



Globalizing Scandinavian Warfare

Plans for Colonial Wars in the Danish-Swedish Wars in the 17th Century

Mathias Istrup Karlslose

During the 17th century, the Nordic kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden were locked in a battle of supremacy over northern Europe, and in particular the Baltic Sea. During this century, they would fight five wars against each other. The majority of the battles took place in either the Baltic Sea, or on land in modern Sweden or Denmark. These wars are some of the most studied aspects of both Danish and Swedish history. However, it is less known that as these wars took place, both Denmark and Sweden had overseas colonies around the world.

The purpose of this article is to investigate how the Danish and Swedish colonies in America, Africa, and Asia were affected by, and in turn, affected by the wars between the two Nordic kingdoms, as well as shed light on

Mathias Istrup Karlslose is a PhD student at Stockholm University and Center for Maritime Studies (CEMAS) in Stockholm, with a specialization in European colonialism in Asia. He is studying the Danish East India Company in Asia from 1620–1700, with a focus on diplomacy, warfare, sovereignty and cultural encounter. Previously, he has researched the Dutch East India Company's colonial rule in Taiwan from 1624–1662.

the role of the colonies in Danish-Swedish warfare, what plans were made to include the colonies, and to contribute to a wider scholarship on the nature and importance of colonial conflicts in the 17th century.

Global Warfare in the 17th Century

Around the turn of the 17th century, the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal (after 1580 united under one crown) dominated trade between Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas. This domination was challenged by rising powers in Northern Europe. Following the Spanish Sack of Antwerp in 1585, the Protestant powers of England and the Dutch Republic launched global wars against the Spanish and Portuguese empires, seeking a twofold advantage in their wars against these powers in Europe: First, to reduce the income their enemies received from the colonies, second, to establish their colonial empires from which to finance their war effort.¹

Through the 17th century, as more European states established and consolidated their own colonial empires, conflict in the colonies became a staple of European wars; it can be said that these wars were becoming globalized. As noted by Peter Emmer, the Dutch attacks on the Iberian empires after 1585 can be called “The First Global War”, it would be followed by more European conflicts. In his assessment of the impact of the first Dutch attacks on Iberian possessions, Emmer argues that despite scoring some seemingly spectacular victories, the Dutch attacks on the Iberian empires initially did little to limit Spanish and Portuguese income from the colonies, and had a negligible impact on the Dutch economy, at least until after 1620 following three decades of warfare.² Rather, much of the Dutch expansion was the work of private entrepreneurs and privateers.

In a study of the three Anglo-Dutch Wars from 1650-1674, Gijs Rommelse argues that both in the Netherlands and England, the economic interests of merchants involved in colonial trade, became a key reason for the outbreak of these wars, and a part of political decision-making at the highest level in Europe.³ As such, these conflicts were driven at least partially due to commercial conflicts originating in the colonies, thanks to the influence of colonial profiteers in the governments of these countries.

Elsewhere, Rommelse has argued that colonial interests could sometimes conflict with state interests in Europe. In the late stages of the Dutch-Portuguese War (1657–1662), the Dutch East India Company (VOC) sought to continue the war, which they benefited from as it enabled them to capture valuable Portuguese colonies in Asia. However, at the same time, Portugal allowed English and French privateers to attack Dutch shipping in Europe under the Portuguese flag, which was both damaging to the Netherlands and creating an internal conflict.⁴ Ultimately, VOC interests were sidelined, and the Dutch Republic entered a peace with the Portuguese in 1662, to safeguard European shipping against the Portugal-sponsored privateering.

These examples show snapshots into historiography, where the agency behind colonial conflicts in 17th-century European empires were often ambiguous. The utility of these conflicts from the state perspective was questionable, and sometimes in direct conflict with state interests in Europe. In this paper, the focus will be on the role of colonial warfare in the conflicts between the Danish and Swedish empires in 17th-century Europe, to shed light on the general questions relating to colonial warfare.

Scandinavian Conflict and Empire

In 1523, the Kingdom of Sweden achieved independence from Denmark with the breakdown of the Kalmar Union. In the following two centuries, the two Lutheran kingdoms would contend over the dominion of Northern Europe, and specifically, control of the valuable trade in the Baltic Sea, known as *dominium maris baltici*. The first Danish-Swedish War started in 1563, and the final one would not end until 1814. The true era of Danish-Swedish rivalry is often said to have ended with the Great Northern War in 1721, and the end of the Swedish Empire.

Although Denmark was initially the stronger kingdom, in the 17th century the balance of power tipped, starting with the Swedish intervention in the Thirty Years War in 1629. By the end of this war in 1648, Sweden was established as a great power in Europe, with the most recent war against Denmark, the Torstensson War of 1643-1645, having ended

with a clear Swedish victory, and significant territorial gains at Danish expense.⁵

By the time the Torstensson War took place, both Sweden and Denmark had also become participants in the European colonial expansion. By 1600, the Spanish and Portuguese monopoly on overseas colonies had finally been broken. The Dutch and the English quickly established significant colonial possessions around the world, using chartered trading companies, such as the VOC, which would function as the administrators of the colonies. The English and Dutch rapidly expanded and supplanted the Iberians from many regions of the world.

