PROLOGUE

1560: British policies and the British context

On 27 February 1560 in the town of Berwick, on the Anglo-Scottish border, a secret agreement was signed containing a range of unusual and profoundly important clauses. In the first place it constituted a diplomatic revolution. A group of Scots were abandoning their 'auld alliance' with France and embracing as allies their long-standing enemies, the English. The central purpose of the Treaty of Berwick was to furnish desperately needed English military aid to the Scottish Lords of the Congregation to prevent them being overrun by the French troops of Mary of Guise, Scotland's regent.[1] From a Scottish perspective, the language employed to describe this diplomatic revolution was equally remarkable. Though exchanging one dominant protector for another, the treaty had carefully avoided any threat to Scotland's independence, in particular making no mention of England's imperial claims that had played such a prominent part in previous Tudor incursions across the Border.[2]

Another unusual feature was that Elizabeth I of England concluded this formal alliance not with a fellow monarch, but rather with those Scots who were fighting against the regent and her daughter, the Scottish queen. In the volatile international situation of spring 1560, aiding rebellious subjects against their lawful rulers was a risky diplomatic gamble for the precarious Elizabethan regime. It also ran counter to all Elizabeth's political and personal instincts, yet the queen had been persuaded of its necessity by her chief adviser William Cecil, supported by her Privy Council.[3]

One highly significant aspect of the treaty was tucked away in a fleeting reference to the 5th earl of Argyll – one of the leading Lords of the Congregation and the dominant magnate in the West Highlands. He agreed to 'imploy his force and guid will wher he salbe requyred by the quenis

[1] See below pp. 96–101.
[2] Dawson, 'Two Kingdoms or Three?', 118–20; Dawson, 'Cecil', 207–8.
[3] For a perceptive study of the formation of English policy during this period, see Alford, *Cecil*, ch. 2.

majestie to reduce the north partis of yrland to the perfyt obedience of england'.[4] This short clause quietly, but completely, reversed English policy in Ireland. At a stroke it replaced England's hostility towards the presence of Scots there with a welcome for Scottish Gaels as valued, subsidised allies. The explicit link between Anglo-Scottish friendship and the Tudor subjugation of Ulster signalled a new departure for both the Scots and the English.

The diplomatic revolution and the novel Irish strategy were the obvious signs of a dramatic change in relations between the three kingdoms. They were products of a remarkable new three-sided approach, which embraced Ireland as well as Scotland and England, and heralded a new era of 'British politics'.[5] That British dimension flowed from the separate, but complementary, British policies pursued by the 5th earl of Argyll and William Cecil. Both were British politicians, but while the English minister's claim has been recognised, his Scottish ally's even greater credentials have been overlooked. Through their joint efforts in the Treaty of Berwick, the triangular approach was for the very first time given official countenance.

Such a momentous development was made possible by a series of changes within Europe and, more especially, within the three kingdoms of England, Ireland and Scotland. Together these changes produced a 'British context' within which the Berwick treaty could be agreed. The most important shift in the international scene was the signing of the Treaty of Câteau-Cambrésis in April 1559, ending the Habsburg–Valois warfare that had dominated European politics since the late fifteenth century. In its wake, the treaty brought peace to Scotland and England, respectively the allies of France and Spain. As a consequence of the peace settlement, European attention was redirected, shifting from the border between France and the Netherlands, the English Channel, and the British mainland, which had been the focal point of the struggle during the 1550s. Preoccupied with their own domestic and international concerns, the last thing either the Spanish or

[4] BL Cotton Calig. B 9 fo. 34. This clause was not included in *CSPSc*, I. 23–4 though it was summarised in *CSP For 1559–60*, 413–5, and see below.

