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**In the shadow of the company : the VOC (Dutch East India Company)  
and its servants in the period of its decline (1740-1796)**

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## **Chapter 2: Ceylon, a cinnamon paradise in jeopardy**

### **Introduction**

The VOC had sole access to several spice-producing islands in Asia which were considered the foundation of the Company's prosperity. Although there were no European competitors present in these islands, after the VOC had lost its naval superiority,<sup>114</sup> the VOC monopolies in these exceedingly prosperous areas of production were in potential jeopardy. In contrast to its situation on the Indian Sub-Continent, the complete hegemony of the Company over these islands gave it more time and power to react towards the mounting power and the insidious intrusions of its competitors.<sup>115</sup> Although the Moluccas in the Indonesian Archipelago did not feel English infringement until 1780, Ceylon had already had to counter this new threat twenty years earlier. In the conflict with the king of Kandy, who already had been weakened by internal troubles in the island, for the first time the VOC also faced external challenge to its position. This was a new experience, because until that moment, the presence of the Company in Ceylon had to confront only internal challenges in the island, more specifically its relationship with its indigenous subjects and with the king of Kandy. Both the internal and external challenges converged in the resulting conflict.

### **1. Enforcing a monopoly**

The complexity of the Indian Sub-Continent in the eighteenth Century, compounded by its breakaway peripheries, and the commercial and military rivalries which seethed there, provides a real contrast to the less complicated situation on Ceylon. In the seventeenth

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<sup>114</sup> See Chapter 1 on the Battle of Bedara.

<sup>115</sup> In the first chapter, we have seen how the Battle of Bedara (1759) had taught the VOC to avoid seeking any further direct military conflict with its European rivals. From that time the Company, when necessary, focused its military power on preserving its position in relation to the indigenous rulers.

century, the VOC slowly had built up its power in the island and had steadily been able to obtain control over all trade to and from the island. The main reason spurring the Company to aspire to entrench itself in Ceylon in the seventeenth century was to achieve a monopoly on cinnamon. Other regions also produced cinnamon, but that from Ceylon was of superior quality, making it more suitable for shipping to Europe. Although the cinnamon trade to Europe was the main aim of the Company, the island possessed such other valuable commodities suitable for trade as areca nuts, elephants and pearls. The island itself was a market for the import of Indian textiles. In short, by conquering several coastal areas in Ceylon, the VOC obtained a monopoly on the best cinnamon plus new assets to add to its intra-Asian trade network. Apart from securing new trading concessions, it also wanted to gain a foothold in Ceylon at the cost of its mortal enemy: the Portuguese. Cannily, the VOC was not planning to tackle the Portuguese head on; instead, the official policy adopted after its arrival in the seventeenth century was to help the king of Kandy. This king was constantly at war with the Portuguese and provided a natural ally. On the arrival of a Dutch expedition in the island in 1638, a treaty was signed between the king of Kandy and the commander of the newly arrived Dutch forces. The balance of power quickly tipped to the detriment of the Portuguese. The expulsion of the Portuguese started when a small VOC fleet took Batticaloa and Trincomalee on the eastern coast of the island (1638). The alliance between the king and the Company completed the process of removing the Portuguese from the island with the capture of their last stronghold, Jaffna, in 1658.<sup>116</sup>

When the VOC had assured its position as the sole European power in the island, it pursued a monopoly position in trade by maintaining its territorial presence. After 1658, the king of Kandy and the Company were the only powers remaining in the island, but it was not long before relations between the former allies grew disturbed as they disagreed about the form the continuing Dutch presence should take. As was stipulated in his version of the treaty signed before the expulsion of the Portuguese, the king demanded the VOC return him the former Portuguese coastal fortifications it had conquered with his help. In the Dutch version of the treaty, however, there was no mention at all of returning

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<sup>116</sup> Lodewijk Wagenaar, *Galle, VOC-vestiging in Ceylon, beschrijving van een koloniale samenleving aan de vooravond van de Singalese opstand tegen het Nederlandse gezag, 1760* ( De Bataafsche Leeuw: Amsterdam 1994), 13.

any conquered fortifications. It was made clear that the Company was only planning to respond to this demand after the king had repaid the military expenses incurred in expelling the Portuguese. As discontent seethed, this conflict erupted into a war between the former allies which lasted almost forty years. A truce (1680) was established and, although they had not been victorious, the Dutch insisted on the possession of parts of the former Portuguese territories as a guarantee of the repayment of their war expenditure. Consequently, the Company retained most of the coastal forts as well as the districts along the south-western coast, plus the Jaffna Peninsula. Although the areas the Dutch acquired were smaller in size than the former Portuguese possessions, they were nevertheless the most fertile parts of the island.<sup>117</sup>

These forty years of warfare ensured the VOC of an exclusive trading presence in the island. The Company entrenched itself, since the king was not powerful enough to oust it without help from another European power. In the truce, the Company strongholds on the coast were diplomatically presented as essential to the defence of the king against his foreign enemies. It was stipulated that the VOC would remain in Ceylon until the king had paid off the costs made in removing the Portuguese and those incurred in protecting against an invasion by other potential enemies of the king in the future. Until that moment, the Company would retain its monopoly on cinnamon. In the final treaty (1680), the VOC insisted on a monopoly on the whole of the external trade of the island rather than just on the monopoly on cinnamon. This meant it obtained a stronghold on such valuable items such as areca nuts, elephants and pearls, although these were always cast in the shade compared to cinnamon. As the Dutch grew more confident of their local power, they argued that the lands of the Portuguese had never actually been in the possession of the king of Kandy, and as it was the Company which had conquered the lands from the Portuguese, the king did not have any legal claim to these territories. Although the new European power had been vague at first about its long-term intentions, this new position it adopted implied an indefinite stay.

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<sup>117</sup> Alicia Schrikker, *Dutch and British Interventions in Sri Lanka, 1780-1815: Expansion and Reform* (Brill: Leiden, 2007), 21.

## 1.1 Status quo

With a monopoly on trade and only one indigenous ruler in the island, the VOC tried to bend the situation to its will. The king of Kandy was not in a position to question the Dutch presence and a situation of status quo which lasted almost a century gradually evolved. Without an income from trade, the king was deprived of the financial capacity to take military action against the Company. He held no income other than what he could tax from his farmers, and that while the most fertile farmlands lay in the VOC controlled areas. This absence of trading possibilities also delivered the Company the means to ensure the loyalty of the King, since it was in control of all goods and information he received from the outside world. For instance, it was fairly easy to cut him off from such coastal products as salt and to control his correspondence.

The VOC aspired to attain control of all trade with the island, while the king simply wanted to be acknowledged as the supreme sovereign of the island. As sovereign, the king was certainly not completely powerless and had his ways to pressurize the company into giving in to his wishes. Chief among these was that the cinnamon growing in VOC territories was insufficient to fulfil the Company's requirements, but in order to obtain cinnamon from the king's territories, it needed to ask his permission. In return for the Company harvesting cinnamon in his territories, the king of Kandy demanded he be visited by a yearly embassy bearing gifts. The Company acquiesced in the demand for embassies, which became institutionalized from 1688.<sup>118</sup> The annual Dutch embassy dispatched to the King contributed to his status. In Asian cultures, such gifts were, as we have seen in the chapter on India, perceived as a token that the giver accepted the sovereignty of the recipient and the king did not perceive it otherwise. This emerges more obviously, when we examine the symbolism involved in the annual royal ceremony, which was performed at a time when other subjects also brought gifts to honour the king.<sup>119</sup> The king would be seated on a dais raised above the heads of the VOC

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<sup>118</sup> Schrikker, *Dutch and British Interventions*, 37.

<sup>119</sup> Tikiri Abeyasinghe, "Princes and Merchants: relations between the King of Kandy and the Dutch East India Company in Sri Lanka (1688-1740)", In *Sri Lanka Archives* 2 (1984), 35-60.

ambassadors, who had to kneel before him and were only allowed to speak when addressed by the king.<sup>120</sup>

As Europeans, the Dutch, took a different view of the sovereignty and gifts, seeing them as a necessary evil, essential to acquiring commercial profits. In order to obtain what they wanted –trade - they consented to participate in what they perceived to be the annual ‘charade’ of the embassy or to put it in the words of the High Government in Batavia; “(...) *You have learned by experience that you will find the court no better disposed, than by flattering its grandeur and excellence, because without this, however distasteful in itself, we think it is almost impossible to obtain a satisfactory conclusion of affairs, and since this is not expensive, it can be acquiesced in on all occasions (...)*”.<sup>121</sup> Officially, the only contract the Company acknowledged was the treaty of 1680. The VOC vociferously claimed it had built fortresses and maintained garrisons at the expense of the king’s treasury, but this was for his own protection. In return for the costs incurred during the war, plus the money lent to the King during same period, and the expense of maintaining a defence for the king, his Majesty rewarded the Company by granting trading concessions and the right to collect cinnamon from his domains. This puts the relationship in a more economic perspective.<sup>122</sup>

The VOC was in a position to determine its relationship with the king, but assiduously avoided open conflict in order to avoid damage to its commercial position. The Dutch were afraid that confronting the king would drive costs up, since he had a strong say in determining the harvest of cinnamon. The king’s power was reinforced even more by the influence he exerted on the special caste of cinnamon-peelers, who could be made to vanish at will to sabotage the harvest.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, the king was not without prestige among the inhabitants of the VOC territories as well, as he was regarded as the religious leader of the island. This idea was reinforced by the revival of Buddhism by King Kitri Raja Sinha (1747-1782), when he reinstated the *Sangha*, the Buddhist monastic order, and renovated monasteries in an effort to revive popular Buddhism.<sup>124</sup> By stirring up the religious fervour of the VOC subjects, the king wielded an instrument to

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<sup>120</sup> Wagenaar, *Galle*, 17-20 and Schrikker, *Dutch and British colonial interventions*, 37-38.

