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### **Rebellion, Government and the Scottish Response to Argyll's Rising of 1685**<sup>1</sup>

The story of the ill-fated rebellion led in mid-1685 by Archibald Campbell, 9<sup>th</sup> earl of Argyll against the newly-minted regime of James VII and II has several times been told.<sup>2</sup> It was a brief affair. Having on 2 May left his home-in-exile of the Dutch Republic, Argyll and a tiny flotilla of just three ships and about 300 men sailed circuitously via Orkney to reach Dunstaffnage on 13 May. They advanced southwards along the Kintyre peninsula as far as Campbeltown, which was reached on 20 May. Over the succeeding weeks Argyll shifted his base twice more, first to Bute and then to Ellangreg Castle on Eilean Dearg island, off the southern coast of Cowal. From this latter position the rebels pushed westwards through Glendaurel and over Loch Striven until, on the night of 15 June, they crossed Loch Long and made a dash towards Glasgow via Gare Loch and Loch Lomond. The whole affair ended in a minor skirmish on the banks of the Clyde on 18 June, during which Argyll himself was captured. The earl was executed twelve days later. Faced with this short and militarily inglorious campaign, modern historians have concluded that Argyll's rising was more or less hopeless, a reading which might explain the relative lack of attention paid to it in comparison with the earlier Covenanting revolt of 1679 or, particularly, the Jacobite rebellions after 1688. It is not hard to understand this pessimism – from its very inception, the campaign was dogged by poor timing, strategic uncertainty, timorous leadership, lack of manpower and supplies and an overwhelming

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Professor Daniel Szechi for his useful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup> The classic narrative is J. Willcock, *A Scots Earl in Covenanting Times: Being Life and Times of Archibald, 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Argyll (1629-1685)* (Edinburgh, 1907), pp. 343-430. Amongst more recent accounts, the most important is P. Hopkins, *Glencoe and the End of the Highland War* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 95-102, but useful material is also available in T. Harris, *Revolution: The Great Crisis of the British Monarchy, 1685-1720* (London, 2006), pp. 73-78; K. McAlister, 'James VII and the Conduct of Scottish Politics c.1679 to c.1686' (University of Strathclyde, PhD thesis, 2003), pp. 200-18; R.C. Paterson, *No Tragic Story: The Fall of the House of Campbell* (Edinburgh, 2001), pp. 97-138.

government counter attack led by John Murray, marquis of Atholl.<sup>3</sup> However, in their anxiety to pass judgement upon the viability of Argyll's rising, historians have tended to underestimate its potential value as a case study of social and political dynamics in late-seventeenth-century Scotland, and the Highlands in particular. This article seeks to reassess the rebellion from that perspective, and it therefore aims neither to provide a narrative of the rising, nor an evaluation of the success of either Argyll's or Atholl's campaign. Instead, it begins by assessing the factors inspiring support for Argyll, focusing particularly upon kinship and religion. It then proceeds to consider the governmental response, asking how James VII's regime sought to counter the insurgency and why it adopted these approaches.

The roots of the 1685 rebellion stretched back to 1681, when Argyll had been convicted of treason following his refusal to take the Test Act (requiring all Scottish office holders to swear allegiance to the Episcopalian Church of Scotland) without qualification. Although it is likely that Charles II intended to pardon Argyll, at least partially, the earl took fright and fled the country. He settled first in London, where he began consorting with radical Whigs led by Anthony Ashley-Copper, 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Shaftsbury, but from the autumn of 1682 resided in exile in Friesland. There he became involved with the emigre community of both English and Scottish radicals which had gathered in the Netherlands, with his aim being to gain a subsidy of £30,000 Sterling to fund an insurrection in Scotland through which he hoped to win back his lands and position. Argyll was never able to secure anything like his desired amount (eventually he had to settle for funds of around £10,000, most of it coming from a wealthy English sympathiser named Ann Smith), and his plans were uncovered by the government late in 1683, but he nevertheless remained a figure of real

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<sup>3</sup> These failures can be considered in light of a model of rebel effectiveness in early-modern Europe recently developed by Daniel Szechi. According to Szechi (drawing upon earlier work by Allan Millett and Williamson Murray), rebel armies' performances can be judged against four criteria: securing external support; achieving strategic goals; building infrastructure; and operational and tactical effectiveness. It is difficult to conclude that Argyll succeeded in any of these areas. D. Szechi, 'Towards an Analytical Model of Military Effectiveness for the Early Modern Period: the Military Dynamics of the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion', *Militär-geschichtliches Zeitschrift*, 72, 2014, pp. 289-316.

consequence amongst the conspirators. The opposition movement teetered on the brink of collapse after the failure of the Rye House Plot against Charles II in 1683, and Argyll seemed a suitably consequential figurehead offering some hope of survival.

In the spring of 1685, immediately following the death of Charles and accession of James, Argyll's plot became intertwined with another – that of James Scott, duke of Monmouth, illegitimate son of Charles, darling of the Protestant opposition to James and prospective leader of an insurrection in England. Allegedly jealous of Monmouth, and certainly suspicious of his personal ambitions, Argyll had not initially been prepared to join forces with him, wishing instead to launch an independent insurrection in Scotland. However, after sometimes heated discussions with leading Scottish conspirators in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, particularly Robert Ferguson and Patrick Hume, and after a promise from Monmouth not to name himself king unless so declared by a free Parliament, Argyll acquiesced. The resultant plot envisaged Argyll leading a small diversionary attack on Scotland, with Monmouth, whose expedition was to leave no later than six days after Argyll's, heading the main thrust into England. The two men also co-operated in drafting complementary manifestos stressing the perceived arbitrary illegitimacy of the Stuart regime. In the end, the wider British context counted for little; Monmouth missed the six-day departure deadline by several weeks, giving James almost complete freedom to crush Argyll before dealing with his nephew. Yet this should not obscure the fact that, in planning if not in execution, Argyll's rising sprang as much from the wider ferment of conspiratorial opposition politics as from the earl's personal estrangement from the regime.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> G. Gardner, *The Scottish Exile Community in the Netherlands, 1660-1690* (East Linton, 2004), pp. 144-153; T. Harris, *Restoration: Charles II and His Kingdoms 1660-1685* (London, 2005), pp. 351-52; Hopkins, *Glencoe*, pp. 84-85; A.D. Kennedy, *Governing Gaeldom: The Scottish Highlands and the Restoration State, 1660-1688* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 224-225; McAlister, 'James VII', pp. 113-28 and at pp. 200-201; Paterson, *No Tragic Story*, pp. 53-66 and at pp. 67-82; M.S. Zook, *Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics in Late Stuart England* (Pennsylvania, 1999), pp. 128-30. The fullest (although by no means impartial) contemporary account of Argyll's preparations in the spring of 1685 is Patrick Hume, 'Sir Patrick Hume's Narrative of the Earl of Agyle's Expedition' in G.H. Rose (ed.), *A Selection of the Papers of the Earls of Marchmont*, 3 vols (London, 1831), iii, pp. 1-66, at pp. 1-34.