Denmark was the first of the Nordic powers to establish overseas colonies. King Christian IV oversaw the establishment of the Danish East India Company in 1616; this was soon followed by an expedition towards Ceylon and India, which ultimately resulted in the establishment of the colony of Tranquebar in the Kingdom of Thanjavur in southern India.⁶ Using Tranquebar as a base, the Danes established a series of trading networks across Asia, connecting the Indian Coromandel coast with Siam, and the ports of Banten and Macassar in modern Indonesia.⁷ Despite this initial success, the Danish colonies in India proved fragile and unable to compete with the Dutch and English in the long term.

From the beginning, the Danish colonial expansion was connected with Denmark's position in Europe, and with the rivalry in Sweden. According to Már Jónsson, the Danish colonial project was borne out of a desire to cement Denmark's position as a major European power, following a successful defense of Danish interests in the North Atlantic, and victory in the Kalmar War.⁸ In particular, it gave Denmark status as a colonial power with possessions in India, and the ability to sign treaties with Asian rulers. Additionally, it helped cement Denmark's status as the leading power in Northern Europe, in contrast to Sweden.

According to Jan Rindom, this contrast with Sweden was at times quite explicit in decision-making related to the Danish East India Company. For instance, in 1621, King Christian bankrolled a large new investment into the company, even though the initial expedition had yet to return. This was a direct response to the Swedish conquest of Riga in the same year, which challenged the Danish dominion of the Baltic Sea. Empha-

sizing the existence of a Danish global empire helped cement Denmark's status vis a vis Sweden, and its chance to become a leader of the Protestant world during the beginning of the Thirty Years War.⁹ As such, even if there were initially no Danish-Swedish clashes outside of Europe, the colonial projects were part of the Nordic rivalry from the very beginning.

Observers in Sweden were also acutely aware of the Danish movements. The Swedish agent in Denmark, Anders Svensson, wrote detailed reports to the king, as well as Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna, about the Danish ships going to the east. Especially important is his note that the commander of the Danes in India, Roland Crappe was "a particularly clever general and commander", and that thanks to his wisdom, the Danes stood to gain a particularly lucrative trade in the Indies, despite their relatively small investments.¹⁰

Perhaps Svensson's optimistic assertions motivated his superiors to join the colonial race themselves. In 1626, King Gustav II Adolf approved the establishment of the Swedish South Company (Söderkompaniet) led by Dutch merchants. This was part of a larger Swedish movement to modernize Sweden as a modern European power under the king – a movement which had included the founding of Gothenburg in 1619, as well as the establishment of a modern Swedish navy. However, due to Sweden's entry into the Thirty Years War a few years later, it would take more than a decade before this company first established any actual colonies, and these colonies were established far away from the Danish colony in India. In 1638, the Swedes established the colony of New Sweden in the Delaware region in North America, a colony that would develop into a small settler colony over the following decades.¹¹

As such, when the Torstensson War started in December 1643 with the Swedish invasion of Denmark, both Denmark and Sweden possessed overseas colonies. However, the influence of this war on the colonies was mostly indirect – the heavy losses suffered by the Danes were a significant reason why the Danes stopped dispatching ships to Tranquebar for almost 30 years, essentially letting the colony fend for itself.¹²

With the Danes left weakened and the Swedes ascendant, it is perhaps unsurprising that the next Nordic colonial project was Swedish. Both Danish and Swedish ships had independently made singular voyages to

the African gold coast to buy gold, ivory, and slaves for some time, but in 1650 the newly established Swedish Africa Company (SAC), established by the Dutch magnate Louis de Geer, negotiated the acquisition of a fortress, named Fort Carolusborg, in modern Ghana. The company's man on the spot, Heinrich Carloff, a veteran of the Dutch West India Company (WIC), acquired the fort by making a written agreement with the king of the Ghanaian kingdom of Fetu.¹³ However, despite this initial success, Carloff soon came in conflict with the Swedish company, and although the Swedes knighted him, he soon broke with them entirely by 1656.¹⁴ For now, Fort Carolusborg remained in Swedish hands, but without the man who had acquired it.

War

In 1654, the Danish Tranquebar, the Swedish New Sweden, and Fort Carolusborg were the colonial possessions of the Nordic countries. This year, the two kingdoms started moving toward war. The Swedish queen Christina abdicated, and she was replaced by her warlike cousin Charles X Gustav, who almost immediately launched Sweden into a war against the weakened Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Although the Swedes went from victory to victory, the king found himself unable to find an end to the war, and they were increasingly stuck in a quagmire.¹⁵

In light of the Swedes seemingly being occupied elsewhere, the Danish king Frederik III sensed a chance to take revenge for the losses in the previous decades and launch a war to restore the Danish advantage in the conflict. After long deliberations, war was launched by a declaration of war against Sweden on June 1st 1657.¹⁶

When the Swedish king heard of the declaration, he immediately gathered his troops in Poland, and marched toward Denmark overland, intending to emulate Torstensson's attack through northern Germany from the previous year. At the same time, the Danes made limited attacks on Swedish positions in three different theaters.

Ultimately, the Swedes were initially the most successful. Charles met little resistance in his attack into Jutland, and after a victory in the Battle

of Frederiksodde in October, the Jutland peninsula fell under Swedish control. Following this, a period that historian Lars Christensen has called “the Autumn of Insecurity”, started. The Danes refused to surrender, and as the Swedes were, for now, incapable of reaching the islands of Funen and Zealand to finish off the war, both sides considered options on how to damage each other.¹⁷ It was under these circumstances that expanding the war to the colonies was first considered.