<sup>121</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4931, 2, 14 April 1761, High Government to Van Eck.

<sup>122</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4931, 2, 14 April 1761, High Government to Van Eck.

<sup>123</sup> P.E. Pieris, *Ceylon and the Hollanders, 1658-1796* (Tellipalai: American Ceylon Mission Press, 1918).

<sup>124</sup> Wagenaar, *Galle*, 20.

prevent the company from obtaining what it was desirous of acquiring: cinnamon. The situation of status quo was maintained as long as both parties were comfortable with the situation and did not attempt to initiate changes.

The power of the king resulted in occasional undesirable troubles, which sparked off a discussion about whether the Company should try to establish full colonial control over the whole island instead of just controlling trade. In heated debates, the question of whether a more aggressive policy was warranted was raised. Rijckloff Van Goens senior (1660-1663 and 1664-1675), had already written to the High Government in Batavia before 1680 intimating that the Company had either to conquer the whole island and attract European settlers in order to exploit its full potential or limit itself to the cinnamon-producing regions. The VOC decided to limit itself to trade and eschew the path of conquest and colonization.<sup>125</sup> In practice, this meant that although, the Company held territories in the south east and north of the island, it did not harbour plans to expand these possessions, nor did it nurture the ambition to usurp the king's power.

The continuing preference for trade over colonization was in line with the strategy of a trading company and calculated costs against potential investments and benefits. The Directors thought that the costs of a military confrontation or colonial control would not surpass the benefits, at least as long as the existing status quo could be maintained. This idea was supported ideologically by the conclusion that the wars between the Portuguese and Kandy before the Dutch arrived in the island had been not only costly in financial terms, but also in terms of lives. The king had succeeded in inflicting great losses on the Portuguese, partly aided by natural circumstances. Such obstacles as impenetrable forests and untraversable mountains meant that pursuing war in the king's territories was a very difficult undertaking.<sup>126</sup> Indeed, it had been an unsuccessful attempt by the Portuguese to invade successfully Kandy which had caused the Company to intervene successfully, ousting the Portuguese with the help of the Kandyans. The Company did not wish to fall victim to such a situation itself and was careful not to be caught in the same trap as the Portuguese, thereby avoiding conflict with the king. As long as the status quo was maintained, this was deemed the best and the most profitable policy.

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<sup>125</sup> Schrikker, *Dutch and British Interventions*, 22.

<sup>126</sup> NA, Van Eck, 33, 5, 10 June 1761, De Klerk to Van Eck.

## 2. Estrangement and conflict

The status quo was perceived to be the most profitable way to ensure the transportation of the cinnamon to Europe, but had unforeseen, or probably simply ignored, long-term consequences. In the eighteenth century different Governors, just as was Van Goens earlier, were dubious about the policy and considered in the long run it would prove unsustainable: they did not want to have to beg the king for cinnamon. With Batavia standing firm on a monopoly on trade and in view of the king's 'misconceptions' (the king decided that the VOC should be grateful it was allowed to harvest cinnamon in his territories)<sup>127</sup> Van Imhoff, at that time Governor of Ceylon (1736-1739), was confident that the outcome of any conflict would always be in the favour of the Company.<sup>128</sup> The reforms Van Imhoff wanted to institute during his term of office were along the same lines as the plans Van Goens had once devised. According to Van Imhoff, one swift military action designed to conquer Kandy would end the power of the king over the supply of cinnamon. His plan was not approved by Batavia, so he proposed to upset the status quo by granting the king trading privileges in a bid to create a bond of mutual interest to serve as a basis for further negotiation, but this was again rejected. The divergence in perspective between the king and the Dutch was not considered to be a problem as long as the status quo continued. Nevertheless, in the middle of the eighteenth century short-term problems remorselessly exposed the differences and simultaneously a new, menacing external threat loomed on the horizon.

The seeds of conflict sprouted as much internally within the territories of the king as externally in those of the VOC. In Kandy, many of the problems besetting the king had their roots in the fact that he was a foreigner and had been summoned from Madurai on the Malabar Coast by the Sinhalese nobles when the old Sinhalese monastic dynasty became extinct. When he acceded to the throne, the new king had employed his own

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<sup>127</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4930, 7, 2 May 1761, Schreuder to Van Eck.

<sup>128</sup> Sinnappah Arasaratnam, "Baron van Imhoff and Dutch Policy in Ceylon", *bijdragen tot de taal- en volkenkunde*, 1962 (118), 454-468.



circle of relatives in the power structure, bypassing the older established, now consequently begrudging Sinhalese nobles. In his conflict with these Sinhalese nobles, the king was not convinced that the VOC was not rousing its weight strongly enough to support him. Internally, he tried to balance his loss of influence with the Sinhalese nobility by enlarging his influence among his ordinary subjects by patronizing Buddhist religion. Paradoxically one side-effect of this policy was that the Sinhalese VOC subjects began to see the King's religious authority as a substitute for the power of the VOC.

Unquestionably the king's policy of promoting Buddhism among his subjects was successful in garnering their regard, but ultimately it led to a deeper estrangement from the Sinhalese nobles. The Sinhalese nobles and Buddhist monks each attempted to appropriate religious fervour as a shield to protect their own positions. The king failed to temper the criticism in his own circle and consequently his position grew precarious. There was even an assassination attempt plotted by the most powerful noblemen of Sinhalese origin. Tragically for the king, the conspirators found ready allies among the Buddhist priests from Siam whom the king had recently brought to the island in order to stimulate Buddhism among his subjects through their reforms. This party planned to attempt to murder the king and to install a Siamese prince, who had been brought along with them, as the new king. They set a trap by digging a hole under the king's throne and filled the hole with sharpened wooden stakes. Just as the king was about to sit down and fall through the textiles covering the throne, the plot was discovered when the King pulled back these draperies and saw the hole. Several noblemen were put to death and the Siamese prince was departed.

After the failed coup, tension between the VOC and the king mounted. Having no means to rid himself of the Siamese prince, the king handed him over to the Dutch at Trincomale, asking them to banish him. Unaware of the attempted coup, the local employees responded that the VOC was an ally of the king of Siam and therefore refused to remove the prince from the island against his will. This displeased the king, who roundly stated that he was more important to the VOC than the Siamese king.<sup>129</sup> Governor Jan Schreuder later apologized, referring to the incident as a mistake in translation and stating that the VOC had not been aware of the crimes the prince had

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<sup>129</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4930, 9, 26 January 1761, Schreuder to King of Kandy.

committed against the king. This excuse was not accepted and the incident fuelled the king's belief that the VOC had been involved in the assassination attempt, lending the plotters its support. This unjustified accusation was aggravated by some more minor issues.<sup>130</sup>

The conflicts with the king assumed even larger dimensions when the cinnamon policy of the VOC caused its alienation from and incited conflict with its own subjects in the island. Never for a moment did the Dutch lose sight of commerce, even in their obligation to govern justly. In the coastal regions it would be fair to say that the VOC relatively neglected its governmental tasks, preferring to keep the profits from cinnamon on a high level. To spare expenses, its aim was to limit its governmental involvement in its territorial possessions on the South-western coast of Ceylon to a minimum. Owing to the long period of peace, the population grew, partly because of an increased number of births, but also partly because of the return of people who had fled before 1680. The growth in the population in the lowlands of south-western Ceylon was disadvantageous to the VOC, because larger tracts of land had to be brought under cultivation. In order to meet the growing demand for food, the cinnamon which only grew in the wild had to be replaced by food crops. As its cinnamon acreage shrank the VOC was made even more dependent on the cinnamon from the king's territories. Inevitably, this led to a tension between commercial priorities and governmental commitments but, given that ultimately the strategic decisions were made in Batavia and the Republic and not in Ceylon itself, the problem was resolved in favour of the cinnamon.<sup>131</sup>

This alienation from and conflict with local subjects was palpable at different levels of society. Often these problems had been smouldering for a long time. The greatest stumbling-block was that most inhabitants did not profit from the trade in cinnamon, so these cinnamon trees were the least of their worries, they preferred growing

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<sup>130</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4930, 9, 26 January 1761, Schreuder to King of Kandy. for instance when the VOC had not responded to the request to rescind the banishment of Leander de Saram, a '*modliaar*' or lower ranking nobleman, who had displeased the VOC. The king questioned the swiftness of this overhasty judgement against Leander de Saram, as this had only taken two to three days. This was considered excessively short for a man of high birth, as the conviction of a murderer usually took fifteen days to a month. The King wanted him to live in the Company's territories in or out of the service of the VOC. Schreuder said he did not understand why the king was so interested in a servant of the VOC and that, in future, people committing crimes similar to De Saram's would be condemned to death.

<sup>131</sup> D.A. Kotelawelle, "Agrarian policies of the Dutch in South-West Ceylon, 1743-1767", In *AAG Brijdagen* 14, (1967), 20-23.

fruit trees which yielded them both nutritional and economic benefits. Since the VOC was focussed on cinnamon trees and their concomitant profit, it often ordered that these fruit trees be cut down. A second problem was that the desire of the VOC to protect cinnamon trees often conflicted with local customs. For instance, the fertilisation of land by practising swidden agriculture, a local custom since time immemorial, was forbidden, because such drastic methods would inevitably kill all the young cinnamon trees. Yet another bone of contention was that the VOC policy was enforced locally by indigenous leaders, but since a village had various leaders, the imposition of this blanket, unnuanced policy led to conflicting authorities and outbursts of violence. This situation was aggravated by the privileged position held by the *Chaliassen* or the caste of the cinnamon-peelers. Assured of the VOC's protection, they abused their position and terrorized the other inhabitants. The tension between castes mounted to a higher pitch, when other high castes were forced to do the work of lower castes, such as transporting cinnamon, wood and lime.<sup>132</sup> Apart from these chronic problems, just at the time the rebellion erupted, new rules had been introduced. A new policy of licensing the collection of taxes on rice to third parties led to an estrangement between the VOC and its subjects, the new taxes were considered not only too exacting, but even unlawful. The VOC ignored the warning signs emitting from the population and declined to seek, let alone offer any solution; the inevitable outcome was an outbreak of violence.

