the government and rule of Anjou”. The heir presumptive was not operating independently in this venture. It seemed likely “that he should have the aid of the French King his brother so as it is very probable that the said countries will be annexed to the crown of France in the time coming”. Should this happen, the Council thought it certain that England “by this alteration will be weakened and for lack of the ancient league with the Low Countries should become subject to the will and power of France”[[20]](#footnote-20).

Spain, on the other hand, didn’t currently have a firm enough grasp on the Low Countries to pose such a threat and moreover lacked the means to establish such a grasp. The Iberian Peninsula was presently engulfed in the War of the Portuguese succession in which Philip was squaring off against Don Antonio, the bastard son of the prior king. Spain then was sufficiently occupied with Iberian affairs meaning that Phillip had “no forces in the Low Countries to withstand the French, and that for burden and charges of an army to be dressed in haste in the Low Countries will beggar him considering the great charge he is at in Portugal”. Elizabeth’s councilors were operating under the assumption that, as things stood, it would be difficult for Phillip “to end that war to his honor unless he lay hands on the crown which he cannot do but with the length of time”[[21]](#footnote-21). France then was the more serious enemy and thus the one which needed addressing.

As the Council saw it, there were three main courses of action that might be taken to prevent a French annexation of the Low Countries. First they considered that if Spain could be occupied by domestic tension so could France. “To protract the troubles in France,” they reasoned, would “serve to impeach the enterprise in the Low Countries, or, by peace to be made, provide in some way to hinder it.”[[22]](#footnote-22) This could be done by secretly funding Protestant Princes like the Duke of Casimir, the Prince of Conde, and Henry King of Navarre as well as the Huguenot churches. By so doing they could discreetly but effectively kick the French beehive of religious turmoil. At the same time that these Protestant Princes were being encouraged to undermine French peace, a representative would be sent to Philip encouraging him to make peace in his rebellious region. Elizabeth’s representative would “make him (Philip) understand that she (Elizabeth) is informed that his said subjects of his Low Countries are fully determined to give themselves over unto the protection of France.” The representative was to encourage this peace by establishing a sense of urgency, making clear that “unless he (Philip) should yield unto some speedy remedy, he shall not be able to prevail.” She would therefore “advise him rather to yield to hard conditions, having regard to necessity which has always overruled the greatest monarchs of the world, then to hazard the loss of those countries.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

A third option of direct intervention was proposed as well and likely was the position of those hawkish courtiers like Walsingham, Leicester, and Sidney. Such aggressive action however could risk incurring both France and Spain’s ire at once and thus a more passive approach was taken. The French beehive would be kicked behind the scene while Phillip would be encouraged to make peace. This policy was made clear to Bernadino de Mendoza, the Spanish ambassador in London, shortly after the council at Nonsuch concluded. England’s foreign policy towards the Low Countries then was one which considered France to be the bigger threat. But that, contrary to the assumptions of the Privy Council, was soon to change.

A crucial component to these considerations in the summer of 1580 was the relatively handicapped position which Spain currently occupied. There was no way as things stood that Philip, for all his might, could actually conquer the Low Countries by force. Surely he would have to settle for some sort of peace sooner rather than later. In September of 1580, however, Philip’s campaign against his Portuguese rival, Don Antonio, took a pro-Spanish turn. On September 10th, Walsingham was informed by Walter Cobham, the English ambassador in Paris, that “the Duke of Alva (a Spanish general) fought with Don Antonio king of Portugal in which conflict the Portuguese were overthrown.” On the same day Stafford reported that “the Duke took Lisbon” and concluded that “the affairs of Portugal are very miserable.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Only months before it had seemed unthinkable that Philip could focus his efforts on the Low Countries. Now the main source of distraction (Portugal) under Phillip’s control meaning that he now had control over both Spain and Portugal’s colonies in the Western hemisphere. Spain’s wealth and thus its ability to make war had grown to powers of freakish proportion much to the chagrin of its neighbors. Consequently talks of an Anglo-French alliance surfaced.

The talks surrounding a possible alliance against Philip were subsumed into wider negotiations that had recently been faltering between England and France; the prospect of marriage between Elizabeth and Francis, Duke of Anjou. The marriage negotiations had started back in 1579 and, as prior scholarship reminds us, were Elizabeth’s last discussion of marriage and her most serious.[[25]](#footnote-25) But Elizabeth met significant public backlash from the prospect of this match in the form of John Stubbs’s famous 1579 tract, *The Gaping Gulf*. Though recent scholarship is somewhat ambiguous as to whether Stubbs was writing independently or at the behest of a powerful court patron,[[26]](#footnote-26) he was connected to Burghley via friends who served as secretaries for the Lord Treasurer.[[27]](#footnote-27) In *The Gaping Gulf* Stubbs laid out the political and social depravity he feared would follow a marriage between England’s Protestant Queen and the French/Catholic Duke. The match to Stubbs was nothing short of a popish plot to undermine the international position of Protestantism. “They of the reformed religion,” Stubbs argued, served “as a brazen door, and an iron wall, against our popish enemies.” The pope therefore by this match “seeks to sunder them from us and us from them, and so by unbarring our brazen door and treading down our wall, to lay open his passage to us.”[[28]](#footnote-28) Stubbs’s rough speech earned him Elizabeth’s ire. Found guilty of seditions libel Stubbs lost his right hand for writing *The Gaping Gulf* yet the tract was ultimately successful; Elizabeth could not marry Anjou without risking the support of her most adamant Protestant subjects.

