



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The second Anglo-Dutch war (1665-1667) : international raison d'état, mercantilism and maritime strife

Rommelse, G.A.

Citation

Rommelse, G. A. (2006, June 28). *The second Anglo-Dutch war (1665-1667) : international raison d'état, mercantilism and maritime strife*. Verloren, Hilversum. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4403>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)
License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)
Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4403>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Conclusions

In July 1667 the Peace Treaty of Breda brought an end to the Second Anglo-Dutch War. To many outsiders and neutrals the war had been spectacular. Both sides devoted unprecedented means to setting out their ships. The number of men, the amount of guns and the size of men of war had never been higher. It resulted in a series of battles that fascinated Europe. The Four Days Battle had been the biggest, longest and bloodiest confrontation in the age of sail.

Both governments had been tested to the full. Building or repairing large numbers of men of war required huge sums of money as well as political and logistical co-ordination. The English Restoration regime had clearly underestimated the burden it had taken on its shoulders. Many politicians and courtiers had expected an easy victory and rich prizes. Charles had hoped to strengthen the political power and financial position of his kingship by siding with a large lobby of mercantilists, naval officers and junior politicians. The king's party in Parliament had ensured what initially was thought to be sufficient financial support for the undertaking. The public sentiment was strongly anti-Dutch and so the war could only improve the regime's position. In 1664 Charles and his ministers believed that France would remain neutral. Other states would and could not play a major role in the Anglo-Dutch conflict. The situation in the international arena seemed to permit and even favour the attack against the Dutch Republic. The English fleet, they thought, would be capable of ensuring an easy victory at sea. The outcome would be profitable to all factions within the bellicose group.

The war exposed these expectations as unrealistic. It could not and did not finance itself by the capture and sale of prizes or the extraction of large indemnities from the VOC and the Dutch state. Fewer prizes were taken than in the First Anglo-Dutch War, and losses to Dutch privateers were unexpectedly high. Altogether the Dutch opponents had proved much more determined and self-confident than had been assumed, whereas in England political co-operation between Court, parliamentary and mercantile groups disintegrated as they failed to advance their interests. Losses and the contraction of trade taught City-based companies and merchants that naval confrontations did not lead to commercial supremacy. Ministers

and some aspiring politicians were put on the defensive; instead of being able to exploit a strengthened royal authority, the failures of the war and the evident disorder of naval organisation and the king's finances forced them to concentrate on defending the king's position and their own responsibility.

The consequences of the Second Anglo-Dutch War were disastrous from the English point of view. In 1667 England needed peace as the war, the Great Fire and the plague had brought maritime commerce to a standstill and had shocked the own population. The conflict had ruined the Royal Adventurers trading into Africa and had brought a temporary end to a period of economic growth. Trust in government had declined considerably and people demanded Clarendon's dismissal. Many politicians like Clifford, Arlington and Coventry who had supported the RAC had lost part of their fortune. Their political position was only damaged slightly and soon recovered when they scapegoated Clarendon. Charles complied with the public's demands regarding the Lord Chancellor. The king was forced to do this in order to rebuild his government. The Second Anglo-Dutch War had thrown his regime into a crisis from which it needed to recover. Several important factions in Parliament had been dissatisfied with the managing and outcome of the war and could only be consoled with the exile of Clarendon. The damage to Charles's kingship however, proved to be persistent. More and more MP's and citizens came to distrust the king and his courtiers. They felt Charles and his ministers had used the war to strengthen their political and financial position. They believed much of the money that had been allocated towards the war, had been spent on other matters. Some MP's even believed Charles had been attempting to use the funds to build up a new standing army that would make him more powerful. Parliament therefore demanded an enquiry into the managing of finances and the war. Other groups in Parliament understood that the king's party was not as strong as it had seemed to be. Charles's managers in Parliament had proved to be less effective in manipulating the Commons. More and more certain factions felt encouraged to oppose the king on specific issues like the Irish Cattle Act.

