

### III

## From patria to Asia

“Don’t mention the war!”

- *Faulty Towers*

This chapter will form the first part of an analysis of one particularly interesting and warlike episode of VOC-history, starting with the end of the Anglo-Dutch War, of which news reached Asia by the beginning of 1655, and ending with the ceasing of hostilities between the Portuguese and the VOC after the conquest of Cochin in 1663. This period saw several of the most intense wars the VOC ever fought, including various campaigns against the Portuguese on the Indian subcontinent in a final bid to drive them from Asia, the first war against Makassar, and the loss of Fort Zeelandia on Formosa.

The analysis made in this particular chapter will limit itself to the first step in the operational, logistical and political aspects of the VOC’s military system: the connection between the Netherlands and the East. Firstly, it will look at the logistics of the supply chain: the way in which patria supplied Batavia with soldiers and material to wage war. Secondly, it will look at the political interaction between patria and Asia, the division of competence, and the way in which decisions in Europe took their effect in Asia.

#### **Introduction: the decision-making process and the rhythm of the return fleet**

The life-line between the VOC’s possessions in the East and the Netherlands was constituted by the return fleets which sailed to and fro between the various Dutch VOC ports and Batavia all year round. In the first few decades of the VOC’s existence, the ships usually left the Netherlands in two large clusters: one around December/January and one in April/May, known as the Christmas and Easter fleets. Later on, as the VOC’s trading network in Asia grew to include India, China and Japan, it became increasingly important for the Christmas fleet to arrive in Asia in time to profit from the winds caused by the summer monsoon, which started in June and died down in the course of September. In these months, these winds facilitated an easy sailing trip for the connecting trade routes from Batavia to the East (India) and the North (China and Japan). The VOC Christmas fleet could in theory make it to Batavia before the end of the summer monsoon, but would miss it in case of any delay, which occurred as often as not. This risk prompted the introduction of an additional fleet in the course of the ‘30s: the Fair Fleet, named after the traditional September fair. This fleet would leave in the course of September or in early October, and would therefore be more than in time for the connection with the Asian trade network.

It must here be remarked that the division into three separate fleets, made by the VOC at the time, should not necessarily be interpreted as three large fleets of, say, seven ships each, sailing to Asia in

convoy. Each of the 'fleets' would leave from several ports, and would often leave in the course of a few weeks instead of at one moment. The arrival dates of the ships in Batavia in the period here considered also indicate that the ships would hardly ever sail in convoys: ships from a single fleet would often arrive in the course of more than one month. We might state the Easter fleet of 1663 as an example: the fourteen ships of this fleet left between the 1<sup>st</sup> of April and the 24<sup>th</sup> of May. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April two ships left together, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April three ships, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May two more ships left simultaneously: all the remaining ships set sail all by themselves. The fastest of the ships arrived in Batavia as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1663; most of the ships arrived in the course of November and December; the last ship would finally arrive in February '64.<sup>111</sup>

In the first two decades of the existence of the VOC, vessels in the East would simply sail back as soon as their cargo holds were full. The resumption of the war between Spain and the Netherlands, however, prompted the Gentlemen XVII to resolve that the return fleets should always sail in convoy. The fact that these return fleets were loaded with valuable goods made them a far more interesting target for privateers and pirates than the outgoing ships, which made sailing in convoy all the more necessary. The entire infrastructure which existed in order to have the return ships arrive home safely (cruising Admiralty ships on the North Sea, secret orders being sent to the Cape for all incoming fleets, a system of secret signals) goes to illustrate the importance and vulnerability of these return vessels.<sup>112</sup>

The return vessels from Batavia to the Netherlands very soon developed into an annual fleet. On the one hand, the Gentlemen XVII wanted all the return vessels to arrive between April and October with an eye on having the auction before winter. On the other hand, the vessels in Batavia had to await the arrival of ships from the outer posts, as well as the entire hustle of the loading of the fleet, before returning to the Netherlands. This very soon led to a system in which the ships would set out from Batavia somewhere between late November and late January. This was slightly too late to the tastes of the directors, as ships departing later than halfway into December might well arrive after the winter auction, which would necessitate another auction and drive down prices at the first one. Repeated resolutions by the Gentlemen XVII to have the bulk of the return fleet depart before the 15<sup>th</sup> of December (allowing for a few late ships, *naschepen*, in the following month) came to nothing: as several governors-general felt their duty to point out, with varying degrees of subtlety, this was simply unfeasible, and a forced attempt to achieve it would do the Company more harm than good.<sup>113</sup>

As to the outgoing vessels: the fact that these left from the Republic virtually all year round, does not at all render meaningless the division into three separate fleets made by the directors at the

111 *D.A.S.*, II, 142-144.

112 Van Dam, 1.II, 12-45.

113 Maatsuiker, quite tactfully, in 1661: *Generale Missiven*, III, 314. Van Goens, less tactfully, in 1681: Van Dam, 3, 496-499.

time. In fact, early on in the existence of the VOC a very clear rhythm to the functioning of the outgoing and returning fleets developed. This rhythm was determined by the prevailing winds over the Indian Ocean caused by the monsoon, the functioning of the Company's administrative and decision-making system in the Netherlands, and the specific trade conditions on either side of the globe.

Ideally, the return fleet from Batavia would have largely arrived in the Dutch ports by October. This would prompt the autumn meeting of the directors, the main purpose of which was organising the autumn auction of goods. Before the departure of the Christmas fleet two months later, however, the directors took care of various other matters, such as the *Eisen van Retouren*, setting the amount of trade goods to be sent from Batavia for the auction of the following year. In addition, the directors also took care of the *Generale Eis* in the autumn meeting. This *Generale Eis* was basically the 'shopping list' of the government in Batavia, and contained requests for weapons, trade goods and provisions, ranging from bacon to rooftiles, from currency to cannonballs. As the various VOC-chambers, each of which was responsible for fulfilling part of the *Generale Eis*, kept stockpiles of the goods usually requested, taking care of the *Generale Eis* did not take too much time and could be largely settled before the departure of the Christmas fleet, allowing for the remaining materials and currency to be sent over with the Easter fleet.<sup>114</sup>

By the period here under consideration, the amount of paperwork sent over from the Indies for the attention of the Dutch branch of the Company had become so vast that it could no longer all be taken care of by the meeting of the directors. For this reason, a specific commission had been called into life in 1649, the purpose of which was to examine the papers in detail: the *Haags Besogne*. This commission took the general letter from the Indies as its starting point, and on the basis of this would read all the paperwork related to each of the regions where the VOC was active. As a part of this work, it would also examine all the resolutions made by the Governor-General and his council. On the basis of this in-depth study of the papers, the commission could subsequently make suggestions to the directors.

After the autumn meeting of the directors, which could last for up to two months, the *Haags Besogne* usually came together in early spring, as soon as weather conditions allowed. Its tasks or working routine were not in any way fixed: it would make *ad hoc* suggestions on the basis of the information in the papers from Asia, or take over some of the work which the meeting of the directors simply hadn't gotten around to. A thing that in practice did become part of their routine was the examination of the overview of the Company's naval power in the Indies, which was sent over from Batavia

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114 Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid bij de VOC: de financiële en commerciële politiek bij de bewindhebbers, 1672-1702* (Zutphen 1989), 49pp; Van Dam, *Beschrijvinge*, 1.1, 260pp; VOC-Archives, 103, 104, 105.

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annually. On the basis of this, it would make a suggestion to the directors pertaining to the number of ships to be built on the Company's shipyards.<sup>115</sup>

Once the *Haags Besogne* had finished its deliberations in the course of spring, the directors would once again meet. In these spring meetings, the second point on the agenda - the most important one, as the first point would invariably concern the credentials of the directors that came to the meeting - would be to read and discuss the report of the *Haags Besogne*, and make decisions on the basis of it. These decisions would range from resolutions about trade, warfare and politics in Asia to the number of ships to be built. The spring meeting would also be the moment to resolve upon the number of cruising vessels that the Gentlemen XVII would request the Admiralty sent out to the North Sea to meet and protect the return fleets. In addition, this meeting would usually be the scene of a great lot of accounting. In the period here under consideration, the meeting of the Gentlemen XVII attempted to strengthen its grip on the various Chambers, and made resolution after resolution obliging the Chambers to account for the amount of artillery they had in stock, the number of people and material that had been sent off in the past year, and more such things, thus giving the general meeting insight into the functioning of each of the separate chambers. It also increasingly specified the way in which ships had to be built, the things that the various Chambers were or were not allowed to do, and all in all shortened the leash on which it kept the various Chambers significantly.

Thus the directors would ideally meet twice a year. In a long autumn meeting they would organise the auction, decide upon the number of ships, soldiers and armament to be sent off in the next year, and respond to any news that required immediate action; then, in a shorter spring meeting, they would discuss the Asian situation in more detail, do a lot of reckoning and accounting, decide upon the protection measures for the return fleets, and usually also resolve upon the number of ships to be built.

In the period here under consideration, this rhythm was followed almost perfectly in practice. This stands in stark contrast to the preceding years; from July 1652 to July 1656, the directors had met a total of fifteen times, almost twice as much as would have been usual. In many cases these were 'half meetings,' with only 8 representatives present instead of the full 17.<sup>116</sup> This construction was often resorted to when a decision couldn't await the full meeting. The emergencies that prompted the directors to come together outside their usual schedule in this period were virtually all connected with the First Anglo-Dutch War going on at the time, which not only required all kinds of protective measures for the return fleets, but in which the VOC was also an active party, as it had leased several ships to the Estates-General for the war effort. Although the period from 1655

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115 Van Dam, 1.I, 309pp.

116 For the principle of a meeting of the 'halve XVII', see Van Dam, 1.I, 268-269. As in these half meetings the Zeeland and Amsterdam Chambers were usually dominant, the smaller chambers did not agree with this practice and it was officially abandoned in 1660.



*Illustration 2: VOC-soldiers embarking at the Montelbaanstoren in Amsterdam. On the left we see a company of soldiers armed with muskets standing on the quay. From this quay on the Oudeschans, the soldiers would be brought to the East Indiamen lying before Texel in small vessels, such as the two waiting in this drawing. Ludolf Backhuysen, pen drawing, ca. 1685.*

onwards was of course no less warlike for the Company, the various wars which it waged in Asia were beyond the direct control of the directors. Only once in the entire period under study here did an event in Asia prompt the directors to officially meet outside their usual schedule: the news of the ‘shameful fall’ of fort Zeelandia on Taiwan was cause for an emergency meeting in December 1662, and occupied the directors for two weeks.<sup>117</sup>

### **Providing the supplies: soldiers, ships and armament**

As has been described above, the decisions regarding the supply were all taken care of in the autumn meeting of the Gentlemen XVII under a single point on the agenda, concerning ‘the number of personnel, ships, cash, trade goods and provisions that shall be sent to Batavia by the respective Chambers.’ The resolution on this point typically started with stating the number of personnel to be sent, usually (but certainly not always) followed by the ratio of soldiers and sailors. For example, on August 22, 1658, the meeting resolved to send 3970 heads east, of which 3/5 would be sailors and 2/5 soldiers. This would be followed by a list of all the ships to be sent over in that

117 VOC Archive, Resolutions of the Gentlemen XVII, 11-23 December 1663, nr. 105, 313pp.

Year		Resolved	Departed	Arrived
1656-1657	Sailors	2160	1132	2373
	Soldiers	1440	540	1168
	Other	-	40	61
	Total	3600	4213	3918
1657-1658	Sailors	-	361	2015
	Soldiers	-	118	1032
	Other	-	10	122
	Total	3600	3628	3169
1658-1659	Sailors	2382	2684	2509
	Soldiers	1588	1289	1136
	Other	-	60	50
	Total	3970	4033	3695
1659-1660	Sailors	-	1814	2150
	Soldiers	-	916	1005
	Other	-	37	175
	Total	4020	4163	3952
1660-1661	Sailors	2406	2944	2736
	Soldiers	1604	1550	1207
	Other	-	102	94
	Total	4010	4674	4128
1661-1662	Sailors	2133	2618	2298
	Soldiers	1067	1640	1303
	Other	-	94	91
	Total	3200+1400	4385	3692
1662-1663	Sailors	-	2112	1954
	Soldiers	-	1328	1227
	Other	-	92	122
	Total	2895	3532	3303

*Table 1: Number of personnel resolved upon by the meeting of the directors, number actually sent, and number that actually arrived in Batavia (on the same ships, so not necessarily in the same year). Years run from August to and including July. Ships with other destinations (Ceylon, Coromandel or Pulicat) not included. For sources and way of compilation, see appendix.*

year, and a specification of the amount of personnel each of them was to carry. With regard to the *Generale Eis*, the meeting usually limited itself to stating that the request ‘had been approved and would be fulfilled,’ although sometimes we find a remark on bringing down some of the requested amounts.

