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Finding solid ground for soldiers’ payment

‘Military soliciting’ as brokerage practice in the Dutch Republic (c.1600-1795)

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The problem of troops’ payment

All early modern states were caught between a lack of solvency and the staggering demands of soldiers’ pay. ‘The Charge of the Militia’, wrote the English political economist William Petty in his *Treatise of Taxes & Contributions*, ‘commonly is in ordinary as great as any other Branch of the whole, but extraordinary, (that is, in time of War, or fear of War) is much the greatest.’ Somewhat later, having gone through a period of major continental wars, Charles Davenant added: ‘Nothing dreins a Country so much as a Foreign War, where the Troops must be paid abroad’.

When Petty and Davenant wrote those lines, the three countries central to their considerations were France, England and the Dutch Republic. Between the Peace of Westphalia (1648) and the Peace of Utrecht (1713), those countries formed the heart of European great power struggles. All three faced the challenge of maintaining armies of escalating size. Although exact amounts of troops for this period are notoriously difficult to calculate and comparisons are even more haphazard, the trends are nonetheless clear. According to one calculation, the French army grew from 125,000 in 1648 to 340,000 during the Nine Years’ War. The English army grew from around 40,000 in the pre-Williamite era to an average of 93,000 men during the War of the Spanish Succession, and in the final year of this war, the British state had 144,650 men under arms. The Dutch army numbered 60,000 in 1643 during the last years of the Eighty Years’ War, passed the 100,000 mark during the Nine Years’ War and almost reached the figure of 120,000 men at the height of the War of the Spanish Succession (see figure 1).

Petty and Davenant summed up the most obvious problem with which early modern states were confronted in this context: the need to match the expansion of their armies with a proportional expansion of their treasuries. Figures 2, 3 and 4 give

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an indication what this meant for the province of Holland, which alone was responsible for 58 percent of troops’ payment in the Dutch Republic and therefore will be the main focus of this paper. Figure 2 shows the development of actual military expenses of the Province of Holland, as far as they could be reconstructed by Liesker and Fritschy. Figure 3 shows the monthly costs between 1644 and 1785 of the major categories of troops employed by this province (cavalry, dragoons, regular infantry and ‘others’, the latter category containing special units like marines, the Swiss companies, artillery etc. This graph does not include officers’ salaries).

Unfortunately, this breakdown had to be based on the ‘ordinary and extra-ordinary War Budget’ - appropriately called ‘State of War’ in the Dutch Republic - containing only ex-ante expenses. These could differ greatly from the actual expenses shown in figure 3. Still, they at least give a good impression of individual costs of different parts of the army. Figure 4 gives the costs of troops’ payment as a percentage of the total ex-ante expenses on the ordinary and extra-ordinary War Budget (excluding costs of the navy). The graph underlines Petty and Davenant’s observations. Only in two years – 1715 and 1716 – did troops’ payment form less than 55 percent of the total military budget. For most of the period, it comprised around 60 per cent of expenses or more.

The impact of warfare on financial systems has been a continuing source of research and debate among historians. In recent years, this debate has revolved around the concept of the ‘fiscal-military state’, focusing on the ways in which rulers formalized and bureaucratized the subtraction of resources in the context of military competition. This puts a strong emphasis of the question of state revenues, indeed one of the major preoccupations of early-modern rulers. However, not only the collection of revenues, but also the question how to make sure that they were spent well was a permanent source for headache. Army pay did not only require vast sums of money. It demanded that those sums arrived on time. In order to provide large numbers of armed men with the monthly pay required to keep them loyal and effective, money had to flow into and out of the state treasury with iron regularity. For

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this regularity, even those early modern states such as the Dutch Republic that could profit from a relatively well organized system for taxation were wholly inadequate. Furthermore, transferring large sums of money – and especially transferring those sums abroad – required a financial infrastructure that in many cases did not exist, or was not easily accessible to the state.

A further problem connected to war expenditure was the high price of non-compliance. Throughout the War of the Spanish Succession, the Dutch rulers struggled to find the necessary funds for maintaining their biggest army so far. Gluts in the financial flow could form an immediate danger to fighting capacity, as is clear from the correspondence of the ruling Dutch statesman Anthony Heinsius. In 1704, he received a letter warning that it was impossible to equip the troops due to ‘non-payment’. And in a letter of 30 March 1711, Heinsius told a high Amsterdam official that the King of Prussia had sent an emissary, threatening that the Prussian troops in pay of the Republic would not march until arrears were met. ‘Meanwhile’, Heinsius said, ‘everything is ready for the march, and will fall into complete disorder when this will be postponed.’ A couple of days later, when the demands of the King of Prussia were hurriedly met, he noted with a combination of relief and worries for the future: ‘The marching orders for the troops have been sent; the formation of the army will suffer a delay of ten days. God protect us against more of such accidents. It causes me great pains to see how little money we have in our treasury.’