In another unremitting struggle, the king sought for trading concessions in return for granting his permission to peel cinnamon in the royal territories. Every now and then, the Governor forwarded the king's requests for trading privileges to the High Government in Batavia, which deferred the matter to the Directors in the Republic. The request was normally returned with a negative answer.<sup>133</sup> In 1761 Governor Schreuder (1756-1761) indicated to Batavia that another rejection of the request had displeased the king. The additional gifts with a value of f24,000 offered to console him were refused.<sup>134</sup> The King later acknowledged that *"the Dutch, who had been settled upon this island for many years, had till recently behaved themselves well towards the King, and complied with whatever he had recommended to them, That within this Year and a half or 2 Years*

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<sup>132</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4931, 2, 14 May 1761, High Government to Van Eck.

<sup>133</sup> Wagenaar, *Galle*, 18-19.

<sup>134</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4930, 7, 2 May 1761, Schreuder to Van Eck.

*they had observed a very different conduct, and shown no regard to the King's orders or Advice; whereupon he had commenced a War against them, and sent his armies by Land to punish them, which he was sufficiently able to do."*<sup>135</sup>

## **2.1 Negotiating internal conflict**

When rebellion did eventually break out against the VOC, for political reasons the Company publicly denied the king's involvement.<sup>136</sup> This prevented the Dutch from having to address the mounting problems structurally. The rebellion was ascribed by Governor Schreuder to a group of troublemakers, who were well known to the VOC. The inhabitants of the VOC territories had been urged by these rebels to unite under the authority of the king. Those who failed to rally to the cause would be demoted to the lowest caste.<sup>137</sup> Schreuder stated that fear was the only reason so many people supported the claims of the rebels.<sup>138</sup> A number of the inhabitants turned to the Governor for protection, while the other inhabitants were forced to join the rebels because of threats, arson, murder and other sorts of violence.<sup>139</sup> The king secretly supported the rebellion, but denied any official connection. In reality, the king was actually merely profiting from discontent instead of instigating it. Asserting his assumed sovereignty over VOC territory, he announced that a royal investigation into the complaints against the Company would be appropriate. Although the king had not openly declared himself to be on the side of the rebels, several members of the Kandyan court were indeed to be among their ranks, vitiating any denial of the king's involvement.

Despite the evident problems, the VOC was not prepared to declare war on the king and tried to solve the crisis through negotiations. The High Government was reluctant to move against the king and ordered that the policy of conciliation be maintained, that the servants in Ceylon act defensively and the king be indulged by

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<sup>135</sup> R. Raven-Hart, *The Pybus embassy to Kandy, 1762* (Colombo: Government Press, 1958), 64.

<sup>136</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 604, 12 March 1761, Van Eck to Schreuder.

<sup>137</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4930, 9, 26 January 1761, Schreuder to King of Kandy.

<sup>138</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4930, 9, 26 January 1761, Schreuder to King of Kandy.

<sup>139</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4930, 10, 28 February 1761, Schreuder to King of Kandy.

giving into his demands.<sup>140</sup> As Reinier de Klerk, member of the High Government, put it: *The lasting presence of the Company should be sought mainly in securing a good harmony between the King and the Company; such a relationship would mean the VOC need not fear the intrusion of any foreign power. This would require the VOC relinquish financial benefits, although it has been noticed that in this respect the Malabar Kings are very different from the Sinhalese Kings, in wanting everything from the other, which the VOC has had to refuse.*<sup>141</sup> The solution to the rebellion proposed by the High Government was to negotiate a larger share in trade for the king. The rebellion was already costing too much, and making concessions and re-establishing trade was considered the cheaper alternative. Therefore, Schreuder was given permission to offer the king half of the profits the VOC made on the trade in areca nuts and elephants; which it was calculated would amount to 25 to 30,000 rds. a year. In return, the Company wanted a free rein to peel cinnamon in the king's territories and the right to transport elephants through the king's domains. If the king disagreed, a further concession could be made. The king could be given the right to send a ship to the Coromandel Coast every year, on the condition that the Company had the right to search its cargo for cinnamon. If all this failed to achieve the desired result, Schreuder had to protect the cinnamon-producing areas and press for peace by cutting the king off from the salt from the coast, which was the only source of supply of this indispensable mineral for the inhabitants. Schreuder however was unable to transmit the message as the king of Kandy stonily ignored his letters.

The Company was bent on pursuing a policy of charming the king and alleviating the strain caused by its top-heavy, trade-focused policy. By instituting reforms, the VOC wanted to show it took the inhabitants' complaints about its policy to heart. Taxes were lowered, hence forward only the old services and the old taxes would be demanded. The tax on seeds was abolished and the taxes were no longer collected by tax-farmers, but as had been the custom in the old days, directly by the officials of the Company. The villagers were to receive protection against violence perpetrated by the *Chaliassen*, the cinnamon-peelers, and the higher castes would no longer be forced to turn their hands to

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<sup>140</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 604, 12 March 1761, Van Eck to Schreuder.

<sup>141</sup> NA, Van Eck, 33, 5, 10 June 1761, De Klerk to Van Eck.

manual labour.<sup>142</sup> The VOC promised to stop cutting down fruit trees. When it was all said and done, this measure had never resulted in any increase in the harvest of cinnamon. The Company made sure orchards of fruit trees were established under the supervision of the chiefs. The slash-and-burn agriculture was tolerated if carried out under supervision of the chief of the village in order to avoid damage to cinnamon trees. It was admitted that regulations for the protection of cinnamon trees had been implemented too harshly and too chaotically. Finally, the inefficiency created by over-government was cut down by stipulating that every village or *gamme*, was to be ruled by one chief or *vidaan*, thereby excising the extraneous bureaucracy.<sup>143</sup> For the first time, the VOC considered the establishment of cinnamon plantations, although these would only be introduced after 1780.<sup>144</sup> The idea was to have special cinnamon plantations, which would obviate conflicts between the VOC cinnamon policy and indigenous farmers.

Despite the best efforts of the Company, the king was not inclined to negotiate and the VOC was forced to search for other ways to re-establish contact. Since communication with the king was non-existent, the king's uncle in Nagapatnam was offered 5,000 pagodas for his help in building bridges.<sup>145</sup> It was deemed perplexing to make promises to the king, since he was said never to have voiced complaints. In the meantime, Batavia realized the animosity between Schreuder and the king might actually pose an obstacle to negotiations and decided to recall the former to Batavia. The official reason given for his recall was that when an oriental ruler took a dislike to a employee on personal grounds, the situation was untenable. This is illustrated by the fact that the king refused to hear, let alone answer, Schreuder's pleas. The High Government in Batavia attributed the behaviour of the king to personal animosity felt towards Schreuder<sup>146</sup> and stated that Schreuder had offered his resignation, although he denied this.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4931, 2, 14 April 1761, High Government to Van Eck and SLNA, VOC, 4930, 10, 28 February 1761, Schreuder to King of Kandy.

<sup>143</sup> SLNA, VOC, 2231, to Van Eck.

<sup>144</sup> Kotelawelle, "Agrarian policies", 24-25.

<sup>145</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4930, 7, 2 May 1761, Schreuder to Van Eck and 10, 26 January 1761, Schreuder to King of Kandy.

<sup>146</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4931, 2, 14 April 1761, High Government to Van Eck and SLNA, VOC, 4930, 10, 28 February 1761, Schreuder to King of Kandy.

<sup>147</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4931, 1, 9 June 1761, High Government to Van Eck and Schreuder.

Servants were often given orders which dovetailed what the VOC desired and it was the servant's own responsibility to make these desires a reality with the resources put at his disposal. The Company often attributed success or failure to the performance of individual servants, while in actual fact the servants were the inescapable victims of having to follow orders. Since Schreuder never acted in any way offensively towards the king, he is sometimes depicted as having been blinded by a policy of appeasement and therefore unable to cope with the situation.<sup>148</sup> From his personal correspondence, we learn that Schreuder was forced to acquiesce in the Company's peace strategy. Personally, he clearly harboured military ambitions, but he did not have the reinforcements necessary to pursue such a policy. The minute the king's involvement with the rebels became undeniable, Van Eck privately voiced his opinion to Schreuder that it was time to act. Schreuder agreed, but replied he was hampered by orders from Batavia which left him no option but to negotiate.

The Directors in the Republic were the people, who determined the degree of conflict as it was they who decided upon the military reinforcements made available. If Schreuder had wanted to use military force, he could only have done so with reinforcements from either Batavia or the Republic. Batavia simply did not have the capacity to supply the reinforcements needed as it was struggling itself to keep its soldiers alive as they showed a marked propensity to succumb to malaria.<sup>149</sup> Therefore real reinforcements depended on the supply from the Republic. At the beginning of 1761, Schreuder complained about receiving only 200 men as reinforcements from Batavia. The troops arriving from Europe in 1760 were normal replacements and in 1761 only 200 of the promised 300 soldiers arrived in Ceylon. The others had died or fallen ill and had been left behind at the Cape. Even so, Schreuder's position improved slightly after receiving 145 European and 312 Asian soldiers and some French officers from the Coromandel Coast.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> J.H.O. Paulusz, *secret minutes of the Dutch Political Council, 1762* (Colombo: Government Press, 1954), 6.