On the basis of this resolution, each of the Chambers would subsequently have recruiting sessions, which were held on fixed days several times a year.<sup>118</sup> After recruitment it could take up to several months before the new soldier or sailor would actually set sail, and in order to live through the in-

118 As these sessions were only held several times a year, but new recruits arrived in the various VOC towns from a large part of north-western Europe, particularly Germany, throughout the year, an entire unofficial system of crimps and brokers developed. For details regarding the mustering of soldiers see Van Gelder, *Het Oostindisch avontuur*, 129pp; *D.A.S.*, I, 149pp.

tervening time, he could obtain a *transportbrief*, effectively an advance payment which would have to be paid off later. At departure the crew would subsequently be armed: according to a 1614 source, the soldiers would receive a musket, ‘forquetstok’ (a sort of bipod), helmet, sabre and bandoleer, and the sailors a musket and a sabre.<sup>119</sup>

Table 1 shows the numbers of sailors and soldiers upon which the directors resolved for the years 1656-1663, the number actually sent, and the number that actually arrived. For the period here under consideration, the VOC got off to a good start: in the years 1653-1655 the directors had sent out 3000 soldiers more than in the three years before. This combined with the fact that the Great Ambonese War, essentially a conflict over the clove-producing areas of the Archipelago with the Makassarese, was finally won by 1655 (although skirmishes would continue until 1658), gave the Company a free hand to swing the focus of its military activities fully towards the Portuguese presence on the Indian subcontinent. “Now there is a good force at hand in order to undertake something noteworthy,” wrote a thankful Governor-General Maatsuiker in the general letter to the Netherlands on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 1655. He had every reason to be thankful at this particular moment, as nine months earlier the directors had resolved to send at least 5090 heads east in the coming year, preferably more, if room on the ships permitted. Of these, some 2000 would have been soldiers, several hundreds more than usual.<sup>120</sup>

If we look at table 1, we see that in this period the number of personnel sent over does not quite match up to the great numbers of e.g. 1654, although the numbers are significantly higher than in the period before 1652.<sup>121</sup> Although it is not possible to make adequate estimations of the total number of military personnel for this period, it seems clear nonetheless that the numbers of troops sent in the years 1653-1655 must have meant a significant military build-up, bringing the total amount of military resources that the Company had to a higher level. This level was not raised much further in the period here under study, but to sustain the increased volume of the armies, more soldiers than before were necessary. For this reason, the Gentlemen XVII structurally resolved upon sending around 4000 sailors and soldiers each year, and the various Chambers stuck to these numbers resolved upon strikingly accurately (although the soldier/sailor ratio does vary quite a bit). The years 1656-1657 and 1660-1661 are notable exceptions; with regard to the former it must be remarked that the directors resolved that should room on the ships permit, the Chambers had a free hand to embark more people. Apparently this advice was taken to heart.

119 J.R. Bruijn en J. Lucassen eds, *Op de schepen der oost-Indische Compagnie: vijf artikelen van J. de Hullu* (Groningen 1980), 57n.

120 VOC-archives, Resolutions of the Gentlemen XVII, 2 October 1654, 103, p. 503-504. As for the following months D.A.S. hardly ever lists the size of crews, I was unable to determine how many were actually sent, and how many of these were soldiers. The resolution of the directors does not specify the ratio of soldiers and sailors, but we might assume the 2/5 against 3/5 ratio that seems to have been most common in this period.

121 Comp. with tables in *D.A.S.*, I, 144, 156.

The numbers of 1661-1662 are quite a story in themselves: in the autumn of 1661 the Gentlemen XVII resolved upon sending 3200 people eastward, on 15 ships. In the end, however, at least 4385 people embarked onto a total of 21 ships in the following year. This difference is to be explained by a fleet of 6 ships which set sail in April 1662. The mission of this fleet, under the command of Hubert de Laresse, was to attack the Portuguese in Mozambique. We will look in vain for any reference to the equipment of this fleet in the resolutions of the XVII, either in the autumn meeting of '61 or the spring meeting of '62.<sup>122</sup> More on this fleet is to be found in the political section of this chapter.

Not everyone stepping on board of a VOC-vessel in the Netherlands would make it to Batavia. In the period here under study, 91% of the people embarking would actually make it to Batavia; the remaining 9% disappeared somewhere along the way. Of this 9%, the great majority died. The cramped and unhygienic circumstances on board, as well as the lack of fresh food, took their toll on both the physical and mental state of the crew. Scurvy and dysentery were usually rampant, as were illnesses related with heat and lack of water. Typhoid fever sometimes broke out. Desperation and insanity also frequently took hold of new soldiers and sailors, in some cases ending in suicide. All in all the outgoing trip was no picnic: for many of the soldiers who eventually arrived in Batavia, the first stop was not the barracks but the hospital.<sup>123</sup>

About 20% of the people who never arrived in Batavia, however, had taken their leave somewhere along the way. Most of these disembarked at the Cape, where in this period virtually all ships made a stopover to take in supplies and make repairs. In the entire period under study here, 1325 people left their ship at the Cape colony. Many of these were too ill to continue the trip, and would be admitted to the Cape hospital to recover or to die there. However, included in the numbers of those disembarking were also deserters, and one gets the impression that all kinds of 'deliberate' shuffling around with personnel also occurred at the Cape. In any case the death rate of those disembarking at the Cape cannot have been that high, as 1325 people disembarked at the Cape, but 974 actually came on board there in the period here under study, leaving only a very small 'net loss.' The bulk of those embarking at the Cape, then, had either recovered from a disease and were now re-embarking on another ship to go to Batavia after all, or were deliberately transferred from one ship to another.

Another risk of people taking an early leave of their ship was constituted by unplanned stopovers in places that were not VOC-property. Although the directors had taken resolution after resolution in attempts to limit these unplanned stopovers to an absolute minimum, storms or other unforeseen circumstances often forced ships to call in, for example, England or the Capeverdian Islands. For some employees, who had come to realise that by signing up they had gotten a little more than

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122 VOC-Archives, *Overgekomen brieven en papieren*, 1239, 1365pp.

123 Bruin en Lucassen eds., *Op de schepen der Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 81-98; Gelder, *Oost-Indisch Avontuur*, 173.



Product	eenheid	1656	1657	1658	1659	1660	1661	1662	1663
<b>Entire melee weapons</b>									
Swords, straight and curved	piece	1000	1000	1500	1100	1000	800	2000	2000
Sabres for the soldiers	piece			500	1500				
Long pikes	piece	1000				300		500	
Half pikes	piece	1000				200		200	
Half ship pikes	piece	500				200		200	
Long ship pikes	piece	500				200		200	
Halberds	piece				40	30			10
Bare pikemen's weapons	piece				25	30		40	
Boarding axes	piece		100						100
Pardesans	piece				300				
<b>Pieces and accessories</b>									
Blades, all kinds	piece	850	250		600	200	65	100	750
Knobs, all kinds	piece		2000	200	1225	600			600
Common armature for the pikes, assorted	piece						1000		
'Spaen' (thin wood) for scabbards	bushel	60		60	100	40			
Scabbard lockets ('Oorijzers')	piece	500		1000	2000	1000	1000	2000	1000
carrying belts for swords or sabres	piece		800			1000			
<b>Armor</b>									
Morion helmets	piece		100	100	50	30		800	

Table 2: *melee weapons and armor as requested for a certain year in the Generale Eis. For details see appendix.*

Product	unit	1656	1657	1658	1659	1660	1661	1662	1663
<b>Complete firearms</b>									
Carbines (with their belts and hooks)	piece	50	50	100					
Muskets	piece				1800	400			
Light muskets	piece		1000	1000					
'Kalibers' muskets with bandoleers	piece			300	400	200			
Long flintlock firearms ('Snaphaanroers')	piece		100	300	200	100	50	300	150
Firearms for the officers	piece						70		
Bandoleer-arquebuses, with accessories	piece				50	800	100		
Arquebuses with accessories	piece		100		200		50	150	50
Flintlock pistols with holsters (for cavalry)	piece		35	100	40			100	50
<b>Parts and accessories</b>									
Flintlock stones	piece	2000	3000	10000	5000	5000		10000	10000
Firestones (for arquebuses)	piece	500	1500	1000	3000	5000	1000	4000	2000
Bandoleers for muskets	piece	200			1400			1000	
Powder measures	piece		5000		6000	1000	3000	10000	
stampers tot muskets	piece			2000					500
Ramrods of ashwood or walnut	piece		300	1000			50		
Ramrods for long flintlock firearms	piece				500				500
Holsters for arquebuses	piece		200						
Ammunition bags	piece		500				150	100	
Carbine hooks	piece			100					
Walnut planks for making stocks	piece			20				100	50
Belts for ammunition bags	piece				200	200			
Belts and hooks for carbines	piece				100				
Armature for repairing muskets	piece			2000	40				
<b>(Production of) ammunition</b>									
Long bullet molds for muskets, assorted	piece		50		40				100
Bullet molds for arquebuses, assorted	piece				300				100
'Bullet biters' and pincers	piece		50						100
Round pincers	piece								50
'Hamerslag' (scrap/grapeshot)	piece?								500

Table 3: *firearms, parts of firearms, ammunition and tools for ammunition as requested in the Generale Eis. For details see appendix.*

they had bargained for, this was their chance to take off; when calling at an English port, there was the additional risk of personnel on shore leave being pressganged into the crew of another ship. D.A.S. lists some episodes from VOC-history in which so many men deserted on unplanned stopovers that ships ran into trouble, but the problem seems to have been quite limited in our period. Over the entire seven year period, there are only 19 documented deserters in either England or the Capeverdian islands. As the death rate on the outbound voyages was also pretty much the lowest in VOC-history in these years, and only one outbound ship was wrecked,<sup>124</sup> these were indeed very untroublesome times with regard to personnel for the Company.

As soldiers arrived in Batavia fully armed, the High Government did not have to separately order weapons for them. The weapons and parts we find listed in the *Generale Eis* would therefore only have been used to repair and replace weapons, as well as arm the Asian legion and the Batavia civil militia. (Members of the latter, unlike their Dutch counterparts, did not have to buy their own armament but could borrow it from the Batavia armoury when the need arose.) The lists also contained a considerable amount of particularly finely made and richly decorated weapons. These were not meant for the actual defence of the VOC's possessions: their mentioning in the lists is sometimes followed by "for the officers", but much more often by: "*tot schenkinge*", meaning that the weapons were intended to make diplomatic gifts of.

The *Generale Eis* was subdivided into several categories: currency, trade goods, provisions etcetera. Batavia's master artisans also filed requests for goods that they needed. Thus we find paragraphs such as "for the bookbinders" or "for the masons." Many of these categories have some relevance to warfare, and categories shifted or changed names quite easily (among others "for the sword-makers", which in some years was one category together with "for the armoury") I have therefore chosen to rigidly limit my analysis to the two categories most directly connected with warfare: the category "for the armoury" and "for the constable-major." The most significant goods in either category are listed in tables 2 through 4.

Looking at the tables, one will note how much of the *Generale Eis* does not consist of actual weapons, but of parts. In the actual *Generale Eis*, this becomes even clearer. The goods that I have chosen to highlight here, obscure the fact that in the actual *Eis* one is hard-pressed to find complete weapons at all: the list is dominated by all kinds of nails, rivets and screws, as well as metal thread of different kinds, tools, glue; even gold to gild weapons with. Most obvious is the example of drums, so essential in modern 17<sup>th</sup>-century warfare: each year, between 20 and 50 entire drums were ordered, alongside several hundreds of snares, drum-skins, lines and other parts: enough material to repair or assemble about ten times as many. In the course of the first thirty years of Batavia as 'capital' of the Company, an artisan's quarter had been set up in the city, and a list by

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124 The *Sloterdijk* was wrecked at Cape Verde in June 1662, while trying to catch up with the expedition to Mozambique in which it was supposed to participate.