Heinsius’ worries were those of every early-modern statesman at war. In order to close the gap between payday and the moment when the state finally managed to cough up the resources to fulfill their obligations, intricate systems had to be developed in which financial middlemen or agents played pivotal roles. In various forms, companies and regiments employed their own private financiers who could advance the credit at times when money from their formal (state) paymasters was not forthcoming. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, captains had often functioned as their own financiers, a situation stemming from the area in which the

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13 Ibid, 696.
nobility was still central in providing sovereigns with their armies. This practice fitted well with a system in which captains ran their companies as small businesses, renting out their troops to the state, controlling recruitment, and building their own private connections with suppliers of food, fodder, arms and clothing. Fritz Redlich described this system in his classical study of military entrepreneurship, in which he introduced the term ‘Kompaniewirtschaft’ in order to describe the financial dealings in and around the army: ‘Whatever else the company was and whatever the raison d’être of the Kompaniewirtschaft, the latter was a flourishing business organization and the captain the administrator of all funds set aside for it.’

However, with the growth of armies, states started to subordinate those company economies to regimental economies for the requisition of food, arms and clothing. In order to manage the growing complexity of regimental finances, captains and colonels increasingly had to rely on financial specialists. And since states regularly remained in arrears for many months, sometimes running up to several years, those specialists had to have easy access to increasingly large supplies of credit. In the course of the seventeenth century, financial agency thus became a central hub in the payment of troops, and the financial agents involved had to be found among a higher stratum of the capitalist class.

The existence of such financiers and the functions they performed within early modern armies are well known. However, most studies of those agents do not rise above the level of description of their financial dealings, and particularly their misdealings. Usher’s Dictionary of British Military History defines the British regimental agent as:

‘A regimental paymaster employed by the colonel of a regiment. A colonel had complete control of his regiment in the 17th and early 18th centuries and was also responsible for distributing the pay to the troops through his agent.

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14 For examples, see Steven Gunn, David Grummitt and Hans Cools, War, State and Society in England and the Netherlands, 1477-1559 (Oxford 2007) 177ff.
16 Based on the interest books of the financial agent Paulus Gebhardt, who during the Nine Years’ War helped to bridge arrears of between 13 and 28 months. National Archives The Hague (NA), Archive of Paulus Gebhardt, 3.01.47, no. 77.
The agent frequently transferred a large amount of the funds to his own pocket by various frauds.\textsuperscript{17}

In a rare article devoted to the wider institutional context in which military agents operated, A.J. Guy rightly noted that ‘In most cases the agents, English and Irish, remain obscure functionaries.’\textsuperscript{18} The same is true for the French army. Officials and businessmen involved in troops’ payment have traditionally been of so bad repute, that one historian could write that ‘[o]n serait tenté de croire qu’il n’y a que des malversateurs chez les Payeurs et que tous les Payeurs se laissent enlever leur caisse’.\textsuperscript{19} For the Dutch Republic, slightly more literature exists. However, the ‘solliciteurs militair’ – as the company and regimental agents were known – once again attracted most attention as likely suspects of large scale embezzlement and as subject for state regulation against fraud.\textsuperscript{20}

The place of intermediaries in early-modern trade and politics has attracted growing interest in the past few years.\textsuperscript{21} In a time when stable state institutions were still in the making, the international market for capital and goods was underdeveloped, and communication and exchange were highly insecure, personal networks were indispensible for financial transactions, long distance trade or political advance. \textit{Solliciteurs militair} thus operated in a larger environment, in which ‘soliciting’ was seen as an indispensible function of social and political life.\textsuperscript{22} The aim of this paper is to describe military financial agency in the Dutch Republic not primarily as a function (or malfunction) of company management, but as part of a wider nexus of relations between state and private capitalists in the organization of warfare. The independent position of \textit{solliciteurs militair} in troops’ payment was characteristic for a phase in

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} George Usher, Dictionary of British Military History (Bloomsbury, London 2003) 3.
\textsuperscript{21} E.g. Hans Cools, Marika Keblusek and Badeloch Noldus (ed), Your Humble Servant. Agents in Early Modern Europe (Hilversum 2006).
\textsuperscript{22} On the place of ‘soliciting’ in Dutch Republican bureaucracy, see Paul Knevel, Het Haagse Bureau. 17de-eeuwse ambtenaren tussen staatsbelang en eigenbelang (Amsterdam 2001) 167-168.
\end{flushleft}
European state formation that Charles Tilly described as the area of ‘brokerage’. In this period, ‘mercenary forces recruited by contractors predominated in military activity, and rulers relied heavily on formally independent capitalists for loans, for management of revenue-producing enterprises, and for installation and collection of taxes’. However, according to Tilly the period between 1700 and 1850 was characterized by the gradual replacement of ‘brokerage’ by ‘nationalization’: a form of organization in which the private entrepreneur was subordinated to the state official, and personal relations gradually made way for centralized, bureaucratic and impersonal or supra-personal arrangements. This paper will show to what extent the organization of troops’ payment in the Dutch Republic was affected by such processes, and in what ways solliciteurs militair responded to or resisted attempts to limit their role.

The origins of ‘military soliciting’

In 1650, the Improved and enlarged Political and Military Handbook of the State of the United Provinces of M.Z. Boxhorn gave a concise description of the by then well-established practice of ‘military soliciting’. The most important challenge for the state in paying the troops, he argued, was ‘to pay all of her soldiers their salaries every week or at most month, even though the General office is almost depleted or becomes impoverished’. Solliciteurs militair helped to solve this problem. The term ‘solliciteur’ in the early modern Netherlands had a wider use for brokers in politics and trade. The services of professional solliciteurs were used, for example, for sending requests to the Provincial States or the States General. In exchange for a fee, a solliciteur would make sure all the required formalities were attended to, and a well-connected solliciteur could also function as a sort of early modern lobbyist, using his contacts to open the right doors or make sure that a request landed at the right desk.