While drawing on the strength of the Whig opposition, Argyll's rising also hoped to exploit disaffection within Lowland Scotland. The earl himself was as much Lowland aristocrat as Highland chief, and his associates in 1685 included many Lowlanders – such as Hume and Sir John Cochran – who saw the rising as a chance to stimulate nationwide resistance; as John Lauder of Fountainhall put it, they 'thought to have found us all alike combustible tinder, that [they] had no more adoe than to hold [their] match to us, and we would all blow up in a rebellion'.<sup>5</sup> Yet Scotland in 1685 was not the tinder box it was to become by 1688, as the rebels discovered when they launched an exploratory thrust into Greenock in early June. This action yielded only a handful of recruits – thirty by one count – and was sufficiently demoralising for some in the rebel command to conclude that there was little support to be had in Lowland Scotland.<sup>6</sup> The likeliest bedfellows seemed to be the Covenanters of the south-west, and it was partly with an eye upon this constituency that Argyll's self-justification, when it came, was strongly religious in tone (see below). In the event, Argyll never got as far as the Covenanting heartlands and so was never able to test his rallying potential, and in any case the government's robust military precautions would probably have proved overwhelming. Yet even if the Covenanters had been reached, it seems unlikely that they would have risen in any numbers. Their disastrous insurrection of 1679 was still too fresh in the memory, as was the brutal crackdown – mythologised as the 'Killing Time' – which had done much to break the back of Presbyterian resistance. Moderate Presbyterians were reluctant to reach for their swords once more; only the most hard line Covenanters, principally the Cameronian sect, remained in the field. Such individuals were unlikely to rise for a leader whom, by virtue of his long service in Charles II's regime, they regarded as a traitor to the covenants, not to mention a leader whose declaration stopped short of promising to uphold covenanting principles. By 1688, of course, Presbyterianism had recovered sufficiently to play a decisive role in the overthrow of James VII, thanks in no small part to that king's ecclesiastical

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<sup>5</sup> John Lauder, *Historical Observes of Memorable Occurents in Church and State, from October 1680 to April 1686* ed. D. Laing (Edinburgh, 1837), p. 165.

<sup>6</sup> W. MacLeod (ed.), *Journal of the Honourable John Erskine of Carnock, 1683-1687* (Edinburgh, 1898), p. 124. This expedition's intended destination was in fact Largs, but it landed in Greenock instead when it became clear that Ayrshire was too heavily defended.

policies. But this was in the future; the Covenanters of 1685 were scattered and demoralised, and the presence of a widely mistrusted aristocratic rebel would likely have done little to change that.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, it was in western Scotland that the rising flared and failed. Here, Argyll was never able to muster a large army. Contemporary estimates varied; Gilbert Burnet and Sir John Edgeworth both reported a maximum size of about 2,500. Hume advanced the figure of 1,800, while Mary Campbell, countess of Breadalbane suggested a mere 1,500 men.<sup>8</sup> Similar numbers would later prove sufficient for the Jacobite movement to cause trouble for the Hanoverian regime, especially in 1745-46, but while Charles Edward had the good fortune to land in a lightly-defended Scotland whose government was distracted by foreign entanglements, Argyll enjoyed no such luck, and in this context his force was vanishingly small, more characteristic of a guerrilla band than a serious field army.<sup>9</sup> Yet despite the diminutive size of the rebel grouping, questions can be asked about why those few who joined Argyll chose to do so. Thanks to the in-built militarism of clan society, whereby clansmen were expected to provide military manpower on the call of their chief – a decaying but still undoubtedly powerful dynamic by the later seventeenth century – family or personal loyalty clearly had a role to play. Argyll himself anticipated that the Campbells' substantial kin and client networks in the western Highlands would form the kernel of his force, perhaps yielding up to 6,000 men. Accordingly, upon landing he immediately summoned his 'Friends and Blood Relations' as well as

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Morer, *An Account of the Present Persecution of the Church in Scotland in Several Letters* (1690), p. 8; Lauder, *Historical Observes*, pp. 166-167; Wodrow, *History of the Sufferings*, iv, pp. 291-293; I.B. Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters, 1660-1688* (London, 1976), pp. 128-129; Gardner, *Scottish Exile Community*, pp. 151-152; Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 77-78; J. Stephen, *Defending the Revolution: The Church of Scotland 1689-1719* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 19-34.

<sup>8</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *Burnet's History of My Own Time, Part I, the Reign of Charles II*, 2 vols, ed. O. Airy (Oxford, 1897), i, p. 295; J. Edgeworth, *A true and faithful account of the Present Posture of the Kings army in Scotland, And Of their Defeating part of Argyles Men. Together with An Account of Argyles Affairs from his Landing in Dustafnage* (London, 1685), p. 6; Hume, 'Narrative', at p. 45; J. Murray (ed.), *Chronicles of the Atholl and Tullibardine Families*, 5 vols (Edinburgh, 1908), i, p. 220.

<sup>9</sup> B. Lenman, *The Jacobite Risings in Britain, 1689-1746* (Dalkeith, 1995), p. 249.

his ‘Vassals anywhere, and all within my several Jurisdictions’ to turn out in his support.<sup>10</sup> Others shared this assumption; the Secret Committee of the Privy Council opined on 20 May that Argyll would receive little support ‘save from his own Highlanders’.<sup>11</sup> And indeed, Argyll’s kin and tenants were crucial to him. Several Campbell lairds, including Colin Campbell of Otter, Walter Campbell of Skipness, Angus Campbell of Kilberry and Duncan Campbell of Auchinbrek, rallied to his call, with the latter explicitly stating that he felt ‘bound by his charter to assist him’.<sup>12</sup> The men of Islay – despite the loyalist stance of its proprietor, Sir Hugh Campbell of Cawdor – also rose, along with those of Cowal, Kintyre, Gigha and, to a lesser extent, Lorn.<sup>13</sup> Thus, that Argyll was able to generate a rising at all owed much to his position as hereditary lord of much of the south west Highlands and chief of one of the largest regional families.

Yet it was not the case that all Campbells or Campbell tenants felt an inexorable obligation to support their forfeited chief. Indeed, Argyll himself was reportedly ‘discouraged ... that some, of whom he expected otherwise, would not come and talk with him’.<sup>14</sup> His own son, the future 1<sup>st</sup> duke of Argyll, famously offered to fight against the earl, although, as a London Scot, he did so safe in the knowledge that he would hardly be called upon to make good his promise. Closer to home, Alexander Campbell of Dunstaffnage sided with the government, as did Alexander Campbell of Lochinell, who told Atholl on 26 May that ‘ther is none that shall be more reddie to waite upon your

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<sup>10</sup> Hume, ‘Narrative’, at pp. 18-19; *The Declaration and Apology of the Protestant People That is, of the Noblemen, Barrons, Gentlemen, Burgesses, and Commons of all sorts, Now in Armes within the Kingdom of Scotland* (1685), p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, 200.

<sup>12</sup> Edgeworth, *true and faithful account*, p. 3; Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, pp. 205-6; John Lauder, *Historical Notices of Scottish Affairs*, 2 vols ed. D. Laing (Edinburgh, 1848), ii, pp. 642-43 and at p. 692; National Records of Scotland [hereafter NRS], Breadalbane Muniments, GD112/39/137/17, Secret Committee to Breadalbane, 25 May 1685.

<sup>13</sup> Historical Manuscripts Commission [hereafter HMC], *Twelfth Report, Appendix, Part VIII. The Manuscripts of the Duke of Athole and of the Earl of Home* (London, 1891), p. 13 and at p. 19; Hume, ‘Narrative’, at p. 44; MacLeod, *Journal*, pp. 118-19; Edgeworth, *true and faithful account*, p. 3 and at p. 5; NRS, Inveraray Sheriff Court, SC54/17/2/12/3, ‘A list of the Giya men sumonded Before the Liffenents deputies at Lochhead the 10 September 1685 yeirs’.

<sup>14</sup> Hume, ‘Narrative’, at p. 41.