Switching Sides

As explained above, Carloff had left the Swedish Africa Company as early as 1656, and he made contact with King Frederik even before the outbreak of the war. He wrote a letter to the Danish king on May 27, 1657, a few days before war was declared, explaining his reasons for leaving the SAC, and offering his services to the Danish king - he offered to sail to Africa on a commission from the Danish king and attack the Swedish possessions there, an offer that Kaarle Wirta has interpreted as a sort of job application.¹⁸

The timing was fortuitous and hardly random, and two months after the beginning of the war, the king entered a contract with Carloff, on August 1, 1657.¹⁹ According to this contract, Carloff received a commission to attack the Swedish possessions in Africa under the Danish flag, with the provision that he equipped the voyage at his own expense, and that any merchandise he conquered would be sold in the Danish town of Glückstadt first.

It is noteworthy that the initial contract was only focused on attacking the Swedish possessions, and not on establishing Danish trade. Frederik explicitly did not commit to establishing a long-lasting Danish trade in Africa, although he did reserve the right to retain the Swedish forts in case he decided to establish a company for this purpose.²⁰ This shows that the main purpose for Frederik was not to expand Danish colonial holdings in Africa - rather it was merely to seize an opportunity to hurt Swedish interests in a new theater, any establishment of Danish trade was secondary.

The provisions of the contract also made it a low-risk investment for the

Danish king, since Carloff equipped the expedition on his own. Overall, it seems clear that the main agency behind making this expedition a reality was that of Carloff, and not of the king. He is the one who first approached the king with the idea, it was his expertise, finances, and manpower that made it a reality. The king simply provided a legal framework for Carloff to operate within, with royal support, in exchange for finding a way to hurt his enemies.

As Wirta points out, Carloff partly financed this expedition thanks to investors in Amsterdam, in return for the promise of African gold. Carloff traveled to West Africa and arrived in January 1658. After short visits ensuring the support of the Dutch West India Company in the region, Carloff attacked Fort Carolusborg. The attack took place under the cover of night, and Carloff conquered the fort with little resistance, as described by the German priest Johan Müller, who gave an eyewitness account of the attack.²¹

A crucial part of Carloff’s actions after arriving was to acquire the consent of Acrosan, the local ruler of Fetu. This was done partially by promising that all his debts to the Swedish company would be forgiven.²² With this, the first colonial clash between Denmark and Sweden had come to an end, relatively bloodless, although the conflict was far from finished. When Carloff returned to Denmark, he found that the war had already ended with the signing of the Treaty of Roskilde in February 1658, resulting in massive Swedish gains at the expense of Denmark.

The news from Africa complicated this image, but when the new war soon broke out, as King Charles Gustav attacked Denmark, the issue remained unresolved. Carloff had left his deputy Samuel Smidt in charge of Fort Carolusborg, and in 1659, Smidt, hearing no news from Denmark, and convinced they were losing the war, decided to hand the fort over to the Dutch, and re-enter their service.²³ However, this displeased Acrosan, who used his military power to prevent the Dutch from taking over the fort, and decided he would hand it over to the Swedes again next time they should send a ship. Acrosan also claimed that he never realized Carloff had left Swedish service, instead claiming he saw the conflict as an internal Swedish one.²⁴

These complex events show the many interests that affected the course

of colonial conflicts. They took place far from Europe, and local actors made decisions without having up-to-date information on the events taking place in Europe. Furthermore, the course of the war was often determined by local, and not European interests – in the end, Acrosan had a great influence on which European powers ended up on the African coast, something that had not been accounted for in the agreements between Carloff and the king.

In the end, although Frederik had mainly intended it to be a strike against Swedish interests, the attack did become the beginning of Danish trade on the Gold Coast. In 1661, the Danes received the permission of Acrosan to establish a second fort, Fort Frederiksborg, a few hundred meters from Fort Carolusborg, which remained in Swedish hands until the death of Acrosan in 1663, after which the SAC was dissolved, and the Swedes withdrew from the Gold Coast entirely.²⁵ Regardless of the king's initial interest in hurting Swedish interest, Carloff's "job application" ended up starting 200 years of Danish presence on the Gold Coast, while ending a decade of Swedish presence.

Trans-Atlantic Attack?

In the Fall and Winter of 1657, before Carloff had returned from Africa, King Frederik considered other options for hurting Swedish interests across the world. In December, he dispatched a letter to Frederik Coninx, the Danish Ambassador in The Hague in the Netherlands. The letter instructed Coninx to find someone in the Netherlands who was willing and capable to locate "New Sweden in America, lying on the southern river, to attack and conquer it."²⁶

The instructions furthermore said that the specific conditions should be negotiated with Joakim Gersdorff, the Steward of the Realm in Denmark, after which a contract should be entered, and the king would provide his commission.²⁷ The letter contained further instructions for Coninx to see if he could acquire three ships from the Dutch. Historian Lars Christensen has noted that this plan may have seemed overly ambitious, and was in any case indicative that Frederik was, at this point, expecting a long war.²⁸

Furthermore, it is also surprising that Frederik would make this plan in 1657 - after the outbreak of the Swedish war in Poland in 1655, Dutch troops had already occupied New Sweden in Delaware in September of that year, and had it still in possession. The Swedes had made no serious movement to recapture it. As such, there was no Swedish colony in America for the Danes to capture. It seems unlikely that Frederik was unaware of the Dutch conquest, or perhaps he had the impression that it was a minor, and temporary one.