Though the marriage talks resumed in tandem with the talks of an Anglo-French alliance following the defeat of Don Antonio, Elizabeth still knew that the Anjou match could not happen. It was still possible however that they might make “a secret accord for the Low Countries.”[[29]](#footnote-29) In July 1581 Sir Francis Walsingham, the Queen’s principal secretary, was sent to Paris with instructions for making such an accord. His instructions were to hammer home the fact that, though the alliance would be explicitly anti-Spanish, it would also be one in which both Elizabeth and Henry would back Anjou to lead the Dutch revolt without actually declaring England or France to the conflict formally. Walsingham was to convince the French that, because “the King of Spain’s greatness should be impeached”, Elizabeth would “be content (though we do not marry) to join with the French King to aid Monsieur {Anjou} with a reasonable portion, so as it may not be so overtly, as thereby to provoke a war upon us and our Realm.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

For all the fear these two realms had of Philip no such alliance materialized. The French thought Elizabeth too fickle to trust to an alliance without a marriage to solidify the pact. A frustrated Walsingham wrote to Burghley on August 20th, 1581 that he “would to God her Majesty would resolve one way or the other”, noting that her indecision was “greatly to her Majesties dishonor, and extreme grief of us here that are acquainted withal.”[[31]](#footnote-31) By winter the writing of the alliance’s failure was on the wall and thus Elizabeth elected to exercise a version of the former plan; she would fund Anjou to lead the Dutch revolt while keeping herself away from actively participating in the fighting. In December 1581 Burghley drew up and approved the loan for Anjou in which he would be given 30,000 pounds presently with another 60,000 to follow in the coming weeks[[32]](#footnote-32). Elizabeth’s policy in the Low Countries then had shifted from anti-French to anti-Spanish and one which would be pursued with cold war tactics.

Now funded with English money, Anjou’s expedition in the Low Countries began in February 1582. At Antwerp he “was received into this town and before his entry sworn Duke of Brabant and Marquis of the Empire at a place appointed for that purpose…at which time also he took an oath to maintain the privileges of this country.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Unfortunately for Anjou and his sponsor, his arrival immediately created religious tension between himself and the Protestant commons over the resurgence of the Catholic mass. William Herle, an intelligencer connected to Burghley’s circle and stationed in Antwerp, wrote the Privy Council noting that Anjou had been petitioning the town magistrates to approve the “exercise of the mass” which the magistrates, being somewhat dependent on Anjou, were “with great displeasure and regret of mind…constrained unto it, which in the end will breed disorder.”[[34]](#footnote-34)

Such immediate tension upon Anjou’s arrival was intensified when, after only a month of his presence, an assassin very nearly killed the Prince of Orange, Anjou’s chief ally in the region and the leader of the Dutch revolt. On March 18th an assassin surprised Orange’s walking party and fired a shot “taking the prince between the ear and the end of the jaw of the right side, passing clean through the left cheek.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Though Orange would survive the ordeal his recovery left him relatively absent from the affairs of the Low Countries and thus eyes turned to Anjou even more. With added responsibility in Orange’s absence his failures to stop the Spanish advance from the south incurred more and more unpopularity. In June he failed to arrive to the besieged town of Oudenarde in time to relieve it from the Spanish. Upon Oudenarde’s surrender Thomas Stokes, Walsingham’s intelligencer in Bruges, informed his patron that “this town is become so passionate for the loss of Oudenarde, as it openly exclaims of the French and of Monsieur, uttering plainly that they find nothing but treasons and deceits in them.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Following this loss Anjou relocated his forces to Dunkirk and, for lack of victuals in their camp, dispersed his troops throughout the country to garrison with the Dutch locals. Stokes again informed Walsingham that this “great sudden altercation” was “to the great misliking of all men here.”[[37]](#footnote-37)

The snowballing of Anjou’s unpopularity reached its zenith in the early days of 1583 when, after months of failure after failure and quarreling with local magistrates, French forces attempted to seize Antwerp, Bruges, and other surrounding towns in Flanders by force. The Dutch in all places rounded on the French, expelling them from the cities and rendering the coup a failure. However there were serious consequences to this faile coup, the height of Anjou’s folly. Stokes, writing to Walsingham again from Bruges, noted that Anjou’s actions “hath made such a fearfullness amongst the magistrates and commons as though their wits were taken from them.” As for Anjou’s standing, Stokes remarked that “he is now grown into such a hatred amongst the commons that they will not take his money that he has caused to be made here in the country. And they cannot abide to have his arms stand in the town. So as the French hath lost their credit here forever.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Stokes wrote in no ambiguous terms; the Anjou campaign in the Low Countries had come to a close with basically nothing but increased antipathy towards the French to show for it. Elizabeth’s policy of tepid intervention via proxy had failed.

In the minds of the Privy Council, the Spanish annexation of Portugal was an axial and terrifying pivot in the dynamic of European power. While previously France had seemed to some like Burghley as the more realistic threat in the Low Countries, the addition of Portugal’s colonial wealth to that of Spain gave Philip the power to make war in a way so menacing that it prompted the formation of an Anglo-French alliance. The only aid to materialize in the Low Countries however was the Anjou proxy campaign however this campaign failed to halt the Spanish advance in any significant way and cemented a thorough anti-French sentiment among the Dutch commons. The Privy Council had come one step closer to war with Spain in the sense that they now ubiquitously saw Spain as their primary adversary. However they had not yet come to agree that open war was necessary. It would not be until the Catholic propaganda campaign of 1584 that such an image of a relentlessly bloodthirsty Spain came ubiquitously into view. For now in mid-1583, the Privy Council needed to reevaluate England’s policy regarding the Low Countries.

**IV**

The Anjou proxy campaign which had been mustered once a formal Anglo-French alliance had fallen through failed spectacularly and accomplished little in terms of halting the Spanish advance. This section will ask and answer why it was that, in the aftermath of the Anjou folly, some members of the Privy Council like Burghley still sought to steer England on a path avoiding open war with Spain favoring accord instead. Addressed also will be why the more dovish attempts to reach an accord with Spain through 1583 failed and how, eventually, the unfolding of events in the Low Countries through 1584 prompted another final consideration in which the Privy Council would realize that an open war with Spain was inevitable. Here the assassination of William of Orange will be shown as a major factor pushing the Privy Council doves to war. However this paper argues that Orange’s death was not the sole reason for England’s entry into war per se but rather was one of many contextual pieces coming together at once.

One of the more immediate consequences of Anjou’s tremendous failure was, as mentioned, the absolute contempt with which the Dutch Commons now held the French. Consequently their eagerness to continue the fight seemed to flounder given that their hope for succor had recently launched a coup against them. Orange and the magistrates of the Estates continued even after the Anjou folly to obtain French aid driving a wedge further and further between them and the commons. The rebellion seemed to be at its weakest point after Anjou’s failure and thus situation in the Low Countries had to be readdressed.