[5] Finding an acceptable shorthand geographical description for the countries which formed the UK before the creation of Eire has proved difficult. Whilst accurate, the term 'Atlantic archipelago' is rather cumbersome so, for convenience, I have used the following as virtual synonyms: the islands of Britain; these islands; the British Isles, and the adjective, British. Without intending to imply any hidden imperial or other agenda, they describe the kingdoms of Ireland, Scotland, and England and Wales as they existed in the sixteenth century, following the definition of the British Isles in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: 'a geographical term for the islands comprising Great Britain and Ireland with all their offshore islands including the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands'. A discussion of some of the ways in which early modern politicians conceptualised these islands can be found in the concluding chapter.

the French king wanted in 1559–60 was for a British problem to restart the fighting.[6] The conclusion of European peace also gave Elizabeth the opportunity to introduce a Protestant ecclesiastical settlement into her realms. One immediate consequence was England's return to the diplomatic isolation that had followed Henry VIII's break with Rome. In 1559, it was conceivable that France and Spain, the two leading Catholic powers, might combine against the heretical Elizabethan regime. Although it did not materialise, the fear of a great Catholic conspiracy haunted England's statesmen for the rest of the reign and dominated their diplomatic outlook.

The peace treaty confirmed the English loss to France of Calais, the final trophy of the Lancastrian continental empire. This was a severe psychological blow, with repercussions for England's defence and for her self-perception. By removing her toehold inside France, it dragged her own southern border into the English Channel. Elizabeth's realm was now separated by the sea from the continental land mass and had become an island 'off' and not 'of' Europe. The entire Tudor state was contained within the Atlantic archipelago, which encouraged the development of an insular mentality and redefined England's defensive needs.[7] The new perspective placed particular emphasis upon the remaining land border with Scotland and the sea frontier between the two states, which ran through the North Channel.

England's geographical and political separation from Europe sharply focused attention upon events within the British mainland. In particular it highlighted Anglo-Scottish relations, which had been subject to a number of twists and turns during the first half of the sixteenth century. At the century's start, the marriage of James IV and Margaret Tudor had failed to end the long-running animosity between the two countries. The possibility of a dynastic alliance re-emerged in the 1540s, when Scotland's ruler was the child Mary and young Edward was heir, and later king, of England. However, the Scottish choice of a French husband and alliance for their queen led to renewed military confrontation in the 'Rough Wooing'. The propaganda that accompanied the English invasion was based upon the concept of a united, Protestant mainland of Britain. Such notions were even welcomed by some 'assured Scots' who, for financial and ideological reasons, supported an alliance with the 'auld enemy'.

[6] M.J. Rodríguez-Salgado, *The Changing Face of Empire: Charles V, Philip II and Habsburg Authority, 1551–9* (Cambridge, 1988), ch. 8.

[7] The Channel Islands provide the obvious exception, but the point concerns a shift in perception, as demonstrated in contemporary maps, e.g. P. Barber, 'A Tudor Mystery: Laurence Nowell's Map of England and Ireland', *Map Collector*, 22 (1983), 16–21; Dawson, 'Cecil', 197–8.

Despite the circulation of these British ideas, a union between the two kingdoms was not a serious political option. Instead, for the English the main result of their military campaigns was proof of an unpalatable truth. England could readily defeat the Scots, but could not hold Scotland permanently by force. Future English policy makers such as Cecil, who had participated personally in the 1548 campaign, concluded that alliance, not conquest, was the best way to eradicate the threat from the north. For the Scots, the long-term consequences of the Rough Wooing were the enduring association between the Scottish Protestant cause and English intervention, and the planting of the conviction that an English alliance could be of benefit for Scotland.[8]

In 1558, Anglo-Scottish relations were further complicated by two dynastic events. The first was the marriage of Mary, Queen of Scots to Francis, the French Dauphin, who was subsequently granted the Scottish crown matrimonial, creating a regnal union between the two kingdoms.[9] The realisation of her cherished dynastic goal allowed Mary of Guise much greater freedom to pursue her pro-French programme within Scottish domestic politics.[10] This, in turn, led several leading nobles to conclude that Scotland's incorporation into France had already begun. Believing its independence was threatened, these aristocrats were willing to consider an alliance with England to defend their kingdom. By the close of 1558, an Anglophile party had been resurrected within Scottish politics.