Solliciteurs militair did fulfill those general functions of ‘soliciting’, handing in requests and filing complaints for the captains or colonels in whose service they were. But as Boxhorn’s description makes clear, by the 1650’s their primary function

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24 M.Z.Boxhorn, Verbetert en vermeerdert Politijck en Militair Hantboecxken Vanden Staet der Geunieerde Provintien (’s Gravenhage 1674 [sixth imprinting; first imprinting 1650]) 63.  
25 Knevel, Het Haagse Bureau, 167.
was financial. During the first half of the seventeenth century, *solliciteurs militair* became the crucial link between the provincial treasury and the troops in the field. The process of troops’ payment started with the issuing of an ordinance by the Provincial States. The task of *solliciteurs militair* was to collect the money from the public office (*comptoir*) and transfer it to the company captains, who were responsible for paying the soldiers. If the public treasury ran out of funds (as happened more often than not), the *solliciteur* guaranteed the continuing of payment ‘either by his own means or by money received from others on interest’. Of course, they were not expected to do so out of sheer patriotism; ‘to do so,’ Boxhorn acknowledges, ‘those *solliciteurs* are driven by the hope for a large and secure profit’.\(^{26}\) The captains had to pay the *solliciteurs* a salary out of the money they received from the States, and above this sum the *solliciteurs* received an interest over the money they advanced. Especially in times of war, the interest payments could far surpass the salaries paid to the agent. Even at a quite moderate interest rate of 4 percent per year, if arrears ran up to 2.5 years (as happened during the Nine Years’ War) *solliciteurs* would receive 10 percent of the principal in interest payment.\(^{27}\)

When and how this system of ‘military soliciting’ started remains unclear. According to Zwitzer, the first mention of *solliciteurs militair* in the resolutions of the States General and the States of Holland dates from the years 1610-1611.\(^{28}\) However, *solliciteurs* already appear sporadically in resolutions from a much earlier date. In 1578, the States General gave orders for the mustering of the artillery train of General Querecques. The results of the muster would be used as the basis for paying the soldiers through ‘*quelque solliciteur ou agent, pour retirer des Estatz lettres de décharge de leur trésorier general, chascun sur sa province respectivement, pour recepvoir paiement, qui sera ausdites provinces défalqué sur leur moyens généraux*’.\(^{29}\) Significantly, the first attempts to limit the possibilities for *solliciteurs* and other agents to directly influence discussions within the States General date from the same period. A resolution from 1580 prohibited ‘*les agents, solliciteur et clercqz*

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\(^{26}\) Boxhorn, *Hantboecxken*, 63-64.

\(^{27}\) Taking into account that asking interest on interest was prohibited.

\(^{28}\) Zwitzer, ‘Controle op de rekeningen’, 78.

de la Généralité’ to enter the room where the general assembly took place, instead ordering them to knock the door without entering.30

The earlier date of origin of ‘military soliciting’ is of some significance. It suggests that this practice arose ‘from the ranks’ as one of many possible solutions to the chaos in army finances prevailing in the first decades of the Dutch Revolt, not as some well thought out strategy implemented from above. The resolutions of the States General of the early 1590’s still mention frequent cases in which companies were not paid at all for many months, sometimes resulting in mutiny.31 And similar problems continued to plague the Dutch Republic throughout the Eighty Years’ War.32 Various emergency solutions were put into practice, such as asking the rich States of Holland to advance the money for poorer provinces33, levying forced contributions on the Dutch countryside34, or drawing on the personal credit of high financial officials.35 Faced with such chaos, the need for a broker presenting their case to the States General and helping to solve the immediate problems arising from non-payment might have been greatest for companies operating far away from home. It is likely that the commanders of foreign troops did not have the same range of local political and economic contacts that were available to indigenous officers. In the 1580’s, Leicester continuously complained that the States General were not forthcoming with the necessary funds to pay the English companies their salaries, and in order ‘to keep the men from starving’ he had to take credit from English merchants who lived in the Netherlands.36 Indeed, for this early period Solliciteurs militair are mainly mentioned in connection to foreign companies. The German companies of Hohenlohe already employed a ‘solicitor or servant’ in the late 1580’s, who made requests for payment to the States General.37 In the first decade of the seventeenth century, the French regiments were served by the solliciteurs Esaias Châtelain and Pieter Parret38, and the

31 E.g. Ibid, OS Volume VII, 154-158.
33 Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal, OS Volume VII, 156.
34 Ibid. 166, and Leo Adriaenssen, Staatsvormend geweld. Overleven aan de frontlinies in de meierij van Den Bosch, 1572-1629 (Tilburg 2007) 202-204,
35 Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal, OS Volume VII, 169.
37 Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal, OS Volume VI, 123-124 and 129.
English companies employed several *solliciteurs* as well, who, next to finance, also played a role in finding accommodation.  