<sup>149</sup> P.H. van den Burg, *Malaria and Malaise. De VOC in Batavia in de achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam; De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1994).

<sup>150</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 604, 12 March 1761, Van Eck to Schreuder and SLNA, VOC, 4930, 6, 25 March 1761, Schreuder aan Van Eck, "(...) We are obliged for your very willing assistance in supplying 145 European and 312 Eastern soldiers, who have already arrived for support. From our side, we shall not abstain from returning your troops the moment this is possible(...)." And NA, Van Eck, 20, 638, 24 May

When a servant was too assertive in proposing an alternative strategy, this was interpreted by Batavia as admitting failure. Schreuder complied with his orders from Batavia but kept the possibility of a frank dialogue with the king open. When he requested more room to take military action to quell the rebellion, the High Government interpreted this as a request to be relieved, because he was unable to maintain peace in the manner the High Government desired. Batavia hoped that a new Governor would be able to re-establish contact with the king and resolve the conflict peacefully. Only two candidates were considered capable of handling the crisis. The first was dexterously, Casparus de Jong, Governor of the Malabar Coast, who had just been granted permission to return to the Republic.<sup>151</sup> Consequently, the second candidate, Van Eck, was selected. According to the High Government Van Eck was known for his “*notorious indulgence of the indigenous people, his generosity, and for his principles devoid of personal interest. It was hoped that he could make peace with the King*”.<sup>152</sup> It was expected he would accept his new job “*willingly and cheerfully*”.<sup>153</sup>

The High Government assessed why its orders had not been complied with and sought a man with a personality deemed best suited to its predetermined policy. The virtues the High Government attributed to Van Eck were a projection of the kinds of policies the Company wanted him to pursue. In actual fact, Van Eck held completely different views on the conflict to those which the High Government hoped or assumed he had. When Van Eck took over, he, as Schreuder had, felt trapped in a dilemma between Company demands that the former situation be restored, perhaps gaining some advantages on the one hand, and the lack of support for a more aggressive policy on the other.<sup>154</sup> Reconciliation was still considered the best policy, but Van Eck personally deplored his forced indulgence towards an enemy which had dragged the VOC into such

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1761, Van Eck to De Klerk, SLNA, VOC, 4930, 1, 16 January 1761, Schreuder to Van Eck and 6, 25 March 1761, High Government to Council of Ceylon.

<sup>151</sup> NA, Hope, 88, 29 May 1761, secret resolution.

<sup>152</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4931, 1, 9 June 1761, High Government to Van Eck and Schreuder, (...) To select his honorable successor, as we shall now appoint, the Governor of the Coromandel Coast Lubbert Jan van Eck, proven by the commission bestowed on His Honour, with confidence that His Honour will take upon him this burden not only cheerfully and willingly, but also will be able to manage with his acknowledged benignity and his disinterested and generous principles towards the indigenous people to achieve the peace and so greatly desired with the king of the lands and the very alienate subjects of the Company.(...).

<sup>153</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4931, 1, 9 June 1761, High Government to Van Eck.

<sup>154</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 721, 21 March 1761, Van Eck to Samlandt.



an *unreasonable and murderous* conflict. The High Government had over-estimated the power of the king and left to face the consequences Van Eck thought the official policy was erroneous: “*Because the indigenous people have such a disposition that when they perceive that people fear and ponder to them, they degenerate from bad to worse*”. He balanced that the VOC would be better off forcing the king of Kandy to surrender, and he was convinced that this would gain the Company the respect of the neighbouring indigenous rulers too.<sup>155</sup> Van Eck’s plan was to try and persuade the king to contemplate peace, but to be ready for an armed conflict if this failed.<sup>156</sup>

## 2.2 Increasing pressure on the king

With its change of governor, the High Government in Batavia at least acknowledged the crisis by installing a Secret Council to monitor the situation. As this was close by, capable of judging the situation in the strictest secrecy, quick decisions could be reached and drastic measures taken when the Company’s position in the island was in jeopardy, with a limited risk of secret orders leaking out either to the public or the enemy.<sup>157</sup> A small alteration in the official policy came with a change in Governor-General, after which the High Government was more inclined to resort to arms to solve the conflict.<sup>158</sup> Shortly after Van der Parra (1761-1775) took over, Van Eck thanked him for sending a ‘*more liberal designation*’ towards resolving the conflict by military force. It was considered only a minor change and Van Eck reassured Van der Para he would

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<sup>155</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 693, 8 September 1761, Van Eck to Van der Parra.

<sup>156</sup> NA, Van Eck 20, 693, 8 September 1761, Van Eck to Van der Parra and NA, Van Eck 20, 694, 8 September 1761, Van Eck to De Klerk.

<sup>157</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4875, 5, Van Eck to Van der Parra. (...) The Secret Committee consisted of the *meest ervaren en getrouwste* employees, Van Eck at first appointed, *Hoofd-administrateur* De Lij, Major Bisschoff, Hugonis, the secretary of police Hugonis as secretary, and as clerk, the sworn clerk of police, Muller. Houting, Commander of the Naval Power of the VOC in Asia, was sent to help him, indicating the naval dimension of the conflict.

<sup>158</sup> Governor-General Mossel died in 1762 and A. Van der Parra (1762-1775) was elected as his successor. In Batavia, the High Government had always acquiesced in Mossel’s preference for peace. In the last resolution on Ceylon under Mossel’s ruler, his successor, Van der Parra, for the first time stated that the VOC had to adopt violent measures if the pursuit of peace was unsuccessful.

still opt for compromise rather than war.<sup>159</sup> The greater liberty of action was seen as a tool by which to respond more swiftly to possible attacks by the king.

The VOC could not ignore the rebellion as it was imperative to restore peace in order to obtain cinnamon for trade. When there were signs that the rebellion had begun to subside, Van Eck tried to damage the king's authority in the Company possessions and to restore Company rule by military means. If action was to be taken against the king's territory, it was necessary to ensure the VOC districts were pacified first and to alienate the inhabitants there from the king. By order of the High Government, the inhabitants of the Galle Corle and Matura districts were promised fair treatment on their return under the authority of the Company. Those who obeyed this order were exempt from tax contributions for a period of five years and were promised a remuneration if they provided commercial and military goods.<sup>160</sup> In 1762 the regions where the revolution had originated had been brought back under VOC control.<sup>161</sup> In the Jaffna area, the chiefs were surveyed and forced to declare themselves vassals or subjects of the Company in order to prevent them from going over to the side of the king.<sup>162</sup>

After restoring order in the VOC regions, the Company carried the war into the territories of the king. VOC detachments started making incursions into Colonna and the Mendez Corle as well as into Oeva (provinces on the king's eastern flank).<sup>163</sup> This tactic proved successful thanks to the collaboration of indigenous chiefs, who were afterwards rewarded for their co-operation.<sup>164</sup> Several Sinhalese nobles were willing to change sides too.<sup>165</sup> When sallies were made against the rebels it was publicly stated that submission to VOC rule meant that no harm would come to them. In the event of resistance, the

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<sup>159</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 719, 15 March 1762, Van Eck to Van der Parra.

<sup>160</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4873, 1, 6 August 1762, High Government to Van Eck, (...) In the meantime, Your Honour will have to assure all the inhabitants of the Gale Corle and those of the Matura district, in the ola already mentioned, through all channels of all reasonable and fair treatment, and to warn the first-mentioned particularly, not to answer to any degree the tempting solicitations of the Matura Command and the Adigar over the king's people. Also, you will have to contribute according to your means in encouraging the people of the Colombo, Gale, Matura districts, to distance themselves from the king and to come to our side, under a final assurance, that Your Honour will spare those who will heed the call within a certain amount of time, for the next five years from paying obligatory contributions, money and goods, and that during this time the funds inevitably needed will be paid for to the suppliers by the Company (...).

<sup>161</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 742, 29 April 1763, Van Eck to Van der Parra, the fortresses of Catoene, Hakman and Tengale had been reconquered and were firmly in the hands of the VOC.

<sup>162</sup> SNLA, VOC, 4873, 1, 6 August 1762, High Government to Van Eck.

<sup>163</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 742, 29 April 1763, Van Eck to Van der Parra.

<sup>164</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 755, 8 July 1763, Van Eck to unknown.

<sup>165</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 719, 15 March 1763, Van Eck to Van der Parra.

Company threatened massacre. Fighting on enemy territory was expected to fuel discontent towards the king and, in fact, this assumption proved partially correct. When one of the Dutch detachments reached the Caimelle river, on the border of the king's territories, it was helped to cross this stream by the subjects of the king and fifteen villages showed up to register their support.<sup>166</sup> This was also palpable evidence that the indigenous farmers were pragmatic in the way they dealt with the conflict.

When war threatened their own homes, the Kandyans sought for peace on the same terms as those before the rebellion. In 1763 the Company maintained its momentum and ignored a royal embassy's plea for peace when it demanded the return of Puttalam and Chialouw.<sup>167</sup> In further negotiations, the promise of an answer from the High Government within three months pleased the Kandyans. They considered the peace already signed and opened their borders, allowing the peelers access to the cinnamon trees in the king's territories. Such products as areca nuts, coffee and pepper were brought to the warehouses again.<sup>168</sup> At the same time, ambassadors from the king tried to assess if the VOC was preparing to attack Kandy, attempts interpreted by the servants as prompted by fear.<sup>169</sup> Van Eck had to wait for the High Government to decide on a policy for Ceylon: should the Company accept the proposal of the King to return to the previous agreement or should a more advantageous peace be insisted upon?<sup>170</sup> Van Eck himself had no doubt that the war would continue, since the king refused to contemplate any compensation for the damage he had caused. Given that Batavia was not able to supply troops, the ultimate decision in favour of war lay in the Republic.