The second event to transform Anglo-Scottish relations was the death in November 1558 of Mary Tudor, England's Catholic queen. Elizabeth's accession installed Mary, Queen of Scots as the next heir in blood to the English throne. Scotland's queen thus became a central and immediate part of the English succession question. For those who believed that the divorce of Catherine of Aragon was invalid and that the illegitimate Elizabeth could not inherit the crown, Mary was presumed to be the lawful queen of England. This posed a direct threat to Elizabeth personally and to her kingdom, especially if the French king, Mary's father-in-law, chose to press her claim with any vigour.

The change of monarch in England had immediate consequences north of the Border. Her daughter's elevated position in the English succession altered Mary of Guise's approach in both domestic and international politics by providing her with a new dynastic goal: a united British mainland under

[8] M. Merriman, *The Rough Wooings: Mary, Queen of Scots, 1542–1551* (East Linton, 2000); G. Phillips, *The Anglo-Scots Wars, 1513–50* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1999).
[9] See below, ch. 3.
[10] I am grateful to Dr Pamela Ritchie for her help on the policy of Mary of Guise. See her thesis, 'Dynasticism and Diplomacy: The Political Career of Marie de Guise in Scotland, 1548–60' (University of St Andrews PhD thesis, 1999).

Franco-Scottish rule. At the same time, Elizabeth's accession and her Protestant settlement gave new heart to Scottish reformers in their own struggle for religious recognition. By the summer of 1559, the Scottish Protestants had moved into outright rebellion. Past association and present necessity led them to seek aid from their southern neighbour. Their pleas were answered at Berwick.[11]

The inclusion in that treaty of a provision for co-operation in Ireland was unprecedented. Previous diplomatic exchanges on the subject had been hostile, and during the preceding two years the English had conducted a campaign to expel all Scots from Ireland.[12] Since the thirteenth century, mercenaries from the Western Isles had been employed by the Irish Gaelic chiefs on permanent or seasonal contracts. These professional soldiers upheld the chiefs' authority and independence and encouraged the increasing militarisation of the Irish lordships. Over the next three centuries, the presence of these gallowglass and redshank mercenaries had helped prevent the English conquering or remodelling Irish Gaelic society.

The flourishing mercenary trade was one dimension of the strong interconnexion between Gaelic Ireland and Gaelic Scotland. The two communities were united by their common language and culture and by their shared identity as Gaels. In the majority of circumstances, Gaeldom ignored the official boundaries between the Stewart and Tudor kingdoms, focusing instead upon its own cultural and social unity. The separate political worlds of the Gaelic regions were different from the national politics revolving around their monarchs, which characterised the kingdoms of England and Scotland. Within Gaeldom, political power was diffuse, being shared between a group of independent chiefs, each able to exercise sovereign powers within their areas of influence. Although sharing the same social structure and values, Gaelic politics did not possess a common focus. There was no unifying centre of authority, not even the limited coherence previously provided by a Lord of the Isles or High King of Ireland. Politics within the Scottish Highlands and Islands and Gaelic Ireland had fragmented into a series of overlapping regional networks.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the power of the earls of Argyll was offering a new unity and focus to the Gaelic communities on either side of the North Channel. Though firmly rooted in the Scottish mainland, Campbell power had spread from the Highlands into the Isles and into northern

[11] For a detailed discussion see pp. 96–101.