Lordship upon advertisemente [as] I shall be'. Several other Campbell gentlemen seem simply to have retreated to their homes to wait out the rebellion.<sup>15</sup> Others adopted the age old strategy of covering all eventualities by splitting family loyalties; Argyll's brother, Lord Neil Campbell, remained on the side of James – or, rather, he was forced to adopt this posture by virtue of his arrest shortly before Argyll landed – but his son did not, allowing the former to appeal for clemency after the rebellion with expressions of 'grieff and sorrow' that 'any child of mine should be in a thing I doe so much abhorre as being contrare to all dutie of God and man'.<sup>16</sup> This widespread equivocation is in fact hardly surprising. Although contemporaries (including Gaelic poets) often caricatured Highlanders as mindless drones following the dictates of their chiefs, the reality was much less clear cut. Kinship certainly remained an important social glue, and membership of a particular kindred was still in many ways the cornerstone of Highland identity – as, indeed, it was for many in the Lowlands. But such considerations were growing increasingly brittle, and by the later seventeenth century it was obvious that political authority could no longer be sustained through kinship ties alone (if, indeed, this had ever been possible). Instead, chiefly power was augmented by, for instance, forging formal friendships and alliances, holding office in the government bureaucracy, conspicuous consumption of luxury goods, courting the support of the Church, or asserting proprietary, rather than customary right to land.<sup>17</sup> Clanship, in short, clothed Highland elites in an aura of innate authority but, as Argyll discovered to his cost and surprise, there was a limit to what this could achieve when divorced from the wider matrix of elite power.

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<sup>15</sup> Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, p. 208; National Register of Archives for Scotland [hereafter NRAS] 234, Atholl Estates, box 29I(4), item 51, Lochinell to Atholl, 26 May 1685.

<sup>16</sup> E.K. Timings (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, domestic series, of the reign of James II* [hereafter CSPDJ], 3 vols (London, 1960-72), i, pp. 172-73; NRS, GD112/39/138/11, Neil Campbell to Breadalbane, 16 July 1685.

<sup>17</sup> These issues are given fuller treatment in Kennedy, *Governing Gaeldom*, chapter 2. See also K.M. Brown, *Noble Power in Scotland from the Reformation to the Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2011); A. Cathcart, *Kinship and Clientage: Highland Clanship 1451-1609* (Leiden, 2006); R.A. Dodgshon, *From Chiefs to Landlords: Social and Economic Change in the Western Highlands and Islands, c.1493-1820* (Edinburgh, 1998); A.I. Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart, 1603-1788* (East Linton, 1996).



The complexities of kinship in determining loyalties are perhaps best exemplified by the response of John Campbell, 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Breadalbane. Despite his clan ties to Argyll, there was never much question but that Breadalbane would throw his weight firmly behind the government. As early as 20 May, he undertook to arm 700-800 of his tenants to augment the government's forces, and he also offered to exploit his personal authority by going on a charm offensive in Argyllshire to inhibit any equivocators from joining the rebels. In addition, he repeatedly proffered his own lands as a loyalist mustering point – his favoured site was a large meadow on the banks of Loch Awe.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, along with Patrick Stewart of Bellechin, Breadalbane established himself as one of Atholl's key advisors and lieutenants during the course of the crisis. The government showed itself very grateful for this assistance. On 23 May, the Secret Committee praised Breadalbane for demonstrating 'proper zeal for one of your quality and interest for so good a Master', and another letter on 25 May declared that 'your lordship does exceeding weell to be full in your letters to us as also in your other diligences, wee approve youw in it'. By June, Atholl was being advised that, because Breadalbane had 'at least a thousand men in action which few or none hath', his lands, including his distant Caithness estates, should be spared any future requisitioning.<sup>19</sup>

Explanations for Breadalbane's support for the government are not difficult to find. His dealings with Argyll had been strained for much of the Restoration, not least because he disapproved of the drawn out campaign Argyll had fought in the 1670s and 1680s to secure control over the island of Mull, a move which he felt threatened not only to destabilise the Highlands but also to damage the reputation of the Campbells.<sup>20</sup> The relationship between the two men had been further soured by

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<sup>18</sup> W. Fraser (ed.), *The Earls of Cromartie: Their Kindred, Country and Correspondence*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1874), i, p. 44; HMC, *Athole*, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> NRS, GD112/39/137/15, Secret Committee to Breadalbane, 23 May 1685; NRS, GD112/39/137/17, Secret Committee to Breadalbane, 25 May 1685; NRS, GD112/39/138/2, Secret Committee to Atholl, 5 June 1685.

<sup>20</sup> NRS, GD112/39/125/6, Lawers to Glenorchy, 18 January 1679; NRS, GD112/39/127/6, Lawers to Glenorchy, 7 May 1679; NRS, GD112/39/127/11, Glenorchy to Moray, 26 May 1679; NRS, GD112/39/127/14, Lawers to Glenorchy, 28 May 1679; NRAS1209, Papers of the Campbell Family, Dukes of Argyll, bundle 46 and at bundle 101.

Breadalbane's tenacious social climbing, particularly his pursuit of an earldom, first in Caithness and then, after 1681, in Breadalbane itself. Argyll was deeply suspicious that this new, upstart Campbell earl wished to challenge his own dominance over the kindred, concern betrayed in a letter of 1680 regarding Caithness' (as he then was) title:

I understand Dominus de Campbello to be of Lands called Campbell but I understand Dominus Campellus to be Dominus Campbellorum primus and this I doe pretend to and will not willingly allow Dominus Campbellorum to any other ... let us not differ about words and names seing you may helpe it nobody will deny you nor your son Campbell as a surname but as a title I cannot agree.<sup>21</sup>

As well as having good reason for remaining distant from Argyll, Breadalbane had done well out of the Restoration regime. By the end of the 1670s he was arguably second only to Argyll himself as the government's favoured agent on Highland business. This pre-eminence was only enhanced by the fall of Argyll in 1681, a position exemplified by the fact that Breadalbane was the only nobleman appointed to the commission for pacifying the Highlands, the main organ of Highland government from 1682, whose activities he came increasingly to dominate. Crucially, this pre-eminence owed much to the support of James VII himself, to whom, as Duke of Albany, Breadalbane had made a personal submission in 1683, in return receiving valuable protection from a number of potentially dangerous legal challenges.<sup>22</sup> Breadalbane, in other words, had little to gain by turning against a friendly government simply in order to support a less-than-friendly kinsman.

Despite Breadalbane's firmly loyalist posture, the inconvenient fact of his kinship to the rebel leader could not completely be ignored. Onlookers often assumed that his loyalties were at least potentially divided. This suspicion was subtly but unmistakably referenced in a letter written to Breadalbane by Lady Essex Griffin, his niece, urging him to involve his son and heir, Lord Glenorchy, in the campaign against Argyll:

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<sup>21</sup> NRS, GD112/39/131/4, Argyll to Glenorchy, 24 May 1680.

<sup>22</sup> See Kennedy, *Governing Gaeldom*, chapter 6.

We hear you are gone towards the Highlands, where God preserve your person ... My Lord Arran and his Brother doe dayly declare they will goe into Scotland the first hour the King receives intelligence off the bold Rebels making any Considerable Advance I cannot hear this without some little Emulation uppon My Lord Glenarchy's account, who I soe much wish should rather give then follow a brave and loyall Example.<sup>23</sup>

Even if Breadalbane himself remained loyal, questions were still asked about the men he led. At a clandestine meeting of disaffected gentlemen from Cowal toward the end of May, it was suggested that many of Breadalbane's men were secretly sympathetic towards Argyll and might be ripe for recruitment to the rebel cause. The Secret Committee found these claims so plausible that they wrote to Atholl strenuously advising him to exercise caution.<sup>24</sup> There is in fact no firm evidence that Breadalbane faced such dissent, and certainly none that it undermined his contribution to the government war effort. But the fact that gossip existed at all reflects not only widespread and enduring suspicion that clanship was inherently subversive, but also the central importance of kinship as a recruiting agent for Argyll.

