

Edward vi foreign policy

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' Foreign policy in Edward's reign was an ignominious failure'. To what extent do you agree with this? When analysing the foreign policy of Edward VI's reign, it is essential that one recognises that Edward was a minor and it was his protectors, the Dukes of Somerset and Northumberland, that were chiefly responsible for England's foreign policy at this time.

While there is debate on this topic, it is generally documented that the foreign policy of Edward's reign was not as successful as the previous Tudors. Foreign policy during Somerset's years of control was dominated, and many would say blighted, by the campaign in Scotland. After a crushing victory at the Battle of Pinkie in September 1547, he set up a network of garrisons in Scotland, stretching as far north as Dundee. This was a great success for England; it is estimated that more than 5000 Scots were killed in the battle and England controlled vast amounts of Scottish land. His initial successes, however, were followed by a loss of direction, as his aim of uniting the countries through conquest became increasingly unrealistic. The garrisons were expensive to maintain, poorly equipped and highly unpopular with the locals. Their inadequacies were particularly evident when the Scots forced the English out of Haddington Castle.

This failed campaign resulted in a treaty between the French and the Scots. England now faced the threat of a French invasion from their northern border as well as from the channel, which put England in a compromising situation and showed Somerset's poor management of foreign policy. England's interest with Scotland was in part due to the prospective marriage of Edward and Mary, with the aim to improve relations between the neighbouring countries. Her being taken by the French was a failure of Somerset's since it

undermined English foreign policy and greatened the links between France and Scotland - it was arranged that Mary would instead marry the new French king, Henry II. The French quickly took advantage of the rebellions in the summer of 1549. They abandoned their campaign in Scotland and laid siege to Boulogne, which they subsequently won. The loss of French land was highly unpopular with the English and seriously compromised Somerset.

Moreover, while Somerset's downfall cannot be directly linked to his failings in foreign policy, there is evidence to suggest that it contributed somewhat. The commanders of the English armies in southern Scotland, Lord Wharton and Lord Grey, sought help from Somerset as to what they should do. They got none. This lack of involvement and commitment by Somerset was eventually to be held against him when he was arrested in 1549. It is important to note Somerset's lack of success in the field of foreign policy, as this put his successor, the Duke of Northumberland, in an onerous position. England was bankrupt, so raising an army to relieve Boulogne was impossible; Charles V did not offer any support; abandoning Boulogne would be unfavourable. One of Northumberland's most significant acts in foreign policy was the Treaty of Boulogne on 28 March 1550.

Northumberland was forced to give up Boulogne, and hand over the fortress and all weapons, in return for 400, 000 crowns. Also, the French king would no longer pay a pension to the King of England. At first, this result appears quite disastrous and many in England believed the treaty to have been a national disgrace – a humiliating experience against a traditional enemy. However, it is accepted that Northumberland gave in to many of the demands of Henry II because England would have been susceptible to its

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enemies as the economic situation was not in a state to support war. On the other hand, England and France made a defensive alliance: England would remain neutral in continental wars and it was arranged that Edward would marry the daughter of Henry II, Elizabeth. England did not abandon its claim to the French throne, however. Such an alliance was critical at a time when England was weak and vulnerable to attack.

This treaty, then, was beneficial to England and allowed Northumberland to concentrate on home affairs. The issue of Scotland continued and Northumberland made himself General Warden of the North in 1550. However, after negotiations and pressure from the French, he gave in and it was agreed that the border would be restored to its position before Henry VIII's campaign. This was another major blow for English foreign policy as it again undermined the successes of Henry VIII and presented weakness to the European powers. England's economy was heavily reliant on cloth trade with the Netherlands and, in fact, it had been protected by the Intercursus Magnus since 1496. Disaster occurred when trading relations broke down in 1550, due to Charles aversion to Protestantism. He ordered that any Protestants (heretics in his opinion) be arrested.

This brought about a disastrous collapse in the Antwerp cloth market as many Dutch traders were indeed Protestants. This issue was made yet more perilous for England when Charles, perhaps the most powerful man in the world at this time, considered an invasion of England in 1551.

Northumberland acted swiftly and put a temporary embargo on trade with the Netherlands, satisfying Charles. Anglo-Imperial relations improved by June 1552, when economic pressures and the need for support forced

Charles' hand. Northumberland's dealing of this difficult situation again shows his calibre in the field of foreign policy. Relations with the Empire were put under further pressure after the Anglo-French agreements at the treaty of Boulogne. Northumberland resisted the pressure from Charles to aid him in the Hapsburg-Valois wars and instead pursued a policy of neutrality, preventing the expense of overseas campaigns.

D. Loades states, " Warwick was above all concerned to avoid any further war, and in that he was completely successful. This was not pusillanimity but common sense. To conclude, while foreign policy cannot be described as a complete success, it should not be labeled an ignominious failure.

Somerset's venture into Scotland was certainly a failure and a cause for his removal. Northumberland's handling of English foreign policy was undoubtedly conservative and England was often a pawn of European powers, but it was the best approach given the circumstances.

Northumberland succeeded in his aims - to avoid war, and he should be judged primarily by this.