Pieter van Dam made at the end of the century informs us that by then a considerable number of people was actually engaged in the refitting, repair, assembly and production of weapons. The constable-major had 73 people permanently in his service, among whom 4 smiths and one *draaier*, all with their own servants, as well as professional bus-firers. The head of the armoury also had several dozens of people working for him, among whom 27 sword-makers, a silversmith (presumably to decorate gift weapons), several bandoleer-makers and gunstock-makers, all with their own servants. Furthermore there was a master-powdermaker with 15 employees (a trade which developed in Batavia in the period 1656-1663, as described in the previous chapter), and 30 smiths. With regard to the latter, Van Dam remarks: ‘In the past there was a head of the gunfoundry, but as for many a year there has neither been a gunfoundry, nor has any gun been made, this function now resorts under the head of the smiths and copper-smiths.’<sup>125</sup> This past that Van Dam referred to was in fact the period here under study: in 1654 the gunfoundry, which had been in existence for quite some time, was moved to a new location, somewhere more out of sight, to keep the local non-European population from getting too much insight into the art of gunmaking. Included in the *Generale Eis* of 1656, we also find the request for ‘two gun-founding apprentices, young lads who know their trade,’ and in 1657, another ‘three or four’ were ordered. (In our eyes perhaps slightly awkwardly, the *Generale Eis* ordered people and books right alongside barrels of nails.)<sup>126</sup>

By the end of the period here under study, the Governor-General and Council also informed patria that they were experimenting with having plate iron, cannonballs, ‘long ammunition’ and nails being produced and sent over from the Coromandel coast, “so as to lower the pressure on the fatherland.” The samples being sent over were all excellent and cheap, the letter informs patria, so more will be ordered.<sup>127</sup>

Over the years 1656-1663, all kinds of new categories sprang up in the *Generale Eis*, suggesting an increasing attention to and organisation of the defences. From 1657 onwards, the categories ‘for the gunfounders’ and ‘for the powdermakers’ are structurally to be found in the lists, in which dozens of drills, kettles, scales, sieves and other tools are to be found. In 1656, the constable-major ordered the ‘artillerybooks’ by Joseph Furttentbach, referring to *Architectura Martialis*, published in 1630, and the works on fortification by Mathias Dögen, which will refer to the book *L’architecture militaire moderne, ou Fortification*, published in 1648. In addition, measuring instruments were ordered for the building of fortresses. From 1661 onwards, we also find a category “For the building and upkeep of the fortifications and strongholds”, which contains hundreds of tools, mostly shovels and mason tools, yearly from then onwards.

125 Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, book 3, 172-208, quote on the smiths 200-201.

126 Kuypers, *geschiedenis der artillerie*, III, 209.

127 General letter of 26 dec. 1662, in: *Generale Missiven*, III, 431.

Product	unit	1656	1657	1658	1659	1660	1661	1662	1663
<b>Ammunition</b>									
Bar shot and chain shot, assorted	piece	2000	14000	48000	44000		16000	11000	10000
Round shot, small (1 to 16 pounds)	Piece		16000	88000	48800	24000	24000	22000	4000
Round shot, large (18 pound or more)	Piece		7000	37000	11400				
'Baskogels'	Piece				2000				
Grenades, all kinds	Piece	10500	450						
Hand grenades	Piece	n.s.	4500	4000		6000	2000	3000	2000
Chain shot	Barrel						12		
'Hollants lont' (fuse rope)	Case						150		
Scrap for the cannon	Barrel							6	
<b>Accessories</b>									
Entire bars(?)	Piece	12	10						
Copper powderhorns, 12 to 24 pounds	Piece		300						
Ramrods, assorted, all calibres	Piece		492						
Powder lanterns	Piece		100						
Assorted powder funnels	Piece		36					36	
Powder horns (large and small)	Piece				200	300		400	
Wooden powder horns, all calibres	Piece							168	
<b>Tools for weapons and ammunition</b>									
Musket bullet molds	Piece				48	24			
Bullet molds for small firearms	Piece				48				
Drills (to drill the cannon)	Piece				240	24	200		
Files (all kinds)	Piece				228	144	72		
Wood graters	Piece				24				
Drills (for the drilling of muzzles)	Piece					72			

Table 4. *Ammunition, accessories and tools for weapons in the Generale Eijs, category for the constable-major/artillery.*

The fulfilment of the *Generale Eijs* was often problematic, as requested goods were not sent and goods that were not needed were in fact sent over. In spite of an increasing number of measures to monitor and streamline the fulfilment of the *Eijs*, irregularities kept on occurring and particularly the smaller chambers seem to have been hard-pressed to fulfil their part of the demands. Armament and ammunition were no exceptions: throughout the period here under study, we find requests repeated, often with added commentary such as “did not come in, very urgent”, “already demanded last year”, or “under no circumstances to be forgotten.” In 1650 an irritated constable-major simply limited his request to “everything that was ordered last year but has not come in,” in 1656 we find a two-page list of weapons under the somewhat unusual heading: “demands from the fatherland already made in 1654.” In a series of lists which compare the *Eijs* with the goods actually loaded in the Netherlands and unloaded in Batavia (as all kind of stuff also disappeared along the way), we find entire pages of armament and ammunition of which too much, or too little, was sent. However, it is striking that for the armoury, the list of surpluses is usually longer than the list of

shortages, suggesting that when it came to armament, the Chambers rather rounded their numbers upwards than downwards.<sup>128</sup>

Indeed, the directors might have been careful on their spending, but this caution certainly did not extend itself to the purchase of armament, either in amount or quality. As Van Dam informs us, with regard to the purchase of weapons, not the price, nor even the best buy, but the highest quality was paramount. The Chambers were required to keep sample weapons of the material they sent east, newly available models were examined by a delegate of the directors and discussed in the meeting of the XVII, and the Chambers were not allowed to buy guns that deviated from the standards set by the XVII. All in all little expense seems to have been spared to ensure both high quality and uniformity of the weapons, and in this matter the meeting of the directors seems to have kept the Chambers on an even tighter leash than in other matters.<sup>129</sup> Even where large deviations from the *Eis* do occur, this doesn't seem to be the result of economy measures, but rather of compensation for the slow communication between patria and Batavia. As it had become practice in Batavia to simply request again any goods that had not arrived in time, the directors, in their deliberations concerning the *Eis*, would subtract from the *Eis* all the goods that were presumably still underway.<sup>130</sup> Although no reference to the content of these deliberations is to be found in resolutions, it stands to reason that this was afoot in e.g. '59, when the amounts listed in the constable-major's request for ammunition were nearly cut in half by the directors. Just the year before, Batavia had ordered a staggering 173.000 cannonballs and grenades, several times more than usual. The directors did not cut down on this request and at least *tried* to fulfil it. How successful they were is hard to tell, as the lists comparing the various administrations are missing for 1658, but at any rate they were apparently not fast enough to the tastes of the government in Batavia. When the next year another large amount was requested, it was presumably decided that the amount still underway would probably do, and the amounts were lowered. Batavia's hunger for ammunition was indeed appeased by the amount that arrived in the end, as the next year's request for ammunition was once again quite modest.

The constable-major might order any number of cannonballs he wanted, but the two things he needed to actually fire these, i.e. gunpowder and guns, are notably absent from the *Eis* in the period here under study. Not a single cannon was ordered from Batavia in the entire period.

Although a seven-year stretch without any guns being ordered was admittedly unusual (browsing through the *Eis* of earlier years, one does occasionally come across a few), it is not as absurd as it

128 Van Dam, 1.II, 104; VOC-Archive, 13476-13481. The latter compare the requests with the specifications of the goods loaded onto the ships for the period here. 1658 and 1661 are missing. The deviations from the requests on the basis of the decisions made by the XVII were also noted in the margins of 13473, used for the tables here.

129 Van Dam, 1.II, 639pp. For an example of the setting of standards, influence of the directors and examination of arms, see the resolutions of the meeting of the XVII of April 28 1659.

130 Van Dam, 1.II, 104pp.

	Metal	Iron
Batavia (including surrounding redoubts and bulwarks)	91	207
Moluccas	23	80
Ambon	14	124
Banda	4	117
Solor	6	32
Taiwan	36	107
Malacca	38	14
Coromandel	18	23
Colombo	52	95
Galle	36	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>820</b>

Guns not in use: 437

*Table 5: list of the Company's guns, 1656. For details see appendix*

seems in the first instance. As described in the previous chapter, gunpowder was treated as a bulk good, which the government in the East simply took from the ships, and which did not need to be accounted for. Surprisingly enough, it was the same story with guns. These were not ordered; Batavia simply took what it needed. The only guns that were ordered were models that were not used on board ships.<sup>131</sup>

This way of dealing with the most expensive and most important type of weapon the VOC had, will strike the contemporary observer as implausibly easy-going of the otherwise so bureaucratic and precise Company administration. Whereas every bandoleer and every barrel of nails was assigned to a Chamber, noted down when loaded, and accounted for in the general meeting, there was no such administrative system for artillery. In 1653, the directors had resolved that from then on, each of the Chambers should include the amount of artillery they had in stock in their reports, but this accountability went no further than the Dutch warehouses: as soon as a VOC-ship cleared the harbour, the cannon on board also cleared the Company's administration. Batavia did not have to report on the number of cannon it had taken from the ships or their current employment, and counts of the Company's artillery were held rarely and irregularly.<sup>132</sup>

The slightly unusual position that artillery and gunpowder took in the Company's supply system, may be assumed to be a legacy of the early days of the Company, when the first fortresses the VOC conquered were indeed supplied with ship's cannon and gunpowder. As the Company's possessions grew, this system continued working in a satisfactory way, and turned from practice into

131 In fact, in 1655, the *Eis* requests a total of 16 mortars, varying in calibre from 6 to 21 *duim*, and 1500-4000 shells of each calibre, as well as 50 light *princestuckgens* firing 3 or 4 pounds (perhaps "tot schenkagie?") and 50 *steenstukken*.

132 VOC-archive, 103, Resolutions of the XVII, May 24 1653.

policy. In the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the meeting of the XVII adapted the standard number of cannon with which outbound ships were equipped to the political situation in both Europe and Asia, and included in the considerations was the number of cannon that the servants in the East would probably lift off the ships. In some instances, such as the year 1672 when the outbound ships had to fear both French and English vessels, requests were sent along to only lift off the ships what was absolutely necessary. In the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the standard amount of cannon for the heaviest category of ships varied from 28 to 38 guns, the guns on average also being of a much heavier calibre in times of war.<sup>133</sup>

With some 16 ships departing for the East yearly, each carrying several dozens of guns, artillery was not in short supply in the East. In fact, the counts that were held every few years, usually listed a surplus.<sup>134</sup> A count held in 1656 (see table 5), in addition to listing 318 metal and 820 iron guns on the various VOC fortifications, also mentions 437 guns in Batavia that are not in active use, and are put up on squares, stocked away in warehouses etcetera. These 437 guns include broken pieces and guns of an outlandish design for which the Company did not have the appropriate ammunition and which were probably not meant for defence purposes anyway (the list mentions some Cambodian guns, for instance), but also mortars and regular artillery which was perfectly useable, but for which there was apparently no direct need at the time.

Accordingly, the purpose of Batavia's gun foundry was not to provide for more firepower, but rather to provide the Company's armies with specific kinds of artillery. The VOC vessels were equipped with heavy yet unwieldy naval guns which could also do excellent service for the defence of fortresses, but were less suitable as field artillery. The guns that we actually find ordered in the *Generale Eis* in an earlier period were usually guns of a very light calibre, or mortars. The gun foundry in Batavia was also specifically set up to cast smaller pieces; the heavier ones were amply provided by the ships.<sup>135</sup>

Finally, the ships that continually went back and forth between the Republic and Batavia merit some attention here. As described above, the decisions regarding the building of new ships were usually taken in the spring meeting, on the basis of the report of the *Haags Besogne*. We accordingly hardly ever find the number of ships to be built as a separate point on the agenda: in most cases resolutions on this matter are to be found among the deliberations of the report of the *Haags Besogne* in spring; in other cases they were simply *ad hoc* decisions, taken either in spring or autumn. In the period here under consideration, the number of ships to be built varied enormously from year to year; in 1659, for instance, the resolutions of neither meeting give evidence of the building of any ships being commissioned; then, in 1660, it was decided in the spring meeting to build four

133 Van Dam, 1.I, 505-511.

134 Van Dam, 1.I, 511, citing 1686 as his example; Kuypers, *Geschiedenis der artillerie*, III, 253, citing 1699 as his example.

135 Van der Meij, 'De VOC onder de wapenen', 50.

large East-Indiamen, and in the autumn meeting four more fluteships. In addition, the Amsterdam chamber had announced in spring that it had bought two fluteships, bringing the total of acquired or commissioned ships to ten.

