11

Historiographical overview

In May 1660, after almost a decade in the political wilderness, Charles II entered the United Provinces, the last stop on his triumphal return to the British Isles. The treatment which the States General and the States of Holland afforded their royal guest "was incredibly splendid and noble," recalled the Earl of Clarendon, "and the universal joy so visible and real, that it could only be exceeded by that of [the king's] own subjects."[1] Samuel Pepys, who had come with his fellow former Cromwellian the Earl of Sandwich to The Hague to bring Charles II back to England, could not "speak enough of the gallantry of the town."[2] Charles II himself declared "his meaning of keeping a true and firm friendship and alliance with [the Dutch], nay that he should be jealous if any other king or prince should have a more near and stricter friendship and alliance with them than himself." On 23 May after almost interminable festivities Charles finally boarded his ships at Scheveling. The shore, wrote one observer, was "covered black with people ... come from several towns far and near to see the king's departure and were forced for want of lodgings to walk all night or lie in the open fields." The salutes and countersalutes from the English and Dutch ships were so tremendous that "the air was set on fire and the smoke like a cloud had made the fleet invisible."[3] Charles II's first act in foreign policy as the undisputed king of Great Britain could hardly have been more satisfying, the prospects for Anglo-Dutch friendships could hardly have been better.

Yet the promised friendship and alliance never materialized. After four years of heated diplomatic exchanges, Dutch and English ships were again setting the air on fire. This time the smoke could not obscure their clashes on the coasts of Africa and India, in the New Netherlands, or eventually in the Channel itself. Ostensibly the Restored Monarchy, which had done so

1 W. Dunn Macray (editor), *Clarendon's History of the Rebellion* (Oxford, 1888), Vol. VI, p. 228.
2 Pepys, *Diary*, Vol. I, 15 May 1660, p. 139.
3 Aitzema, "Selections," Bod., Rawl. C734, ff. 259r–260v.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 13:35:25, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560781.012

much to obliterate any memory of the Commonwealth, had adopted its foreign policy. What had happened?

Many historians argue that the continuities in foreign policy were quite real. The Restoration had not changed the national interest of England. "English policy," Sir Keith Feiling claims, "could not fail to be continuous, guided as it must be by continuous geographic law." Charles II "could no more cancel Puritan foreign policy than he could their Church settlement, and for war and peace, as for the management of Parliament, he must depend on their experience, their co-operation, and their wealth." Although Feiling is alive to the Anglo-Dutch disputes over the place of the Prince of Orange in the Dutch polity, he dismisses this dispute as "the effect, not the cause of the ill relations between Holland and England."

In the view of Feiling, then, Anglo-Dutch conflict was all but inevitable. "Trade was the life-blood of both countries," he argues, "and economic causes extinguished the wide hopes and good intentions with which both had entered on the peace conferences of December 1660."[4] More recently, Charles Wilson in his classic account of Anglo-Dutch relations in the mid seventeenth century, reached similar conclusions. Despite the valiant efforts of John De Witt and the Earl of Clarendon "to divert the currents of [their] time from the channels in which they were now running strongly," war was unavoidable. "The balance of economic influence," argues Wilson, had shifted "away from the industrialists who urged caution to the more ambitious merchants who urged risk and change." In this context, then, it is not surprising to discover that in "matters of national policy" the otherwise antagonistic "cavaliers and Roundheads were not far apart."[5] In his magisterial account of Dutch economic development in the seventeenth century, Jonathan Israel substantially supports this view. "The second and hardest-fought of the three seventeenth-century Anglo-Dutch wars," he points out, "grew out of the unresolved legacy of the first, aggravated by England's accelerating colonial expansion after 1654 and Dutch efforts to obstruct it."[6]

Historians of Dutch politics draw a picture which largely corroborates this interpretation of the outbreak of the second Anglo-Dutch War. The Dutch nationalist historian Pieter Geyl acknowledges Charles II's ostensible concern for the welfare of William III, but concludes that the English king

4 Sir Keith Feiling, *British Foreign Policy, 1660–1672* (London, 1930), pp. 3–4, 91–93.

5 Charles Wilson, *Profit and Power* (London, 1957), pp. 9, 110, 120–121. In this scenario, Bennet's rise to power in England represents the unleashing of the natural developments in foreign policy. Dutch opposition to English attempts to reestablish the Princes of Orange are dismissed as opposition to an economically centralized state, p. 105.

