

## The Dutch Republic

The Dutch Republic consisted of 7 provinces. During the golden age of the republic, mostly within the 17<sup>th</sup> century, these provinces represented a unified force, powerful in trade, war, and economics. Many of the Dutch ideas developed then helped to determine the view of the modern world. The United Provinces, as the republic was also called, also became a model for modern constitutional governments. The Peace of Utrecht in 1713, however, marked the beginning of a steady decline for the Dutch republic. After this, many factors in Europe began to challenge the prosperity, unity, and security of the Dutch Republic.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch Republic represented one of the most prosperous and economically stable states in Europe. Early Dutch trade rested in the fishing industry. From their knowledge of the sea and shipbuilding, the Dutch built an industry on shipping. This successful industry allowed the Dutch to be able to buy large quantities of resources and products from surrounding countries. They then sold these huge purchases to individual buyers and ended up with a successful trade. The people of the United Provinces enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in Europe.

However, the decline of the Dutch Republic began when it became very involved in the war of the Spanish Succession from 1701 to 1713. The war created a great drain on the Dutch funds, and the provinces ended up in debt. In 1713, the national debt of the republic had risen 118 million guilders, from 30,000,000 in 1688 to 148,000,000 in 1713 (refer to document 12). The signing of the Peace of Utrecht in 1713 marked the beginning of the decline of the Dutch republic. Another war, beginning in the

1650s between England and the Dutch Republic, was caused by the competition in trade between the Dutch and English East India Companies (refer to document 11). This war led to yet more battles and another war with the English. These two wars represented the threat of the English trade to Dutch prosperity. The growing trade of the English East India Company cut off portions of Dutch trade routes. These wars also added to the debt the Provinces were accumulating. By 1705, the Dutch East India Company was losing money from competition with not only the English, but also the Muslims, Chinese, Portuguese, and French (refer to document 13). In addition to trade problems, the Dutch came to have problems with their taxation systems. While in other countries with taxation disputes the taxes fell on the most impoverished, the taxes seemed to fall on the merchants of the Dutch Republic (refer to document 5). These taxes hindered the trade all the more. The taxes placed on merchant ships meant that fewer ships could be sent out thereby reducing trade. In 1645, the Dutch ships represented around 75% of the total voyages in the Baltic Sea trade (refer to document 2). By 1695, however, this number had been drastically reduced to about 30%. This was probably a result of the heavy taxation on the merchants, the loss in trade to other trade companies, and the national debt. In the years from the beginning of the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic to the 1650's, the United Provinces were a powerful force in European trade. But by the 1650's, the decline had begun and the Dutch Republic had begun to lose trade and profits.

Many factors effected the internal unity of the Dutch Republic, making it an easy target for other nations. Any factor that threatened the prosperity or security of the republic also affected the unity, because a nation that is economically unstable and in danger of attacks by stronger powers is harder for a ruler to hold together. The frequent

wars against the Dutch Republic made national unity difficult. During times of war, the republic became “shattered and divided” (refer to document 4). All of the provinces depended on the most prosperous province of Holland during these times. If one province is expected to bear the weight of a nation, and if that one province falls, the entire nation falls apart. This type of dependence puts a nation’s unity in danger. The need for a single military commander to lead the troops of the provinces and to protect the Dutch Republic was recognized in the 1670s (refer to document 9). However, there was no trust among the provinces. This made it impossible to decide as a nation how to combat Louis the XIV’s attacks. Distrust between provinces was a major factor that could have added to the decline of the Dutch Republic, and threatened its unity. When trust between provinces does not exist, it is impossible for the provinces to function as a whole, to make decisions together, or to fight together. Unity is one of the most important aspects a nation must have in order to stay a country, and in the late 1600s to the early 1700s, there were many factors endangering the unity of the United Provinces.

During the Golden age of the Dutch Republic, the Dutch provinces made far more in profits and had the highest standards of living in Europe, making them a desirable target for annexation by other countries (refer to document 7) and threatening their security. In the Treaty of Dover (refer to document 6), the French king promised the English king 2 million livres in return for him becoming an ally against the Dutch Republic. The English King agreed to conduct the naval warfare, while the French king would lead the attack by land. Treaties like this threatened the Dutch Republic’s security because any enemy could conceivably gather enough force to invade and take over. England and France represented two especially strong powers in Europe, so the Treaty of

Dover was extremely dangerous to the Dutch Republic. The English foreign policy lay in perpetuating war between France and the Dutch Republic (refer to document 8), thereby neutralizing two of their strongest competitors. This was dangerous to the Dutch republic because it meant that it would always have an enemy- be it France or England. If the country was kept constantly at war, its trade would be ruined, it would be financially exhausted because of the cost of war, and it would be virtually defenseless against attacks by other outside forces. During this period, England still continued it's own war on the Dutch Republic. From 1652 to 1654, the English captured over 2000 Dutch ships (refer to document 3). The Dutch captured far less, probably only 500 of the English ships. One problem was that because of the great national debt, there was no one to fund the armies to fight against these forces (refer to document 10), though soldiers were greatly needed. Many of the soldiers who were recruited weren't well armed or prepared for the fight and most were killed in battle (refer to document 14). The distrust that caused indecision over whom to elect as a military leader hindered the Dutch Republic security because their armies had no leadership and represented a disjointed and disorderly military that was unable to defend itself or it's country.

In conclusion, many factors contributed to the decline of the Dutch Republic, once the wealthiest nation in Europe by threatening it's unity, prosperity, and security. Competition for trade and the continual threat of war weakened the Dutch economy, while lack of internal unity among the six provinces reduced their ability to defend themselves either militarily or economically. These factors contributed to the vulnerability of the Dutch to external threat and led to their decline as great European power.