The letter to Coninx is short on details, but it seems to broadly follow the same pattern as Frederik's agreement with Carloff. The letter only speaks of conquering the colony, with Dutch ships, and no mention is made of plans for the colony, similar to how Frederik made no initial plans for what to do after the capture of Fort Carolusborg.²⁹ Therefore, it seems Frederik mainly intended to capture New Sweden to hurt Swedish interests, and perhaps to use it as a bargaining chip in future peace negotiations.

Another noteworthy difference with the African projects is also apparent – there was no one to carry out the mission, and Coninx's task was actually to find someone. This is in stark contrast to the African plan, where Frederik merely reacted to and approved a plan devised by Carloff, someone with personal expertise and interests in the colonies. The initiative to capture New Sweden did not come from any entrepreneur from the colonies eager to use the war for their benefit like Carloff was. Instead, the king himself, or perhaps one of his councilors, took the initiative.³⁰

Ultimately, unlike Carloff's plan, nothing came of this, given New Sweden was already a Dutch possession. No further mention is made of it in the sources, and as such it is unclear how seriously Coninx pursued the request in the Netherlands. In any case, it soon turned out the war didn't take nearly as long as the king was expecting – less than two months after the letter to Coninx had been dispatched, the Swedish army had crossed the frozen belts and Denmark had been forced to cede vast territories to the Swedish in the Treaty of Roskilde. However, although this mission never made it past the planning stage, it shows an important thing - by 1657, perhaps as a result of the agreement with Carloff, colonial warfare

was on the mind of the Danish king, and expanding the war with Sweden to other continents was considered a viable strategy, despite never having been considered before.

The Swedish Plot against Tranquebar

In the wars of 1657–1660, it had been Denmark who took the initiative to take the fight to the colonies, whereas Sweden was mainly focused on the war in Europe, and mostly had a reactionary approach in Africa. However, following the end of the war, and the death of King Charles X Gustav in 1660, the Swedes did start to develop plans against Danish colonial possessions. Although the war had been a success in Europe, a few years after the war Sweden was left without any colonies outside Europe - New Sweden was lost to the WIC in 1655, and after a few more years of trying, the African possessions were lost to the WIC in 1663, and the SAC was disbanded.³¹

After 1660, Sweden was ruled by a regency led by Queen Dowager Hedwig Eleonora, representing the minor King Charles XI. During these years, Sweden largely avoided wars, but was still a major player in European politics, as seen in their role as mediators at the end of The Second Anglo-Dutch War in 1667.³² It was around this time that a new plan for Swedish colonialism was being developed, focusing on Asia.

The first Swedish ship was sent to Asia in 1663. This was the frigate *Falken*, captained by Dutch officer Hessel Gerritsz. According to Per Tingbrand, the impetus for this expedition originated in a Portuguese offer to allow Swedish ships access to Portuguese ports in the Indian Ocean, in exchange for Swedish mediation in the Dutch-Portuguese War.³³ While this offer wasn't immediately followed up on, eventually it led to the dispatching of *Falken*.

Curiously, no chartered company was created for the voyage, and evidence indicates that it was intended as a singular voyage. The mission was mainly a privateering raid, intended to capture Muslim vessels in the Red Sea to secure profit for the crown. However, the expedition failed to capture any ships, and suffered from infighting between Dutch and

Swedish crewmembers. Ultimately, the ship was sold to the Portuguese in Goa and the crew returned with a Portuguese ship, leading to a trial to place blame for the failure of the expedition.³⁴

Because of this failure, and the fact that no Swedish voyage to Asia immediately followed, Tingbrand treats the voyage as a singular oddity with no immediate aftermath. However, shortly after the completion of the voyage, a new letter arrived in Sweden, addressed to the regency council, with the proposal to establish a Swedish East India Company.³⁵

The man behind this proposal was a Swede by the name of Olle Borg. By his statement, Borg was a native of Gothenburg who had served in Asia for the VOC for 18 years, with intimate knowledge of the region. He first presented the proposal to the Swedish envoy in London, Johan Leijonbergh, and through him wrote a letter to the Regency with his proposal.³⁶ (The actual letter from Borg is unfortunately undated, but a pencil note places it in the late 1660'es – given its contents, it must have been after the voyage of *Falken*, so this seems true)

Borg refers directly, in detail, to the voyage of *Falken*, showing his proposal was probably inspired by witnessing the arrival of a Swedish ship in India.³⁷ Among his detailed proposals for the newly established company, Borg proposed that on the outbreak of a new war against Sweden and Denmark, the Swedes should seek to capture Tranquebar, the Danish fortress in India, and use it as their base. Borg's reasoning for this was fairly straightforward. He believed the Swedes needed a base of operation in India, as the Portuguese had Goa, and the Dutch Batavia, and given the Danish-Swedish conflict, Tranquebar was an excellent opportunity. It is unclear from the documentation whether Borg had visited Tranquebar in person, but he seems reasonably well-informed about conditions there.

