Anglo-Scottish relations during the reign of James VI have often been discussed within the framework of Scottish dependency on England and the king's desire to be formally recognised as Elizabeth's heir apparent. Securing his place in the English succession was indeed an important issue for James but in examining the nature of his relations with England from 1585 onwards it is clear that he was not wholly reliant upon England and was willing to exploit Elizabeth's vulnerabilities in order to achieve his objective. As the period progressed, England became increasingly susceptible to the forces of the Counter-Reformation, in particular Spain. Militarily over-extended in the Netherlands and in Ireland, with its navy engaging Spanish shipping, the English government needed to secure its northern border with Scotland and to forestall potential Scottish aid to any foreign enterprises via Ireland. As fears regarding a Spanish armada heightened, England became more and more reliant on an alliance with Scotland. The course of events leading to and following the Anglo-Scottish treaty in 1586 illustrate the strength of Scotland's negotiating position and the various options from which James was able to choose in his pursuit of political security whereas, in contrast, England's security increasingly depended on Scotland.

Proposals to establish a formal alliance between Scotland and England were first made in August 1584 by James Stewart, earl of Arran and chancellor of Scotland, when he approached Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, governor of Berwick and warden of the English east march. The negotiations which ensued over the following two years reflected the changing dynamics of European politics as mounting pressure wrought by increasingly militant Catholic politics was brought to bear on England. The Elizabethan government decided to respond to Scottish overtures in 1584 when its increasing commitment to those revolting against Spanish rule in the Netherlands and the corresponding deterioration of relations with Spain made the prospect of formalising its amity with Scotland more appealing. A treaty would be a means of regaining the
influence England had lost within Scotland when the conservative Arran administration had replaced the Anglophile Ruthven regime in June 1583. The English also hoped to curb King James VI's interests in Catholic Europe. What had been a fairly relaxed attitude towards the treaty which had been predominantly perceived as advantageous but not imperative, however, had completely changed by 1586 when securing Scotland had become vital to England's security in the face of an imminent Spanish attack—an attack in which, according to rumours and intelligence, Scotland featured.¹

By contrast, Scotland's objectives in the negotiations remained relatively constant, although the methods evolved in response to the changing European politics and declining English security. James VI and Elizabeth both shared the goal of security; however, for the Scottish king this security was closely connected to his place in the English succession. James was determined to procure formal recognition as Elizabeth's heir apparent and was willing to employ a variety of methods in order to obtain his goal. A straightforward amity with England was the preferred and simplest method, but when this did not gain him the succession, the king turned to the manipulation of Scottish domestic and European Catholic politics in order to exert pressure on Elizabeth. Catholic politics, therefore, played a role in the Anglo-Scottish treaty negotiations from the start and, cannily employed by James, increased in significance until they became a prime factor in the need for England to conclude an alliance with Scotland.

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When Arran was appointed chancellor in May 1584, one of the key policy initiatives entrusted to his government was the conclusion of an Anglo-Scottish alliance under the terms of which James would be recognised as the heir apparent to the English throne. His initial overtures, however, were not well received. Many in England, especially Sir Francis Walsingham, had never trusted Arran.² It was immaterial that he had the proper Protestant credentials or that the ecclesiastical legislation

¹ For example, in the autumn of 1586, Alejandro Farnese, duke of Parma was advised that to prevent the military situation in Flanders from becoming hopelessly entrenched, it would be necessary to 'sting' England in either Ireland or Scotland: CSP Spanish, iii, 637–8.

² See, for example, Walsingham's correspondence with Edward Wotton in the summer of 1585: Hamilton Papers, ii, 673, 674, 684, 685, 695, 697, 702. Neither did Walsingham trust John Maitland of Thirlestane or Sir Lewis Bellenden of Achnoull because of