The mercantilist lobbies of London still had their disputes with the Dutch. Yet by 1667 they were desperate for a peace treaty and they did not again aim for a naval confrontation. The war had proved that Dutch primacy could not be conquered by means of arms. English competitors of the WIC suffered heavy losses in West Africa and the Caribbean, and the EIC failed to make any impact on the VOC supremacy in East Asian markets. The Baltic remained closed to English shipping throughout the war. The pressing of seamen reduced the number of outward-bound sailings by merchant ships. Consequently merchants, and the public generally, did not actively support the declaration of war in 1672. Court clearly abused mercantilist ideas as pretext for that new collision with the Dutch Republic.

The people of the Dutch Republic celebrated the Peace of Breda as a honourable and justified victory. De Witt and his fellow regents enjoyed their finest hours when the news of the Raid on the Medway and the signing of treaty became pub-

lic. Most issues that had plagued Anglo-Dutch relations were now solved in an advantageous way. Dutch maritime trade and wealth had been defended successfully. The treaty reconfirmed the status and position of the Dutch Republic as a great power. This meant the political survival of the country. The regime's domestic situation had been improved as well. Before and during the war certain regent factions, aiming to advance William's interests, had tried to use English pressure to gain power. They had hoped Charles's help would weaken the De Witt's regime and would force the Grand Pensionary to give in to their demands. Yet their efforts had been largely in vain although they did complicate political decision-taking. The conspirators had been punished or had lost much of their power and influence. The Prince's education was put in the hands of the ruling Holland regents. For the moment De Witt had managed to neutralise most domestic opposition although in the future regent support for Prince William's position would, no doubt, arise again.

The Dutch Republic had succeeded in achieving its main objective: self-preservation in the international arena. This had required skillful diplomacy and large sums of money but the young state had demonstrated its strength. The regent regime in charge had not eagerly fought the war with England. Yet foreign pressure and threats convinced De Witt and his fellow regents that the Republic should not give in. Giving an inch would encourage the English to demand a mile. Instead the Dutch should confront the enemy. Free and undisturbed trade was as essential as territorial integrity for the political survival of the young Dutch Republic.

The Dutch had not desired the outbreak of war and had had little to win and much to lose. The observation that the English were about to attack a mountain of gold and the Dutch one of iron, seemed at first to be as valid as in 1652-1654. The English had hoped to conquer commercial primacy and the Dutch had been defending this position. De Witt had been determined to oppose English aggressive diplomatic methods and tactics. He believed fighting to be preferable to giving in. Showing weakness in the international arena was asking for more trouble. De Witt understood this very well and so the war was brought to a good end for the Dutch. He had successfully sailed between the Scylla of aggression and Charibdis of giving in.

The war however, had also shown the military weakness of the Dutch. The army had been largely neglected and the Bishop of Münster had easily overrun a number of eastern provinces. This demonstrated that maintaining a strong army as well as an expensive large fleet was a necessity. But it proved to be financially impossible. Even the financial position of the States General had its limits. France's help had been required to evict the Germans again.

Some commercial advantages had been obtained during the war. Surinam had been conquered and the Dutch position in the African and Asian trades had been protected. The Act of Navigation had been relaxed somewhat. It seemed most commercial disputes had now been solved permanently. Yet Anglo-Dutch relations remained complicated and five years later the next war broke out. Charles and James used mercantilist arguments and rhetoric to legitimise the third war, covering their real main objective of using total victory to strengthen the position of the monar-

chy. It was their partnership with the overwhelming power of France that they relied on to achieve this; Parliament was not called until the naval campaign began to go wrong.

The Second Anglo-Dutch War confirmed France's, England's and the Republic's status of great power in the European powerplay. More and more the international political arena was determined by these three powers. France however, was the most dominant of the three and responsible for shaping European politics. The Republic, like England and other states, had to try to adjust its policies to take account of the military power now possessed by Louis, as demonstrated by his army's advances into the Spanish Netherlands during the last stages of the Breda negotiations. This provoked an apparent diplomatic revolution: after concluding a peace England and the Dutch Republic formed what was to become the Triple Alliance when Sweden joined, in order to check further French advances. Appearances deceive. The causes of the Third Anglo-Dutch War and the French declaration of war against the Republic can be traced back directly to the Triple Alliance¹ and even the Peace of Breda. Superficially it meant that Charles and De Witt had come to the same conclusion, that Louis must be checked, and so they quickly concluded the Triple Alliance. De Witt believed that this prevented Louis conquering all or most of the Spanish Netherlands. But Charles and his new set of ministers used it as a signal to Louis that he could now choose to help England achieve the objectives which the Second Anglo-Dutch War had failed to win, in return for an alliance that would give him a free hand to remove all possibilities of Dutch obstruction of his territorial and dynastic ambitions.