### 2.3 External factors

From the beginning it had been clear the King needed outside help to defeat the Company. Consequently the Company strove with might and main to keep external influence at bay. The High Government was aware that negotiations between the king of

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<sup>166</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4864, 1, 2 December 1762, Resolution by the Council of Ceylon.

<sup>167</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 727, 20 March 1763, Van Eck to Weyerman.

<sup>168</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 746, 27 May 1763, Van Eck to Van Teylingen.

<sup>169</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 751, 10 June 1763, Van Eck to Van der Parra.

<sup>170</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 742, 29 April 1763, Van Eck to Van der Parra.

Kandy, the king of Tanjore and the nawab of the Carnatika, two of the more powerful indigenous rulers on the Coromandel Coast, had been unsuccessful.<sup>171</sup> The nawab had refused to come to the aid of the king of Kandy, *explaining that to aid the Kandy ruler was really below his dignity – since the new Dravidian ruler [the king of Kandy] was merely an aldear, or country gentleman, from Madurai.*<sup>172</sup> During the rebellion, the Company sent an expeditionary force to the other side of the Pambe channel. The theuver, an Indian king of lesser stature on the other side of Adam's Bridge, had seized opportunity to cast envious eyes at the island of Pambe. VOC intelligence claimed the theuver was even prepared to supply the uncle of the king of Kandy with 6000 men and send them over to Ceylon.<sup>173</sup> Later, it became clear that the theuver had intended this army to fight against Tanjore.<sup>174</sup> The communication of the king of Kandy with these Indian rulers aroused the VOC suspicions about the King's professed desire for peace, which in its eyes was not genuine and no more than a ploy to buy time to negotiate outside help.<sup>175</sup>

The Company wanted to prevent foreign support for the King and prepared itself militarily by occupying strategic positions. In order to counter the Indian threat, occupation of the strategically situated island of Pambe was considered, even though an earlier occupation under Van Imhoff had been a disaster because of extraordinarily unhealthy living conditions. This was partly solved in 1763 by sending indigenous soldiers, who were considered more resistant. Finally, the problem was completely solved when the expansionist theuver died soon afterwards and was succeeded by an infant son; under these circumstances peace returned. Soldiers were sent to force the theuver to hand Pambe over to the Dutch under the pretext of war-reparations. The troops were recalled in 1765 as the Company had conquered Puttalam in 1763 and could prevent any attempt to cross from India from there.<sup>176</sup> If the theuver harboured any fresh plans towards the island, however, new troops could be dispatched quickly.

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<sup>171</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4930, 6, 25 March 1761, High Government to Council of Ceylon.

<sup>172</sup> Winius, *Merchant-warrior pacified*, 137.

<sup>173</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 742, 29 April 1763, Van Eck to Van der Parra.

<sup>174</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 751, 10 June 1763, Van Eck to Van der Parra.

<sup>175</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 742, 29 April 1763, Van Eck to Van der Parra.

<sup>176</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4938, 18, 25 February 1764, Van Eck to Secret Council.

Until the middle of the eighteenth century, the Company had always possessed sufficient sea power to ward off any outsiders and the question of sovereignty over the island played only a minor role. From the time of the Seven Years' War, the English not only became the predominant power on the Coromandel Coast, they also literally ruled the waves. This was partly because the Royal Navy sent warships out to India to help the English against the French. The Company never at any time received similar support from its home country, nor was it equipped to fight the larger English warships. Initially, the VOC remained unaware of the potential magnitude of the new English threat to its position in Ceylon. The Company thought it was safe from English intrusion, because the latter were still too preoccupied in Bengal and with an expedition to Mauritius which eventually turned out badly.<sup>177</sup> When the king's advance was halted, he realized it was impossible to oust the VOC from the heavily fortified, sea-supplied strongholds of Colombo and Galle on his own. To get rid of the Dutch, he needed European help.<sup>178</sup> The reason the King had avoided contact with the Company for a long time was his hope of an alliance with the English. The king had sent messengers to the English inviting them to court to discuss the possibility of help. The Company was aware that these Kandyan messengers had been sent to the Coromandel Coast, and ordered that a close watch be kept on the king's uncle in Nagapatnam. The same precautions had been taken in the case of two EIC servants who were active in Madurai, since contact between Ceylon and Madurai was easy. The king succeeded in handing a letter over to an English ship from Malabar passing off Matara.<sup>179</sup>

When the extent of the imminent external involvement in Ceylon dawned on the Company, it decided to pursue a more aggressive policy. Although the Dutch were not unaware of a possible threat from the English, at first they had been ignorant of the English embassy to the king. This embassy under the leadership of Pybus, member of the Council of Madras, commenced badly.<sup>180</sup> After a couple of days a new meeting was set

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<sup>177</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 719, 15 March 1763, Van Eck to Van der Parra.

<sup>178</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 694, 8 September 1761, Van Eck to De Klerk.

<sup>179</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 636, 21 May 1761, Van Eck to Mossel.

<sup>180</sup> Raven-Hart, *Pybus*, 54-60. Pybus was told to kneel in front of the king in order to hand him his letter. Refusing, he was forced to comply, only complaining afterwards about the treatment. Raven-Hart, *Pybus*, 60-61. He continuously stressed he came on different terms from those of the Dutch, as he had been invited by the king. He told the king the English would never comply with the ceremonies, but was still promised a new meeting with the king in two or three days.

up and the English were asked how they were prepared to assist the king against the Dutch. Although Pybus indicated he was powerless to promise or actually engage anything, he had demonstrated the EIC was inclined to enter into an alliance. He raised the matter of the privileges the king would be willing to grant them in return.<sup>181</sup> In the next meeting, Pybus stated that *the English should be allowed the same privileges of Trade, in every Respect as the Dutch enjoyed*.<sup>182</sup> Later, he stated the costs of any future war would have to be borne by the king. In the end, the alliance proved fruitless, because the English insisted on the same rights as the Dutch. Entering into an alliance with the English would have just meant trading one European power for another. Retorting, the VOC explained that in comparison to its policy of peace, the king had nothing to expect from the English.<sup>183</sup>

The VOC was temporarily saved from the English threat because of the excessive demands the latter made and because of geopolitical reasons. When the Dutch found out about the English plans, the EIC was directly confronted with its alleged intrusion into VOC territory. The English countered arguing that the king of Kandy was a sovereign ruler and there were no treaties extant excluding contact between the king and other countries. Van Eck was very relieved when the English fleet which seemed bound for Ceylon was diverted to Manila. It was destined to fight the Spanish who had just entered the Seven Years' War on the side of the French.<sup>184</sup> When paper cartridges were found covered with writing in English, this gave the Company time to come to its senses about the nature of the relationship between the king and the EIC. As soon as peace was signed in Europe, there was apprehension the EIC would certainly direct its attention towards Ceylon. This anxiety was reinforced by rumours of a possible rupture between England and the Republic.<sup>185</sup> The English plans to sign a contract with the king made it untenable for the VOC to accept peace on the previous terms, because it was feared that once a

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<sup>181</sup> Raven-Hart, *Pybus*, 66.

<sup>182</sup> Raven-Hart, *Pybus*, 70 and 72.

<sup>183</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4930, 7, 2 May 1761, Schreuder to Van Eck.

<sup>184</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4875, 4, 10 January 1763, Van Eck to Van der Hoop.

<sup>185</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4875, 2, 12 August 1762, Secret Council to High Government, NA, Van Eck, 20, 747, 2 June 1763, Van Eck to Van Teylingen, War was anticipated since the Republic launched an ambitious plan to fit out forty-six ships of the line and to build thirty-six new ones armed with forty-two cannon each. NA, Van Eck, 20, 749, 10 June 1763, Van Eck to Cordua & Faure, That this is not just rhetorical question framed to elicit reinforcements is proved by the fact that Van Eck truly feared war and ordered his agents in Batavia to sell all his goods in order to send his money home as quickly as possible.

peace treaty was signed the English would obtain a settlement in the island. The Company had to hasten to resolve the issue of sovereignty to assure its monopoly on cinnamon before the Seven Years' War ended.<sup>186</sup> Reinforcements from the Republic were indispensable to such an offensive.<sup>187</sup> With the permission of the High Government, Van Eck sent a letter to the Directors in the Republic asking for reinforcements in view of the English threat.<sup>188</sup>

### 3. Solving dilemmas by war

Fear of English involvement in the island prodded the VOC to consider war against the king. The decision to go to war was not taken out of fear of the Kandyans or for any nascent colonial design. It was taken purely and simply to keep the English out of Ceylon.<sup>189</sup> The fear of English naval power encouraged the Gentlemen Seventeen to give this order two months later, when they gave the green light for war against the king. The Directors urged their servants in Ceylon not to use violence against the English unless the latter disembarked troops. Under all other circumstances the Governor should restrain himself to protesting in writing.<sup>190</sup> This order came too late, as two English ships had already been denied entry to Trincomalee.<sup>191</sup> The king neither acknowledged the Company's sovereignty nor did he abandon his demand for direct open trade. From the point of view of the VOC, this only added to the '*sinister and treacherous*' behaviour of the court assiduously searching for foreign aid. The idea of reaching a compromise vanished from that very moment, since possession of all the coastal areas was deemed essential to a sustained and profitable Dutch presence in the island. The Company was

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<sup>186</sup> NA, Van Eck, 20, 761, 30 July 1763, Van Eck to Van der Parra.