Nonetheless, support for Argyll could be rooted in issues other than clan obligation. Fear was one; Breadalbane noted in late May that many of Argyll's adherents had joined him simply in order to protect their livestock from destruction.<sup>25</sup> This, of course, became a handy excuse after Argyll's defeat, as in the case of more than forty erstwhile rebels later tried on Islay:

The pannellis all of them acknowledged ther going out of Ila with the late Argyll, but were compelled by force and fear, being threatened with fyre and sword by ane number of armed men ... They had not the lest prejudice against the king or government, and in evidence therof they made ther escape and deserted him from tyme to tyme as occasion offered.<sup>26</sup>

As well as those allegedly forced into rebellion, Argyll's small army contained some adventurers or other individuals seeking personal gain – men like James Omer, identified after the rebellion as

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<sup>23</sup> NRS, GD112/39/137/22, Lady Essex Griffin to Breadalbane, 28 May 1685.

<sup>24</sup> HMC, *Athole*, p. 13 and at p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> C. Innes (ed.), *The Book of the Thanes of Cawdor* (Edinburgh, 1859), p. 373.

someone who ‘took severall horses both from loyall persones and lykewayes from rebells’.<sup>27</sup> It was even suggested that some merely turned out in order to acquire the new weapons being distributed by Argyll, melting away once they had acquired their guns.<sup>28</sup> The rebel-cum-bandit was a common sight – during Argyll’s time on Bute, according to the rebel and diarist John Erskine of Carnock, the ‘Highlanders ... committed many abuses, by plundering people’s houses, killing and hoching kine sheep and lambs’ – and it persisted beyond the point of defeat.<sup>29</sup> William Douglas, 3<sup>rd</sup> duke of Hamilton suggested at the end of June that a military presence remained necessary on his lands because they had still not been ‘fried of the highlanders’. Even a month later, the Treasurer, William Douglas, 1<sup>st</sup> duke of Queensberry, was still complaining of ‘sculking Rebels’ who had not submitted.<sup>30</sup> That some of Argyll’s erstwhile partisans remained active weeks after the dispersal of the rebel force might suggest that they were simply waiting to see how the wider political situation developed, but it might also imply that it was plunder, not principle which was uppermost in their minds.

But these were all minority concerns. Aside from kinship, only one other motivating factor might be described as significant. Allan Macinnes has demonstrated that religious affiliation was a major factor in determining Highland loyalties during periods of Jacobite activity, and while it would be difficult to make the same claim for Argyll’s rising, the religious dimension should be acknowledged.<sup>31</sup> In the declaration which he famously had printed and distributed shortly after landing in Scotland, Argyll was careful to present his motivation as religious. Ever since the Restoration, he claimed, Charles II and James VII (the latter referred to only as the ‘Duke of York’ in token of the rebels’ rejection of his kingship) had been engaged in a diabolical plot to undo the godly reforms of the Covenanters, relying upon arbitrary and tyrannical expedients to reintroduce Popery. Having thus justified rebellion, the declaration proceeded to set out three broad aims: a true and pure

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<sup>27</sup> NRS, SC54/17/4/2/3, ff. 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> Macleod, *Journal*, p. 125; Hume, ‘Narrative’, at p. 42 and at p. 53.

<sup>29</sup> Macleod, *Journal*, p. 122.

<sup>30</sup> NRS, Hamilton Papers, GD406/1/3324, Queensberry to Arran, 23 July 1685; NRS, GD406/1/7551, Hamilton to Arran, 30 June 1685.

<sup>31</sup> Macinnes, *Clanship*, pp. 181-181.

Presbyterian Church would be established; Popery and idolatry would be eradicated; and the mechanisms of arbitrary power would be dismantled.<sup>32</sup> While arguably not as audacious as the manifesto later produced by Monmouth – not least because Argyll, while implicitly rejecting James VII's right to the throne, offered no overt programme for replacing the king with another claimant – Argyll's was still a bold and uncompromising declaration which cast him as a Presbyterian champion. This message was further emphasised by the banners created for his army, which bore the motto 'For the Protestant Religion' and 'Against Popery, Prelacy and Erastianism', and by Argyll's personally pious behaviour, especially during the final hours of his life.<sup>33</sup>

The rebels' overtly spiritual and nonconformist posture has sometimes been described as a mistake, not just because their radicalism alienated moderate opinion, but also because, in the words of Patrick Hume, religion 'was no motive to the Highland comons, for they neither understood nor valued' it.<sup>34</sup> Yet – no doubt taking its cue at least in part from the earl himself – Argyllshire boasted a rather more vibrant dissenting tradition than is sometimes allowed. There was for example a staunchly Presbyterian community clustered around Campbeltown in the presbytery of Kintyre, while the neighbouring presbytery of Dunoon became well known during the Restoration as a site of intense conventicling activity, especially around Strathmore.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, there are some indications that religion may have been a motivating factor for some of Argyll's supporters. At a lieutenancy court held shortly after the rebellion, testimony was collected about two 'seditious sermons' allegedly held by the rebels at Lochhead (Campbeltown) on 21 and 24 May.<sup>36</sup> The local minister, David Simpson,

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<sup>32</sup> *Declaration and Apology of the Protestant People, passim*; McAlister, 'James VII', p. 207.

<sup>33</sup> MacLeod, *Journal*, p. 119; McAlister, 'James VII', p. 115; NRS, GD406/1/3225, Unknown to Arran, 1 July 1685; Robert Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the Restoration to the Revolution*, 4 vols (1828-40), iv, p. 303 and at pp. 305-06; NRS, Campbell of Stonefield Papers, GD14/5, 'An Epitaph on The late Earl of Argyle, writ by himself 1685. Found amongst some Papers'.

<sup>34</sup> Hume 'Narrative', at p. 42; Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 77-78; Paterson, *No Tragic Story*, pp. 104-05.

<sup>35</sup> National Library of Scotland, Campbells, Earls of Argyll, MS.975, f. 13r, W. Ralston and John Cunningham to Argyll, 26 November 1672; A.D. Kennedy, 'The Condition of the Restoration Church of Scotland in the Highlands', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 65:2, 2014, pp. 309-326.

<sup>36</sup> MacLeod, *Journal*, p. 119.

reported that most of the ethnically Lowland population had withdrawn from the parish church in order to attend these meetings, and it was further suggested by several witnesses that a number of children had been illegally baptised. In the end, enough evidence was found to fine nearly 100 people for attending these sermons.<sup>37</sup> Later, in October, an additional sixteen individuals were cited for communing with outlawed preachers.<sup>38</sup> That all of this was happening in one of the more conventionally nonconformist parts of Argyllshire indicated that, while Argyll's message of a Presbyterian crusade was hardly likely to attract a stampede of supporters from the Highlands generally, it could be an effective means of reinforcing his appeal within certain sectors of his heartlands.