Most of the ships being commissioned in this period were either square sterned East-Indiamen or fluteships. On their outward voyage, the former were mainly “passenger ships”, transporting the Company’s personnel to the East. Not only were the holds full of soldiers; the ships also took many more sailors than were really necessary to operate the ship. Many of these would stay in the East and serve aboard vessels active in the intra-Asian trade. The return ship could subsequently make it back to the Netherlands with a greatly reduced crew and its hold full of trade goods instead of people. The cargo holds of the smaller fluteships, then, would mainly be filled with goods on the outward voyage: the cannonballs, tools, and weapons, but also bricks, shipbuilding wood and trade goods, requested in the *Generale Eis*. These fluteships, being smaller but more durable and requiring relatively little personnel to operate, were also deemed very suitable for the intra-Asian trade by the government in Batavia, and were therefore often simply kept when they came in from the Netherlands. However, as the directors in the Netherlands were not pleased to have to build new fluteships for every outward bound fleet, they very soon started requesting that fluteships be included in the return fleets as well.<sup>136</sup>

Decisions on the building of ships meant planning ahead, as it took more than a year from the day of the resolution to get a ship seaworthy. If, for example, the decision to build an East-Indiaman was taken in the spring of 1659, wood was bought straight away; this would then have to leach for six months. Only by November or December could the keel be laid down, and from then it took another three months in the yards to complete the vessel. The completed ships, then, would usually set sail with the next Fair Fleet, almost 1 ½ years after their construction had been decided upon. This timing was convenient, as the ships coming in from Batavia with the return fleet would arrive roughly at that time, but were often late and in any case needed to be unloaded, repaired and loaded again, often only being ready for another round by winter or spring. The new ships, therefore, came right on time to sail with the Fair Fleet, for which no or few ships would have been available otherwise.<sup>137</sup>

It was with good reason that this resolution was part of the task of the *Haags Besogne*, which included in its considerations not only the list of naval power, but the entire situation in the East. The system seems to have worked very well. In D.A.S., it is remarked that this planning ahead was certainly in good hands with Gentlemen XVII, and the shipbuilding business is described as a “well-oiled machine.”<sup>138</sup> However, there were always eventualities which could not be planned for.

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136 D.A.S., I, 23-25, 40.

137 Ibid., 24-25.

138 Ibid., 27.



One of these was obviously shipwreck. In the resolutions of the XVII we often find ships which have not arrived back yet already scheduled for the *equipage* of the following year. It was of course possible that these ships would not arrive back at all, which would ruin the entire planning for the year. If overdue ships were therefore included in the *equipage*, this was usually done with the aside that “should any kind of calamity have befallen this ship, which God forbid”, one of the Chambers (usually Amsterdam) would be allowed to buy replacing ships. Indeed, every once in a while we find the Amsterdam Chamber informing the spring meeting of the XVII that they have bought ships, so as to be able to complete the *equipage*.

Another instance in which the directors couldn't wait for their ships for 1 ½ years, was a military campaign. The fleet of six ships that sailed for Mozambique in the spring of 1662 is a case in point. As the directors could not simply conjure up eight ships on top of the usual *equipage*, there was nothing for it but to buy them. Indeed, four of the six ships which constituted this war fleet had been bought just before; the other two ships were fresh off the Company's shipyards.<sup>139</sup> Another example is the first large direct fleet to Ceylon, which had set sail a year earlier, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1661. All five yachts of this fleet had been bought just before.<sup>140</sup>

### **Communication, administration and secrecy**

As has been described earlier, one cannot pinpoint where in the organisation the responsibility with regard to warfare and politics lay. Technically, the Gentlemen XVII had the final responsibility, and all decisions of the Governor-General and Council were subject to their scrutiny. Then again, the Governor-General and Council had been called into existence for a good reason; it was impracticable to rule the VOC's possessions all the way from the Dutch Republic. In the end, therefore, policy did not come from any particular source, but developed in the interaction between Batavia and the Netherlands. Where the centre of gravity in this interaction lay, entirely depended on the political situation in Asia as well as the character of the person actually taking up the seat of the Governor-General.

The Governor-General of our period, Johan Maatsuiker, was later described by Pieter van Dam as “having fulfilled his task to the greatest contentment of his overlords and masters.”<sup>141</sup> It is easy to see why the Gentlemen XVII were so content with him: under his Governor-Generalship, which lasted from 1652 to 1678 and was the longest period any Governor-General spent in office,

139 Their commissioning, however, is nowhere to be found in the resolutions, suggesting that perhaps they had expressly been built for war-purposes and had therefore been kept out of the resolutions. In that case the directors had indeed reckoned with some naval action against the Portuguese earlier on.

140 This is another instance of an impressive fleet, with a clear military purpose if the soldier/sailor ratio of the one ships of which this has been preserved is representative for the other ships (The *Wassende Maan* had 107 sailors against 139 soldiers), which is completely invisible in the resolutions of the XVII. The fleet had a total of 1325 on board. More on this in the section on politics below.

141 Van Dam, book III, 20.

the VOC did consistently well. Maatsuiker was both willing and able to use violence to protect the Company's interests, but did not have the hawkish and self-righteous characteristics of some of his predecessors and successors. He was no Coen or Van Goens: it is striking how often he left decisions at the discretion of the Gentlemen XVII. The smaller decisions that he left to patria, regarding, for one, the reduction in size of fortresses or the administrative redivision of the Coromandel coast,<sup>142</sup> were not actually discussed in the meeting of the XVII: the *Haags Besogne* already resolved on these kinds of issues and formulated the answer in its draft general letter, which then only had to be approved by the spring meeting and was usually included in the final letter virtually unchanged. Also striking about the general letters under Maatsuiker is his apparent insistence on giving patria as much insight into Asian politics as possible. In spite of several promises to the directors to keep the letters short, the general letters of this period often contain page-long passages on the dynastic wars in the Moghul Empire or political developments in and around Makassar, even where these had only second-hand relevance to the interests of the Company. Thus, even patria had access to a great amount of up-to-date information on the political developments in Asia. To what degree either the *Haags Besogne* or the directors actually *appreciated* this wealth of information is unclear, as there is little evidence of this kind of news actually being discussed in the meetings of either.

The *Generale Missiven* from the Governor General and Council Batavia to the directors and vice versa, were the most important means of communication between patria and Batavia. This communication was asymmetrical in the same way that the fleets were; as ships left from the Netherlands to Batavia practically all year round, the Gentlemen XVII were also capable of sending off letters throughout the year. Usually one or two letters were sent during each meeting. As the return fleets from Batavia, on the other hand, only sailed between late November and February, this also limited the possibility of sending letters to the Netherlands to this period. A general letter was usually sent somewhere in December, followed by another one a good month later. In effect, therefore, news was saved up over an entire year, and the Gentlemen XVII were informed of all this in two long letters. In cases of very important news, the VOC sometimes sent off letters with English ships that left from the region throughout the year, with the sensitive news in coding. This was done, for example, to inform the XVII of the conquest of Colombo in 1656, and Coxinga's attack in 1661.<sup>143</sup> In a single instance in the period here under study, Batavia sent off a fluteship outside the normal shipping season to bring news to patria: on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 1662, the *Spreeuw* set sail from Batavia to inform the XVII that fort Zeelandia on Formosa had fallen.<sup>144</sup>

Reading through the resolutions of the Gentlemen XVII, one gets the impression that the directors were indeed a bunch of clerks rather than a political body. The bulk of the resolutions concerned

142 For examples of Maatsuiker leaving decisions to the XVII: see *Generale Missiven*, III, 93pp, 225pp.

143 Letters of July 31 1656 and July 29 1661, in: *Generale Missiven*, III, 82pp, 372pp.

144 *Generale Missiven*, III, 393.

balances, inter-Chamber business, relations with the Estates-General, costs, prices and alike. The various military campaigns or the political situation in Asia were hardly ever a topic of debate at all. If Asia was mentioned, this often concerned candidacies for vacant functions or the competence of the employees there, rather than the military campaigns or the threats posed by local rulers. A point on the agenda of the spring meeting of 1656 concerning the campaigns on Ceylon was a notable exception, and the actual goal of this point is telling indeed: in the previous meeting it had been brought forward that the garrisons and field armies on Ceylon were much too expensive, and apparently some of the Chambers were of the opinion that for this reason the campaign should be abandoned. The resolutions of the 1662 autumn meeting ramble on for pages on the pros and cons of open trade on Ceylon and the South Indian Coast, completely disregarding the war going on there; one of the most intensive campaigns the VOC ever fought. If we go by these resolutions, it has every appearance that the Gentlemen XVII perceived their task to be limited to the wellbeing of the European side of the Company and the fiscal policy, leaving political matters in the capable hands of the personnel in Asia.<sup>145</sup>

However: appearances can deceive. The events in the period here under study strongly suggest that during the meetings of the XVII, a host of things was decided that did not make it to the resolutions as we can read them today. Above it was already mentioned how war fleets were sent out in 1661 and 1662, which simply did not show up in the resolutions. The 1661 fleet to Ceylon, which left on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April, had already been announced to Batavia in a letter from the XVII, dated January 7, which was subsequently brought to Batavia by the *Nieuwenhove*, arriving in Batavia on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August. This letter informed Batavia that peace talks between the Republic and Portugal were making headway, and that it was therefore imperative that all possible damage should be inflicted on the Portuguese before this would be made impossible by the peace. For this purpose, six ships manned with 1500 heads would be sent directly to Ceylon, to definitively decide the war in the Company's favour there.<sup>146</sup> If we are to believe the resolutions, however, the Gentlemen XVII were not even convened on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January, when the letter was signed. Neither is this letter included in the book of outgoing letters of the XVII.<sup>147</sup> The letter that was apparently never sent if we go by the Dutch Company administration, did however arrive in Batavia on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, and the

145 Curiously enough, the same goes for the various papers of the *Haags Besogne*, i.e. the *Haags Verbaal* and concepts for the general letter to Batavia. Whereas this commission had the explicit function of examining the situation in Asia, the war against the Portuguese is hardly treated here at all, and a same care with words is used when things like the building of fortifications are discussed. *Haags verbaal*, VOC 4455, for the years 1661 and 1662.

146 Willem Martin Ottow, *Rijckloff Volkert van Goens: krijgsman, commissaris en regent in dienst der VOC, 1657-1662* (unpublished 1995), C12.

147 VOC-Archives, outgoing letterbooks of the Gentlemen XVII and the Chamber of Amsterdam, 318.

fleet that it promised was in fact bought, manned and sent by April, before the Gentlemen XVII reconvened for their spring meeting on the unusually late date of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May.<sup>148</sup>

Similar curiosities surround the fleet to Mozambique which departed in the third week of April 1662. Nothing regarding the equipment of this fleet is to be found in the resolutions of the spring meeting, which had lasted from the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, or the previous meeting, being the autumn meeting of 1661. In fact in the latter meeting all kinds of preparations for the peace were already decided upon, such as designing new instructions for the outgoing fleets, striking all the clauses about inflicting as much damage as possible on the Portuguese. However, the XVII would obviously have been the organ to commission this fleet, and indeed, in the *Overgekomen brieven en papieren*, we find various letters that Huibert de Lairesse, the commander of the fleet, sent to inform the XVII of the progress of the mission, in which he expresses his hope that “our design, God willing, shall be attained.” The letters make abundantly clear that the Gentlemen XVII had indeed commissioned this expedition.<sup>149</sup>

All in all, these years seem to show a pattern of decisions on warfare structurally being kept out of the Company’s Dutch paperwork. We only find these decisions and letters in the archives in the second instance, when the news of their results is starting to come back to the Netherlands through the general letter and the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren*. Why this was done will not be found in the archives, but the first thing that obviously comes to mind is fear of espionage by other European nations, particularly the Portuguese. The resolutions of the Gentlemen XVII as well as the letter books were kept in several copies (each of the Chambers had a copy of both), and many VOC-employees must have had access to them. Fear of espionage would not have been wholly unjustified, as in this period the Republic was visited by Portuguese embassy after Portuguese embassy, in attempts to restore the peace between the two nations. The arrest of two citizens of The Hague in March 1651 on the accusation of spying for the Portuguese goes to illustrate that these embassies were cultivating more activities than just negotiating with the Estates-General.<sup>150</sup> As retaining

148 The general letter to Batavia which was sent by this meeting on the 7th of May 1661 does not make any mention of the fleet either. The sections on Ceylon and Coromandel once again completely ignore the war going on there, and talk about the future profitability of these regions and Van Goens’ fortification plan, where the letter tactfully talks about defending the island against ‘a possible European enemy.’ The actual word ‘Portuguese’ is completely avoided, and only used once with reference to religion, as there are ‘Popish Portuguese priests’ active in the area. One day earlier, the meeting had sent a letter overland to the Western Quarters, expressing its hope for news from the Western Quarters. This letter *does* in fact state that all possible damage should be inflicted upon the Portuguese, as peace is approaching. The letter states that the directors are careful with the pen here, as the overland route is not very secure. “Other letters”, however, will have informed the various governors of more details. These admirably vague statements are of course not elaborated anywhere in the letter book, and it stands to reason that these ‘other letters’ refer to the one sent to Batavia with the *Nieuwenbove*, and the letters and orders sent with the expedition fleet to Ceylon. Letters in VOC-archives 318, 280pp, 299pp.