<sup>187</sup> Van Eck, 20, 761, 30 July 1763, Van Eck to Van der Parra, 400 soldiers died of sickness in 1763, so Van Eck asked for more reinforcements. Van Eck, 20, 764, 30 July 1763, Van Eck to Schreuder, Van Eck followed the High Government's orders to send expeditions from several sides of the island into the king's lands.

<sup>188</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4873, 1, 6 August 1762, High Government to Van Eck.

<sup>189</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4873, 1, 6 August 1762, High Government to Van Eck.

<sup>190</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4873, 4, 20 October 1762, High Government to Secret Council.

<sup>191</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4873, 6, 12 November 1762, High Government to Secret Council.

not willing to give up what it considered its lawful legal possession. For his own good reasons, Van Eck decided to pretend to be inactive, postponing any plans to attack the king until after the arrival of reinforcements from Europe.<sup>192</sup>

Hence the new as yet covert plans supported radical intervention, militarily and politically, including the conquest of Kandy to enforce demands. The High Government conceived a strategy in which one main army should invade Kandy from Puttalam. The task of the auxiliary forces, scheduled to leave Trincomalee and Baticaloa, was to create chaos in the king's territories. Initially Van Eck was ordered to manage with the 7 to 8,000 troops who were already in Ceylon at the outbreak of the conflict, plus the reinforcements already received.<sup>193</sup> As a consequence of the structurally high mortality there, Batavia<sup>194</sup> could send only 300 slaves to be used as coolies. While Van Eck was waiting for reinforcements from Europe, the king made a renewed attempt to seize the area around Matara, which failed to succeed.<sup>195</sup> Meanwhile the rebels were again quickly brought under the rule and authority of the Company.<sup>196</sup>

Van Eck wanted to sow discord against the king at the Sinhalese court, in order to force him to accept the peace proposal. Pursuing this strategy, he aimed his next attack on the lands owned by the higher-ranking nobles, who in their attempts to safeguard their lands were expected to force the king to bow to Dutch demands. Van Eck was convinced some of the higher-ranking nobles would join the Dutch, since they had been unhappy with the king's policy. This was deduced from the attempted assassination of the king the year before the rebellion, when the Sinhalese nobles had planned to replace the sovereign with a Siamese prince. Nothing was expected from the nobles of Malabar origin as it was assumed they would never change their negative attitude towards the Dutch.

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<sup>192</sup> He had asked for 2000 troops.

<sup>193</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4873, 6, 12 November 1762, High Government to Secret Council, 282 Europeans and 1854 natives from Batavia and 600 to 700 Europeans from a total of 2136 men from the Cape of Good Hope.

<sup>194</sup> P.H. van den Burg, *Malaria and Malaise. De VOC in Batavia in de achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam; De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1994).

<sup>195</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4875, 4, 10 January 1763, Secret Council to High Government, (...) The Royal *adigar* who was in command since our soldiers have retaken the position at Matura has been thoroughly exasperated. He has spared neither any effort nor men to disperse our troops from their fortifications, which he has not succeeded in doing, but as a consequence has also had to retreat and flee to the borders of the king's land after several severe defeats. Various indigenous chiefs and subjects of the Company seeing his lack of power, left his side and have returned to subject themselves to the Company (...).

<sup>196</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4875, 4, 10 January 1763, Van Eck to Van der Hoop.



The Sinhalese noblemen at the court were said to be still in favour of replacing the king with the Siamese prince, but because they feared that the Company would be the only party to profit from the change, they were planning to send a mission of their own to Siam.<sup>197</sup> These fears of the nobles were not unfounded, since the High Government had sent a guideline for a contract with the Siamese prince,<sup>198</sup> who was to replace the King and reign with the assistance of the Sinhalese nobles. If the contract was observed to the satisfaction of the Company, his royal status would become hereditary. Both parties, the Company and the Siamese king, would be recognized as sovereigns of their respective territories, the border of the two being the same boundary which had existed between the Portuguese and the king, plus the addition of the whole coastal strip of the island to the Dutch. The future king would have to cede several provinces to the Company,<sup>199</sup> although the Sinhalese nobles could keep their positions by changing their allegiance to the Company.

The new king should pledge himself not to allow other Europeans into Ceylon and he was expected to marry a Sinhalese princess. The king would share in the profits of trade under terms set out in a financial contract.<sup>200</sup> When the search for the Siamese prince proved unsuccessful, Van Eck was instructed to declare war without reflecting any further on the *deceitful expostulations of the perfidious and unruly court*.<sup>201</sup> Van Eck finally received reinforcements in 1764 and the first campaign against Kandy was planned. The High Government warned Van Eck that it was aware that he wanted to make the king a tributary of the Company, but they believed this was too extreme. It was essential to strike a deal with the king as soon as possible, since the Company could not afford a long war.<sup>202</sup> At the same time, Batavia realized that the present situation was also

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197 SLNA, VOC, 4875, 3, 25 September 1762, Secret Council to High Government.

198 SLNA, VOC, 4873, 5, 19 November 1762, High Government to Secret Council.

199 3,4 and 7 and Puttalam provinces.

200 SLNA, VOC, 4873, 2, 6 August 1762, concept contract of ideal peace with Siamese Prince.

<sup>201</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4873, 3, 14 September 1762, High Government to Van Eck, (...) Without in the future reflecting in any way on the deceitful expostulations of the perfidious, and in all respects unruly court, however beautifully and radiant it may be dished up, in this case we are still and unchangeably reserved to continue as powerfully as possible a war of so many done injustices and deceitful doings against the earlier mentioned court and its followers from the Malabar (...).

<sup>202</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4873, 13, 11 July 1763, High Government to Secret Council.

detrimental to the position of the Company. As long as he kept the interests of the Company in mind, Van Eck was given plenipotentiary power to act as he saw fit.<sup>203</sup>

### 3.1 Military intervention

The Dutch had waited to go to war, but the 1764 military campaign against the king of Kandy was as a complete failure. The VOC army entered enemy territory on the 16 February and met with no resistance up to Wisenewe. There the Kandyans made a stand against a forward detachment. After coming under fire, the VOC forces formed up in European-style and wasted their ammunition, firing into the bushes at random. Having squandered their twenty-four cartridges per person and all their extra ammunition, the troops had to retreat to the main body of the army.<sup>204</sup> After this strategic failure, a more fundamental problem presented itself when in a meteorological abnormality for that time of year it started raining. Because the small number of coolies available, aggravated by their desertions, which caused transportation problems,<sup>205</sup> the Dutch retreated, ending the first major excursion of the Company into enemy territory of the war not so glorious. The VOC detachments dispatched from other sides of the island also decided discretion was the better part of valor in engaging the enemy. Moreover, the tactic of attacking from different sides had overstretched the meager resources and led to nothing. Now it was the turn of the Kandyans to respond.<sup>206</sup> They captured Appretotte and Jaliput, but soon had to beat a hasty retreat from VOC territory.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4874, High Government to Secret Council, (...) the orders incorporated in the messages of this Government of the 5th of May and 14th of June 1763 are so liberal that Van Eck and his Council have received plenipotentiary power to act as they deem right according to the circumstances (...).

<sup>204</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4938, 18, 27 February 1764, Leaving behind them seven dead, and one soldier unaccounted for. Fourteen people were injured of whom four seriously. Van Eck did not spare the dead a second thought, just giving order so that their name be taken off the payrolls, a normal procedure, which shows us the accuracy of his body count.

<sup>205</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4983, 6, 16 February 1764, Van Eck to the Secret Council, the desertion was caused by hunger, since the coolies were unable to buy rice with the money they received as pay.

<sup>206</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4865, 9, 16 February 1764, Van Eck to Secret Council. To stop them, soldiers were sent to strengthen parts against intrusions. Van Eck told indigenous chiefs not to yield to the pressure of the Kandyans and to respond aggressively. If they could not stand their ground, they should request military

The 1764 campaign against Kandy had been a defeat, so a decision had to be taken about whether a new campaign would be mounted the next year.<sup>208</sup> The final decision to continue hostilities, was made by the High Government in Batavia.<sup>209</sup> The Council was divided between supporters of war<sup>210</sup> and doubters who insisted that peace had to be pursued. The supporters were eager for a full-scale continuation of the war as long as the Gentlemen XVII in Holland agreed to this and were convinced that unity was of the utmost importance.<sup>211</sup> As the acknowledged expert, Jan Schreuder, who had returned to Batavia to take his place in the Council of the Indies, did not believe in negotiations. He argued strenuously that the king be deposed. The Company should return to its former contract plus obtain an assurance against foreign intrusion. The doubters wanted to seek peace on the Company's terms.<sup>212</sup> Nevertheless, mindful that war was too expensive, they argued for peace.<sup>213</sup> Councillor Pieter Haksteen, maintained a more neutral stance and proposed waiting for the reports of the Secret Council in Colombo. Eventually it was decided by seven votes to four, with one undecided, that Van Eck should continue the war and attempt to establish peace on terms favourable to the company when the opportunity presented itself.<sup>214</sup>

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assistance. If they surrendered the VOC positions too easily, Van Eck threatened to degrade them to the lowest caste and to withhold a second pardon from them.

<sup>207</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4865, 11, 16 February 1764, Van Eck to Secret Council.

<sup>208</sup> The answer to this question if he should be continuing the war was dealt with by the High Government on 4 June 1764 in the document SLNA, VOC, 4874, 4th of June 1764, "(...) In order to obtain the desired durable guarantee of security of the Company possessions and its exclusive trade, if possible protect the shores or at least those which are most highly coveted and wanted, [they are] namely the means to keep our competitors off the island during peacetime. Through the appeal to rights obtained, we now see other means to assure this than by taking up arms (...)."