Borg was aware that the Swedish presence in Tranquebar would require the consent of the local ruler, the Nayak of Thanjavur, whose consent was the base of the Danish lease of Tranquebar. However, Borg was confident that with a proper introduction from the Swedish king, the Nayak should see no reason to treat the Swedes differently from the Danes. Most importantly, Borg points out, that having Tranquebar in their position with the consent of the Nayak would also grant protection from the Dutch, should they wish to expel the Swedes from Asia.³⁸

Borg seemed confident that Tranquebar would fall easily, which seemed likely given the realities in Danish India in the late 1660'es - no ship had left Denmark for Asia since 1639, and the Danes had attempted the sale of Tranquebar several times in the intervening years, both in Europe and on the ground in Asia. However, the fort still flew the Danish flag, largely thanks to the intrepid effort of the last remaining Danish soldier, the commander Eskild Andersen Kongsbakke, who continued limited commerce with the Indonesian principalities of Banten and Makassar, while at the same time defending Tranquebar from the Nayak, and carrying out a privateering war against the Mughal Empire in Bengal.³⁹

Borg was not the only Swede who had noted the weakness of Tranquebar. In 1667 the first East Asian travelogue had been published in Sweden, a joint publication by Nils Mattson Kiöping and Olof Eriksson Willman, two Swedish travelers in the VOC. Among these, Kiöping had personally visited Tranquebar in 1653. Although he noted that Tranquebar was well fortified, so much that "it could never be conquered by any pagan potentate", he also noted that the Danish garrison was weak, without ships, and in disarray, and that Tranquebar would be conquered by the Dutch in no time.⁴⁰

Although this description was 14 years old by its publication in 1667, the Swedes must have been well aware the Danes had not sent any new ships to Asia, and in the late 1660s, the image of a weak, undefended Tranquebar, ripe for the taking, was reinforced from several sources in Sweden. Potentially, interest in Tranquebar was also ignited by a painting of Tranquebar, captured in Denmark in 1658 by the military commander Carl Gustav Wrangel, and kept in Skokloster Castle.⁴¹ In any case, Borg proved able to convince the regency of his plans and a new Swedish East India Company was established. It received a buy-in from several prominent investors, including the Queen Dowager, and Louis de Geer the Younger. Yet as time passed, the investors proved reluctant to pay the amounts they had committed to, which Borg complained about in a letter to Knut Kurck, one of the appointed directors of the company.⁴²

In the end, political turmoil surrounding the regency, and insecure economic prospects prevented the company from actually launching any ships, and in any case, the plan to conquer Tranquebar would have to wait

for a war to break out between Denmark and Sweden. After some years of languishing, the company was dissolved in 1674.⁴³

Notably, this was only one year before the outbreak of the Scanian War in 1675, in which case Borg's plan could have been put into action. However, Sweden ended up fighting much of that war on the back foot, and suffered several naval defeats against Denmark in the opening stages of the war, and the plan seems to have not been brought up again. In the end, Sweden would not send any ships to Asia until the 18th century, by then it was purely a trading expedition, and not a military venture targeting Danish colonies.⁴⁴

For King or Profit?

It is fruitful to compare the Swedish venture to the two Danish ones. It bears resemblance to Carloff's plan to conquer the Swedish Gold Coast possessions, in the sense that it was the brainchild of someone with experiences from the colonies – the plan was developed by Olle Borg, based on his own experiences on the ground in Asia, and was merely approved by the regency.

A notable difference from the Danish plans was, of course, that it was developed in peacetime, with no Danish-Swedish conflict on the immediate horizon (although the breakout of such a conflict was rarely a farfetched idea in 17th century Scandinavia). This also meant that the damage done to the Danes seemed a lower priority – Borg's proposal mainly focused on how to establish a commercially successful company that would make money for its investors, in the style of the VOC, not on how to damage the geopolitical enemy of Sweden.⁴⁵

In contrast, while Carloff had been motivated by his gain, or as described by Wirta, an entrepreneurial opportunity in light of the war, the Danish king was mainly interested in hurting his enemies.⁴⁶ The contract signed between Carloff and Frederik had very little consideration of the King's long-term investment and included no commitment to making a Danish trading company or controlling the African trade long-term.⁴⁷ The

Danish plot to seize New Sweden, which never came far from the drawing board, was similar – no mention was made of holding onto it long-term or any considerations of Danish colonization of the Delaware River – rather it was simply another way of hurting Sweden for a low investment.⁴⁸

In Borg's scheme however, conquering Tranquebar was not mainly to hurt the Danes, it was seen as a smart way to take advantage of political relationships in Europe to gain a foothold and a base of operations in India. He was far more concerned with creating a successful and viable trading company and seizing Tranquebar was a part of this. Being made in peacetime, hurting the Danes alone would be little motivation for the regency to support Borg's plan – they needed to be motivated by the prospect of a return on their investments and to increase the economic power of Sweden.