During the first decades of the seventeenth century, more and more companies employed *solliciteurs militair*, and this practice also spread to non-foreign regiments. This process went hand in hand with the first steps towards formalization of soliciting practices. In 1606 a number of solicitors, among whom the solicitor of the French regiments Châtelain, were summoned by the States General to take an oath, promising to observe the existing regulation for troops’ payment. And in 1608, the *Gecommitteerde Raden* of the province of Holland, responsible for the daily management of the affairs of the Provincial States, issued their first general order for the payment of troops through the intermediation of ‘the solicitors of the companies in The Hague’. However, it would be wrong to assume that in those early years, the business of military solicitors much resembled the relatively well-ordered system described by Boxhorn for the 1650’s. The terms on which soliciting took place seem to have been negotiated per case. In 1615, the merchants Caspar van Uffelen, Johan Baptista Colpin and Guido de la Maire offered to handle the payment of the garrisons in the Lands of Gulik, demanding 1.5 percent of the principal in interest, and a one month term for repayment. The Council of State did not agree on those conditions, doubting whether the captains would agree to contribute to such a high interest payment. To this, it added its own fears of a profiteering scheme, suggesting that the three merchants wanted to speculate on the differences in the exchange rate between The Hague and the provinces the money had to be transferred to. However, handling money transfers over larger distances could be a source of loss as well as gain. A serious matter for debate during those early years of soliciting was the question who would carry the risks of sending large amounts of money through insecure lands. In one case, French regiments garrisoned in a border area were withheld their wages

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40 Ibid, Volume XIII (Old Series), 673.
41 NA, Archive of the Gecommitteerde Raden van de Staten van Holland en Westfriesland, 3.01.05, no. 3291, Indices op de Resoluties 1624-1659.
43 In the Republic, army payment did not take place monthly but once every *Heeremaand* or pay month of 42 days, dividing the year in eight full pay months and one *korte Heeremaand* or short pay month of 29 days. At 1.5 percent per pay month, the yearly interest rate in this case would have amounted to 13 percent.
after the Province of Holland had supplied the funds, since neither the *solliciteurs* nor
the captains were willing to share the risks of transport.\textsuperscript{44}

Military soliciting only became widespread during the relative quiet of the
Twelve Years’ Truce with Spain (1609-1621). Resolutions dealing not with individual
*solliciteurs militair* but introducing regulation for *solliciteurs militair* as a group start
to arise in the 1620’s and 1630’s, when the war resumed in full force. A resolution
from the *Gecommitteerde Raden* of Holland from 1622 strengthened the position of
*solliciteurs militair* vis-à-vis the captains who employed them. It gave them the right
to redeem any outstanding debts when a captain died by selling the arms in possession
of the company involved. Furthermore, it prohibited captains from firing their
solicitors without the consent of the *Gecommitteerde Raden*.\textsuperscript{45} And in 1632, the
*Gecommitteerde Raden* of Holland resolved ‘to free and secure [the solicitors – PB]
from all accidents, whether through capture by the enemy or otherwise’, promising to
repay any money that was stolen or lost on the way to the frontlines.\textsuperscript{46} The
introduction of such regulations transformed military soliciting from one out of many
ad hoc solutions to the problem of non-payment, to the preferred way to organize the
payment of the troops.

*Consolidation*

Since the first mention of *solliciteurs militair* in the resolutions of the States General
of the 1570’s and 80’s, it had taken approximately half a century to arrive at the
situation in troops’ payment that was described by Boxhorn. From the resumption of
hostilities with Spain in 1621 onwards, the number of *solliciteurs militair* proliferated.
Unfortunately, it seems impossible to find anything approaching precise figures for
the number of solicitors who were active at this time. In part, this is a result of the
chaotic way in which soliciting contracts came about. Individual captains had the right
to choose their own solicitor, or even more than one. Solicitors did not have to be
appointed by the provincial authorities, and many aspects of the relationship between
captain and solicitor remained unregulated. However, from the resolutions of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[44] Ibid, 329.
\item[45] NA, Resoluties Gecommitteerde Raden van de Staten van Holland en Westfriesland, 1621-1795
(RGSH), 3.01.05, no. 3000, and Zwitzer, ‘Militie van den Staat’, 94.
\item[46] RGSH, no. 3000B, fol. 132 vso.
\end{footnotes}
It is possible to come to some tentative conclusions about the functioning of military soliciting in the Province of Holland before the introduction of stricter regulation in the 1670’s.

From the 1620’s onwards, solliciteurs militair figured frequently in the resolutions of Holland’s Gecommitteerde Raden. Sometimes, this happened in the context of general regulation. But most of the time, the Gecommitteerde Raden discussed individual cases. By far the most frequent mention of solliciteurs militair is made under the heading ‘Justitiële zaken’ (judicial affairs). For lack of clear guidelines, conflicts between captains and their solicitors over payment, interest rates, or the settling of debts could only be resolved on a case to case basis. In the indices of those resolutions for the period 1624-1659, at least sixty solicitors are mentioned by name. These are only the individuals for whom it is stated explicitly that they were solliciteurs militair. Many more resolutions deal with financial conflicts between officers and private persons without calling them solliciteurs, or between captains, solliciteurs and the small traders involved in supplying the troops. Some solliciteurs are mentioned more than one time over a longer period, allowing for conclusions about their staying power. For example, it is noticeable that De Bruyne, Van der Mast and Meurskens, three financial agents who were involved in the soliciting of French and English companies during the first and second decade of the seventeenth century, still appear in the resolutions of the 1630’s and, in the case of Van der Mast, even as late as 1651. The name Casembroot first appears in the resolutions of the States General in 1613, when he handed in a complaint about the large arrears into which the payment of troops had fallen, and again comes up in the 1620’s and 1630’s. In this case, the Casembroot mentioned in 1637 probably was a son of the first Casembroot. There are many more cases in which soliciting contracts were handed from father to son. Also, like in many other businesses in the Republic, widows often continued the soliciting contracts of their deceased husbands.