At the end of 1665 it became clear that the Dutch and French would confront the English together. From that moment a pattern developed with two powers confronting the third. In 1668 England and the Dutch Republic obstructed Louis's ambitions. Sweden was the third partner in this co-operation but only played a role in the Baltic and not in Western Europe. Four years later the Dutch were isolated against the other two. Other states could not play a decisive part in these developments. The concept of a European balance of power did not apply on this situation and would only emerge in the late 17th century.

The Second Anglo-Dutch War had given Louis opportunity to invade the Spanish Netherlands. Neither England nor the Republic had been able to prevent or obstruct this. Other states had been incapable or unwilling to intervene. In this sense the Second Anglo-Dutch War marked the beginning of the era of coalition wars that shaped European politics in the decades to come. The three major powers and others like Spain would confront each other in changing alliances. All European states had to shape their policies to take into account the dominating position of France, based on the strength of its army and skill of its diplomats. Hollis had been right in his characterisation of Louis and French potential.

¹ Sonnino, *Louis XIV and the origins of the Dutch War*, 6-27; Lossky, *Louis XIV*, 133-136; Lynn, *Louis XIV*, 108-109.

The Second Anglo-Dutch War can, in my opinion, largely be explained by combining the traditional explanation of Boxer, Wilson and Israel with Jones' and Rodger's view. Both interpretations deal with one important factor but neither is completely satisfactory. Obviously there were great mercantile forces at work trying to get state power involved in their plans. In England politicians and merchants had to combine their forces in order to shape the political agenda. In the Dutch Republic many regents, whose official functions were essentially part of the sovereign power, represented their own commercial interests. The Dutch and English confronted each other in every market in the world. The Dutch and English East India Companies were struggling for dominance in Asia. The Royal Adventurers trading into Africa tried to break into the Dutch West India Company's trade in Africa. The Mediterranean was another area of competition over so-called rich trades. The English attempt to close off its American colonies to foreign competitors, by passing several Acts of Navigation, was another important cause for the increasing rivalry. Closer at home there was strife as well. The fishing industry and European markets were also fought over.

Boxer, Wilson and Israel were right when they pointed out that this rivalry almost necessarily had to lead to war. They did not however, explain the process of political decision-making that preceded the actual declaration of war. Jones and Rodger explained how young politicians, courtiers and naval officers hoped to profit from a confrontation with the Dutch Republic. The war would provide them with rich prizes, more prestige and more political power at the expense of older competitors. In 1664 the king's party managed to manipulate Parliament into supporting and funding the war effort. Jones' and Rodger's argument is therefore the other component in the explanation of the war. They ascribed however, only a minor role to the various mercantilist groups in their analysis of the political process.

In Restoration England a large faction developed consisting of courtiers, politicians and mercantilists from the City. In the course of 1662 and 1663 these different groups felt they could achieve their aims by co-operating. Anti-Dutch mercantilist ideas became more and more prominent in English politics. Young, ambitious politicians adopted this cause as their own in order to pursue their own interests. Many large companies and merchants believed they could benefit from this link with politics. A large *ad hoc* coalition of warlike factions then managed to provoke the war.

Pincus' interpretation is, in my opinion, not realistic. He argued that ideological and religious motives drove English Anglican Royalists to seek a confrontation with the Dutch Republic. The Dutch regent regime was, he claimed, perceived as a dangerous threat to the Restoration monarchy. Also, he stated, the Dutch worshipped Mammon rather than being proper Protestants. His analysis of the Dutch Republic however, is almost caricatural and contains many obvious mistakes.