Despite the catastrophe that had just ensued at French hands, Orange maintained in spring of 1583 that France was the best ally which the Dutch could seek in their fight against Spain. In an attempt to solidify his French connection in the aftermath of Anjou’s departure, the Prince of Orange elected to marry. Audley Dannet, another of Walsingham’s agents in Antwerp, noted on March 3rd that “It is also bruited, but how truly I know not, that the Prince of Orange sometime this week goes into Zealand to marry Admiral Chatillon's daughter, Monsieur Teligny's widow.”[[39]](#footnote-39) This Admiral Chatillon was Gaspard II de Coligny, previously the leading figure of the French Huguenots who was ambushed and assassinated in the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre back in August of 1572. Orange, in other words, was marrying the daughter of a French Protestant martyr and thus was attempting to tie his (and the Low Countries’) interests to those of French Protestants whom he considered the rebellion’s best chance of success. Such attempts were not unnoticed or well-liked by the commons. Stokes wrote on March 10th from Bruges that “the commons here murmur very much against the Prince of Orange's marriage with a French lady...So as the Prince grows more and more out of favor of the commons only because they see him lean so much to the French.”[[40]](#footnote-40) It seemed, to the bewilderment of the Privy Council and the Dutch commons, that Orange still thought that the Low Countries brightest future was a French one. Even more disturbing was the fact that England barely seemed to be coming to his mind in such considerations. On July 29th 1583 Stokes rather anxiously reported that “the Prince of Orange plies to the Four Members (of Flanders)…that they must either be French or Spanish.” England, Stokes and the commons noted, apparently did not enter into this calculation. No matter how adamantly Orange pressed the States to reaccept the French, Stokes made clear that “they (the commons) will not harken to it.”[[41]](#footnote-41) French or Spanish with no realistic prospect of them being French; this was the future which Orange seemed to be pushing on the Low Countries.

In response to the recent shift in the dynamics of the region, the Privy Council met another moment of reflection and reconsideration in October 1583. Here the choice was whether they ought to encourage Elizabeth to aid Orange, either passively with funding or actively with troops, or whether they ought to encourage Orange to find an accord with Spain. The former of these positions, that hawkish position advocating for open war, again was composed of Walsingham, Leicester, and Sidney. The latter, the position opposed to war, was again composed of the Burghley/Sussex faction.

The Walsingham/Leicester/Sidney camp argued that at present if the States continue in their weak state they will either be conquered or submit. Philip would “not trust and native person to have rule over those estates, but will so rule them and keep them under as he will intend that they never rebel again.” This would have menacing implications for English security. They argued that “thereupon must needs follow that the realm of England should be neighbored by such a nation, as will take advantage many ways to offend this realm, and to attempt for the cause of religion and other quarrels to make an altercation or rather a subversion of this estate.” Should they somehow be successful in garnering France's help again “it is to be thought that at this time the French king for his own troubles cannot give them a sufficient aid; such as they shall remain in the former danger of the Spanish conquest.” In order to avoid having dangerous Spanish neighbors governing their close neighbor, the hawkish camp concluded that Elizabeth must intervene for the sake of English national security. Interestingly, they noted that if Elizabeth should elect this course of open war it was vital she guarantee that she have the prior support of England’s shakers and movers. If war was elected it was reasonable that “the Queen Majesty would call to her that same choice number of noblemen and other capital persons of the best towns of the realm to consult not only whether the enterprise shall be taken in hand but how it may be maintained.”[[42]](#footnote-42) The hawkish camp recognized that the common people of England, represented in House of Commons, must be behind such bold action for the sake of maintaining public support and thus levying the necessary taxation for war.

The Burghley/Sussex camp however disagreed with the fundamental assumption of the hawkish camp; they simply did not believe that, if the right accord was found, Philip would be able to remove local governors with Spaniards without risking war breaking out all over again. By coming to an accord now “the Spanish King would have his hands bound for harming us, and his brain occupied, whereas if he prevailed (by conquest), he might make these countries a dangerous staple of warfare to annoy all his neighbors.” Furthermore, coming to an accord now would mean that the rebels could bargain collectively rather than the alternative of surrendering individually. This would help guarantee the strongest hand with which to negotiate and thus those parameters which helped preserve English security (preservation of trade with England, Dutch governors, and religious freedom) were most likely to manifest. This, however, was a reality that would not last forever. “Time bringeth the bad the bad as well as the good,” they reasoned. “Her Majesty therefor ought not to put into the hands of fortune that which is already in her own.” This was the time to act if she is going to make peace, it must be now before the board was rearranged to weaken their position any further. As far as convincing Orange and Philip was concerned this camp seems to have thought that it would actually be harder to convince Orange to find an accord rather than Philip despite the fact that the former was very clearly losing this fight. Philip, they reasoned, must be tired of this protracted conflict by this point and thus he may be more prone to make peace. “He may be contented” the claimed, “to be discharged of so violent a war especially with subjects whereas the means to establish his authority better elsewhere.” Orange however would be harder to convince. He was clearly adamant about bringing the French back into the fray and thus was standing in the way of a peace whose window of opportunity was fast closing. He was “wise, experimented, but perhaps, though not without cause, full of choler, desire of revenge, ambition accompanied with some taste already of sovereignty; full of hope and despair, and in truth or just distrust, joining always his own cause with the public, and wholly transformed both into a lion and a fox.”[[43]](#footnote-43)

The instructions given to Edward Burnham on October 23rd 1583 confirm that the Burghley position won yet again at this juncture as it had in 1580. Burnham was sent to negotiate subtly with the Prince of Orange and his representatives, hopefully convincing them that, despite their desperate hopes, no help was coming from France and thus Elizabeth encouraged them to make an accord with Philip. He was first to make plain that they were “so weak as were not sufficient to make head or withstand so potent an enemy as Spain is, his numbers and forces being greatly enlarged.” With that considered “she held it better to grow to a treat of accord with him (Philip) now whilst they have some means to defend themselves than to protract the treaty so long as the desperation of their estate shall force each...to make their own compositions and accords separate.”[[44]](#footnote-44) It was time, Elizabeth had decided, to bring this affair in the Low Countries to a dissatisfying but not entirely dangerous close.