149 VOC-Archives, *Overgekomen brieven en papieren*, 1239, 1365pp.

150 Cornelis van de Haar, *De diplomatieke betrekkingen tussen de Republiek en Portugal 1640-1661* (Groningen 1961), 129.

the Asian empire was one of the first concerns of the Portuguese in their negotiations with the Estates-General, we must also assume that they would have had a keen interest in finding out the plans that the VOC had for those regions. It would seem that the VOC took every precaution not to let them find out.

All in all, only recurring issues such as the number of soldiers to be sent to Batavia made it to the resolutions; decisions regarding military campaigns and grand strategies were kept out of the paperwork. To what degree these things were entrusted to the paper at all remains unclear: we know that the Gentlemen XVII also had secret resolutions which were kept in separate books, but these have only survived for the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The content and extent of the secret resolutions for our period can therefore only be guessed. In the end one can only conclude that the resolutions hardly tell us anything about the level of involvement of the Gentlemen XVII in matters of war.

### **Calling the shots: political interaction**

This fear of espionage in Europe brings us to the point where any analysis of the political interaction between patria and the Asian possessions must begin: European politics. The VOC was a Dutch Company, falling under Dutch law, officially acting in the name of the Estates-General in matters of politics and war, and dependent on the Republic for the extensions of its Charter. This meant that treaties between the Republic and other European nations officially extended to the VOC's empire in the East, and that European politics had a strong influence on what happened on the other side of the Cape.

In the first two chapters, the complexities that this fact brought along were already touched upon. In the first few years after the Company's founding, the interests, as well as the enemies, of the Republic and the Company were virtually the same, and at any rate the political and military dimensions of what was in essence a trading company were still insignificant. However, as the VOC increasingly became a military and political actor, and started using violence as a tool to influence the trade, the plot rapidly thickened. This became very pertinent, for one, when Portugal broke away from the Spanish Empire and concluded a peace agreement with the Republic in 1641. This treaty was officially also binding for the VOC, but did not at all coincide with its market strategy of driving out the Portuguese and attaining a monopoly position. The Company did everything it could to postpone the peace, so as to be able to make more conquests in Southern India.<sup>151</sup> The period here under study, as I hope will become clear in the coming paragraphs, saw similar complications.

With England, the Dutch Republic was at peace in 1656. The First Anglo-Dutch Sea War, mainly a conflict over trade hegemony sparked off by the English Navigation Act of 1651, had been concluded by the treaty of Westminster in 1654. However, neither the war nor the treaty had removed

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151      Also see above, page 10.

the root of hostilities, i.e. the commercial rivalry between the two nations, which would remain at an uneasy peace until, in 1665, open war broke out again.

This uneasy peace and ongoing commercial rivalry extended beyond the line as well. Rivalry in the colonies, particularly the West Indies, would be an important cause of the Second Anglo-Dutch War. In the East Indies, no open hostilities actually broke out in the years here under consideration, and the Companies nominally stuck to the peace in Europe. Nonetheless, both the English and the Dutch East India Company certainly probed into the grey area between commercial competition and acts of war. The continuing English trade with Bantam, the kingdom to the west of Batavia with which the Company had an on-and-off war throughout the 1650s and 1660s, annoyed the government in Batavia greatly. Repeated English attempts to run through a VOC blockade before the harbour of Bantam in 1657, and, worse still, a similar English action at the Goa blockade in that same year, seriously tried Maatsuiker's patience.<sup>152</sup> The Dutch Company, in its turn, was also taking measures which hardly seem consistent with a peaceful disposition towards the English, for one by signing a treaty with Aceh on October 5<sup>th</sup> 1659 which gave the VOC the right to keep the English away from the Achinese coast, by force if necessary. The English, of course, kept on coming anyway, and Maatsuiker, somewhat disappointed, informed the directors that he was not going to use violence, "knowing what is at stake for Your Honours in this matter."<sup>153</sup>

An even bolder action against the English was taken on Ceylon by Van Goens, on his own initiative. Van Goens was leading the military campaign against the Portuguese in India, when in July 1660, without any orders from either patria or Batavia, he suddenly marched on the cities of Cottiar and Trincomalee, which at the time did not have a Portuguese presence and were owned by the Raja Singha, the ruler of central Kandy Kingdom. Van Goens explained himself by stating how he had gotten wind of English plans to establish posts there and get hold of part of the cinnamon trade. Van Goens, who was trying to obtain a complete cinnamon monopoly and had already vented his dislike for the English ships in the area previously, had decided to beat them to the punch. This brought with it the risk of greatly angering the Raja Singha, and in any case reduced the number of troops Van Goens would be able to throw against the Portuguese, as the new conquests would have to be garrisoned. Even angrier than the Raja Singha, however, was Maatsuiker, who thought that Van Goens' action had been reckless and premature.<sup>154</sup>

All in all, the peace to which the English and the Dutch East India Companies were bound was quite at odds with the trading ambitions and notions of monopoly that formed the prime motivation for the actions of both Companies. Perhaps there was no open war, but the disposition of the two companies toward one another was certainly hostile and suspicious. In this case, the tension

152 Letter of 17<sup>th</sup> of December 1659, in: *Generale Missiven*, III, 147pp.

153 Letter of 16<sup>th</sup> of December, in: *Generale Missiven*, III, 257. Treaty in *Corpus Diplomaticum*, CXXXVIII.

154 Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), C8, C9.

between peace and commercial rivalry in Asia was mirrored by developments in Europe, where commercial rivalry was also the cause of mutual animosity. Indeed, European and Asian politics mutually influenced each other here, as developments in the colonial realm would be an important part of the *casus belli* in 1665.

With regard to the Portuguese, on the other hand, the VOC did not need to show any restraint at all. By the start of the period here under study, Portugal and the Dutch Republic had officially been at war for five years. A ten year truce between Portugal and the Republic, which had been put into effect on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 1641, had actually collapsed before its expiration. A revolt in Brazil against the Dutch rulers, which had begun almost the moment the open war had come to an end, and at times received hardly concealed support from Portugal, had increasingly soured the atmosphere between the two nations, until negotiations between them collapsed in the course of 1649. Open hostilities in the West Indies had already resumed, when, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1651, the Estates-General decided to break off negotiations with the Portuguese ambassador. Preparations for a seawar in Europe were made, an admiralty fleet to Brazil was supposed to come to the aid of the Dutch West India Company, and the VOC was allowed, indeed encouraged, to resume hostilities with the Portuguese. Before however the Dutch Republic or the VOC undertook anything noteworthy against the Portuguese, the war with England broke out. This war took up all the military resources of the Dutch Republic, and enabled the Portuguese to retake the colonies in Brazil, which were definitively lost to the Republic.<sup>155</sup>

Once the treaty of Westminster had ended the war with England, it became clear that the Portuguese conquest of Brazil had changed the political balance between Portugal and the Netherlands. In the negotiations up to 1651, the various Portuguese ambassadors had always tried to trade off concessions on Brazil, where the WIC was in a precarious position, with promises regarding the East Indies, where the VOC was far stronger than the *Estado da India Oriental*. Now that Brazil was lost to the Dutch, this pattern was broken. The Dutch Republic no longer needed to show any scruples in Europe or Asia to protect its interests in Brazil. While preparations for a sea war in Europe were underway, the Estates-General once again encouraged the VOC to undertake action against the Portuguese.<sup>156</sup>

This time, the VOC hardly needed any encouragement. As already mentioned, the XVII, in their autumn meeting of 1654, had decided to send out 5090 heads in the coming year. Now that the war with England was over, the directors were confident that their outward fleets would be safer, the lack of manpower about which Maatsuiker was complaining could now be solved, and something could finally be undertaken against the Portuguese. The large injection of manpower coin-

155 Resolution of the Estates-General, 29th of March 1651, mentioned in V/d. Haar, *Diplomatieke betrekkingen*, 130; Henk den Heijer, *De Geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen 1994), 49-54.

156 V/d Haar, *Diplomatieke betrekkingen*, 143.

cided with the Ambonese Wars being practically won by 1655. Suddenly the Company had a great amount of military resources at its disposal to throw against the Portuguese in India, and it was quite ready to deploy them. Before the encouragement of the Estates-General could have possibly reached Batavia, Maatsuiker could announce to patria that he would soon send out a fleet of 12 to 14 ships under the command of Gerard Hulft to confront the Portuguese on Ceylon. He acted accordingly a month later, sending out a fleet with 1200 soldiers.<sup>157</sup>

Only adding to the sense that the time had come to act against the Portuguese, was the *Vertoog* of Rijckloff van Goens. Having had a true lightning career in Asia, Van Goens had arrived back in patria as commander of the return fleet in September 1655. He had requested repatriation, officially to be able to see his son. We might however also suspect some of his motives to be of a more ambitious nature: repatriation enabled Van Goens to directly inform the directors of his ideas on how the Company should be run. He had taken some time out on his way to the Netherlands to entrust these ideas to paper, and his honourable discharge from Company service by the meeting of the XVII on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1655 enabled him to present the *Hoogmogende Heren* with the result of his writings.

In this report, Van Goens had something to say about practically every region where the VOC was active, but if we would have to summarize the whole report into one slogan, it would be something like: “War cannot be avoided; it can only be postponed to the advantage of others.” The Portuguese and the English, according to Van Goens, were jealous of the Company’s possessions and would take whatever the Company would let them. Worse still, “those insidious snakes” the Moors (a name which he generically applied to Makassarese, Muslim traders in South-India, rajas in the Western Quarters and all other Muslims), were bent on eradicating the Company throughout Asia, not only because of the trade but also from religious motives. If the Company was to hold its own in Asia, so Van Goens reasoned, it needed to be able to make a fist. The Spice Islands should be equipped with larger garrisons to keep Makassar at bay, the Portuguese should be beaten out of Ceylon, Diu and Macao (which could be done within two years, Van Goens expected), and the Company should no longer allow the Moors in Coromandel to play around with them, and use force there in order to inspire some respect for the Company again:

“It is not unknown to me to what little degree the Company’s current state will allow war all around, and with God as my witness, I would never advise it except in times of crisis. One cannot overlook that war is an unjust exercise and a clear and important ground for God’s anger with mankind, as one man beats and punishes the other at his will. But rationally observing the present troublesome situation of the Company, I dare state that Your Honours will have no

157 *Generale Missiven*, III, 3; Colenbrander, *Koloniale geschiedenis*, II, 158.



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choice, and the sooner the better, than to set an example, in order to restore our ruined state. [...] The Moors have been warned often enough, but never did any action follow so far.”<sup>158</sup>

It is interesting to note how Van Goens interpreted the situation in Asia not only in terms of profit and trade, but also in terms of a religious clash and a matter of prestige. Here, then, was a high-ranking VOC official with a Conquistador mentality.

Van Goens' plans fell into favour with at least some of the directors: one of the Chambers had put his possible re-employment in Company service on the agenda of the spring meeting of 1656. Interestingly enough, another agenda point brought in for that same meeting was whether the expensive campaigns on Ceylon could not be brought to an end. Apparently, there were some conflicting views on the course the Company should take. At any rate, Van Goens' supporters seem to have won out in the end: he was once again hired by the Company on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, and set sail to Batavia with the autumn fleet, in order to execute part of his own great plan.<sup>159</sup> We will just follow him along for the moment, as he will take us straight to the other end of the decision-making process: the battlefields in Asia.