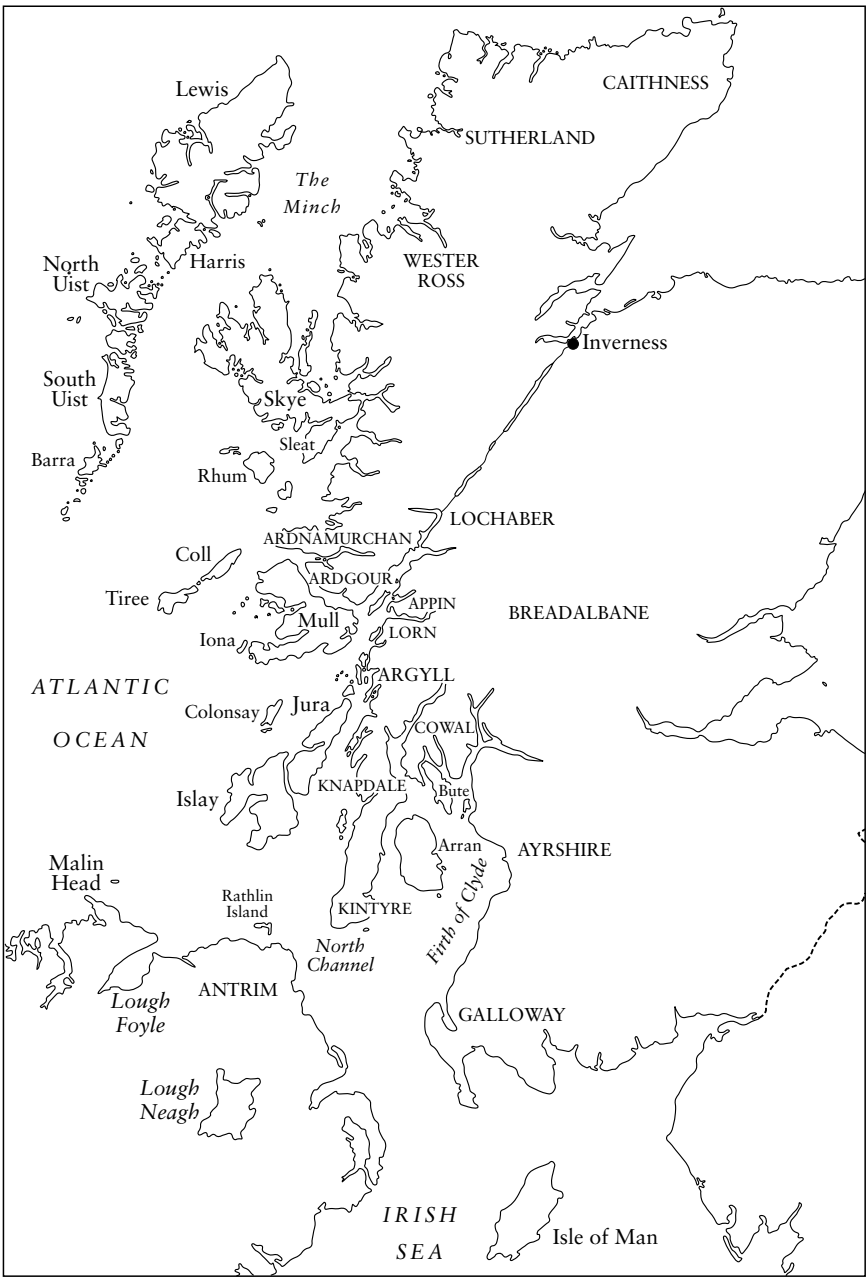
[12] 'Notes for Sussex' and 'A present remedy for the reformation of the north', 27 April 1556, *CSP Ireld*, I. 33–4 (11 and 13); Act 'against the bringing in of Scots, retaining of them and marrying with them' printed in *Irish History from Contemporary Sources, 1509–1610* ed. C. Maxwell (London, 1923), 298–9; for Sussex's 1558 expedition against the MacDonalds, see Dawson, 'Two Kingdoms or Three?', 117–8.

Ireland.[13] After the forfeiture of the Lord of the Isles in 1493, the earls of Argyll extended their influence over the Hebridean chiefs, thereby increasing their involvement in the mercenary trade with Ireland and the Western sea routes along which it travelled. This led to a greater awareness of, and interest in, Irish politics, especially in the north. With its close links to the Isles and the Scottish seaboard, Ulster had become part of the earls' political world. By 1555, the formal adoption into his affinity of O'Donnell, the ruler of Donegal, signalled that Argyll's political dominance had traversed the North Channel and was extending into the north of Ireland.