However, the resolutions not only give proof of the success of some businesses, but also of the troubles surrounding others. Since no rules existed to proscribe who could become solliciteurs militair, there also was no real system of control guaranteeing that those who entered this business had the necessary

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47 RGSH, no. 3291, Indices op de Resoluties 1624-1659.
48 Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal, NS Volume II, 82.
49 E.g. in the cases of Bonser and La Mair, two solicitors who were already involved in troops’ payment during the 1620, and whose widows were still active on the market during the 1640’s.
creditworthiness. Frequently, solicitors themselves ran into arrears, leaving the captains without the means to pay their troops. This resulted in many conflicts, and sometimes even in physical confrontation. A good example is provided by Paulus Maes, who in the late 1640’s was a frequent visitor of the offices of the Gecommitteerde Raden. In March 1649, a conflict between this solicitor and a soldier from one of the companies that he served ran up so high, that it ended in a fight. According to Maes, this ‘old and impotent soldier’ had insulted him on the streets. To the great dismay of the Gecommitteerde Raden, Maes had proceeded to hit him in the face until blood showed, and what was even worse, he had done so in the offices of one of the ushers of Holland’s treasury. The location of the crime was far more worrying to the authorities than the fate of the poor wretch that had been its victim, for a fight involving a solicitor in one of the offices of the provincial authorities ‘could only result in the diminution of Her Highly Esteemed and is incompatible with the respect which should always be shown at the offices and other premises of the land’. Paulus Maes was fined the sum of 30 guilders. 50

The Gecommitteerde Raden had ample reason to worry about the damage to their reputation that could result from cases such as this. In the immediate aftermath of the war with Spain, which had ended in 1648, expenditures for the troops had become a highly contested issue. In 1650, this even led to armed confrontation between stadtholder William II, who demanded the means to retain a large army, and the city of Amsterdam, that had already started to reduce the number of troops on its own account. As happened so often, the debate on war finances went hand in hand with a debate on the efficiency of state finances. Allegations of corruption were flying. In 1652, an anonymous pamphlet on the Sinews of War, and (next to God) the preservation of a Country argued for a stricter control of the accounts of the Receiver General, explicitly directing its attention to the possibilities for fraud in army expenses. The author reserved some special venom for the Province of Holland, ‘where by and by, affairs have been handled so horribly and godlessly’, accusing the personnel of the Receivers Office of profiting from the negotiating of payment ordinances. 51 As one possible solution to those practices, he suggested the precise,

50 RGSH, no. 3003, 26 March 1649.
51 Noodighe aenwysinge tot de uytwerckinge ende krachten, tot de Zenuen van Oorloge, ende (naest Godt) de Behoudenisse van een Landt (Rotterdam 1652) fo. 3 vso.
monthly payment of the troops by representatives ‘of the country’.\(^\text{52}\) This suggestion went to the heart of the existing practice, characteristic for the area of brokerage in military affairs, of paying the troops through the services of private intermediaries.

*Centralization stalled*

The anonymous pamphlet of 1652 does not stand alone. Just one year before, a commission had delivered a report to the States of Holland considering the possibilities of a system of ‘per capita payment of the militia’.\(^\text{53}\) Although the commission concluded that the introduction of such a system of direct, state controlled troops’ payment was not feasible, it spoke highly of the advantages it would entail:

> ‘Per capita payment - if a solid ground for this could be found, and if such were practicable by the deputies of the government itself - is judged by the commissioners to give a great splendor and respect to the State, and to bind the militia to the same with affection; also to be one of the surest means to avoid frauds and to enable the country in every respect to find the account of the soldiers, in quantity and quality.’

In fact, in a wonderfully concise way this short paragraph sums up three of the major reasons why many European states in the course of the eighteenth century would increasingly favor direct, non-brokerage systems of troops’ payment: to increase the power of the state within society, to extend its of control over its troops, and to close the existing venues for fraud at the state’s expense. But just as illuminating are the reasons given by the members of the committee why centralization in this area for the time-being remained a utopian idea.

First, the commissioners once again established the ‘uncontestable’ truth in troops’ payment: ‘that in order to maintain a well-conditioned militia, the soldiers need short, precise and regulated payment’. However, neither the magistrates in...
cities where the troops were garrisoned, nor the deputies of the *Gecommitteerde Raden*, nor deputies of the cities housing the Receivers’ Offices, could guarantee such a continuous flow of money. For the group of officials to whom the task of payment was assigned, this would immediately raise the question where to find credit, and according to the commissioners, without intermediation their chances of finding enough money in time were slight. Even if a remedy could be found for the irregularity in state income, the underdeveloped nature of the state bureaucracy would pose another barrier to centralization. If the task of paying the troops was left to local officials, this would bring back some of the worst problems in the existing system of troops’ payment;

‘considering, that among those (…), there are many persons of mean conditions, who will usually seek their own interests from one or another trade, and by this authority [over troops’ payment – PB] will try to gain some direction over Companies and officers’.