Van Goens arrived in Batavia on the first of July 1657, one month before the annual blockade fleet to Goa would set out. As “commissioner, admiral and commander-in-the-field of the Western Quarters”, he was supposed to set sail with this fleet, to start driving the Portuguese off Ceylon, Diu and the Malabar Coast. He actually stayed in Batavia for another month to read up on the situation, and followed after the blockade fleet with six ships on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September. He joined the blockade before Goa on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November, after an unusually long trip, and sailed southwards with four ships on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December.

Before the renewed outbreak of hostilities, the Dutch had been in possession of two strongholds on Ceylon: Galle and Negombo, and surrounding areas. Between these two cities lay Colombo, which the Company had vainly attempted to conquer during the campaigns of the late 1630s. This, however, had been the first (and last) Portuguese stronghold targeted by Gerard Hulft's campaign, who had arrived before the city in October 1655. A siege had ensued, during which Hulft's 1200 soldiers vainly attempted to conquer the city on its 800 defendants for months. Gerard Hulft himself had been killed during the siege. When the city finally surrendered eight months after the beginning of the siege, only 73 Portuguese soldiers and a few hundred citizens turned out to have survived the unceasing mortar bombing of the months before.<sup>160</sup>

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158 Rijckloff Volkert van Goens, *Vertoogh wegens den presenten staet van de Generale Nederlantse Geotroijeerde Oost-Indische Comp.* Etc., printed in: *Bijdragen tot de Taal – Land en Volkenkunde* (1856:4), 141-180, there 154-155.

159 This is one of the cases where it becomes quite frustrating that no record survives of discussions between the directors. In the resolutions, the meeting seems one monolithic bloc producing unanimous decisions. Van Goens' private correspondence was later seized by Pieter van Dam, and there is no easy way of telling who was lobbying for Van Goens' plans, and who was against them.

160 Winius 'Luso-Nederlandse rivaliteit', 127.

With the fall of Colombo, the entire west coast of the island had come into possession of the Company, and the Portuguese presence on the island was limited to the area surrounding Jaffanapatnam and Mannar, on the north of the island. This, then, was the region on which Van Goens concentrated his military efforts. The details of his campaigns will be the topic of the next chapter; here it suffices to say that by the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1658, Jaffanapatnam, Mannar and the stronghold of Tuticorin on the Coromandel Coast had all fallen to Van Goens' forces. After a short pause to get things in order on the island, Van Goens continued his campaigns, conquering various Portuguese strongholds on the Coromandel and Malabar coasts.<sup>161</sup> His spree of conquests there would only be brought to a temporary halt by the end of 1658, when Van Goens, lying before Cannanore on the Malabar Coast at the time, received word from Batavia that he should immediately cease his campaign and send 500 of his soldiers to Batavia. This time, the enemy there was not Makassar, but "hot fever", which was decimating the garrison there. In order to keep the region safe from possible Makassarese attacks, Maatsuiker had recalled these troops, telling van Goens that the campaigns in the Western Quarters would just have to wait. Van Goens grudgingly complied, and subsequently spent his time putting things in order on Ceylon.<sup>162</sup>

In the meantime, it became clear that Van Goens' assertive personality and strong ideas on how the Company should be run, led to trouble with his functioning within the Company hierarchy. Very soon after his arrival on Ceylon, he got into conflict with Governor Van der Meijden. The task of a VOC commissioner was always of a temporary nature, and therefore he had no fixed place within the Company hierarchy. Ideally, he would of course cooperate with local VOC officials to get the task done. Van Goens, however, was very dominant *vis-à-vis* Van der Meijden from the very start, causing a conflict of competence between the two, which was further reinforced by the personal disliking the two seem to have taken to one another from day one. Van Goens overruled Van der Meijden in decisions on the garrisons of Ceylonese cities, as he needed the troops for his own campaigns, and also suggested that his conquests on the north of Ceylon would fall under the

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161 This and much of the following is based on Ottow, *Rijckloff Volkert van Goens: krijgsman, commissaris en regent in dienst der VOC, 1657-1662* (unpublished 1995). This is such a curious book that it merits some attention here. Ottow had written his dissertation on the diplomatic career of Van Goens up to 1655, and this dissertation appeared in print in 1954. Apparently he remained interested in the topic, as in the course of his life he wrote a 'sequel' to his 1954 dissertation, about Van Goens' work as a commissioner in the Western Quarters. For this book, however, he did not manage to find a publisher. Reading the work it is not hard to see why: the book is a fascinatingly old-fashioned hagiography of national hero Van Goens, which on the basis of its style, source-base, method and point, one would expect to date back to the 1940s rather than to 1995. The only copy of the book publicly available is therefore a stencilled manuscript in the Royal Library in The Hague.

It is a pity that the distribution of the book remains so very limited. The book, although old-fashioned, is an incredibly thorough source study on the correspondence between Van Goens, Batavia and patria. For the better part of the work, Ottow limited himself to sifting through the thousands of pages of correspondence between Van Goens and other parties, and summarizing these letters, rendering the jungle of documents related to Van Goens very accessible and thus opening up an episode of VOC history which has received too little attention so far.

162 Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), C4; *Generale Missiven*, III, 212.

direction of the Coromandel Coast, and not under the governorship of Ceylon. In various letters, Van Goens claimed that this made more sense from an administrative point of view, but the fact that he held Laurens Pit, governor of the Coromandel Coast, in much higher personal esteem than Van der Meijden, would also seem to have played a role in this suggestion.<sup>163</sup>

The disagreements between the two gentlemen were soon taken to the higher authorities by Van Goens, who on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1658, during his brief stay on Ceylon, sent a report to Batavia in which he accused Van der Meijden of being incapable and miserly. These kinds of formulations about Van der Meijden were repeated in many subsequent letters. Things finally came to a head in 1659. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, the fortress of Quilon, one of Van Goens' conquests on the Malabar Coast, had been evacuated by Van der Meijden, as a combined attack by the local ruler and the Portuguese was expected, which the small garrison would not be able to withstand. Van Goens, who was on Ceylon at the time, but had not been consulted on the matter, was outraged when he heard of the evacuation. Mutual accusations now reached such a level that both gentlemen uttered their willingness to come to Batavia to explain themselves and clear their name. In the end it was Van der Meijden who went to Batavia for a formal hearing, provisionally leaving the governorship of Ceylon in the hands of Van Goens. Van der Meijden arrived in Batavia on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1660, and by the 24<sup>th</sup> of August it was clear to the *Hooge Regeering* that Van Goens' accusations were completely unbased. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of October he was on his way back to Ceylon.<sup>164</sup>

In the meantime, the atmosphere between Van Goens and Batavia had also steadily soured for a host of other reasons. Although the *Hooge Regeering* was impressed with the conquests Van Goens had made in such little time, the letters from Batavia also show an increasing tiredness with his attitude. Van Goens kept on bombarding Batavia with all kinds of far-reaching and often unrealistic plans, like the demolition of the fortress in Jaffnapatnam in order to replace it with four smaller forts, the addition of northern Ceylon to the Coromandel governorship, a plan to turn Colombo into the "perfect harbour" by sinking off three or four old ships in front of it (whereas patria wanted the fortress torn down as it was hard to defend and not useful as a harbour), and an ambitious long-term plan of building fortresses all around the island. Van Goens would hardly ever take no for an answer, and after receiving a negative response from Batavia, would simply request to reconsider, insisting that his plans were really sound. At least as worrying to Maatsuiker and his Council was the fact that Van Goens often took decisions completely on his own initiative, and only informed Batavia as soon as the deed was done. Above, the attack on Trincomalee and Cottiar was already mentioned; another case in point is constituted by the thousands of Portuguese prisoners made with the conquest of Jaffnapatnam and Mannar. These needed to be sent back to Europe: Van Goens had sent many of them up to Batavia without prior correspondence, which

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163 Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), 35pp, 62pp.

164 Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), C9.

caused huge trouble there. Furthermore, Van Goens' had promoted various people to high-ranking positions and had raised their salary accordingly, which was really the prerogative of Batavia, expressing his hope that they would endorse his nominations afterwards. In a letter written August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1659, an indignant Maatsuiker refused these nominations in phrasings that dangerously stretched the rules of politeness.<sup>165</sup>

Maatsuiker faithfully informed the directors of his various considerations regarding Ceylon and Van Goens in his extremely complete general letters, often citing both Van Goens' opinion and his own. In the general letter of January 17<sup>th</sup> 1658, for one, Maatsuiker informs the directors of Van Goens' plans to build new fortresses, notably in Madure on Ceylon, and advises against this, as it might anger the local nayak. In the same letter, he explains the controversy surrounding the division between Ceylon and Coromandel. He advises against Van Goens' plan, and instead suggests evacuating Paliacatte and making Coromandel a directorship, explicitly leaving the final decision up to the directors. Although Maatsuiker's general style is rather polite, we also notice how he is quite discontented with Van Goens, explaining to the directors how for one the prisoner-issue got him into serious trouble. Similar complaints in the general letter would continue throughout the period here under study.<sup>166</sup>

Van Goens however, also had the means to communicate with patria. Like the Cape Colony, the Western Quarters regularly corresponded with patria directly. Looking at a map of the VOC Charter area it is not hard to see why: for most VOC posts, corresponding through Batavia made perfect sense not only from an organisational but also from a logistic point of view. For the Cape Colony this was obviously not the case, as practically all ships headed for Batavia stopped there anyway. The Western Quarters, in this respect, were a somewhat ambiguous case. Communication to and from the Western Quarters was already often done by an overland route, instead of through Batavia; although not very secure, as many letters never arrived, the overland route was usually worth a shot, as it was much faster. We therefore often find information for the Western Quarters sent two times: through Batavia in the general letter, and in a direct overland letter. In their 1657 spring meeting, the Gentlemen XVII contemplated sending the *Eis van Retouren* to the Western Quarters overland from then on. Just after the end of our period of study ships sailing directly to and from Ceylon became usual as well. Although the Western Quarters officially had the same status as all the other VOC posts, their geographical position thus gave them a slightly exceptional position within the VOC command structure.

This aspect of the Western Quarters was handily exploited by Van Goens, who was assertive enough to start making use of the overland route as a private channel of communication with patria. This direct communication started innocently enough: in a letter sent on the 8<sup>th</sup> of Febru-

165 Ibid., C4, C6.

166 *Generale Missiven*, III, 224-227. For other examples see 299, 378.

ary 1660, he mainly directly updated patria on the situation and his accomplishments as a commissioner, and requested that free citizens be sent to Ceylon, as he was planning to turn it into a settler colony. This plan he had previously suggested to Batavia and it had the full support of Maatsuiker. He did add that as far as he was concerned, the settlers could be sent directly to Ceylon, without bothering to sail via Batavia. Once again, looking at the world map this seems reasonable, but we might also imagine that Van Goens making direct requests to patria, which could subsequently be fulfilled without Batavia's involvement, were a precedent not at all to the liking of Maatsuiker.<sup>167</sup>

Soon, Van Goens was shaping precedents which were a lot more dangerous still. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of July that same year, just after his conquest of Cottiar and Trincomalee, he decided to inform both patria and Batavia of this by letter at the same time, explaining and defending his decision directly to patria instead of leaving this to Maatsuiker, as would have been usual. Worse still, in the same letter to patria, he disputed several decisions taken earlier by Maatsuiker, trying to convince his friends in the XVII of the good sense of his plans for the division of Ceylon and Coromandel, and the new fortress plan for Jaffnapatnam. A direct letter to patria on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 1661, then, left nothing to interpretation: Van Goens wrote to the directors that he had noted how his actions were not always appreciated by Batavia, but that he acted in good faith, and that Batavia apparently blamed him for his vigour rather than for any weakness.<sup>168</sup> Van Goens was exploiting the geographical position of Ceylon to go right over the head of his superior Maatsuiker, short-circuiting the chain of command. This required quite some guts, as copies of his letters to patria were always sent to Maatsuiker. Although not quite escalating a conflict with Batavia or operating outside all control, Van Goens was certainly violating the rules of the game, self-righteously believing that it was in everyone's best interest if he pursued his own agenda.

In Van Goens' case, his character, combined with his geographical location and his apparent powerful friends in the Netherlands, led to a situation where the central guidance from Batavia became less self-evident. It would appear that Van Goens deliberately created this situation to have his way. In other cases, however, circumstances, big distances and bad communication simply prevented the power structure from functioning optimally. This, for one, was the case with the failed attack on Macao in the first months of 1661. Attacking Macao, the Portuguese gateway to the China trade, had been high on everyone's agenda for a long time. It had been one of the spearheads of Van Goens' 1655 *Vertoog*. Maatsuiker had also been keen to undertake something against Macao for a while: in January 1658, he wrote to the directors that it would be desirable to drive the Portuguese from Macao as soon as possible, as the English were also trading there now.<sup>169</sup> The various other

167 Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), C8.