Geographical proximity maximised the ties between the Gaelic communities of Ulster, Kintyre and the southern Hebrides.[14] In the sixteenth century, these links were represented by the MacDonalds, who held lands on both sides of the North Channel, a mere day's sailing apart.[15] The southern branch of Clan Donald, whose forbears had been the Lords of the Isles, had expanded from their original Ulster settlement in the Glynnes of Antrim into the Route.[16] Though they were by far the most successful colonists in Ireland during the sixteenth century, they did not forsake their ancestral lands in Kintyre and Islay. Because of his Scottish origins and holdings, the MacDonald chief owed his allegiance to the Stewart crown. Within Ireland, his clansmen were regarded by both English and Irish communities as foreigners and unwelcome colonists. They were also assumed to pose a security threat. In Edward VI's reign, the MacDonalds had offered a base for a French invasion of Ireland, and as long as a Franco-Scottish alliance survived, the English believed they would act as a French fifth column. In the late 1550s, their chief, James MacDonald of Dunivaig and the Glens, was regarded with deep suspicion by the English.[17]

With so much of the country beyond its control, Ireland's vulnerability to foreign intervention became a permanent concern for the English authorities in Dublin and London. King Henry VIII's adoption of the title 'King of Ireland' in 1541 had underlined the problem that, despite the grandiose rhetoric, beyond the small area of the Pale, the English did not rule over the island nor its inhabitants. By 1556, with Sussex's appointment as chief

[13] See below p. 61.
[14] F. Macdonald, 'Ireland and Scotland: Historical Perspectives on the Gaelic Dimension, 1560–1760' (2 vols., University of Glasgow PhD thesis, 1994). I am grateful to Dr Macdonald for many helpful comments on the links between Scotland and Ireland.
[15] The MacDonalds could bring reinforcements in a few hours, if the tides were right, see below p. 135. The warning beacons on the Antrim hills were drawn on a map of Ulster c. 1602: D. Rixson, *The West Highland Galley* (East Linton, 1998), Plate 13, 208, n. 8.
[16] Hill, *Fire and Sword*, 14 (Map 2).
[17] For example Sidney to Privy Council, 8 February 1558, SP62/2, fos. 15–6; D. Potter, 'French Intrigue in Ireland during the reign of Henri II, 1547–1559', *International History Review*, 5 (1983), 159–80.



1. Map of the north-western seaboard

governor, schemes of plantation and conquest began to replace conciliation and consent as methods of extending English authority throughout Ireland. The goal of controlling the entire island became increasingly important, but in practice English rule remained fragile and patchy.[18] Dublin's authority was least effective in the north, dominated by two great Gaelic lords, the O'Neill ruling Tyrone and the O'Donnell holding sway in Donegal.[19] At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, both Ulster chiefs were consolidating their positions. Having won his succession battle against Matthew, Baron of Dungannon, who had been supported by Dublin, Shane O'Neill was determined to keep English influence out of Ulster. Two years earlier, his rival Calvagh O'Donnell had forcibly replaced his own father in Tyrconnell. In that task he had been assisted by Argyll and had strengthened his ties with the earl through a Campbell marriage.[20]

As the major power in the West Highlands and Islands, Argyll was the dominant figure in the Gaelic world that straddled the North Channel. Within Ulster politics, he was involved with all three chiefs. Calvagh O'Donnell and James MacDonald were both members of his affinity. Relations were cooler with Shane O'Neill, who maintained a healthy respect for Argyll as an obstacle to his own plans to rule the north. The Irish clause in the Treaty of Berwick originated in the earl's personal experience of the situation in Ulster and was the first tentative expression of the British policy he was to develop during 1560.

That Irish clause and the other distinctive features of the Berwick treaty were only possible because a British context had been created by the convergence of these long- and short-term factors. The repercussions of European peace and the accession of Elizabeth combined with the situation in Ireland to propel this British context into policy making within mainland Britain. Two men understood that context more clearly than their contemporaries, seeing it as a marvellous opportunity rather than a threatening development. They seized the chance to devise and gain acceptance for their revolutionary British policies and in so doing created a form of British politics not seen before.