Of these three plans, only one came to fruition – Carloff's plan to conquer the Swedish possessions in Africa. It can be said that in this case alone, opportunity and capacity were at a confluence. Carloff had the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully carry out the plan, and the imminent war between Sweden and Denmark created the circumstances for royal support from Frederik III. As such, their interests aligned, and Carloff was able to carry out an expedition that conquered Fort Carolusberg, and ended a decade of Swedish presence on the Gold Coast while beginning two centuries of a Danish one.⁴⁹

Frederik III's plan against New Sweden, by contrast, lacked the capacity. The fact that it came from the king himself, and had the support of high-ranking councilors, shows that royal support existed to carry it out, against the background of the ongoing war against Sweden. However, there was no one available with the necessary background and knowledge, or the right interests, to do so. The plan never made it further than looking for such a person in Amsterdam, before it was overtaken by events on the ground in Denmark, and subsequently forgotten.

In the Swedish plan to conquer Tranquebar, capacity was present. Olle Borg was an experienced traveler who drew up detailed plans based on first-hand knowledge and perspectives. However, in peacetime, the royal will from the regency was lacking – despite the detailed plans from Borg, investors hesitated to honor their commitments, and royal support was

missing, meaning no ships were dispatched, and Tranquebar remained in Danish hands, blissfully unaware of the plots against it. As such, the Gold Coast remained the only colonial arena in which Denmark and Sweden fought each other in the 17th century.

Overall, the fact that only Carloff's plan – with a limited impact on the outcome of the war – was carried out is a testimony to the fact that ultimately, colonial warfare was not considered central to the war-planning between Sweden and Denmark. Neither side believed that striking at the colonies of the enemy would convey a decisive advantage to the war in Europe, and thus, were unwilling to allocate resources to it unless the means could be provided privately – as Carloff did, at no expense to the state.

On the contrary, while the colonies did not figure strongly in the war plans made in Stockholm and Copenhagen, a war in Europe presented opportunities for entrepreneurial individuals in the colonies, such as Carloff and Borg. These could use the outbreak of a European conflict as a means to further their interests in Asia and Africa while presenting themselves as loyal servants of the king. While Carloff's capture of Fort Carolusborg may have had limited impact on the course of the 1657-1658 Danish-Swedish War, it was an important event in the history of Danish and Swedish colonies in Africa – it brought the brief Swedish presence on the Gold Coast to an end and started the Danish that would last for nearly two centuries.

Perceptions of Non-European Agency

One interesting angle that these different plans provide, is how non-European agency was perceived by the planners. Carloff was the driving force behind the plan to capture Fort Carolusborg on the Gold Coast and understood the importance of gaining the approval of Acrosan, the ruler of Fetu, an approval he believed he could provide.⁵⁰

Indeed, as later events in the Gold Coast made clear, Acrosan was ultimately the arbiter who decided which European powers were present in his kingdom. At first, he accepted Carloff's transfer of Fort Carolusborg

to Danish rule, but when Carloff's promises of forthcoming Danish trade failed to materialize, he considered the agreement void. He stopped a transfer from Danish to Dutch control from happening and indeed sought to return Fort Carolusborg to Swedish control afterward, believing that agreement had, in the end, served him best.⁵¹

In the brief plan for a Danish conquest of New Sweden, no mention is made of the native Lenape and Susquehannock, with whom the Swedish colony had close relations. Of course, as mentioned above, this idea came from Frederik III, who was rather poorly informed on the state of the colony – being unaware it had not been in Swedish hands for two years. Even if the king did not account for native interests, the experience of the Dutch after the conquest of New Sweden – which resulted in the Susquehannock launching the punitive expedition known as the Peach Tree War upon the New Amsterdam colony in 1655 – proves that a Danish takeover of New Sweden would have had to account for at least Susquehannock interests.

Olle Borg's scheme to seize Tranquebar was well-informed, probably based on his own experiences in India. He also knew that the consent of the Nayak of Thanjavur was necessary if Swedish long-term presence in Tranquebar was to be secured. According to his reasoning, the Nayak would accept the Swedes on proper introduction to the Swedish King, in other words, proper diplomatic introduction was necessary.⁵²

One of the key reasons why the Nayak of Thanjavur tolerated the Danish presence in Tranquebar was as a counterweight to the Portuguese, and a bulwark against the Dutch, towards whom he was suspicious. As Borg's plot never materialized, one can only speculate how the Nayak would have reacted to a violent Swedish takeover of Tranquebar. However, it should be noted that the basic reasoning of Borg was sound and perceptive of Thanjavur interests – the Swedes, as a minor, relatively non-threatening power, could reasonably serve as a bulwark against a larger European power, similar to the Danes.

Conclusion

Beginning in 1657, Denmark and Sweden started to consider colonial warfare as an opportunity in addition to their wars in Europe. This article has explored three different plans to attack colonial possessions on three different continents, two by Denmark, and one by Sweden. Only one of them, Hendrik Carloff's attack on the Swedish Gold Coast in Africa in 1657, came to fruition, while the Danish plan to attack New Sweden in America, and the Swedish to take Tranquebar in India, never left the drawing board.

Put together, the three cases show the necessary prerogatives for waging colonial war in the 17th century. There needed to be an initiative by an adventurer with expertise and experience from local circumstances, backed by royal support and geopolitical interests. For Hendrik Carloff and Frederik III, these interests aligned with the attack on the Gold Coast in 1657. However, Frederik could not find a man like Carloff with knowledge of New Sweden, so despite royal initiative, this plan was stillborn. On the contrary, the Swedish plan to take Tranquebar had the backing of an experienced adventurer with clear knowledge of local circumstances in India. However, in the absence of committed support from a regency preoccupied with internal struggles during peacetime, no Swedish ships left for India, despite long preparations.