Orange however proved to be the obstinate ally which Burghley and his camp had feared when presented with Elizabeth’s proposition. He continued through the end of 1583 to pursue Anjou’s return and thus to continue his fight against Spain to the increasing chagrin of the commons. Stokes noted on December 1st that “It seems the prince and the General Estates in Holland have agreed to take Monsieur again.” Unsurprisingly he added that “'this makes a greats murmuring amongst the commons again” who “would rather be ruled by the Spanish than the French.”[[45]](#footnote-45) This disappointing news was complimented with disturbing news when in January of 1584 Roger Williams informed Walsingham of a troubling arrival in the Low Countries; “The Marquis of Saint Cruz is appeared at Tournay in person, his troops in the Duchy of Luxembourg, they say in number about 5000.”[[46]](#footnote-46) This Marquis of Santa Cruz was Alvaro de Bazan, a Spanish admiral renowned for his naval victory over the Ottomans at the Battle of Lapento in 1571. Santa Cruz was in essence exactly the sort of Spanish military commander whom the Privy Council had hoped would not arrive in the Low Countries. It was rumored that Santa Cruz was “a tyrant”[[47]](#footnote-47) who was “a cruel man, valiant and of good judgement, and thought far more better acquainted with the secrets of the Spanish than ever Don John or the Prince of Parma.”[[48]](#footnote-48) More bad news came in April when Stokes informed Walsingham that Flanders (with the exception of Bruges and some other towns) had surrendered individually and on incredibly worrying terms; they had not secured their freedom to exercise the Protestant religion. Those of Bruges, Stokes wrote, “doth make marvel that Flanders would yield to this peace without open exercise of religion or as they say religious friede” and they “wished that the religion had been better provided for, so as the gospel which hath been so worthily preached here must now be put to silence”. When the Privy Council had concluded that an accord was the best path forward, they had done so because, should Orange continue the fighting, they feared he would not be able to muster a sufficient resistance and thus a conquest of the region would be made in which Spanish governors would enter and the towns, having now to bargain independently rather than collectively, would jeopardize their religious freedoms. By the beginning of the summer of 1584 all of this, on account of Orange’s obstinance, seemed to be unfolding just as the Privy Council had feared.

With June and July of 1584 came news of two unexpected deaths which would significantly shift the dynamics of the Low Countries yet again, those of both Anjou and the Prince of Orange. With Anjou’s death in early June came a serious and unexpected upheaval in French politics. Anjou had been the heir presumptive of the French throne given that his older brother, currently King Henry III, had no direct male heir. When Anjou died the most obvious heir presumptive was now Henry of Navarre who, unlike Anjou, was not a Catholic but Protestant. France then was poised to shift from a Catholic to Protestant monarch at any moment should Henry III unexpectedly die. These were the conditions for religious-civil war meaning that France would likely soon be so engulfed in its own turmoil that it would have no time for foreign affairs. On top of this, Orange not only died but was assassinated by a gunman’s bullet only a month after Anjou’s death. In July 1584 George Gilpin, the principle English financial representative in the Low Countries, informed Walsingham of “the sudden loss of the Prince of Orange.” The assassin was an informant close to Orange who “had brought him the news of Monsieur his death” only a month prior. “Making show as if he had some letter to impart and to talk with his Excellency” the assassin “with a pistol shot him (Orange) under the breast, where he fell down dead in the place and never spoke a word.” The States, Gilpin claimed, were distraught and outraged. They hoped “her Majesty and other Protestant princes will be more assistant, seeing the murderous and villainous intent and practices of the Pope and his devillish children, the papistical princes.”[[49]](#footnote-49) Only four days later though Gilpin’s tone regarding Anjou’s death seemed to be more optimistic as far as its implications for England. “His excellency” Gilpin reminded Walsingham “(who neither would nor for cause could command absolutely) was of late slenderly accounted of amongst them, and surely his words of that small sway as at length would have been able to do no more than themselves had pleased. Also there began a general murmuring that to make and maintain his greatness all these wars were continued.”[[50]](#footnote-50) Orange, it must be remembered, had been a rather inconvenient impediment to wrapping up the conflict of the Low Countries as much as he had been a valuable ally. William Herle too made note of the rather mixed bag of good and bad that came with Orange’s death. He wrote to Leicester that both the common people Magistrates were “but rather generally animated, with a great resolution of courage, and hatred engraved in them to revenge the foulness of the fact committed in the person of the Prince of Orange, by the tyrant of Spain…and to defend their Religion and liberties.” Determined to give “the last drop of blood” for their cause, the commons were “recommending themselves throughout the country…to the Queen of England’s only favor and goodness, whom they call their Savior.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Prior to Orange’s death the distance between the Dutch commons and magistrates had been starkly tense as the former hated the French and the latter continued to seek French aid. Following his assassination the commons and the magistrates were united in their shock and thus their appetite to fight the Spanish was reinvigorated where it had previously been waning.

The deaths of Orange and Anjou prompted the last major reflection by Elizabeth’s Privy Council regarding the Low Countries before they reached open war. Uncertain what the future of the rebellion would look like in the absence of Orange, the Council debated yet again whether England ought enter openly into the fray or come to an accord with Philip. Both Walter Mildmay (prone to the hawkish faction) and Burghley (obviously prone to the non-warring faction) recorded their opinions.

Starting with Mildmay, the Chancellor of the Exchequer himself weighed the dangers of either option. If no aid were given, Mildmay reasoned “The king of Spain will overrun all the countries” which surely would result in “the alteration and overthrow of religion the destruction of their ancient privileges.” Things from there would only get worse as Philip “being then settled there” would be driven by “the malice he haveth to her Majesty” leading him to “prick quarrels to her and her country.” All of this would lead to a dangerous war being waged on English soil. If, however, she were to aid the States, Mildmay worried that “the enterprise [was] not just to aid subjects against their King and therefore against honor and conscience.” On this point he reasoned that Phillip would make some sort of offer “to the Queen of Scots and her son to trouble her Majesty, which is more perilous than any other foreign war considering the readiness of their dispositions.” Unsurprisingly the hawkish Mildmay concluded that if Elizabeth were to again let this opportunity slip through her fingers she “shall never have the like occasion to stop the King of Spain’s malicious work against her. And much better for her to keep him occupied abroad…than bear the war at home.”[[52]](#footnote-52)