If patterns of support for Argyll's cause reveal something of the dynamics of Scottish society in the later seventeenth century, the nature of the loyalist response is equally suggestive. The government had been expecting some kind of insurrection from Argyll ever since his forfeiture and flight in 1681, and indeed throughout the early 1680s various efforts had been made to secure Argyllshire from potential rebel attack, most significantly by granting Atholl a lieutenancy to secure the shire in 1684.<sup>39</sup> However, preparations grew much more intense in the months following James' accession in February 1685, as intelligence about Argyll's imminent rising began to trickle in. A proclamation of 28 April put the kingdom in a posture of defence, and in particular placed shire militias (where extant) and fencible men on alert. The militia was formally called out on 9 May. On 11 May, a general muster of all heritors with more than £100 valued rent was called, and eight days later this was extended to cover all heritors.<sup>40</sup> According to one estimate, these call ups, combined

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<sup>37</sup> NRS, SC54/17/4/2/3.

<sup>38</sup> NRS, SC54/17/2/12/6.

<sup>39</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, domestic series, of the reign of Charles II*, 27 vols (London, 1860-1947), xxvii, p. 104; P.H. Brown *et al* (eds.), *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, Third Series, 1661-91* [hereafter *RPCS*], 16 vols (Edinburgh, 1908-70), ix, pp. 81-83; Lauder, *Historical Notices*, ii, p. 547.

<sup>40</sup> *RPCS*, xi, pp. 29-31, pp. 40-42 and at p. 46.

with the regular army, produced a nominal force of 60,000 men.<sup>41</sup> All this is reflective of the single most striking trend in Scottish governance in the later seventeenth century, namely the rising military capacity of the Scottish state. The military was always the largest item of public expenditure during the reigns of Charles II and James VII; this only paid for a modest standing army (up to about 3,000-strong) and a handful of garrisons, but was augmented by the creation in 1668-69 of the militia, a means of maintaining armed forces at private, rather than public expense.<sup>42</sup> Such militarism, amply borne out by the massive mobilisation orders of 1685, underpins Maurice Lee's suggestion that Restoration Scotland was controlled by 'an arbitrary regime dependent on military force'.<sup>43</sup>

Lee's thesis is compelling, but it should not obscure the fact that, on account of mundane administrative and financial challenges, the government was never quite as militarily strong in practice as it seemed in theory.<sup>44</sup> In part because of this, the Restoration regime had developed a track record of raising and exploiting irregular forces, especially from the Highlands. Highland recruitment into the standing army seems to have been minimal, and Highlanders had been thought so unreliable that the militia was seriously under developed in the Highland shires, but it was judged safe periodically to exploit the armed retinues of senior chiefs as augmentation for the government's own power – the infamous 'Highland Host' of 1678, incorporating Highlanders levied by the earls of Atholl, Moray, Perth, Mar and Caithness (later Breadalbane), was only the most obvious example.<sup>45</sup> This tendency was also reflected in the response to Argyll. On 17 May, just after the rebel landing,

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<sup>41</sup> John Lauder, *Historical Selections from the Manuscripts of John Lauder of Fountainhall* ed. D. Laing (Edinburgh, 1837), p. 165.

<sup>42</sup> R. Lee, 'Government and Politics in Scotland, 1661-1681' (University of Glasgow, PhD thesis, 1995), p. 129 and at pp. 130-31; B.P. Lenman, 'Militia, Fencible Men, and Home Defence, 1660-1797' in N. Macdougall (ed.), *Scotland and War AD79-1918* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 170-92, at pp. 170-84.

<sup>43</sup> M. Lee, *'Dearest Brother': Lauderdale, Tweeddale and Scottish Politics, 1660-1674* (Edinburgh, 2010), pp. 316-17.

<sup>44</sup> Harris, *Restoration*, p. 112; C. Jackson, *Restoration Scotland, 1660-1690: Royalist Politics, Religion and Ideas* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 81-82; Lee, 'Government and Politics', pp. 129-36.

<sup>45</sup> *RPCS*, v, pp. 300-04. For more on Restoration militarism in the Highlands, see Kennedy, *Governing Gaeldom*, chapter 3.

the Privy Council dispatched letters to fourteen Highland chiefs asking them to raise a total of 4,200 troops from amongst their tenants and dependents. George Gordon, 1<sup>st</sup> duke of Gordon was given the largest burden – 600 men – as well as nominal command of the clan levies, but substantial contingents were also expected from John Mackenzie, master of Tarbat, George Gordon, lord Strathnaver, Kenneth Mackenzie, 3<sup>rd</sup> earl of Seaforth, George Sinclair, 6<sup>th</sup> earl of Caithness, and the chiefs of the MacLeans, Grants, Frasers of Lovat, MacDonalds of Glengarry, MacDonalds of Clanranald, MacDonalds of Sleat, Camerons of Lochiel and Mackintoshes.<sup>46</sup> All this, of course, was over and above the several hundred men already offered by Breadalbane and the 2,000 or so promised by Atholl himself, who, in his continuing capacity as lieutenant of Argyllshire, retained overall control of the campaign on the ground.<sup>47</sup>

The theoretically enormous muster enacted to counter Argyll was however undermined by a number of factors, not least strategic considerations. The Secret Committee revealed its thinking in a letter to Breadalbane on 23 May:

As to the forces in the west wee are of opinion that they are more usefull at present in the west then with yow, our reasones are, that certainly Marquis Atholl ... will be hard enough for all that argyle can, and more than he designs to out in that place; and there is great ground for your lordships opinion that if he have any designe of consequenc it must be in air-shyre or Galloway and therfor a good levy in all prudence is to be posted there.<sup>48</sup>

This stance originated with the king himself. James was convinced that the Argyllshire landings were a distraction, and that the real attack – and the real danger – lay in a potential rising of the disaffected Covenanters of the south west.<sup>49</sup> He focused, therefore, on using his formal military resources to block the rebels' path south; the regular army was permitted to advance no closer than Glasgow, while

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<sup>46</sup> *RPCS*, xi, pp. 43-45; HMC, *Athole*, p. 19; Fraser, *Earls of Cromartie*, i, p. 41; W. Fraser (ed.), *The Chiefs of Grant*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1883), ii, pp. 25-26 and at p. 90; W. Fraser, (ed.), *The Sutherland Book*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1892), pp. 41-42.

<sup>47</sup> Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, pp. 217-18.

<sup>48</sup> NRS, GD112/39/137/15, Secret Committee to Breadalbane.

<sup>49</sup> Edgeworth, *true and faithful account*, p. 5; Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Fifteenth Report, Appendix, Part VIII. The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, preserved at Drumlanrig Castle*, 2 vols (London, 1897), i, p. 110.



the bulk of the militia remained stationed around Ayrshire and Renfrewshire.<sup>50</sup> This preoccupation with hemming Argyll in was confirmed repeatedly over the course of the crisis. At the start of June, having already reported that all the passes from Argyllshire into the Lowlands were guarded, the new commander-in-chief, George Douglas, 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Dumbarton occupied himself moving his men towards Largs so as to repel a rumoured rebel landfall in Ayrshire. Later, in mid-June, upon receiving reports that Argyll was preparing to break towards Stirling, the Secret Committee intemperately implored Atholl to attack, while also hurriedly moving the militia of Clackmannanshire to reinforce the town.<sup>51</sup>

Resource management likewise demonstrated that the government was determined to keep its main muscle in reserve to protect the Lowlands. Supplies were low; the Secret Committee ruefully reported on 21 May that ‘things are not as wee would desyre in provisiones’, and George Mackenzie, 1<sup>st</sup> viscount of Tarbat went so far as to suggest that ‘necessity of dissipating for want of bread’ was a genuine concern.<sup>52</sup> Emergency measures therefore proved necessary. A one off tax (equivalent to one and three quarter months of cess, the main land tax of the Restoration) was levied on the burghs, and orders were given for requisitioning all excess food supplies in Ross-shire and Morayshire.<sup>53</sup> In this way, victual to a value exceeding £8,200 was successfully stockpiled in the main storehouse at Stirling Castle. But all of this did Atholl little good, since the government was determined that the bulk of these resources be reserved for the standing army and militia. Thus, only £384 worth of Stirling’s meal ever found its way to Atholl – and even then, it was only released on 15 June and amounted to less than half of the 1,000 bolls earlier promised. To assist Atholl in the meantime, commission was given to Sir Patrick Threepland, collector of the cess in Perthshire, to requisition

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<sup>50</sup> NRS, GD112/39/138/19, Atholl to Breadalbane, 26 May 1685; Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, pp. 203-04; Lauder, *Selections*, p. 165.