Ultimately, this helps shed light on the role played by colonies in the wider context of European warfare in the 17th century. Despite entertaining the idea of colonialism, ultimately neither Sweden nor Denmark afforded the colonies an important role in their war plans, seeing as only one of the plans was carried out, with little impact on the outcome of said conflict. However, while it may have been insignificant for the outcome of the conflict in Europe, it had an important impact on the course of Scandinavian colonialism in Africa, by ending the brief Swedish colonial project, and conversely starting the Danish presence there. This shows that colonial warfare provided an important potential opportunity for individual entrepreneurs in the colonies to further their interest, with the backing of the home state.

In the broad picture, this supports the view that colonial warfare in the 17th century did not yet have a major impact on the outcome of the power

struggle in Europe. Nonetheless, it still existed as one of the options rulers had to hurt their opponents, by employing private interests at no cost to themselves. Conversely, a war in Europe was an opportunity for individuals in the colonies to further their interests, as can be seen in the cases of Carloff and Borg, and as seen by Carloff's conquest of Fort Carolusborg, the conflicts could greatly impact the fate of Denmark and Sweden's remote colonies.

Literature

Brimnes, Niels, *Indien: Tranquebar, Serampore og Nicobarerne*. Copenhagen 2017.

Christensen, Lars, *Svenskekrigene 1657–60: Danmark på kanten af udslettelse*. Copenhagen 2018.

Emmer, Pieter C., "The First Global War: The Dutch versus Iberia in Asia, Africa and the New World, 1590–1609", *eJournal of Portuguese History* 1, January 2003.

Feldbæk, Ole, "Intet skib til Trankebar", *Skalk*, No. 1, 1991.

Gooskens, Frans, "Sweden and the Treaty of Breda in 1667 – Swedish diplomats help to end naval warfare between the Dutch Republic and England," *Forum Navale*, Vol. 74, 2018.

Hernæs, Per Oluf, *Vestafrika: Forterne på Guldkysten*. Copenhagen 2017.

Jónsson, Már, "Denmark-Norway as a Potential World Power in the Early Seventeenth Century", *Itinerario*, Vol XXXIII No. 2, 2009.

Kjellberg, Sven, *Svenska ostindiska kompanierna, 1731-1813*. Stockholm 1975.

Rindom, Jan, *Ostindisk Kompagni 1616–50 – en studie i organisation og handel*. Copenhagen 1995.

Rommelse, Gijs, "The Role of mercantilism in Anglo-Dutch political relations, 1650–74", *Economic History Review*, Vol. 63, No. 3, 2010.

Rommelse, Gijs, "Political agendas and the contestable legality of privateering: the case of the Dutch-Portuguese War (1657–1662)", *Forum Navale*, Vol. 69, 2013.

Subrahmanyam, Sanjay "The Coromandel trade of the Danish East India Company, 1618–1649", *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1989.

Tingbrand, Per, "Falkens seglats till Goa 1663–65", *Forum Navale*, Vol. 63, 2007.

Wirta, Kaarle, *Dark horses of business: overseas entrepreneurship in seventeenth-century Nordic trade in the Indian and Atlantic oceans*. Leiden 2018.

Published Sources

Degn, Ole, *Kancelliets Brevbøger vedrørende Danmarks indre Forhold I Uddrag 1657*. Viborg 2002.

Jones Adam, *German Sources for West African History, 1599–1669*. Wiesbaden 1983.

Justesen, Ole, *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana, 1657–1754, Vol 1: 1657–1753*. Copenhagen 2005.

Rundkvist, Martin, Kiöping, Nils Mattson, *Travelogue and Autobiography 1647–1656: Coastal Africa, The Red Sea, Persia, Mesopotamia, Coastal India, Sri Lanka, South-East Asia*. Stockholm 2021.

Tandrup, L., *Svensk agent ved Sundet: Toldkommissær og agent i Helsingør. Anders Svenssons depecher til Gustav II Adolf og Axel Oxenstierna 1621–25*. Aarhus 1971.

Archival Sources

Riksarkivet Stockholm, Riksarkivets ämnessamlingar, Miscellanea, Handel och sjöfart, Ostindiska kompaniet, 1626–1739.

Sammanfattning

Artikeln syftar till att undersöka betydelsen av kolonialkrig i rivaliteten mellan Danmark och Sverige under andra halvan av 1600-talet. Det sker genom att undersöka tre planer för krig utanför Europa från 1650-talet och 1660-talet: 1) den danska planen för att erövra Fort Carolusborg 1657, den svenska kolonin på Afrikas Guldkust, 2) den danska planen för att erövra kolonin Nya Sverige i Delaware 1657 och 3) den svenska planen från slutet av 1660-talet för att erövra Trankebar, den danska kolonin i Indien.