Finally Burghley agreed. Spain no longer had reason to make an accord and thus it was inevitable that Philip and Elizabeth would come to blows in the future. In fact were Philip not currently impeached by the previous “succoring of the Hollanders and their party” England might have “suffered the full height of his designs and conquests.” Still, Burghley had a slightly different take on the direction. He still held out that some sort of Anglo-French league might be made or at least they might mutually give aid to the States without a formal alliance. Burghley understood though that there had been near perpetual rumors of possible French aid and thus he reasoned that “if it should appear that there was not a full conclision made for their (French) succor…then her Majesty would strain herself as far forth as with preservation of her own estate.” Simply put, even if France wouldn’t help England would go it alone. That decision would remain to be seen. In the meantime Burghley thought that the States were most likely to guarantee Elizabeth’s aid if they were “to offer her Majesty for her assurance and her charges the ports of Flushing, Middleburg, and Brill wherein she would claim no property but only gages for performance of their covenants.” Not only were these ‘cautionary towns’ a sign of good faith between two allies but they were also a guarantee that England would control those ports directly east from the mouth of the Thames. These, in other words, were the ideal springboards from which Philip might launch La Empresa Ingleterra. Given that fact it was for the best, in Burghley’s mind, that England have direct control over them for the time being. Burghley also thought it “most necessary to have a Parliament called…in which…besides the request of a subsidy, many other necessary provisions may be made for her Majesty’s surety.” The Lord Treasurer’s conclusion was much the same as Mildmay’s; “That though her Majesty think lowly to enter into a war presently, that she were better so to do now, whilst she may make the scene out of her realm.” England needed to move boldly or soon suffer the full might of Spain. If this happened they would never “withstand his attempts but shall be forced to give place to his unsatiable malice which is most terrible to be thought of but most miserable to suffer.”[[53]](#footnote-53)

Even though the Anjou proxy campaign had failed Burghley and the more dovish members of the Privy Council still thought Philip more likely to sue for peace than to continue war in October 1583. They thought that, though Philip was having success in the region, his progress was slow and expensive meaning that he would even now be more likely to reach a palatable accord with the Dutch rather than continuing the war of conquest. Orange however stood in the way of English attempts to sue for peace with Spain, ignoring the advice of English representatives to treat with Parma. By the time of Orange’s assassination in July 1584 towns had begun to surrender to the Spanish independently without any regard for the state of Protestantism and military leaders like Santa Cruz had entered the fray, two dangerous prospects that the Privy Council had hoped to avoid by making peace in 1583. The situation by November 1584 however was bleak and dangerous enough to move Burghley and the other doves finally to support the call for active intervention in the Low Countries. This decision however was not contingent on Orange’s death alone. It is only when his assassination is considered in the domestic context of the Catholic propaganda campaign of 1584 that a full understanding of the coming of war to England emerges.

**V**

This section will be primarily concerned with the process of contextualization described at the close of the previous section. It will address why the Catholic propaganda campaign launched from the Rouen press in 1584 looked so menacing to the Elizabethan regime, why it, when added to the context of contemporaneous events in England and abroad, prompted the Privy Council to see war as begrudgingly necessary, and how the regime both justified its actions of going to war and responded to the Catholic propaganda which had prompted such action.

In the first week of November 1583, Francis Throckmorton was arrested in London. Suspected of acting as secret courier for Mary Stuart, his house was searched and there in his chambers were discovered a list of English Catholic nobles and some noted English havens where an invasion force might be landed. After weeks of torture on the rack he confessed the entirety of his treachery; he had been enlisted on the continent by the Duke of Guise, Mary Stuart’s cousin, to facilitate a simultaneous invasion and uprising in England. Guise himself would lead the invasion which was to be funded in tandem by Phillip of Spain and Pope Gregory XIII.[[54]](#footnote-54)

In the aftermath of the Throckmorton Plot’s failure Christopher Barker, licensed as the Queen’s printer, was instructed to publish an official yet anonymous account of the events. The result was the 1584 pamphlet titled *The Discovery of the Treasons Practiced and Attempted against the Queen’s Majesty and the Realm by Francis Throckmorton Who Was For the Same Arraigned and Condemned in Guild Hall in the City of London the one and twenty day of May Last Past (Discovery of Throckmorton).* This pamphlet was intended to explain and justify the torture and subsequent execution of Throckmorton, addressing an apparently prevalent feeling that Throckmorton was not sufficiently guilty and had only admitted his guilt under torture. The cause of Throckmorton’s apprehension, the *Discovery of Throckmorton* claimed, “grew at first upon secret intelligence given to the Queen’s Majesty, that he was a privy conveyor and receiver of letters to and from the Scottish Queen.”[[55]](#footnote-55) It was only after Throckmorton’s house had been searched and had yielding the list “expressing the havens for landing of foreign forces” that it was deemed necessary to torture him so as “to draw from him the truth of the matters appearing so weighty as to concern the invading of the realm.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Upon being tortured Throckmorton confessed that he entered into “sundry conferences with Sir Francis Englefield in the Low Countries, who daily solicited the Spanish King in Spain and his governors in the said Countries, to attempt the invading of the realm.”[[57]](#footnote-57) This Englefield had been a Privy Councilor during the reign of Elizabeth’s half sister Mary I (colloquially Bloody Mary) but he fled to the continent in 1559 when Mary’s Catholic England was undone and Protestantism restored. After decades away from home he was now actively in league with foreign powers, primarily Spain, to have Elizabeth usurped and the Church of England destroyed.

Throckmorton also confessed to knowing about info passing between his brother, Thomas, and Thomas Morgan regarding Mary Queen of Scots. Morgan was essentially the French connection who had been recruiting the Duke of Guise to lead the invasion. While this was happening “the Spanish ambassador (Bernardo de Mendoza), to encourage the English to join both in purse and person, did give out that the King his Master would not only make some notable attempt against England but would also bear half the charge of the enterprise.”[[58]](#footnote-58) Throckmorton and Mendoza discussed frequently how prominent underground Catholics might be rallied; “under color of their authority and the defense of her Majesty” they “might after join to the foreign forces.”[[59]](#footnote-59) In case there was still any doubt about the validity of the actions taken by the regime, subsequent intelligence from the continent has confirmed all of what Throckmorton confessed.

The anonymous *Discovery of Throckmorton* concluded with a rather blunt assertion and rhetorical question follow: “He hath conspired to overthrow the state, to bring strangers to invade the realm, to remove her Majesty from her lawful and natural right and inheritance to the Crown of England and to place a stranger in her seat…May the law touch the traitor or no? If any man hold this question negatively, hold him for a friend to traitors and treason.”[[60]](#footnote-60) The *Discovery of Throckmorton* then was a tract which felt the need to explain and justify the regime’s actions and turn them back on the reader in a rather defensive tone. This gives credence to the notion that the regime’s concerns regarding the rebellion of their own subjects were far from behind them. In July of 1584 Francis Throckmorton was hanged, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn. His death however did not bring the end of domestic anxieties for the Privy Council. In fact it coincided with a Catholic propaganda campaign which, especially in the immediate aftermath of the Throckmorton Plot, petrified the Elizabethan Regime.