<sup>209</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4874, 4 June 1764, High Government to Secret Council, "(...) That the extraordinary as well as the ordinary points in the present matter dealing with the continuation or discontinuation of a war, will be given a conclusive voice in the advice following the order of the Directors in the year 1742.(...) "This meant that Van Eck had a double role in the decision-making process. In his capacity as a member of the council he had the right to vote and in his capacity as Governor of Ceylon, he was the chief supplier of information to the High Government in Batavia. Another problem was that because Van Eck was in Ceylon, he was not able to be present at the meeting. In decisions of sufficient magnitude, members of the council were allowed to make their opinion and vote known on paper.

<sup>210</sup> Schreuder, Van Riemsdijk, Van Basel, De Klerk, Alting, Van der Parra, and Van Eck.

<sup>211</sup> In this respect, the appointment of Van Angelbeek to the Secret Committee had to be supported since Van Eck had to appoint people who were willing to work with him.

<sup>212</sup> Although Van Eck was absent, the Governor-General summarized Van Eck's point of view from his private correspondence, demonstrating Van Eck's inclination to pursue war. The Governor-General had the final word and said that Van Eck should be given all possible room to maneuver.

<sup>213</sup> Harting, Taillefert, Hilgers, and Romp.

<sup>214</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4874, 4 June 1764, High Government to Secret Council.

Before the decision of Batavia reached Colombo, the Secret Council had met to debate the same question, but with even more divergent views on the conflict<sup>215</sup> were proposed advocating tactics to force the king to make an advantageous peace with the Company and suggesting ways and means to remedy the shortage of coolies.<sup>216</sup> Renewed intervention was deemed inevitable: it was absolutely essential the VOC have possession of and sovereignty over all the coastal areas. The Company could not afford to lose its invincible reputation with indigenous powers all over Asia.<sup>217</sup> The fly in the ointment was that the Council was wracked by personal tensions, since several members of the Secret Council had played a somewhat dubious role in the previous campaign. For instance, Major Bisschoff, leader of the expeditionary force in the south, had not been able to make his way into enemy territory and had retreated, greatly to Van Eck's amazement.

The personal tensions in the Council erupted in discussion of the question of whether the war should be continued. Several members opposed Van Eck and defied him with arguments concentrating on alternatives for a new campaign, disagreeing with the assumption that war was in the interests of the Company. They asserted that if the Company was incapable of forcing the king into signing an advantageous peace treaty, war would ruin the Company as it had ruined the Portuguese.<sup>218</sup> The tactic of terrorizing enemy territory must be continued, since the Portuguese had also used this tactic successfully.<sup>219</sup> The prospect of a sustainable peace would only be feasible by displaying the Kandyans generosity.<sup>220</sup> The newly conquered territories should be returned to the

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<sup>215</sup> At the end of 1764, this committee consisted of Van Eck, Bauert, Jacobus de Lij, Major Bisschoff, Moens and Van Angelbeek. Van Eck had formed this committee shortly after his arrival in Colombo.

<sup>216</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4865, 17, 5 April 1764, (...) At present we shall discuss what needs to be done in order to force the king of Kandy to a advantageous and reputable peace, in obedience to the special order of the High Government. More specifically this means it judges it necessary and will help us remedy the principal impediment, namely the lack of coolies, in the upcoming campaign.(...).

<sup>217</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4874, 18, High Government to Secret Council.

<sup>218</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4865, 29-31, 10 April 1764.

<sup>219</sup> Channa Wickremesekera, *Kandy at war: Indigenous Resistance to European Expansion in Sri Lanka, 1594-1818* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2004), 36. SLNA, VOC, 4865, When the weather was right, detachments should raid the king's territories to frighten his subjects and to lure him into a confrontation in the vicinity of VOC strongholds, where circumstances were more advantageous to the VOC than in the mountainous areas. As it was highly unlikely that he would succeed in defeating the VOC, the VOC would be forced to accept a treaty advantageous to the VOC. The issue of the small numbers of coolies could easily be solved.

<sup>220</sup> In order to counter the ideas and assumptions of De Lij's and Bisschoff, Van Angelbeek had researched the history of the Portuguese and come to three conclusions. Firstly, that the Portuguese had not been nearly as powerful as the VOC was at the time. Secondly, that they spoiled their position by not keeping their own pledges and promises, which had let to a general hatred of them. Lastly, that they would never

king and more gifts than had been its wont in former days should be dispensed to please the king in order to restore trust and to avoid foreign intervention in the future.<sup>221</sup> Peace was considered a better option than risking everything in war, at a time at which it was confronted by insoluble problems.<sup>222</sup> By obstructing the supply of salt and cloth to the highlands, the king would be given a stern reminder that he also depended on the Company.

The problem with the alternative plans was that they ignored changes in the balance of power at sea.<sup>223</sup> A peace treaty would have to be framed to keep European competitors out, securing the possessions of the Company and its exclusive trade. The king would have to relinquish sovereignty of the coastal strips to the Company and renounce the right to contact other Europeans. If the Company were to sign a peace treaty over-hastily, it would be impossible to force these concessions on the king. Alternatively, the plan of harassing the king would take years of war and influence commerce negatively. Turning to the matter of the costs of a protracted struggle, it was judged that forcing the king to make peace with an expedition to Kandy would be the least expensive option. The costs of such an expedition were bearable, because the financial position of the Dutch had improved since the cinnamon sent to Holland in 1762 had yielded huge profits. Weighing all this up, Van Eck believed the VOC should obey the orders of the Gentlemen XVII to bring peace by war.<sup>224</sup>

As it was conscious of the English threat, it was unavoidable that the High Government would resume the war with renewed vigour and more resources.<sup>225</sup> Now that Van Eck had been assured of the support of the Gentlemen XVII and the High

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have left the island if the VOC had not helped. If De Lij's plans were executed, it would give the king the chance to invite the other Europeans to his assistance, because he would have harbours open to him. He would no longer permit the VOC to conduct the trade in cinnamon. It was also proposed that the VOC should obtain a contract from the king, and not from his principal minister, which would be scorned by other Europeans. Van Angelbeek also stressed that the resistance by the Kandyans was a myth.

<sup>221</sup> In return for the elephant trade, the king would be asked to recognize the VOC as sovereign ruler over its territories and the coastal areas, plus allowing the VOC the access to cinnamon trees.

<sup>222</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4865, 30-34, 10 April 1764. They also believed that, even if the war was continued, the problem with the coolies would prove insoluble.

<sup>223</sup> Van Eck began by saying that nobody desired the restoration of peace as much as he did, as he longed to return to his fatherland and family. He simply desired a lasting peace, which he did not judge achievable on the basis of the alternative plans.

<sup>224</sup> SLNA, VOC, 18, 31 July 1764, High Government to Secret Council.

<sup>225</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4873, 17, 12 June 1764, High Government to Secret Council, (...) It has been approved and acknowledged that the earlier-mentioned expedition has to be continued with all possible vigour, also to enable the Lord Van Eck to make war on the king more successfully than today (...).

Government, he still had to solve the problems which had emerged in the earlier campaign.<sup>226</sup> In 1765, the Company took great care not to scatter its forces: the two columns it sent out to Kandy were to converge before the first mountains were reached. Along the route of the army, reinforced depots were built to guarantee supplies. The army advanced only after sufficient supplies had been brought in and the depot was secured. Although some resistance by the Kandyans is described in the literature,<sup>227</sup> in the report of the campaign the employees were mostly relieved that the Kandyans had not made optimal use of the obstacles with which nature had provided them. Had they done so, it would have been impossible to conquer Kandy. On the actual battlefield, the Dutch did not fear the Kandyans as they never inflicted much damage. After loosing their first shots far too high, normally the Kandyan soldiers only fired at random. In every battle, the Dutch forces tried to outflank them, which normally put the Kandyans to flight without any great loss of men.<sup>228</sup> The VOC campaign was gathering momentum and actually managed to penetrate the territories of the king. In order to halt the Company's progress, the king decided to use alternative tactics, since this time the rain did not come to his aid. The king on a regular basis sent forth a messenger to initiate peace talks, also asking the VOC army to return to Colombo. The Company was dubious about the real objective of such messengers who did not carry royal credentials and were often sent back to the king without a reply.<sup>229</sup> Other tactics to slow the Dutch advance down were also tried. For instance, the king decided to send a religious fanatic to kill Van Eck, but he did not even succeed in passing the guards.<sup>230</sup> Only slightly discommoded by the Kandyan attempts at

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226 SLNA, VOC, 4881, report military campaign 1765. Parts of the report of the campaign of 1765 have been preserved. Van Eck had only Portuguese maps and Valentijn's words to ascertain where Kandy was located, but it was known that the road to Kandy was virtually impassable and wound tortuously across ranges of mountains. From Colombo, it was best to head north, where there was a slightly easier pass through the first two chains of mountains, before turning south again.

<sup>227</sup> Pieris, *Ceylon and the Hollanders*, 112-115; Winius, *The Merchant-Warrior Pacified*, 136; L.S. Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka 1707-1782* (Colombo: Lake House, 1988).

<sup>228</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4881, Report of military campaign 1765. In the diary of the campaign, Van Eck ordered track be kept of the names of the soldiers killed in battle in order to scrap them from the payrolls as quickly as possible, giving an objective account of deaths.

<sup>229</sup> When the campaign began to show signs of success, the *Rijxadiagars*, the two principal ministers in the Kandyan kingdom, started sending messengers to propose peace talks minus the condition of withdrawal to Colombo. The VOC indicated it would only to negotiate peace with an ambassador of the King bearing a letter of credence. When the Kandyan negotiators answered it would take some time to obtain such a letter from the king, the VOC was uncompromising and the campaign we continued in full force.