What makes this 1651 report so valuable is that it shows that in the minds of Dutch policy makers at the middle of the seventeenth century, troops payment, state access to the credit market, the strength and independence from private interests of the bureaucracy, and the dangers of corruption were closely interrelated problems. And in the eyes of the commissioners, these problems could not simply be overcome by the introduction of tighter control from above. Look at the Spanish king, ‘who despite so much supervision and control over the same payment, is being cheated more than anyone’. Similar weaknesses would prevent the introduction of a system of payment through national or provincial envoys, leading the commissioners to the conclusion that ‘it was not possible to find a foundation or reason by which to regulate per capita payment in such a way, that it could be introduced and practiced in good service and orderly fashion’. Attempts to introduce a system of direct payment therefore had to be referred to the future. For the time being, the report advised to concentrate on fighting the ‘frauds and disorders’ in the existing system by further regulation.

The irony is that for the much more thoroughgoing restructuring considered and rejected in the 1651 report, some favorable conditions existed during the 1650’s and early 1660’s that ceased to exist after this period. A brief lull from Great Power conflicts after the Peace of Munster allowed the Dutch Republic to cut back army
expenditure to an all time low (see figures 2-4). On the other hand, the loose group of often rather small scale *solliciteurs militair* had not yet coalesced into a stable pressure group that could mount serious resistance against attempts to limit their influence. Although the 1651 report did talk about the advantages of centralization, it ignored those factors that might actually have favored practical steps in this direction. Apart from the openly stated reasons a strong political bias almost certainly played a role, among others highlighted by the in the conditions of the time extremely unflattering reference to the Spanish crown. Stadtholder William II’s failed attack on Amsterdam and his death soon afterwards had greatly strengthened the anti-centralizing wing of the Dutch elite, led by the States of Holland. Its clash with William II had directly been connected to troops’ expenditures, and the Great Assembly called in the early months of 1651 was dominated by Holland’s fight for provincial autonomy and against the reconstitution of the stadtholderate. The measures taken at the Great Assembly effectively led to the diminution of central, union-wide arrangement in favor of the provinces. And at the same time, by strengthening the merchant-led regent party they also enhanced the partnership between state and private capital which formed the economic basis of brokerage practices. The turn against centralization of the 1650’s is an early example of the close connection between the persistence of brokerage practices, the provincial particularism that was strongly entrenched in the Dutch political system, and the commercial prosperity that allowed Dutch Republican rulers to rely on the market with much more success than any of its competitors.

With the 1651 report, suggestions to replace the system of military soliciting by a system of direct payment were silenced for a time. However, important new regulation was indeed introduced. One of the prime targets was to bar holders of public office from soliciting. This dealt directly with the allegations that financial agency was upheld in order to provide lucrative opportunities for individuals within the state apparatus. The charge was not entirely unwarranted. The intermingling of public office and military financial agency had long antecedents, and went up to the highest regions of administration. Already in the early 1590’s, Receiver General

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Philips Doubleth had advanced money for troops’ payment. In all likelihood, his family had continued this lucrative business. In 1659, a younger member of the Doubleth-clan was involved in judicial cases on soliciting that appeared before the Gecommitteerde Raden. It is not surprising that officials of lower rank tried to get a foothold in this business as well. Given the number of times that decrees had to be repeated and extended prohibiting soliciting by clerks, registrars and public accountants, it seems that separating the worlds of officialdom and financial agency remained an uphill battle.

A serious attempt to clear the accountancy offices was undertaken by the Gecommitteerde Raden in 1669. On 5 March of that year they declared that all clerks working for the treasury and the administrative department had to ‘effectively and actually quit and let go’ of the solicitation of companies. Two days later, clerks and accountants were summoned to appear before one of the commissioners of the States. Out of 23 officials who gave a statement that morning, six were involved in military soliciting. Clerk of the treasury Harman, audit officer Willem Bronsvelt and clerk of the secretary Willem Hulshout all ‘served’ more than one company. Arent and Philips Pijll, both working at the secretary, functioned as solicitors for the company of a close relative who was a captain. Accountant of the treasury Bellecherie tried to excuse himself by stating that he did not receive a salary for soliciting the company of count Maurits of Nassau, but ‘only was sometimes honored with an allowance or the like’. Nonetheless, after a stern admonition by his interlocutor, he had to promise to resign from his function as solicitor. But despite this apparent strictness, the long-term effect of those measures remained limited. In the Dutch Republic, where the worlds of politics and finance were so intimately interwoven, open or hidden routes between the one and the other could always be found.

1673: First attempt at reform

The invasion of 1672, one of the gravest crises the Republic went through in its entire existence, renewed the cry for a complete reform in the system of troops’ payment.

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55 Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal, OS Volume VII, 159.
56 On the Doubleth family, see ’t Hart, Bourgeois State, 193-194.
57 RGSH, no. 3018, 5 March 1669.
58 Ibid., 7 March 1669.
The financial strains, seriously affecting the ability of the army to put up resistance against the French advance, were already well known at the time of the fall of Johan de Witt, the leading statesman of the post 1648-period and main opponent of William of Orange. In his final address to the States of Holland, he complained

‘that Holland alone has contributed what it is due, and Zealand and Frisia have not furnished the costs of the army; and that posterity will not believe, that such losses can happen in so little time’.59