The works that comprise this Catholic push in the summer of 1584 are three in total, all coming from the press of the Jesuit College in Rouen.[[61]](#footnote-61) First is *A Copy of a Letter Written by a Master of Art of Cambridge,* more colloquially known as *Leicester’s Commonwealth*. Though anonymously authored it is suggested that this text was likely written at least partially by Robert Parsons,[[62]](#footnote-62) the second most famous member of the previous English Jesuit Mission behind Edmund Campion alone. Parsons, unlike Campion, had escaped England in 1581 and since then he had been (troublingly to the regime) working on the continent to bring about England’s return to the Catholic fold. The tract takes the form of a dialogue between three characters, a gentleman, a scholar, and a lawyer (the only Catholic). The interlocuters, Protestant and Catholic alike, lament the current state of England as a place of turmoil and religious persecution. These realities, they concluded, were not an accident but rather were very intentionally the machinations of Elizabeth’s councilors, principally the Earl of Leicester. The more intense Protestants, that group typically calling for an active intervention in the Low Countries as opposed to passivity, were depicted as those with “quicker and more stirring spirits” who “do love to fish in water that is troubled.”[[63]](#footnote-63) In other words, Leicester and his more fanatical Protestant allies were purposefully creating the conditions to persecute Catholics as seditious because, by so doing, these councilors could establish and maintain their own power in a manufactured crisis; “for that every one in how much soever each one endeavoreth to increase his part or faction that desireth a governor of his own religion.”[[64]](#footnote-64)

The general message of *Leicester’s Commonwealth* is that religious toleration of a sort was a necessary step moving forward if England was to be peaceful. The rising religious turmoil of the day threatened to jeopardize the long peace England had enjoyed. Elizabeth, then, ought to learn from her continental neighbors who were settling troubled waters by refraining from making windows into men's souls. The Low Countries were one such example. After years of fighting Philip had begun to “abstain from the pursuit and search of men's consciences.”[[65]](#footnote-65) By so doing he had created the conditions which permitted the Dutch “to live quietly to God and themselves at home in their own houses, so they perform otherwise their obedience and duties to their prince and country."[[66]](#footnote-66) This being said, the gentleman saw this as nothing more than wishful thinking when it came to England for Leicester and Elizabeth's evil councilors would never allow such things to happen. Such toleration “standeth nothing with their wisdom or policy, especially at this instant, when they have such opportunity of following their own actions in her Majesty's name under the vizard and pretext of her defense and safety.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Leicester and his hawks had played fear-monger for too long and had done so as a means of maintaining and increasing their power. Leicester soon would “catch the fish he gapeth so greedily after, and in the meantime, for the pursuit of these crimes and other that daily he will find out, himself must remain perpetual dictator.”[[68]](#footnote-68)

Parsons was thus claiming that the hawkish camp was trying to steer England towards overtly championing the Protestant Cause for the sake of seizing power for themselves. Again the main point of the tract was innocuous enough; religious toleration equals domestic peace. Taken by itself this might not have been too much cause for alarm. However when added to the other two tracts printed at Rouen around the same time the message could take a more sinister shape to the regime.

Next to consider in this Catholic push of 1584 is John Leslie’s *A treatise touching the right, title and interest of the most excellent princess Marie, queen of Scotland and of the most noble king James, her grace’s son, to the succession of the crown of England (Treatise)*. Leslie had long been a problematic figure for the regime. In the late 1560s and early 1570s he had defended Mary Stuart and her claim to the throne in the midst and aftermath of the Rising of the North and Ridolfi plot, schemes by Catholics foreign and domestic to (much like the Throckmorton Plot) replace Elizabeth with her Catholic cousin. In the eyes of the regime he seemed to be doing the same yet again.

Where *Leicester’s Commonwealth* was primarily about peace via religious toleration, Leslie’s *Treatise* was about the succession. The tract was written both for the attention of Christian princes but also for the general English public, a foreign and domestic target audience. Leslie made clear that nations must rule peacefully with a content and undisturbed citizenry if they were to remain peaceful. Should they become tyrannous their depravity could wickedly “cast out their venom upon others and with such contagious poison have infected their neighbors.”[[69]](#footnote-69) Leslie was writing then to encourage foreign princes not to ignore the rightful claim that Mary Stuart and James had to the throne of England by right of their blood. They “ought to take her (Mary Stuart’s) part and to join with her against her enemies.”[[70]](#footnote-70) This fact needed to be recognized if England was to avoid a civil war. Leslie felt a particular need to write his *Treatise* because the evil counselors (Dudley unnamed but implied) were working to keep the path to power clear for themselves by excluding Mary. It was the duty then of Mary's fellow princes, for their own sake, to recognize the legitimacy of her and James's claim lest they risk their own claims being undermined. Along with princes, Leslie mentioned the pope specifically, urging him to “defend her (Mary Stuart) as his daughter,”[[71]](#footnote-71) a notion which must certainly have solidified the idea of a Catholic League driven by the pope coming to Mary’s rescue.

Leslie then stressed the importance of concord amongst the people. This he said was the best way to avoid the wandering eyes of less happier realms. Recognizing the rightful prince of a realm was a nonnegotiable aspect of this concord or else factionalism would ensue. Leslie placed the blame for dissension on those ambitious climbers who are trying to usurp sovereignty for themselves away from a rightful monarch (in his mind Dudley and the Prince of Orange). They were doing so with a political religion, a Protestant cause that is not believed but rather purposed for personal gain i.e. the exclusion of the rightful ruler or heir. By excluding the rightful heir (Mary Stuart) these evil climbers showed “no regard to the safety of the citizen, no love to their native country, no care of religion, nor of trye service and obedience to God but have such an inordinate desire to rule and reign.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

Making this point Leslie returned to the more international picture by highlighting the ancient Franco-Scottish connection. In times past the two nations were “entered in to a firm & perpetual league of alliance & amity with Charles the great, called Charlemagne King of France: to the end that those two nations, French and Scottish, should from time to time for ever, aid and succor, one another, against their common enemy.”[[73]](#footnote-73) This was the sort of support from other princes, France included, that Leslie wanted to see defend Mary Stuart’s right. With such aggressive apologies for Mary Stuart’s claim coming from Leslie’s *Treatise* in the immediate aftermath of the Throckmorton Plot*,* the call for religious toleration in *Leicester’s Commonwealth* may have looked more like a subtle attempt to permit Catholics to gather and plot using religion as a cover.