<sup>51</sup> HMC, *Athole*, p. 16; NRS, Erskine of Kellie and Mar Papers, GD124/15/180, Dumbarton to Mar, 30 May-1 June 1685; Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, p. 229; NRS, Treasury Vouchers: Argyll Rebellion, E28/346/35/3, Secret Committee to David Bruce of Clackmannan, 16 June 1685.

<sup>52</sup> Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, p. 203; Fraser, *Earls of Cromartie*, i, p. 41.

<sup>53</sup> *RPCS*, xi, p. 45; W. Mackay, H.C. Boyd and G.S. Lang (eds.), *Records of Inverness*, 2 vols (Aberdeen, 1911-24), ii, p. 332.

supplies within that sheriffdom. He provided 1,134 bolls, taken from five leading local lairds. There were other provisioning problems as well. Repeated undertakings to provide arms from the royal magazine, also at Stirling Castle, came to naught, and Atholl's force had to rely upon private stockpiles. Even clothing Atholl's men required emergency measures; a merchant named John Adam was given £1,500 to locate suitable attire for 'the highlanders presently employed in his Majesties service', and he used this money to buy 1,000 pairs of shoes and 1,000 ells of plaid in Musselburgh.<sup>54</sup> In short, the government's overriding concern as regards provisions was that enough be held in reserve to sustain the army and militia stationed in the south, a stance which reinforces the sense that its key strategic goal was to ensure that Argyll could not advance into the Lowlands.

With Scotland's formal military apparatus tied down, the active campaign came to rely almost exclusively on the irregular forces gathered under Atholl. Such an approach, which placed the burden of home defence upon private, local resources, had obvious advantages in terms of simplicity and cost effectiveness, but there were other positives as well. It is clear for instance that Atholl's campaign received a significant fillip from the fact that, thanks to centuries of highly successful aggrandisement in the west Highlands, the Argyll Campbells had many local enemies. For such people, siding with Atholl was seen as a chance to exact revenge on the hated *MacCailein Mór*, and nowhere was this impulse more gleefully reflected than in the work of the Keppoch MacDonald (and virulently anti-Campbell) poet Iain Lom, who gloried in Argyll's disgrace:

'S ann ort thàin' an dà latha  
Ged bha e grathann gun tighinn,  
Fhuair thu cùirt na bu leatha  
An déidh t'athair a mhilleadh;  
Ach gun aon bhuile claidheimh,  
Gun sàthadh gatha no sgine,  
Mar gum bàidhte na coinnlean  
Chaill thu t'oighreachd 's do chinneach.

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<sup>54</sup> Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, p. 213, pp. 223-24, pp. 229-30, pp. 231-32 and at pp. 237-38; NRS, Treasury Vouchers: Argyll Rebellion, E28/346/10, E28/346/35/4, E28/346/36/25.

[*What a change for the worse has come for you, although it was some time in coming; your prestige at court increased since your father was destroyed; but without a single sword blow or thrust of barb or dirk, as candles are extinguished, you lost your estate and kin*].<sup>55</sup>

Such sentiments help explain why Atholl's force of 'Highlanders' included contingents from several families, such as the Camerons, MacLeans and MacDonalds, from whose 'losse and misfortune', in the words of the Irish Catholic missionary John Cahassay, Argyll had 'builded up his uast estate and fortune'.<sup>56</sup> As historians have long noticed, this presaged developments a few years later, when the Jacobite movement's success amongst Highland families was greatly assisted by (although not wholly dependent upon) the Williamite stance of the Argyll Campbells.<sup>57</sup> The comparison is far from exact, however. Some of 1685's loyalists, like the Frasers of Lovat or the Gordons of Huntly, had turned Jacobite by 1689, while others, like the Breadalbane Campbells or Atholl men, flirted with James's cause. Conversely, and the Williamite bent of revolutionary Argyllshire was much more pronounced than had been its rebelliousness three years earlier. But if Argyll's rising cannot be characterised as a simple Jacobite dry run, it is striking that the broad local divisions which would mark Highland Jacobitism were already more or less in place during Argyll's rising.

At the same time, Atholl's nominal strength was augmented by some seeking to use the rebellion as a cover for straightforward plunder.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, so extensive was this tendency that, in the view of one witness, the war effort had by mid-June become little more than an exercise in mass theft:

I beginne to wearie of this campaigne, since I see it is not by faire feighting wee are lyke to have a speedie issew of it, for I have realie to tender a hairt to take plaisore in the Lowing of herds of cows, and bleeting of sheip, and shriking of women folowing them in to owre camp, and if my honore, which I am possiblie more tender off then is nessesaire for a man in my sircumstances, hade not obliged me, and will still, to stay so long as I think it concerned, I

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<sup>55</sup> John Macdonald, 'Oran do Mharcus Atholl' [A Song to the Marquess of Atholl] in *Orain Iain Luim: Songs of John Macdonald, Bard of Keppoch* ed. A.M. Mackenzie (Edinburgh, 1964), pp. 166-78, at pp. 174-75.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, at pp. 169-69 and at pp. 172-73; Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, pp. 257-58; Fraser, *Earls of Cromartie*, i, p. 41; Scottish Catholic Archives [currently relocating], Blair Letters, BL1/90/1, John Cahassy to Unknown 8 November 1685.

<sup>57</sup> Hopkins, *Glencoe*, p. 130; Paterson, *No Tragic Story*, pp. 145-146.

<sup>58</sup> Hopkins, *Glencoe*, pp. 101-02.

was never att a Lyffe more onplaisant to me, amongst such a pack as I could not have thought hade been on arth.<sup>59</sup>

By 2 June, the marquis was so conscious of the problem posed by ‘Thieves and Robbers’ committing depredations under the cover of his name that he established an armed watch between Glen Shira and Glenaray, designed to prevent marauders from entering Argyllshire.<sup>60</sup> The situation was particularly troublesome immediately after the rebels’ defeat in late June, when the disbanding levies simply pillaged their way home. The Camerons of Lochiel were especially associated with such activity, but reports also surfaced involving the MacGregors, MacDonalds, MacLeans, MacNaughtons and Appin Stewarts, as well as the contingents commanded by Lord Strathnaver and numerous individuals desirous of joining the feast.<sup>61</sup> Amongst the lands badly hit were Breadalbane’s Perthshire estates, something about which the earl, writing to Atholl, was clearly livid:

I am just now informed by my tennents in Glenorchay in Breadalbane that the brea of Lochaber men hav stolen ane hundreth gott from them. For Godsak secur us from these base villanes befor you leav that shyr, from these murthering base villans who never serv’d the King, and yet ther loyaltie must be cry’d up beyond my poor men who hav left all they hav to their mercie for to serv the King ... I am very angry.<sup>62</sup>

The ‘Atholl raids’ caused enormous damage. In Ardinglass alone, destruction exceeding £60,000 Scots were recorded. Elsewhere losses were smaller, but still significant – £2,000 Scots in Ellengreg, £6,200 Scots in Rosneath, nearly £10,000 Scots in Cowal. The cultivated woodlands around Inveraray Castle were later calculated to have sustained nearly £17,000 Scots of damage.<sup>63</sup> This

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<sup>59</sup> Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, pp. 241-42. This tendency towards theft was a problem for other sections of the royal forces as well – of the ‘highlanders’ serving under the Earl of Arran it was observed that ‘so shun as the son begenes to rayes in the morning they run to the helles Layk beies to geder honey and all the day ther is nothing bout complentes of thiuing and robrie uich ther ofeseres sayess thay can not get help of’. NRS, GD406/1/3352, Alexander Bruce to Arran, 13 June 1685.