Finding significant ideological roots that underlie the eruption of a complicated international conflict is a challenge. The Second Anglo-Dutch War was obviously

the product of many different motives and decisions, held and made by various people or groups, that were sometimes contradictory or complementary, and sometimes intended or not. Even if English public opinion were unanimously negative about the Dutch this would not automatically lead Charles and his ministers to adopt this view as the basis of foreign policy. Subjects' ideas and arguments would be noticed and used by politicians and courtiers, but these views could hardly determine the course actual politics. The English printing press was strictly limited by government regulations. Authors would therefore often write to please the regime.

The quotes Pincus produced to illustrate the ideological controversy are mainly from political pamphlets. He does not, however, take into account that many of these texts contain rhetorics intended to conceal other motives. The publications often represented the political interests of certain groups or companies and were meant to persuade the public and exert pressure. Exaggerations were commonly used by pamphleteers. Ideological differences were often rhetorical appeals to popular sentiments of xenophobia. In most of these pamphlets commerce and politics are the real issues at stake. They do certainly not represent a coherent ideological programme.

The Dutch Republic was ruled by a group of co-operating regents. Consequently the attitude of De Witt and many fellow regents to all monarchs was defensive and wary. Yet they were certainly not as radical and offensive as Pincus described them. No trust could be placed in kings, Swedish and Danish as well as English and French, whose policies were driven by personal and dynastic ambitions. A republic, on the other hand, guaranteed the common interest by definition. The people's well-being and prosperity would therefore be best safeguarded by a regent government of highly educated and wealthy men.

In international affairs De Witt strove for a policy of 'active neutrality'. In this ideal situation a status quo existed that allowed the Dutch to trade and transport unhampered. The Republic would not undertake any aggressive actions that could endanger its neutrality. The Dutch government actively attempted to secure its position by concluding treaties. Commercial successes would bring prosperity and would enable the Republic to ensure its independent position. Obviously an active and sometimes even aggressive foreign policy had to secure this precarious situation. De Witt's ideas of aristocratic republicanism were very much influenced by pragmatism and realism. He would never allow theoretical ideas to determine domestic politics. De la Court was backed up by a number of likeminded writers but they never managed to seriously influence the Dutch Republic's politics. There was no serious 'radical republican threat' that endangered England. Therefore it is significant that there is no hard evidence that he made any serious or organised attempt to subvert Charles's authority by encouraging or organising English republicans or Scottish dissidents. Some English radicals regarded the Dutch Republic and De Witt's faction as potential deliverers. This view was completely unrealistic however. Most English, especially leading politicians, saw De Witt as a pragmatic,

realistic and highly-skilled leader who was too involved in power politics to allow ideology to take over.

In 1660 Charles Stuart was restored to the throne his father had lost. Among his supporters were old and young Royalists, members of several official delegations that had visited him in The Hague and a number of opportunist fortune seekers who had sought the new monarch's favour. These people did not share a common political, religious and social background and had often been each other's adversaries during the preceding decade. Opportunism and greed were their main motives. There was simply no coherent group of Anglican Royalists that dominated the early Restoration period. The only real Anglican Royalists, Clarendon, Nicholas and Southampton, were in fact no longer in the political spotlights. The ideological controversy within England between supporters and opponents of the Restoration regime was, according to Pincus, an important cause of the Second Anglo-Dutch War. The Anglican Royalists would have suspected the Dutch of supporting the risings in the North. The rebellions were however, entirely insignificant. Mistaking rhetorics for actual ideological controversy, Pincus overestimated the importance of domestic opposition.

Charles understood the tense religious situation perfectly well. In order to strengthen his government he would have to reconcile all or at least most of the different competing groups. Religious controversy after all, had been one of the main causes of the Civil Wars and had afflicted the country for decades. Charles wanted to prevent new troubles at all costs. In the long run he did not succeed.

The background of the new regime was simply too diverse to allow one ideological vision to determine and dominate domestic and foreign politics. The nature of Restoration politics only added to this; factions and individuals hoped to increase their wealth and influence without trying to promote a coherent ideological line of policies. Opportunism and pragmatism had become more important as part of the *raison d'état*.