168 Letters summarized in Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), C8, 209pp.

169 General letter of 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1658, in *Generale Missiven*, III, 199.

campaigns, the epidemic in Ambon, and, not unimportantly, an expected invasion of Formosa by Coxinga, however, prevented him from equipping a sufficient fleet for this purpose.

It is interesting to note Maatsuiker's laconic attitude with respect to an attack by Coxinga. In his letter of December 1659, he wrote how they were once again expecting an imminent invasion, but then added how they had expected this attack for years, and it simply never happened.<sup>170</sup> On the 10th of March 1660, however, a panicked governor Coyet sent out a junk against the northern monsoon, specifically to inform Batavia that he was expecting an attack by the 27th of March. Maatsuiker, receiving the letter on the 4th of April, was still not wholly convinced of the severity of the situation, but finally decided to just take Coyet's word for it. By the 23rd of April, he sent out three ships, bringing fifty soldiers, great amounts of ammunition, and the promise of a larger fleet as soon as it could be assembled. This larger fleet, twelve ships with a total of six hundred soldiers on board, was ready to set sail by the 17th of July. Maatsuiker decided to make the best of the situation, and ordered the fleet to sail to Macao and beat the Portuguese out of it, should Coxinga not have landed at Formosa. At least something good would come out of this expedition, as Maatsuiker's plan to rid Macao of Portuguese would finally become reality.<sup>171</sup>

Things would however turn out entirely differently. Van der Laan, a rather undertaking character who shared with Maatsuiker his disdain for Coyet's panic, did not head straight for Formosa but headed for Macao, apparently to conquer it. The fleet was however hit by two storms, one on the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, which dispersed it and wrecked one of the ships with 128 soldiers on board. Disoriented and not capable of undertaking anything against Macao without the entire fleet assembled, some of the ships made for Macao and waited. In the end, however, too few ships showed up to risk an attack, and the various ships decided to just try and make it to Formosa. As the ships trickled in there in September, Coxinga's attack turned out not to have taken place, but Coyet was so terrified that it would still come, that he overruled Maatsuiker's plan and added most of the fleet's soldiers to the garrisons in and around Taiwan, allowing the ships to continue to other destinations. The attack on Macao therefore never took place, and the city would remain Portuguese until 1999.<sup>172</sup>

Receiving word that the attack on Macao had not taken place, and that Coxinga was nowhere in sight of Taiwan, around the turn of the year, Maatsuiker became positively furious. In the general letter of the 26th of January, the otherwise so business-like Maatsuiker filled several pages venting his anger and disappointment with Coyet, who had once again been wrong about Coxinga and had subsequently kept the fleet before the coast of Taiwan, in contravention of his orders to attack Macao. And now it was too late, Maatsuiker bitterly wrote: Macao had been in a very bad state of

170 Letter of 16<sup>th</sup> of december 1659, in *Generale Missiven*, III, 277.

171 Blussé, 'De Chinese nachtmerrie: een terugtocht en twee nederlagen' in: *De VOC: tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, 209-238, there 227-228; *Generale Missiven*, III, 358-359.

172 Herport, *Reise*, 33-34; *Generale Missiven*, III, 358-359.

defence, but by now the Portuguese would have gotten wind of the VOC's plans to attack it, and the place would have been properly defended. Meanwhile his valuable soldiers, which would have been very useful elsewhere, were tied up before the coast of Taiwan defending the island against an imaginary enemy. And all because of this unreasonable fear of Coxinga.<sup>173</sup> Shortly afterwards, however, Coyet's fear turned out not to be so unreasonable at all: on the 29th of July 1661, Maatsuiker sent a coded letter with an English ship, informing patria of the ill tiding that on the 30th of April, Coxinga had landed on Taiwan, and was now laying siege to Fort Zeelandia. Maatsuiker had already sent off a fleet of ten ships carrying some 700 soldiers to come to Taiwan's aid, which had set sail on the 5th of July.<sup>174</sup>

Meanwhile in Europe, peace talks between the Portuguese and the Dutch were finally making headway. Holland in general and Amsterdam in particular had been lukewarm about the war all along, as it was expensive and bad for business. By 1659, public sentiment in Holland had really turned against the war. Portugal, which now had to fight the Dutch Republic and Spain at the same time, was faring very badly, and the Portuguese embassy to the Republic had received a very free hand from the Portuguese court to establish peace.<sup>175</sup> The ambassadors now approached Johan de Witt, *raadspensionaris* of the province of Holland. They were hoping to turn the anti-war sentiment in the most powerful province of the Republic to their advantage, and were willing to make big concessions to achieve peace. Their hopes proved justified: on the 19th and 20th of October, the States of Holland discussed a draft-treaty which was the result of these negotiations.

At least two trade organisations with their main office in Amsterdam were however less than enthusiastic about the prospect of peace: the Dutch West India Company, and the VOC. Now that the VOC's war machine was finally getting up steam, and the complete expulsion of the Portuguese from Asia slowly became a realistic goal, a peace treaty which was also effective 'beyond the line' would ruin everything that the VOC had been striving for. Before the concept-treaty was even discussed by the States of Holland, the directors wrote a remonstrance to the Estates-General. Being, well, slightly economical with the truth, the remonstrance stated that the VOC had only started the war against the Portuguese under pressure from the Estates-General, and that the added costs of sending more soldiers and ships had put pressure on the dividends the Company was able to pay. These costs had not been compensated for by the conquests made. Their solution to this clearly uncalled for and unprofitable war was therefore all the more surprising: the war should either continue, or the Portuguese should simply cede the places that would reasonably have been conquered

173 General letter of 26th of January 1661, in *Generale Missiven*, III, 359pp.

174 General letter of the 29th of July 1661, in *Generale Missiven*, III, 372pp.

175 The first ambassador of this mission was Telles de Faro. He, however, had laid contact with the Spanish embassy, and when he feared to be found out in June 1659, defected to the Spanish, seeking refuge in the Spanish embassy in The Hague! His secretary, Luis Alvares de Ribeiro, then continued the negotiations. V/d Haar, *Betrekkingen*, 162-163.

by the Company if the war had continued. We might wonder what Portuguese places did *not* fall into that category in the eyes of the directors.<sup>176</sup>

Peace with Portugal was, however, not yet endorsed by the entire Estates-General, mainly because of a very successful lobby by the West India Company with the States of Zeeland and Groningen. The West India Company wished restitution of certain regions in Brazil as well as a huge war indemnity. The bickering over this matter, as well as a change of the guard within the ranks of the Portuguese diplomats, soon made clear that the final peace agreement would not come around for a while, if at all.<sup>177</sup>

This delay gave the Company a chance to still undertake something in the East. Maatsuiker, however, was juggling too many things at a time to be able to make an extra effort against the Portuguese in India. By the time he was informed of the peace talks in Europe, he was not only short on troops because of Coxinga's threat and the recent epidemic on Ambon; in January 1660, war had also broken out with Makassar. Hostilities had ceased by the end of 1660 again, but no treaty was as yet ratified and a conquered fortress near Makassar was still heavily garrisoned by VOC forces. The only thing Maatsuiker could do was hope with all his heart that peace would not come for another while, as he definitely wanted the Portuguese south-Indian possessions conquered.<sup>178</sup>

The hands of the directors in the Netherlands were not thus tied. They might have usually held their hand on the wallet, but found the conquests upon the Portuguese important enough to forego their careful spending for once. Before Maatsuiker had even entrusted his thoughts about the peace to paper, on the other side of the world the directors had decided to send out a fleet with 1500 souls directly to Ceylon, to conquer the remaining Portuguese strongholds on the Malabar Coast. In their letter of the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1661, they informed Batavia of the fleet, and insisted that all possible effort should be made, from Batavia as well, to drive the Portuguese from India. This sudden haste of the Gentlemen XVII was mainly inspired by developments in Europe: in April 1660, Charles II of England had been restored to power, and was now conducting negotiations to marry the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza. The ties between England and Portugal were thus reinforced, and the English offered their aid in establishing peace between the Republic and Portugal, as their now revalued ally needed this peace very badly. This enforced English mediation helped the peace process back on the rails, much to the dislike of the directors. In addition, there was the fear that part of the dowry would consist of Portuguese colonies. Suddenly seeing the English flag raised over the various places that the VOC was now trying to conquer, was not an attractive prospect to the directors.<sup>179</sup>

176 V/d Haar, *Betrekkingen*, 167.

177 V/d Haar, *Betrekkingen*, 168pp

178 Generale Missiven, III, 367, letter of 26th of January 1661. For war on Makassar see next chapter.

179 This fear was later to prove justified to some degree: Bombay, the later headquarters of the English East India Company, came into English hands as part of this dowry.



The expedition seemed somewhat ill-starred from the very beginning. The *Nieuwenhove*, which set sail to Batavia with the letter on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January, immediately ran into trouble. It was back in the Wielingen within a few days, and only set sail again on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February. The subsequent voyage, however, was quite speedy, and the ship arrived in Batavia with the letter on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August. A direct voyage to Ceylon with the same news and one hundred soldiers, was however less successful. The *Zeepaard*, which left for Ceylon on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, never arrived on Ceylon: incredibly, by mistake of the master, the ship made a quite uneventful and speedy passage, and arrived on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August... in Batavia.<sup>180</sup>

Van Goens therefore learned of the orders and reinforcements the long way around: via Batavia. Maatsuiker and Council, upon receiving the news from Europe, had decided not to send a blockade to Goa that year (the blockade fleet, not having left yet, was slightly late anyway), but instead concentrated all available resources on a final and hopefully decisive campaign on the Malabar Coast. They had immediately sent out the ships *Sluis* and *Rode Leeuw* to Ceylon with 150 soldiers and the news, in the meantime preparing a larger fleet. As preparations for the blockade fleet had already been underway, the fleet was ready remarkably soon: in the first week of September, a total of eight ships, carrying 768 soldiers, set sail to Ceylon. These numbers would probably have been a lot higher had it not been for the soldiers at that moment tied up at Taiwan.

When the ships from Batavia bringing the news arrived in Galle, Van Goens was on the Coromandel Coast, for an inspection round of the Dutch factories there, as well as an attempt to conquer Sao Thomé. The orders from patria had specified that Van der Meijden should take command of the campaign, unless Van Goens was still around in which case he should take command. Van Goens was supposed to finally return to Batavia after his inspection round, thus concluding his commissionership which had by now lasted four years. On the first of September, however, a ship sent from Ceylon came before Sao Thomé, ordering Van Goens to drop what he was doing and immediately return to Ceylon with all available ships and soldiers.<sup>181</sup>

When Van Goens finally arrived in Colombo on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, bringing a large army of his own veteran soldiers as well as soldiers he had lifted from various Coromandel garrisons, the waters around Ceylon were slowly filling up with VOC vessels. Batavia, having expected some overcrowding in the harbour of Galle, had sent its ships to the north of island, near Cape Coromin. From the West, however, only the galiot *Parkiet* had come in by the end of October. This insignificant ship had not even been part of the expedition fleet, but had left from the Netherlands more than a year

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180 D.A.S. II.