With war at its doorsteps, and much of the other provinces under French occupation, Holland was forced to take upon itself even more of the financial burden of troops’ payment than the regular 58 per cent. According to the repartition that was made up in August 1672, it had to take care of 110 out of 160 companies on horse, and 457 out of 666 companies on foot.60 In November of that year, with army costs rising to over f9 million, the Gecommitteerde Raden had to report a deficit of almost f6 million. It was at this point that they again proposed to bypass the solicitors as a means to cut back on unnecessary expenses:

‘because by doing this, the militia would be encouraged and the solicitors and other side-costs would be discarded; and the credit of the country would thereby increase, and the enemy would sooner be inclined to conclude peace’.61

Stadtholder William III, now firmly in charge of the state, took a personal interest in the financing of the army. According to Wouter Troost, since his coming to power it was William III rather than the States General who ‘determined all military and naval policy’.62 In January 1673, he exhorted the States of Holland to take measures for the redemption of the burdens on the war budget, saying that there was ‘periculum in mora’.63

Not much later, the Gecommitteerde Raden took practical steps in order to bring these measures into effect. Their main aim was a drastic reduction of the number of solicitors, thereby tightening the strains of financial control. On 28

59 Cornelis Hop and Nicolaas Vivien, Notulen gehouden ter Staten-Vergadering van Holland (1671-1675). Edited by N. Japikse (Amsterdam 1903) 245.
60 Ibid., 250.
61 Ibid. 325-326.
63 Ibid, 387.
February, they ordered that all existing companies on the payroll of the Province of Holland would be divided under eight solicitors, giving an exact description of which companies would fall under whom. This meant that each of the eight solicitors among this select group would arrange for the payment of 75 to 80 companies. New companies that were to be recruited would be divided among the same group. On 2 March, they ordered the receiver general and urban receivers not to give out ordinances to any solicitor except the appointed eight.

But the measures of the Gecommitteerde Raden did not only consist of a drastic reduction in the number of solicitors. A whole new system of payment was envisioned, in which the military solicitors would be replaced by ten ‘directors to the payment of the militia’. The Gecommitteerde Raden would commission the directors, and the States of Holland would provide them with a sum of f1 million, to be remitted through direct and per capita payment. The directors were also allotted a controlling function, since they would pay only the soldiers whose name was on the muster roll. Another innovation was the planned division of the entire army in ten ‘classes’ of equal strength, each resorting under the responsibility of one of the directors. However, not all features of soliciting were superseded. The directors still expected, in case the province remained in arrears, to pay the troops out of their own means ‘or of their friends’, for which they would receive 16 stuivers per hundred guilders every pay month, or 6.9 per cent per year. At one point, the document described the new functionaries as ‘solicitors or directors’. Nevertheless, the introduction of this way of payment would have been a real step towards the ideal sketched in the report of 1651.

However, the new scheme did not work out as planned. A testimony of this comes from a later generation of solicitors. Arguing against the reform-attempt of the early 1720’s, they pointed with glee to the failure of 1673: ‘[D]espite the authority, power and command with which the general directory was invested (…) and above that being assisted with a million guilders from the provincial treasury (…), after a few months it (…) collapsed out of its own accord’. According to the same testimony,
this collapse had created ‘such confusions’ and financial chaos that the military solicitors who took the place of the directors could only find credit at interest rates of nine to ten per cent.\textsuperscript{69} The reason for failure was simple. Under the immediate pressure of war, the appointed directors proved unable to provide all the necessary funds for the maintenance of the existing army and the levying of substitute recruits. According to the ‘state of war’ of 1673, total costs of the companies solicited by the eight directors exceeded one million guilders per pay month.\textsuperscript{70} Despite the initial advance to the directors of a million guilders from the general means, frequent recourse had to be taken to paying soldiers directly from the provincial treasury. The first time this occurred was only half a year after the introduction of the new system.\textsuperscript{71} In January of the next year, the order to give out ordinances only to the directors of payment was temporarily withdrawn. This meant that, next to the eight directors, individual solicitors could once again step in as financial agents and creditors to Holland’s companies.\textsuperscript{72} It confirms the statement from the 1720’s that reforms did not last more than a couple of months. Around the same time as this unofficial re-entry of a more or less free market for soliciting, allegations of corruption arose against one of the appointed directors, Diderick de Wilde. Although the accusation that he had pocketed money destined for the troops was quickly cleared, the rumors further helped to discredit the new system of payment.\textsuperscript{73}

The failure of the 1673 reform attempt led to a de facto re-introduction of the pre-1673 situation, but in the heated conditions of war and a permanent quest for funds, the situation on the ground became even more chaotic than it had been. When the \textit{Gecommitteerde Raden} tried to deal with this chaos, they had learned their lesson. Instead of a complete reform of troops’ payment, in 1676 they chose to officially restore military soliciting on a much firmer judicial basis. As the 1651 report had predicted, the weakness of state finances, combined with the lack of strong bureaucratic structures, had forced the Provincial States back into the arms of private intermediaries.

\begin{flushright}
\textit{The golden age of military financing}
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\textsuperscript{69} Request of the Military Solicitors to the States of Holland, SoH, no. 1905, 14 April 1723.\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Staat van Oorlog 1673}, NA, Archive of the States General, 1.01.05, no. 8081.\textsuperscript{71} RGSH, no. 3022, fol. 745-745 vso, 6 November 1673.\textsuperscript{72} RGSH, no. 3023 fol. 22 vso-23, 22 January 1674.\textsuperscript{73} RGSH, no. 3023 fol. 104 vso-105 vso, 8 March 1674, and fol. 158-160, 13 April 1674.
The 1672 invasion marked a caesura in Dutch history. The joint attack by France and England showed the determination of the two main rivals to contain the Dutch position within the European state system. A period of half a century of almost continuous warfare started, in which both the Dutch hegemony in world trade and the health of Dutch state finances were seriously threatened. But for military financiers, the intensification of great power rivalry signified a new era of incredible prosperity. The combination of a sharp rise in military expenditure and a further institutionalization of military brokerage practices created the conditions for a golden age for solliciteurs militair.