The last tract to be considered in this Catholic publicity push of 1584 came from none other than Cardinal William Allen himself. Allen, like Parsons and Campion, was a Jesuit and had long been committed to re-Catholicizing England. Consequently he was seen by the Elizabethan regime as one of their most obstinate foes.[[74]](#footnote-74) His 1584 work titled *A true, sincere, and moderate defense of English Catholics that suffer for their faith both at home and abroad* had multiple goals. One of Allen's main purposes in his *True Defense* was to defend the actions of previous English martyrs like Campion and his fellows in faith who, Allen claimed, had been slandered by Elizabeth's evil councilors for political gain. Second, he wanted to condemn tracts (or libels) from the regime like Burghley's 1583 *Execution of Justice*. Here Burghley had sought to legitimize the trial and execution of Campion and seditious Catholics in the same sort of defensive tone seen in the anonymous *Discovery of Throckmorton*. Here Cecil had claimed that the recently executed Catholics were executed on account of their treason, not their faith. Their “addiction to Rome”[[75]](#footnote-75)had driven them to undermine Elizabeth’s supreme authority. At the pope’s behest, Burghley claimed, they had been there for “the sowing of sedition by warrant and allowance.”[[76]](#footnote-76) Allen’s *True Defense* claimed, like *Leicester’s Commonwealth,* that Elizabeth’s councilors were creating an imagined crises and then using the circumstances as an excuse for illegal purposes i.e. usurpation of authority against a lawful prince via religious persecution. The Prince of Orange, like Burghley, had also produced “infinite libels for the excuses in wickedness.”[[77]](#footnote-77)

Allen made the case that Campion did not nor intended to commit treason but rather that this narrative was created by atheist politiques who were “pretending to be Protestants” in desperate need to defend their regime.[[78]](#footnote-78) The regime needed to make this claim about treason in order to get rid of those who were threatening their power with religious toleration. The council, Allen claimed, were “a sort of greedy wolves”[[79]](#footnote-79) who had such disdain for Catholics not because of a difference in religion but because their faith could be made a strawman for them to condemn and thus to war-monger, giving an excuse to exercise and maintain their power. And now more than ever they were “standing in fear of their state so long as they see any true bishop or Catholic man alive.”[[80]](#footnote-80)

Crucially, Allen addresses the judgement and practices of Protestants when it comes to deposing princes for religious matters, a topic with obvious implications for the situation in the Low Countries. He claimed that, when the Protestant playbook was laid out, it would be clear that the resisting of princes and magistrates for religious causes, as well as subjects' armed self-defense was not treason according to their own logic. In this sense Allen again was making a dangerous point; he would show the regime, by their own logic, why it was justifiable for there to be a rebellion for religious causes. And this was said in a book where the alleged persecutions being faced were "intolerable."[[81]](#footnote-81) In other words, this looked to the regime like Allen trying to justify rebellion in the aftermath of an invasion plan that was still unfurling. Crucially again Allen mentioned the rebellion in the Low Countries with an ominous tone of warning. The Protestant regime should be careful with their activities in the Low Countries “for that (as I have signified) their pudding lay also in that fire. As likewise it is well known that themselves have been the chiefest procurers and doers in the depriving of the lawful and anointed Queen of Scotland.”[[82]](#footnote-82) By supporting such causes as the rebellion in the Low Countries, the regime, Allen explicitly noted, was perilously close to undermining their own safety.

Allen concluded that, though it may not look like it, anyone with a serious mind would see that England was “in the greatest misery…far in the worst case than any country of Christendom.”[[83]](#footnote-83) This was the sort of message that left the reader with the impression that *something* must be done. The anti-Catholic actions undertaken by the regime were portrayed as nothing more than the persecutions of a nominally Protestant but secretly atheistic, Machiavellian group of evil counsellors who hope to extend this disquiet to their neighbors such as France and Flanders by encouraging them to rebel against lawful magistrates on bogus religious grounds. What sort of justification was there for such foreign and domestic depravity? On this Allen was clear; “none at all, surely.”[[84]](#footnote-84)

When these three sources are taken together and examined in the immediate aftermath of the Throckmorton Plot, the claims fuse into one sinister message in the eyes of the regime. Catholics, they thought, were trying to make the case for an England in which they could more easily gather and, with the succession formalized, plot for the usurpation of Elizabeth with Mary Stuart. Adding to this suspicion was the fact that when Throckmorton had been arrested in 1583 the search of his house had yielded “twelve pedigrees of the descent of the Crown of England, printed and published by the Bishop of Ross (John Leslie), in the defense of the pretended title of the Scottish Queen.”[[85]](#footnote-85) Now in 1584 it was translated into English and thus repurposed to reach both a foreign and domestic audience, reinforced the idea that such plots were the preamble crusade. The case for validity of such an invasion was seemingly made by Allen’s *True Defense*; English Catholics were absolutely facing intolerable persecution.

The Throckmorton Plot and the assassination of William of Orange played fundamental roles in the decision of Elizabeth’s Privy Council to direct their queen towards war. Of that there is no doubt. However it is not until the Catholic publicity campaign of 1584 is centralized in the minds of the regime that the full picture becomes clear. The three tracts from Rouen may sincerely have been a call for religious toleration, especially in the case of *Leicester’s Commonwealth*. They were however received from the anxious regime’s perspective as a the subtle case for rebellion. This Catholic campaign then was a terrible political miscalculation even if it tried to distance itself from politics. It’s place in the minds of the regime is axial for understanding why the Burghley camp saw war with Spain as inevitable in October of 1584. The Throckmorton plot seemed to be very much alive and it’s chance of success had increased dramatically now that Orange was dead. The presence of Spanish naval commanders like the Marquis of Santa Cruz in the Low Countries all but confirmed that Spain had a mind to launch an invasion from the coastal towns of Holland or Zealand, a prospect which would be accompanied by internal revolt. Thus Burghley concluded that the writing was on the wall and the di must be cast now before it was too late.