181 I have not been able to exactly reconstruct the way in which this news travelled, but as the news only reached Batavia on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, this is remarkably quick. It is possible but rather unlikely that the news had travelled with the *Sluis* and the *Rode Leeuw* to Galle, and then on to Sao Thomé, in only 22 days. Nonetheless a series of really speedy voyages seems the only explanation. The only other possibility, an overland letter not included in the outgoing letter book seems even more unlikely as it would have been mentioned in other correspondence and as the directors were loath to send sensitive information overland.

ago. It had still been at the Cape when the *Nieuwenhove* arrived there, and it may be assumed that the news of the imminent actions in southern India prompted it to finally get going. Van Goens, however, was anxious to get started: the northeastern Monsoon was just coming through, hailing the start of the season in which the Portuguese would have to be driven from India. In less than five months, rain, storms and sandbanks before the coast would make campaigning utterly impossible. Van Goens was determined to start his campaign by the end of the first week of November, with or without the expedition fleet that the directors had so painstakingly assembled for him.<sup>182</sup>

Fortunately, in the first few days of November three more ships came in. One of these was the flute *Hilversum*, which had also not been part of the expedition fleet but had strayed for more than a year and was now finding itself near Ceylon in the middle of all the action. And finally, two ships of the expedition fleet came in on the first of November after a seven month voyage: the *Beurs van Amsterdam* and the *Raadhuis*, bringing some 250 soldiers. In spite of the troops being held up at Taiwan and the better part of the expedition fleet from patria still being nowhere in sight, the buildup of ships and troops around Ceylon was now becoming impressive: 21 ships and 6 chaloups, carrying a total of 2139 soldiers, 1550 sailors, 240 Lascars (Singhalese soldiers in Company service), and 180 slaves. Despite Van Goens' worries about the quality of most of these soldiers, this would just have to be sufficient. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of November, the fleet set sail. Via Tuticorin and Cayalpatnam, where supplies were taken in and negotiations with local rulers were conducted, the fleet set sail to Quilon, which was quick to surrender on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December. The fleet was now joined by two more ships of the expedition fleet from patria, the *Rijzende Zon* and the *Huis te Swieten*, of which many of the people on board were however sick and weak from the journey.<sup>183</sup>

For the details of this ensuing campaign I will once again have to refer to the next chapter; here it suffices to say that the heavily defended Portuguese city in Cochin was in the end fruitlessly besieged by the VOC, with great loss of life. By March 1662, with the summer monsoon rapidly approaching, it became clear that the fortress would not fall before the start of the rain season, and what was left of the besieging army retreated.

Meanwhile, Formosa had fallen. On the 1st of February 1662, Coyet had surrendered fort Zeelandia, on the condition that he could peacefully evacuate the fortress and return to Batavia. Macao had not been conquered, and now, the other route into the Chinese trade had also been lost to the Company. Back in Europe, things had taken an ill turn for the Company as well. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1661, a peace treaty between Portugal and the Republic had been signed. Another

182 Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging Malabar*, 242-252, Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), 240pp, D.A.S. II.

183 Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging Malabar*, 254pp; DAS. The last ship of the expedition fleet, the *Wassende Maan*, had a reasonably speedy voyage to the Cape, and left from after a month, but never shows up in any documents concerning the fights. Its arrival on Ceylon is only registered in June 1662, when the fights were long over. What it did in the meantime is not documented, but as it only left from the Cape in late September, more than a month later than the other ships, it is likely that it was caught up in the Southern Monsoon, could no longer reach India, and had to 'winter' somewhere. Its return to the Cape is not documented in *D.A.S.*, but it seems possible that it ended up there again.

remonstrance by the Company two months earlier, attempting to postpone the date at which this peace would take effect 'beyond the line', had proven fruitless. Two months after the signing, the peace would also take effect outside Europe. The news of the peace reached Batavia by the end of April, at about the same time the survivors of the Fort Zeelandia ordeal arrived in Batavia, and the arrival of the news of the failed siege of Cochin. The game finally seemed up for the Company. In spite of the conquest of Ceylon and the complete expulsion of the Portuguese from the Coromandel Coast, we might imagine that many people in the Company ranks would be disappointed: Macao, Diu, Goa, Cochin and Mozambique were all still Portuguese, and Formosa, oh shame, had been definitively lost. Little had come of the masterplan which Van Goens had presented to the directors six years ago, and of which he himself had just miserably failed to realise an important spearhead.<sup>184</sup>

The Company had, however, not yet played its last card. The treaty with Portugal had been signed but not yet ratified. The treaty specified that this should be done within three months, i.e. before the 6<sup>th</sup> of November. Here, however, the process ran into some trouble. England, which had been so instrumental in establishing the peace, very much disliked a clause giving its Dutch rival trade rights in Portuguese ports, and over this point was willing to send the parties back to the negotiation table. Under English pressure, the Portuguese did not ratify the treaty until May 1662. In addition, the state system of the Dutch Republic required that all the separate provinces ratified the treaty, and for the time being, Gelderland, Zeeland and Groningen simply refused to do so. Prestage suspects that the refusal of these provinces was the work of the VOC.<sup>185</sup> Whatever the case, the VOC soon saw enough difficulties emerging around the treaty to decide to just ignore it. For their part, the directors were ignoring the treaty with fervour and enthusiasm. At the same time that Maatsuiker must have been smashing dishes against the wall in Batavia over so much bad news coming in at the same time, the directors were sending out another extra fleet. In the third week of April 1662, a total of six ships carrying at least 1400 souls set sail with orders to drive the Portuguese from Mozambique and then continue to India. Both from the Cape Colony and Batavia, patria had been receiving news of the precarious position of the Portuguese in Mozambique, due to disease and conflict with the local population.<sup>186</sup> This little island was to the Portuguese what the Cape was to the VOC: ships heading for Goa (or increasingly Cochin, as Goa was blockaded all the time and Cochin took over some of the functions of trade and information hub), usually called there. For the Portuguese, this port of call was even more important than the Cape to the VOC, as Goa could only be reached for a few months a year, at the end of the winter monsoon. Many Portuguese ships had to 'winter' in Mozambique to await that moment, or sometimes didn't make

184 Blussé, 'De Chinese nachtmerrie', 227-234; V/d Haar, *Betrekkingen*, 176pp.

185 Edgar Prestage, *The diplomatic relations of Portugal with France, England and Holland, 1640-1668* (Watford 1925), 226-227.

186 Generale Missiven, III, 170.

it to Goa in time and were mercilessly blown back to Mozambique. Without this ‘buffer harbour’, the functioning of the Portuguese *carreira da India*, and by implication the entire Portuguese empire, would be seriously disrupted.

This expedition, however, never reached Mozambique, or the Indian coast for that matter. As will be described in the next chapter, the only enemy it had a serious struggle with was the monsoon, and the latter won convincingly. The expedition fleet would eventually make it to Batavia, without having fired a single shot at any Portuguese vessel or stronghold.<sup>187</sup>

In Batavia, the news of the postponed peace had immediately been cause for the preparation of another campaign to the west coast of India. In July, upon returning to Batavia and learning of the green light to continue the war against the Portuguese, Van Goens had immediately written a campaign plan. This was somewhat redundant, as the Governor-General and Council were already resolving upon action. The surrender of Fort Zeelandia, however undesirable in itself, had brought a good number of soldiers back to Batavia. Added to the reinforcements that had arrived from patria in the last year and the soldiers of last year’s campaign, the Company was able to once again amass a sufficient force to attempt to conquer Cochin, hopefully Diu, and perhaps even Goa itself. Aware of the precarious position of the Portuguese in Europe, the *Hoge Regering* expected that very few Portuguese reinforcements would have arrived in either Goa or Cochin. Its only worry was that the English might aid in the defence of the various Portuguese stronghold, as it might well be the dowry to Charles II, and therefore their own future colonies, they would be defending. The *Hoge Regering* resolved not to be too careful with the peace with England this time, and already thought up some smart legal arguments with which the fighting forces could later justify violence against the English.<sup>188</sup>

Van Goens was once again to take command. However, when the fleet was ready to set sail, he was seriously ill. It was therefore Jacob Hustaert who commanded the fleet of thirteen ships, with a total of 800 European soldiers as well as 134 Mardijkers, Ambonese and Bandanese on board, which sailed from Batavia on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1662. When Van Goens had recovered by the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, he set sail with two ships and orders to lift as many soldiers as possible from the various Ceylonese garrisons before sailing to Cochin and retaking command. He would finally join Hustaert’s fleet on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November before Cochin, bringing 400 veteran soldiers and 500 Lascars. In the meantime, Godske, who had been sent ahead and was now commanding an army of soldiers lifted from the various Malabar garrisons, had also arrived at Cochin with some 500 soldiers. Hustaert had learned that only three frigates had managed to reach Goa that year, and

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187 VOC-Archives, Overgekomen brieven en papieren, 1239, 1365pp. For more details see next chapter.

188 Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging malabar*, 309-310.

that fear of a VOC attack on Goa had limited reinforcements to Cochin to 100 soldiers and a great amount of ammunition. The English were nowhere to be seen.<sup>189</sup>

Considering the rather hopeless situation of the Portuguese in Cochin, the city held out for an admirably long time. The siege really took off as soon as Van Goens arrived in November. Assessing the situation, he immediately abandoned his plan of sending off part of the army to conquer Diu: all his resources would be needed here. After a long siege and various smaller actions in the surrounding area, the Company forces stormed the Cochin fort on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1663. After a bloody fight with heavy losses on both sides, Portuguese commander Sermento, having no expectations of any reinforcements or relief, decided to negotiate a surrender. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of January, the Portuguese laid down their arms.<sup>190</sup>

In Europe, meanwhile, the treaty between Portugal and the Republic had finally been ratified on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1662. The directors, in their extra meeting called together in December that year because of Formosa's fall, also took the opportunity to resolve that the overseas possessions would be informed of the peace overland, and that all clauses in sailing instructions on bringing damage to the Portuguese would be struck. The war was finally over, although the last rearguard skirmishing would continue for a while, at least in Europe. The new Portuguese resident in The Hague, Diogo Lopes Ulhoa, disputed the legitimacy of the conquest of Cochin and Cannanore as soon as he heard of it. The Estates-General, however, would have nothing of it, and insisted that because of Portugal's own attitude, the Company's military actions had been legitimized. Negotiations on this point would drag on into 1666, when the Estates-General proposed that the VOC would retain Cochin and Cannanore, in exchange for which the overdue payment of the Portuguese war indemnity to the Republic would be cancelled. This was unacceptable to Ulhoa. In the end, however, the cities were kept as a guarantee, and would only be returned until the war indemnity was paid off. Portugal, being in no position to pay the indemnity or take measures against this decision, never got its cities back, which was exactly how the Estates-General, not to mention the directors, had wanted it.<sup>191</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has tried to give insight into various aspects of the connection between patria and the Asian side of the Company for the period 1654-1663. I hope this 'case study' has given more substance to some of the statements made in chapter II. What I hope to have shown is that the connection between Europe and the overseas possessions was complicated, and that the Asian

189 Ibid., 320pp.

190 Ibid., 330-338.

191 Prestage, *Diplomatic Relations*, 228-235.

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‘empires’ of the various European powers, although tied to Europe, can certainly not be interpreted as extensions of these powers overseas.

This complicated nature, firstly, finds expression in the ‘material’ aspect of this connection. On the one hand, the possessions in the East were dependent on a steady stream of reinforcements, in the form of weapons, ammunition, ships and soldiers, from Europe. On the other hand, the numbers we find in the resolutions and the *Generale Eijs* are ridiculously small when looked upon in a European light. Van Goens observed at the first siege of Cochin how incredible it was that he was now laying siege to a city the size of Leiden with 1700 soldiers. He would have been aware that Leiden, almost a century earlier, had withstood a siege laid by 10.000 soldiers, more than the entire Company had, spread out across half the globe, at the time involved in various large campaigns and garrisoning a few dozen strongholds. The VOC’s warfare was, in that respect, of an entirely different nature. Coming back to the statements made in chapter II, I hope this chapter has illustrated in what ways the Military Revolution worked differently outside Europe.

A similar ‘complication’ of the European situation beyond the line can be distinguished in the political interaction. Although not as clear an example as 1641-1644, the period here treated does show that the policy of the VOC cannot be interpreted as a simple continuation of what the Republic was doing in Europe. I hope also to have made clear that saying ‘the Republic was at war with Portugal’ is very different from saying ‘the VOC was fighting the Portuguese in Asia.’ Although many of the conflicts between the two countries had had their origin in the developments overseas, it remains clear that the VOC’s motivation for war was not one and the same with the Republic’s. The VOC was not concerned with the European balance of power, but with profit and monopoly. The various developments in Europe, such as an enforced peace or the looming threat of Portuguese colonies being transferred to the English, were mostly considered a nuisance, and were in a way incompatible with the matters that drove the Company.

Furthermore, I hope this chapter has succeeded in showing the VOC’s information network and command structure in action. In this case-study, we have seen detailed information on local Asian politics travel all the way from the outposts to Batavia and on to patria, and decisions as well as material and soldiers travelling all the way from patria back to these outposts. This has hopefully also made clear the ‘fault-lines’ in this system, in the form of the huge time-lapses and distances, the different perspectives of VOC officials in different places, misunderstandings, circumstances that could not be planned for such as storms, and the personalities of the different people involved in the decision-making process. In spite of all these things, the system seems to have worked very well: the centralized command structure that had come into being in the first decades of the VOC’s existence gave it a serious edge in the wars it had to wage.