<sup>60</sup> Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, pp. 221-22 and at pp. 249-50.

<sup>61</sup> Anon., *An Account of the Depredations Committed on the Clan Campbell, and their Followers, During the Years 1685 and 1686* ed. Kincaid, A. (Edinburgh, 1816), *passim*.

<sup>62</sup> Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, p. 256.

<sup>63</sup> *Account of the Depredations*, pp. 1-19; Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, p. 265.

extensive theft and destruction reflects how the lure of easy personal gain drew in supporters for the government.

The pillaging associated with the government campaign also reflects the key disadvantage of relying on clan levies. These were irregular troops, many glorying in their hatred of the Campbells, and Atholl's control over them was tenuous at best. The result was not only short term chaos, but also longer term destabilisation, as the commissioners for pacifying the Highlands observed in May 1686:

The highlands by reasone of the Late trowbles therin and the Libertie quich the highlanders did then take to themselves Have casten off much of the former obedience to quich they were formerly reduced.<sup>64</sup>

The prominence of clan levies was potentially disadvantageous for other reasons as well. Chiefs could not necessarily be relied upon to muster their men in a sufficiently timely fashion – the MacDoanlds of Glencoe, Stewarts of Appin and MacDougalls, all of whom were expected to join Atholl, had still not done so by 31 May, much to the annoyance of the Secret Committee. Meanwhile, it took time to get the more northerly levies into position. The Grant contingent, for example, was still in Strathspey in the first week of June, while Gordon's men had only reached Perthshire by the time of Argyll's defeat. Neither, as a result, saw active service against the rebels.<sup>65</sup> A perhaps more serious problem was raised by John Keith, 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Kintore, who warned on 30 May that Atholl should 'be vpon your guard, as weill with some that ar with you as open enimies'.<sup>66</sup> The question marks surrounding the loyalty of the Campbell contingents have already been noted, and there were also suspicions that smaller clans, like the MacAllisters or MacDougalls, might be sympathetic towards the rebels. Claims of treachery also surrounded the notoriously slippery Lochiel. It was alleged, not least by Argyll himself, that the Cameron chief acted as his spy in the government camp, relaying information either by letter or ambassador. Lochiel later denied any such double dealing, but the suspicion was not helped by a number of actions on his part – such as an attack on some of

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<sup>64</sup> NRS, PC8/7, Register of the Commissioners for Pacifying the Highlands, 1682-6, f. 25v.

<sup>65</sup> Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, pp. 219-20 and at pp. 237-38; Fraser, *Chiefs of Grant*, ii, p. 25; MacLeod, *Journal*, pp. 130-31.

<sup>66</sup> NRAS234, box 29I(4), 67, Kintore to Atholl, 30 May 1685; Hopkins, *Glencoe*, p. 100.

Atholl's men during the night of 9-10 June, or his failure to prevent Argyll escaping from Ellengreg into the Lowlands five days later – which, if not treacherous, were certainly inept.<sup>67</sup> Much of the speculation surrounding the loyalty of Atholl's men was far-fetched (at one point it was even claimed, most implausibly, that the MacLeans, who had spent much of Restoration locked in a bitter feud with the Campbells, would be willing to join Argyll), and some of it was no doubt based upon rebel misinformation, but that it existed at all demonstrates the essential instability of the loose coalition fighting under Atholl.

Reliance upon personal levies also complicated central supervision of the war effort. Having decided to hold both the regular army and the militia in reserve and instead out-source the conflict to Atholl and other local elites, the government's own role was largely limited to its hit-and-miss efforts to provide supplies, and to offering intelligence; it was for instance the Secret Committee which informed Atholl on 30 May of a supposed plot on the part of the gentleman of Cowal to feign desertion from Argyll, infiltrate the loyalist camp and undermine its war effort by spreading misinformation or stimulating desertions.<sup>68</sup> The only significant government contribution came not from Scotland, but from England, in the form of a small fleet of five ships of the Royal Navy dispatched by the king. Having already worked to secure the south west coast, these had by early June succeeded in blockading Argyll's tiny flotilla at Ellengreg, which castle they bombarded and captured on 15 June.<sup>69</sup>

Otherwise, the government was reduced to shouting suggestions from the sidelines. Although official advice (especially from Dumbarton) repeatedly warned Atholl not to engineer too hasty a confrontation, growing impatience as the rebellion progressed led the government to urge a more punitive and aggressive stance. On 20 May, the Secret Committee ordered Inveraray to be burned,

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<sup>67</sup> Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, pp. 260-64; HMC, *Athole*, p. 18; Fraser, *Earls of Cromartie*, i, p. 40; Lauder, *Notices*, ii, p. 661; NRS, GD112/39/139/5, Atholl to Breadalbane, 8 August 1685.

<sup>68</sup> Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, pp. 214-16; HMC, *Athole*, p. 13 and at p. 14.

<sup>69</sup> *CSPDJ*, i, pp. 217-18; Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, p. 232 and at pp. 236-37; Edgeworth, *true and faithful account*, p. 5; Anonymous, *An Account of the Most Remarkable Fights and Skirmishes Between His Majesties Forces, And the Late Rebels in the Kingdom of Scotland* (London, 1685), p. 4; Hume, 'Narrative', at p. 54.

along with the homes of all rebels. On 27 May, Tarbat, believing that an overly timid approach would allow Argyll either to fortify himself at Tarbert or escape into the south western shires, pointedly advised Atholl that ‘if yee fight him and beat him, that is the best of all’.<sup>70</sup> More orders from the Secret Committee on 31 May demanded that Atholl kill anybody not actively assisting him. By 15 June, the Chancellor, James Drummond, 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Perth, was complaining to Breadalbane that ‘uee long to hear you have got that little wildcat ferretted out of Argyle or Els beat for it keeps heart in some folks, that it is so long of Doing’.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Perth’s bloodlust survived the defeat of rebels; on 23 June he ordered the execution of all Argyllshire’s rebellious heritors, as well as exemplary execution of 100 of the ‘chief ringleaders of the tennents’.<sup>72</sup> Atholl sensibly ignored this instruction.

The government’s tendency towards issuing histrionic orders was in part a reaction to Atholl’s generally cautious strategy. He was at pains to avoid engaging too early, and certainly not until he had merged his own levies with Breadalbane’s and the small garrison force stationed under Bellechin at Inveraray.<sup>73</sup> He did not reach Argyllshire until early June, at which point he stationed his force at Inveraray and remained there for nearly a fortnight, not wishing to move lest doing so provide an opening for Argyll to slip past, either deeper into Argyllshire or into the Lowlands.<sup>74</sup> In this, Atholl was heartily supported by Breadalbane, who recognised that time was on the government’s side and therefore argued (not least to the overly belligerent Bellachin) that a defensive posture was most appropriate.<sup>75</sup> But such a strategy looked very strange from Edinburgh, where it was always expected, as Hamilton put it on 8 June, that ‘some ingagment betuixt [Argyll] and Atholl’ was imminent; indeed, Kintore repeatedly warned that Atholl’s caution gave his enemies ample ammunition maliciously to question his ability and resolve as a general.<sup>76</sup> Government frustration

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<sup>70</sup> NRAS234, box 29I(4), 58, Tarbat to Atholl, 27 May 1685.