The regime responded, along with its new open-war policy, with propaganda of their own. In March 1585 Burghley informed Walsingham that Elizabeth was keen for the summoned Parliament to push forward the necessary subsidy for war. He noted too that he and Walsingham ought meet at Burghley’s house to discuss the public narrative they would put forward and what form it ought take.[[86]](#footnote-86) The immediate result was *An Order of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Preservation of the Queen Majesty’s Life and Safety*. Circulated amongst the diocese of the Church of England, their case was to be made in part from the pulpit. Upon receiving *An Order* preachers were instructed that they “shall make a sermon of the authority and majesty of princes, according to the word of God, and how straight duty of obedience is required of all good and Christian subjects.”[[87]](#footnote-87)

By July 1585 the English ambassador in Paris reported that France certainly would not be lending any aid to the Low Countries and thus England moved into the conflict alone. On August 10th the Treaty (technically treaties) of Nonsuch were signed formalizing England’s aid to the Dutch rebels in the form of troops. *A Declaration of the Causes to give aid to the Low Countries* followed. Written by Burghley and printed again by Christopher Barker, here Burghley wrote with the voice of Elizabeth herself. The English and the Dutch were ancient friends whose amity was preserved by the “continual intercourse”[[88]](#footnote-88) of trade. The recent appointment Spaniards as governors, Burghley wrote, jeopardized this ancient friendship vital to the English economy since these Spaniards like Santa Cruz were “men more exercised in wars then in peaceable government and some of them notably delighted in blood.”[[89]](#footnote-89) Spain then was violating “their franchises and privileges”[[90]](#footnote-90) on which England depended. Further the recent involvement of Mendoza in the Throckmorton Plot had cemented the fact that the Spanish sought the “invasion of our realm by forces out of Spain and the Low Countries.”[[91]](#footnote-91) It was for the preservation of the ancient liberties of their close trade partner and the concerns for future national security that moved Elizabeth to give her aid to the Low Countries, not an adoption of the Protestant cause.

Leicester too legitimized the new foreign policy via the public sphere. Thomas Bilson, a client of Leicester’s, wrote *The True Difference Between Christian Subjection and Unchristian Rebellion* in which two characters, a Catholic and Protestant, converse about the legitimacy of rebellion against a monarch. The Protestant character, Theophilus, was cautious to sanction revolution but drew clear distinctions about when it was and was not legal. Bilson’s distinctions interestingly were on secular and not religious grounds. He claimed that the Low Countries, unlike England, were not the domain of a king (like Philip) but instead were part of the Holy Roman Empire. For Bilson this meant that “if he (the authority of part of the empire) infringe their liberties, or violate the specialties which he by oath and order of the Empire is bound to keep, they may lawfully resist him and by force reduce him to the ancient and received form of government or else repel him as a tyrant.”[[92]](#footnote-92) Both Leicester and Burghley then were exceedingly cautious that the justification of going to war in the Low Countries *did not* meet the justifications for holy war which Allen and Leslie had laid out in their propaganda push of 1584.

The Catholic propaganda campaign, coming in the unfolding aftermath of the Throckmorton Plot and the assassination of William of Orange, looked to the regime as if the ground for a domestic rebellion was being laid. In other words, it seemed like the media campaign from Rouen was preparing English Catholics for a rebellion which might soon be accompanied by a naval invasion launched from the Low Countries should they fall. War then, in the minds of the former doves, was coming to England whether they liked it or not. If they let Spain advance too much farther in the Low Countries, invasion at the hands of Santa Cruz and rebellion at the pen of William Allen, John Leslie, and Robert Parsons would certainly follow. The Catholic propaganda plot of 1584 thus pushed those Privy Council members like Burghley to make sure that war would take place offshore by keeping Spain occupied abroad. The fact that the regime’s formal and informal justifications for giving aid to the Dutch tiptoed around the points made from the Rouen press shows just how present the Catholic propaganda campaign was in the minds of the regime regarding this issue. It was then, this push for partial religious toleration that prompted the regime to see war as completely unavoidable and thus to cast their di against the greatest power of the age.

**VI**

As has been shown, the Catholic propaganda campaign of 1584 played a central role in pushing the Elizabethan Privy Council and subsequently Elizabeth herself to enter in to open war to aid the Low Countries. The Burghley faction of the council had rejected and rejected again the prospect of waging open war at multiple points between 1580 and 1583. Risky, uncertain, and expensive, war was not considered absolutely necessary by the more dovish councilors until November of 1584. The revelation of the Throckmorton Plot and the hole left in the Dutch resistance left by Orange’s assassination created a rather desperate situation where the Privy Council thought England extremely vulnerable. However, it is not until the tracts from Robert Parsons, John Leslie, and William Allen are added to these other factors that the sense of desperation felt by the regime is completely understood. These tracts convinced the regime that Throckmorton Plot was hardly over. The prospect of the domestic rebellion of underground Catholics in England seemed less like a threat that might happen and more like a threat that was actively happening via the Rouen Press. After the publication and dissemination of *Leicester’s Commonwealth,* Leslie’s *Treatise,* and Allen’s *True Difference* even the more dovish Privy Councilors considered war inevitable. Their decision then was one in which the impending and certain violence to come would at least take place offshore.

As discussed in Section II, some historians have explained the cause of war as the moment in which an ascending Protestant England rose to challenge the descending Catholic Spain. Others, more accurately, have emphasized the erosion of diplomatic relations between the two entities which were strained to the utmost by the Throckmorton Plot and ultimately cast into war by Orange’s death. But, as has been argued, this is not the whole picture.

The campaign of Catholics like Robert Parsons, John Leslie, and William Allen for religious toleration in their home, when viewed through the lens of an increasingly paranoid regime, had the rather tragically ironic effect of escalating England from a state of cold war to hot. Their rightful presence at the center of the considerations of Elizabeth and her advisers reinforces an ever-useful reminder; this Golden Age of English history was fraught and shaped by fear and paranoia.

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**Abbreviations and Archives**

BL MS British Library Manuscript

Bodelian Bodelian Library, London

TNA PRO The National Archives, Public Record Office

f./ff. folio/s

SP 12 State Papers, Domestic, Elizabeth I

SP 78 State Papers, Foreign, France (from 1577)

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