Av de tre planerna var det bara den första som förverkligades då den svenska kolonin i Afrika, Fort Carolusborg, övertogs av danskarna under ledning av Hendrik Carloff. Det pekar på att krig i kolonierna bara spelade en begränsad roll i den skandinaviska rivaliteten på 1600-talet. De långa avstånden och Danmark och Sveriges relativt begränsade mängd kolonier gjorde att krig i Afrika och Asien hade lägre prioritet jämfört med krigshandlingar i Europa. Däremot kunde konflikterna få stor betydelse för koloniernas historia. Den danska erövringen av Fort Carolusborg ledde till slutet av svensk kolonisering av Afrika och början på en dansk närvaro där som varade i nästan 200 år.

De undersökta fallen visar också betydelsen av individer på plats i kolonierna. För att kunna angripa fiendens kolonier var Danmark och Sverige beroende av individer med lokala erfarenheter och kontakter, som Hendrik Carloff på den afrikanska Guldkusten och Olle Borg i Trankebar. För dessa individer innebar krig mellan Danmark och Sverige i Europa möjligheter att främja deras egna kommersiella och ekonomiska intressen – att de kunde säkra kungligt stöd för planer på att erövra fiendens kolonier. I ett vidare perspektiv bidrar undersökningen av det dansk-svenska fallet till att stärka bilden av att kolonialkrig under 1600-talet ännu inte hade någon avgörande betydelse i europeiska maktkamper. Snarare var kolonialkrig en av många möjligheter som makthavare kunde nyttja för att försöka skada sina fiender. Möjligheten var särskilt lockande om de kunde använda privata intressen utan att det uppstod några kostnader. Det gav i sin tur möjligheter för individer som Carloff och Borg för att kunna utnyttja konflikten till att främja sina egna intressen.

Notes

- ¹ Emmer 2003, p. 1-2.
- ² Emmer 2003, p. 13-14.
- ³ Rommelse 2010, p. 605.
- ⁴ Rommelse 2013, p. 25-26.
- ⁵ Christensen 2018, p. 30.
- ⁶ Brimnes 2017, p. 20-30.
- ⁷ Subrahmanyam 1989, p. 43.
- ⁸ Jónsson 2009, p. 21.
- ⁹ Rindom 1995, p. 33-34.
- ¹⁰ Tandrup 1971 p. 262-63.
- ¹¹ Wirta 2018, p. 34.
- ¹² Subrahmanyam 1989, p. 54.
- ¹³ Hernæs 2017, p. 50-51.
- ¹⁴ Hernæs 2017, p. 52.
- ¹⁵ Christensen 2018, p. 55.
- ¹⁶ Christensen 2018, p. 80.
- ¹⁷ Christensen 2018, p. 154-155.
- ¹⁸ Wirta 2018, p. 152-153.
- ¹⁹ Justesen 2005 p. 1-3.
- ²⁰ Justesen 2005, p. 1-3.
- ²¹ Jones, 1983, p. 143.
- ²² Wirta 2018, p. 155.
- ²³ Hernæs 2017, p. 52.
- ²⁴ Wirta 2018, p. 155.
- ²⁵ Hernæs 2017, p. 53.
- ²⁶ Degn 2002, p. 493.
- ²⁷ Degn 2002, p. 493.
- ²⁸ Christensen 2018, p. 119.
- ²⁹ Justesen 2005, p. 1-3.
- ³⁰ Degn 2002, p. 493.
- ³¹ Hernæs 2017, p. 53.
- ³² Gooskens 2002, p. 72.
- ³³ Tingbrand 2007, p. 72.
- ³⁴ Tingbrand 2007, p. 84.
- ³⁵ Kjellberg 1975, p. 35
- ³⁶ Riksarkivet, Riksarkivets ämnessamlingar, Miscellanea, Handel och sjöfart, Ostindiska kompaniet, 1626-1739, Olle Borg to the Regency, late 1660'es.
- ³⁷ Riksarkivet, Riksarkivets ämnessamlingar, Miscellanea, Handel och sjöfart, Ostindiska kompaniet, 1626-1739, Olle Borg to the Regency, late 1660'es.
- ³⁸ Riksarkivet, Riksarkivets ämnessamlingar, Miscellanea, Handel och sjöfart, Ostindiska kompaniet, 1626-1739, Olle Borg to the Regency, late 1660'es.
- ³⁹ Feldbæk 1991, p. 18.
- ⁴⁰ Rundkvist 2021, p. 124.
- ⁴¹ Brimnes 2017, p. 56.
- ⁴² Kjellberg 1975, p. 35.

- ⁴³ Kjellberg 1975, p. 36.
- ⁴⁴ Kjellberg 1975, p. 36.
- ⁴⁵ Riksarkivet, Riksarkivets ämnessamlingar, Miscellanea, Handel och sjöfart, Ostindiska kompaniet, 1626-1739, Olle Borg to the Regency, late 1660'es
- ⁴⁶ Wirta 2018, p. 152-153.
- ⁴⁷ Justesen 2005, p. 1-3.
- ⁴⁸ Degn 2002, p. 493.
- ⁴⁹ Hernæs 2017, p. 52
- ⁵⁰ Justesen 2005, p. 1-3.
- ⁵¹ Wirta 2018, p. 120-121-
- ⁵² Riksarkivet, Riksarkivets ämnessamlingar, Miscellanea, Handel och sjöfart, Ostindiska kompaniet, 1626-1739, Olle Borg to the Regency, late 1660'es.