<sup>71</sup> NRS, GD112/39/138/5, Perth to Breadalbane, 15 June 1685.

<sup>72</sup> Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, p. 200, pp. 219-20, pp. 212-13, pp. 231-33 and at pp. 246-47.

<sup>73</sup> NRS, GD112/69/137/18, Atholl to Breadalbane, 25 May 1685.

<sup>74</sup> Edgeworth, *true and faithful account*, p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> HMC, *Athole*, pp. 19-20; Murray, *Atholl and Tullibardine*, i, pp. 220-22.

<sup>76</sup> NRS, GD406/1/7552, Hamilton to Arran, 8 June 1685; NRAS234, box 29I(4), 43, Kintore to Atholl, 25 May 1685. At least one Gaelic poet, Alexander Robertson of Bohespic, echoed this sense

was rendered more acute by a lack of reliable intelligence (a dearth which the Council attempted to fill in early June by having the magistrates of both Kilsyth and Linlithgow create a temporary system of horse relays to shuttle information between Glasgow and Edinburgh), but also by a sense of powerlessness, as betrayed on 31 May when the Secret Committee told Breadalbane ‘wee can give no orders but leave all to God and your Conduct’.<sup>77</sup> Arms-length oversight of this kind was a natural consequence of the ‘fog of war’, especially when the campaign involved dispatching an irregular force into a peripheral region, yet the steadily rising hysteria which characterised the government’s interaction with Atholl suggest that it found such constraint deeply uncomfortable.

As well as overseeing the military campaign, it fell to Atholl, in his capacity as lieutenant of Argyllshire, to oversee the wider pacification of the region. Notwithstanding Perth’s call for a course of exemplary executions, Atholl’s activities were relatively restrained. Already on 8 June he had drafted a proclamation of indemnity, offering pardon to all of the ‘commons of those tua Shyres of Argyll and Tarbert’ who had been ‘forced and prest by the rebels to Joyne with them’, providing they laid down their arms and swore an oath of allegiance. Twenty nine copies of this declaration were ordered to be distributed across the region – nine in the division of Kintrye, eight in Argyll, seven in Cowal and five in Lorne.<sup>78</sup> On 14 July, after Argyll’s defeat, Atholl issued an order requiring all ministers to compile lists of rebels within their parishes – the resulting registers named 1,081 individuals.<sup>79</sup> Some of these (just over 200 people) were dealt with, principally by means of fining and forfeiture, through a series of lieutenancy courts at Lochhead and Mull, presided over by Atholl’s deputies (Bellechin, John Boyle of Kelburne and John MacNachtan, sheriff depute of Argyllshire)

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of dissatisfaction with Atholl’s caution, writing incredulously in the song ‘Latha Cheann Loch-Fine’ [The Day of the Battle at the Head of Loch Fyne], that ‘On the day of the battle at the head of Loch Fyne, when we crouched on the hillside, our commander held us back from capturing our foes! We got a week’s training marching to meet Archibald, and it is we who were angry when we were turned back’. Quoted in J.A. Maclean, ‘The Sources, particularly the Celtic Sources, for the History of the Seventeenth Century in the Highlands’ (University of Aberdeen, PhD thesis, 1939), pp. 213-214.

<sup>77</sup> NRS, E28/346/36/19-20; NRS, GD112/39/137/27, Secret Committee to Breadalbane, 31 May 1685.

<sup>78</sup> NRS, SC54/17/4/11/1.

<sup>79</sup> NRS, SC54/17/4/11/2, SC54/17/5/2.



between August and November. Simultaneously, Atholl borrowed a central plank of wider Restoration Highland policy by demanding, on 8 September, that all ‘Heretors Freeholders Woodsetters Lyfrenters and Tacksmen’ offer bonds for the peaceable behaviour of their dependents as well as assuming responsibility for spoliations committed by them during the rebellion itself – a policy which attracted vehement protest from some Campbell lairds who regarded it as a ‘too sevear measure of Iustice’.<sup>80</sup> The government would continue to regard Argyllshire with suspicion for much of the remainder of James VII’s reign, but by the end of 1685 it felt sufficiently confident to allow Atholl’s lieutenancy to lapse in favour of resurrecting the commission of pacifying the Highlands. The marquis himself, despite attempted reassurance from Melfort, regarded this as a personal snub engineered by his enemies.<sup>81</sup>

The comparatively muted reprisals which followed in the wake of the rebels’ defeat reflect the general insignificance of the threat posed by Argyll. Despite genuine concern in the opening months of 1685, his rebellion had never really presented a significant challenge, and to that extent, historians are right to have paid it scant attention. Yet if Argyll’s rising was a damp squib, it revealed in its failure much about the socio-political dynamics of late-seventeenth-century Scotland, and the Highlands in particular. Argyll, along with many other observers, seems to have assumed that his position as the major clan chief in the western Highlands would be sufficient to sustain a major campaign – that, in effect, he could lead a clan rising. But in this he was seriously mistaken, because Highland society was already by the later seventeenth century well advanced in the process of locating clanship within a much broader matrix of formal and informal power; the ties of kin were now routinely supplemented by other sources of authority, such as formal possession of landed titles, service in the government bureaucracy, religious engagement (usually, but not always through the established Church of Scotland), residence in Edinburgh and/or London, and conspicuous consumption – exactly the same strategies, in fact, which marked lordly authority elsewhere in

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<sup>80</sup> NRS, SC54/17/2/12/32, SC54/17/4/11/4. While all this was going on, more robust reprisals – execution or transportation – were being undertaken against the most senior rebels by the Privy Council and High Court of Justiciary.

<sup>81</sup> HMC, *Athole*, p. 25; NRS, GD112/39/139/5, Atholl to Breadalbane, 8 August 1685.

Scotland. Certainly the Gaelic side of Argyll's identity offered him some scope for mustering a force of dependents, but the unspectacular progress of his rising demonstrated that clanship alone was no longer enough to guarantee power in the Highlands, far less in Scotland more generally.

Similarly, the government's response to Argyll said much about the nature and development of the Restoration regime. Ever since 1660, Charles II's monarchy had been working to equip itself with the ideological and coercive trappings of absolutism. This was a multi-faceted project which involved developments in several areas, including heightened parliamentary management, judicial stringency, tighter censorship and heavier taxation, but its key prop was a greatly expanded, if still by international standards fairly modest military establishment. The famous boast of John Maitland, duke of Lauderdale to Charles II that there was never 'a king so absolute as you are in poor old Scotland' may have been an exaggeration, but not grossly so.<sup>82</sup> Yet for all its absolutist pretensions, the government's resources were limited and it remained dependent upon the support and co-operation of local elites to keep the wheels of state turning. The campaign of 1685 neatly encapsulated this dichotomy. Despite a theoretically enormous mobilisation, general reluctance to risk scarce resources meant that frontline resistance was outsourced entirely to the irregular forces commanded by Atholl, who enjoyed precious little material support from, or oversight by, central authorities. Argyll, in short, may not have come close to overthrowing the Restoration regime, but his rebellion did highlight an on-going convergence between Highland and Lowland lordship, while also disrupting the facade of Stuart absolutism to expose the compromise between central and local power which remained at the heart of political life in Scotland.

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<sup>82</sup> O. Airy (ed.), *The Lauderdale Papers*, 3 vols (London, 1884-85), ii, p. 164.