6 Jonathan Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade 1585–1740* (Oxford, 1989), p. 271. It should be noted that Israel gives by far the best account of the economic devastation wreaked by the first Dutch War, and unlike Wilson explains why the economic conflict did not begin prior to the 1650s.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 13:35:25, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560781.012

only wanted the restoration of the power of Orange because it "might prove a useful instrument in vitiating the hated commercial policy of Holland." "In contrast to the first English war," Geyl posits that "the causes of the second were purely economic."[7] Herbert Rowen, in his exhaustive study of the political career of John De Witt, finds little reason to disagree with this conclusion. "Charles remembered his nephew's cause," he asserts, "because he was outraged by De Witt's success in outwitting him by sending De Ruyter to Guinea undetected."[8]

Against this chorus of agreement, there have been only a few dissenting voices. These revisionist historians emphasize political accident and the role of English political faction in the outbreak of the war. J. R. Jones has often described the factional and often seedy world of English Restoration politics. Not surprisingly he finds that the second Anglo-Dutch War "was pushed without scruple by a combination of Court factions, composed of ruthlessly ambitious politicians who planned to use the war to climb into high offices, ruining Charles's leading minister, Clarendon, and replacing his system of administration by one that gave ministers more power." These politicians only used a rhetoric of national interest as a cover for their real aims of career advancement and sheer plunder.[9] Ronald Hutton, while pointing to the economic competition which led to the first Anglo-Dutch conflict, locates the origins of the second war in "a surplus of energy at Charles's court among men grown used to excitement during the turbulence of the past two decades, and the new confidence of his government in 1664." The economic aggression initiated by the Restoration court, after Clarendon had ceased to serve as an effective restraining influence, was not meant to lead to war "as Charles and James both expected the Dutch to concede the claims of English merchants to compensation and to a greater share of the tropical trade." Nevertheless when the Dutch put up some resistance the Stuart brothers, egged on by popular enthusiasm, were quite happy to carry on with this new and exciting adventure.[10] For J. L. Price the war was the result of poor intelligence and shoddy economic thinking. "Far from being the logical conclusion to long years of economic and colonial rivalry," he maintained, "it was rather an ill conceived attempt to compensate for the continued inability of the English economy to compete effectively with the Dutch." Ultimately English insularity, resulting in "poor

[7] Pieter Geyl (translated by Arnold Pomerans), *Orange and Stuart 1641–1672* (London, 1969), pp. 179, 190.

[8] Herbert Rowen, *John De Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland, 1625–1672* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 544–545. There is narrative discussion of the events preceding the outbreak of the war in an earlier chapter.

[9] J. R. Jones, *Britain and the World 1649–1815* (Glasgow, 1980), pp. 53, 71–75. It should be said that Jones gives by far the best account of the ideological issues at stake, but ultimately dismisses them as secondary to factional politics. He also gives the best account of Sir George Downing's political ideas.

[10] Ronald Hutton, *The Restoration.* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 215–216.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 13:35:25, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560781.012

and misleading intelligence," deserves the blame for English involvement in the ignominious conflict.[11]

In order to reassess the outbreak of the second Anglo-Dutch War it is necessary to place the political and economic developments in their intellectual, cultural, and religious contexts. Too often historians have been content to accept the propagandistic and *post-facto* explanations of contemporaries at face value, underestimating the potential of early modern governments and polemicists to present images which served their own ideological predispositions.

Charles II's glorious departure from Scheveling in May 1660, for example, was perhaps not all that it seemed. After fulminating on the lavishness of Charles's reception and treatment by the Dutch States General, Clarendon could not but muse "that no man would have imagined, by the treatment he now received, that he had been so lately forbid to come into that place." John Dryden thought it ironic indeed that Holland seemed "to regret a king." Certainly the Orange tinge of the crowds which blackened the Dutch coast upon Charles's departure left room for contemplation. The Dutch people, thought Clarendon, "had always passion for [the king's] prosperity" it was only "the rudeness of their superiors, whom they were always bound to obey" which had prevented Charles from visiting The Hague.[12]

Ideological divisions in both the United Provinces and in England, not the cold logic of commercial competition or factional politics, I claim, drove the English and Dutch to war again in the 1660s. The newly restored English monarchy and its most enthusiastic supporters, the Anglican Royalists, perceived the Dutch republican party to be the natural allies of its own domestic enemies. Anglican Royalists merchants, it is true, did fear and loathe Dutch commercial success. But the way in which these merchants understood economic competition was colored by their ideological presuppositions. Anglican Royalists were concerned not only about secular declines in their own profit margins, but in the perceived designs of the republican Dutch on universal dominion. I maintain that Anglican Royalist ministers, courtiers, and merchants all believed that the only means to prevent the Dutch from pursuing universal dominion and from bringing their fanatical and republican friends to power in England was to compel the Dutch to restore rational government in the United Provinces, to compel them to restore the Prince of Orange.

[11] J. L. Price, "Restoration England and Europe," in J. R. Jones (editor) *The Restored Monarchy 1660–1688* (London, 1979), pp. 122–126. This discussion intentionally omits the important works of Michael McKeon and Paul Seaward which receive full treatment later in this Part.

[12] Edward Hyde, *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (Oxford, 1843), Vol. VI, p. 227; Aitzema, "Selections," Bod., Rawl. C734, f. 259r; John Dryden, *Astraea Redux: A Poem on the Happy Restoration and Return of His Sacred Majesty Charles the Second* (London, 1660), Thomason: 19 June 1660, p. 12.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 13:35:25, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560781.012