<sup>230</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4881, Report of the military campaign, 100-106. One day a Moor came to the Dutch camp carrying a white flag, indicating he had to speak to the Governor in person and would tell his story only to

delay, the VOC army reached the capital. The city and the temple of the Tooth were pillaged, after which the same fate befell the temples close to the city.

#### 4. A new status quo

Since the Company did not succeed in capturing the King,<sup>231</sup> the war had not been won decisively, but the will to pursue it to the bitter end was absent. It was decided to leave a garrison in Kandy and return next year after the monsoon season. The main army under the command of Governor Van Eck would withdraw to just beyond the mountains. This was not to be as on his return to Colombo, Van Eck felt ill and died. On his deathbed Van Eck recorded his final plan of his vision of the relationship with Kandy after the war. He was convinced it was impossible to work with the present king, because he was being influenced by his relatives on the Malabar Coast who wanted to obtain trade concessions, and as an outsider he would not be able to exert sufficient power over the Sinhalese nobles, who would not be happy about having to cede land to the VOC. To remedy this, external intervention was necessary and Van Eck wanted an expedition to

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him. Because they were suspicious, he was denied access to Van Eck and told Van Angelbeek his story. Having been born on the Coromandel Coast, he had been called to the island, to serve in a temple. There he had led an ascetic life, refusing normal food and consuming toxics materials which did not affect him because of the power of the god of Kattergamme who protected him and ordered him to drink some milk every couple of days. The king of Kandy had heard of him and summoned him to Candia in order to consult him about the war and ask his assistance against the Dutch. In return the king had given him a hundred pieces of fine cloth and a hundred silver-mounted daggers, but he had accepted only one piece of cloth and one dagger. Van Angelbeek, suspicious, feigned interest in the knife and asked him to hand it over, effectively disarming him. According to the man, the god of Kattergamme had revealed to him the king's resistance was futile, because the VOC would conquer the whole kingdom as far as Battialaloe. He had come to announce their imminent victory to the Dutch and if they would allow him to talk to the Governor in private, he would guide the whole army to Kandy unharmed. They had only to postpone their advance until he had designated the appropriate day. He declined to give more information about the enemy saying that if the VOC were to listen to him no army would be big enough to hold them back. Van Angelbeek and the other servants were not impressed by the story, trying instead to discover his purpose, but to their dismay he adhered to his story. Since they thought he was harmless after his knife had been taken away, he was quartered with the indigenous servants, where he was recognized by one of the indigenous chiefs as a man who had served him a year before and had stolen from him before disappearing. No long afterwards, several *lascorins* or indigenous soldiers, who had been captured by the Kandyans the year before found a way to flee back to the Company, and they reported that the man had been promised great riches were he to succeed in killing the Governor.

<sup>231</sup> The story was that during one excursion the army had nearly captured the king, as an elephant bearing the coat of arms of the King had been seen fleeing over the hills.

search for the Siamese prince, so as to bring him to Ceylon and put him on the throne as king, after he had signed a treaty acquiescing in everything the VOC wanted. The councilors agreed with Van Eck, but they thought it better to oust the king and install the Sinhalese noblemen as independent rulers. This would make it easier to set them against each other and none of them would be powerful on his own enough to threaten the VOC. The garrison left in Kandy was supplied with provisions, but mistakes were made in calculating the amount of rice necessary for the number of men present. They were undersupplied, leading very soon to a grave situation. The garrison had to make several attempts before it was able to inform Colombo of its desperate plight. In Colombo, it was decided to have a support party, commanded by Major Meddler, leave at once, despite insufficient time to make proper preparations. Meanwhile, decimated by disease and hunger and running acutely short of powder and bullets, the garrison in Kandy decided it could not wait any longer and fought its way back to Colombo. When the relief troops finally reached Kandy, they found the camp deserted and likewise returned to Colombo.

After this campaign to Kandy had proved successful, the Company thought it best to press for a favourable peace treaty.<sup>232</sup> The new Governor, Iman Falck, was ordered to confer on peace with the king. Negotiations followed and the Company obtained its goals in a peace treaty signed in 1766. Under its terms the Company expanded its control over the entire coastline and obtained royal acknowledgement of its sovereignty, ensuring the position of the Dutch until 1795. The treaty enabled the Company to continue to hold the monopoly on all trade from Ceylon and ensured it against foreign intrusion on its trade. The Company also disposed of some parts of the ritual to which it had objections during the annual embassy.<sup>233</sup> The right to peel cinnamon in the territory of the king was traded against the right of the king to obtain salt in the VOC regions. The control over the salt production in the vicinity of the captured regions of Puttulam and Matara, which had been under the control of the King before the war, left the VOC more room to bargain.

After the war, the Company succeeded in mending its relationship with the king to such an extent that he no longer contemplated seeking foreign intervention. At the time

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<sup>232</sup> SLNA, VOC, 4866, 27 March 1765, last resolution by Van Eck.

<sup>233</sup> Schrikker, *Dutch and British colonial intervention*, 113-122 and Arasaratnam, "Dutch Sovereignty in Ceylon", 105-121. The VOC representative was no longer obliged to kneel down, but was received on the same level as the king. Embassies also went back and forth between the King and the VOC



of the English occupation of Trincomalee during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch Sea War (1781-1784), the king of Kandy declined an English proposal for an alliance against the Dutch. Ultimately, the Company was saved by a naval squadron under the French admiral Suffren, which chased the English from the island. After the Fourth Anglo-Dutch Sea War, the embassy to Kandy was reinstated and the king asked for the return of Puttalam. Since the king initially denied access to the cinnamon in his territory, the Company proceeded with its plan to established cinnamon plantations. This led to the involvement of Company servants in the plantation system. They worked together with the indigenous chiefs to supply the company with either cinnamon or coffee.<sup>234</sup>

The treaty of 1766 brought peace to the island, and the Dutch managed to safeguard their position in Ceylon for another thirty years. The Dutch presence in the island was safe as long as the Republic did not embark on a war with England. This had been made obvious in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch Sea War. When war between the Republic and England erupted again in 1795, the Dutch reign over Ceylon ended, since at that time the English were powerful enough to enforce a change of European regime even without the help of the king of Kandy.<sup>235</sup> Twenty years later, the King suffered the same fate as the Company and was deposed: henceforth the whole island was controlled by the EIC.

The situation in Ceylon was reproduced in the Indonesian Archipelago after 1780. In Java, the Company had already stepped up political activities in the 1750s in order to make sure that the indigenous rulers knew who was in charge.<sup>236</sup> When the naval superiority of the English was felt in 1784, the Company reacted similarly in the Spice Islands by multiplying military activities to keep the English country traders out. The extirpation of spice-bearing trees and shrubs outside the Company-controlled areas was vigorously pursued to ensure the English did not obtain spices anywhere outside of the VOC establishments. Politically, the Company was confronted by indigenous rulers skillfully navigating the shifting political balance. One such example was Prince Noekoe of Tidore who succeeded in leading a protracted and successful rebellion against the

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<sup>234</sup> Schrikker, *Dutch and British colonial intervention*, 116.

<sup>235</sup> Schrikker, *Dutch and British colonial intervention*, 130-132.

<sup>236</sup> S. Margana, *Java's last frontier : the struggle for hegemony of Blambangan c. 1763-1813* (Leiden: Unpublished thesis, 2007).

Company with the help of the English.<sup>237</sup> This mounting political instability led to increasing costs for the Company and when it failed to step up to the political challenge and assert its authority, its trade was in potential danger.

## Conclusion

For almost a century, the VOC lived in an often turbulent state of peace with the king of Kandy, the last indigenous king in Ceylon. The combination of naval superiority and European-style fortifications on the coast made it impossible for the king of Kandy to expel the VOC without summoning outside help. With the eclipse of the naval dominance of the VOC, the threat of expulsion became reality as European competitors began to show an interest in the island, and the king saw an opportunity to set the European companies against each other. The relationship between the king and the Company became strained with the outbreak of an indigenous rebellion in the VOC-controlled areas, which provided an opportunity the king could not resist. In order to avoid military costs, the VOC tried to negotiate its way out of the crisis. As the negotiations failed and the threat of English involvement grew imminent, violence escalated when the Dutch waged war against the king. The upshot of this conflict was that the VOC enlarged its colonial possessions in the island at the cost of the king and secured its position by occupying the whole coastal strip of the island. Lacking naval superiority, the VOC knew that it was essential to conquer the entire coastline of the island so as to maintain its monopoly in the trade with Ceylon. As long as the Republic and England were at peace, the conquest of the coastline would guarantee the Dutch presence on the island as it obviated English intervention on legal grounds.

The relative military weakness of the VOC was reflected in the relationship between Company and servant in Ceylon, limiting the liberty of the servants in their military endeavours. There was a big difference to indigenous rulers infringing on trade

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<sup>237</sup> M. S. Widjojo, *Cross-cultural alliance-making and local resistance in Maluku during the revolt of Prince Nuku, c. 1780-1810* (Leiden: Unpublished thesis, 2007).

between the Dutch reaction in Ceylon and the English reaction in Bengal. The English were sure of support from the home country in Europe, the VOC was not. This meant that the EIC servants could respond quickly since troops were at hand, albeit with the risk of being judged after the action. Even in a war situation, the Dutch Company servants enjoyed no such liberties and were obliged to wait for orders and reinforcements from Batavia and the Republic before they could react. This was a realistic policy and the servants had no option but to concede to this strategy which was based on the financial reality.