With neither 'British state' nor supranational British political system, the Atlantic archipelago contained a complex of polities which intersected, but

[18] For the major debate concerning Tudor policy towards Ireland during the sixteenth century, see B. Bradshaw, *The Irish Constitutional Revolution in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1979); N. Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established 1565–76* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1976); C. Brady, *The Chief Governors: The Rise and Fall of Reform Government in Tudor Ireland, 1536–1588* (Cambridge, 1994); C. Lennon, *Sixteenth-Century Ireland: The Incomplete Conquest* (Dublin, 1994); S.G. Ellis, *Ireland in the Age of the Tudors, 1447–1603* (London, 1998).

[19] T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne, eds., *A New History of Ireland III* (Oxford, 1978) III. 2–3, 15–16.

[20] See below pp. 23–5, 105–6.

did not combine. The policies of Argyll and Cecil made a conscious effort to connect the fragmented Gaelic politics of Ulster and the West Highlands, the Irish political arena of the Dublin administration, the political world of the English court and the national politics of Scotland. In 1560, British policy briefly held these separate political worlds together. Its slender thread was not strong enough to unify them nor was it able to weave together a single, inclusive British political system. It was spun by two men who emerged from contrasting political backgrounds. On a personal level, the co-operation of the Englishman and the Scottish Gael symbolised the policy of joint action they advocated.

As Elizabeth's chief adviser, Cecil operated within the political orbit of the Tudor state. His remit covered all aspects of the queen's rule, and he strove to formulate comprehensive policies to serve her interests both at home and abroad. In 1559 he was primarily concerned with two separate areas: Anglo-Scottish relations, particularly the threat from Mary, Queen of Scots, and Elizabethan policy within Ireland, especially as regards Ulster. Having received Argyll's offer of help in northern Ireland, Cecil was quick to make the connexion between his twin concerns. By weighing his options within the British context that emerged in 1559–60, he was able to develop a coherent British strategy, which dominated English political decision making during the critical early years of Elizabeth's reign. Later, both the aims of that British policy and its methods of implementation changed, yet Cecil never lost his capacity to impart a British dimension to his planning.[21]

By contrast, when he was formulating a British policy linking different political worlds, the 5th earl of Argyll had the advantage of personal experience. As part of the Gaelic world, which took no notice of the boundaries between the Stewart and Tudor realms, the earl was involved in events in Ulster as well as in the Western Isles. He was deeply embroiled in Scotland's national politics and its international dimension of relations with London. His Protestantism was the driving force behind his commitment to an English alliance. It was the plight of the Lords of the Congregation and their urgent need for English support that triggered his offer of assistance in Ulster. Whilst the 5th earl's triangular British policy grew out of his daily contact with the Gaelic political world, the catalyst was his involvement in Scottish politics and Anglo-Scottish relations.

The British policies of both Argyll and Cecil initially came together in the Berwick treaty. That first flowering rapidly became a plant in full bloom in the summer of 1560.[22] Their shared commitment to a Protestant Britain

[21] Alford, *Cecil*, chs. 1–2.
[22] Traditionally, the conclusion of the Wars of the Congregation and the Treaty of Edinburgh have been viewed as the major turning point in British and even imperial history.

was the foundation for a single, harmonious British policy. It was revealed in two documents completed in July 1560. The first was Cecil's personal diplomatic triumph, the Treaty of Edinburgh, which guaranteed Protestant ascendancy in Scotland, cementing the Anglo-Scottish alliance and the diplomatic revolution it had produced. Alongside the treaty the 5th earl signed a personal agreement with the English in which he promised a substantial contingent of Scottish troops and all his political authority to help the English subdue Ulster.[23] The document could only have been negotiated by one man. No other magnate could make an independent agreement with a foreign monarch to provide an army to fight outside his own territories. The 5th earl of Argyll had the vision to create a British policy and, crucially, he possessed the power to implement it.

F.W. Maitland in the *Cambridge Modern History*, wrote of 1560, 'a new nation, a British nation was in the making' and 'the fate of the Protestant reformation was being decided, and the creed of unborn millions in undiscovered lands was being determined', cited in D. Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 67. More recently, G. Donaldson, 'Foundations of Anglo-Scottish Union', in G. Donaldson, *Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh, 1985), 137–63.

[23] For a full discussion, see below, pp. 107–8.