The institutionalization was a direct result of the failed attempt at reform of 1673. On 13 March 1676, the Gecommitteerde Raden accepted a resolution that introduced extensive and precise regulation for the practice of soliciting. This resolution laid the foundation for the system of soliciting for over a century. It tried to put an end to ‘the excesses and exorbitances that, to the great disservice to the Country, are undertaken by some solicitors of companies on horse and on foot’. Among those excesses, the resolution listed ‘blackmailing, and negotiating unbearable interest rates, (…) as well as too high salaries or rewards, that are enjoyed by aforementioned solicitors for soliciting of (…) the ordinances and for managing the affairs of the companies’. As the main reason, the resolution pointed to the advent of ‘different persons of very small means and potential, not understanding in large part or entirely, the act of soliciting of companies or the handling of money’.

The resolution proposed a number of measures which remained the cornerstones of government control of soliciting. The most important was the reduction of the total number of solicitors to 32 ‘qualified, well-to-do and capable persons’. Those solicitors had to solemnly swear an oath containing the conditions on which they accepted their commission. The resolution initially limited the interest on advanced payments to 16 stuyvers per 100 guilders every Heeremaand or 6.9 per cent, an amount that was somewhat later reduced to 12 stuyvers or 5.2 per cent. It also put a maximum to the salary solicitors would receive. Furthermore, solicitors were stipulated to deposit the considerable sum of f 5000, which in case of malpractice would accrue to the provincial treasury. This advance payment primarily served to keep out the aforementioned ‘persons of very small means’.

75 RGSH, no. 3026, fol. 117 vso-118 vso, 13 March 1676.
Although this resolution put stricter limits to the market practices that had previously dominated military soliciting, it also created a clearer legal framework within which they could work, and provided a basis for judicial protection of their interests. This protection was further extended in the decades that followed, especially during the War of the Spanish Succession when solliciteurs militair were in a particularly strong position to raise demands. A resolution of September 1706 extended the collateral for captains’ debts from arms to the company’s wagons, horses and equipment.\footnote{RGSH, no. 3056, fol. 425, 29 September 1706.} Another resolution from around the same time banned ‘Jews and the associates of Jews’ from soliciting, thereby limiting ‘outside’ competition to the ‘indigenous’ financiers.\footnote{Ibid, fol. 471 vso, 22 October 1706.} In 1711, the Gecommitteerde Raden resolved that all companies within the same regiment should strive to deal with the same solicitor. They also restricted the freedom of captains to leave their solicitor in favor of another.\footnote{RGSH, no. 3061, fol. 94, 17 February 1711.} However, there was still a lot of room for negotiation between captains and their agents. Interest rates, for example, were not simply determined by the maximum rate that was set by the Gecommitteerde Raden, but were negotiated individually.

Paulus Gebhardt, a solicitor who was largely responsible for the payment of companies from Brandenburg and the Paltz, charged interest rates between 4.8 and 5.2 per cent at the start of the Nine Years’ War, but lowered those to 4.3 per cent at the end of this war.\footnote{Archive Paulus Gebhardt, no. 77, Liquidatieboek Interesten 1689-1698.} During the War of the Spanish Succession, the pressure was in the other direction, and interest rates went up from 4.5 per cent to 5.85 per cent in 1713. Unable to counter this upward pressure, the States of Holland in 1711 had agreed to raise the maximum interest rate to 5.64 per cent, but even this higher maximum rate was not respected in practice.\footnote{W. Fritschy and R. Liesker, ‘Overheidsfinanciën, kapitaalmarkt en “institutionele context” in Holland en Overijssel tijdens en na de Spaanse successie-oorlog’, in: C.A. Davids, W. Fritschy and L.A. van der Valk (ed), Kapitaal, ondernemerschap en beleid. Studies over economie en politiek in Nederland, Europa en Azië van 1500 tot heden (Amsterdam 1996) 165-196, 180.}

The combination of the surge in war expenses and the introduction of regulation against incompetent solicitors seems to have caused a shift towards professionalization. Paulus Gebhardt, for example, acted as solicitor for more than 60 different officers over the course of the Nine Years’ War. This required him to handle enormous sums of money. To give just one example, between 1689 and 1697, the
company of major Petit Jean received a total of f177,584 in advance payments from him, or an average of f19,732 per year. Throughout the war, arrears averaged approximately 1.5 years. Just for this company, the cumulative interest that Gebhardt received in the course of the war amounted to f12,549, or an average of almost f1400 per year. Figure 5 shows the development of Gebhardt’s soliciting practices in the course of the Nine Years’ War. The total amount of interest he received over this period was f329,078 guilders.\(^81\) If the proportion of the overall interest received to the sum advanced were equal to that in the case of major Petit Jean’s company, this would suggest that over the course of the Nine Years’ War, Gebhardt would have advanced over f4.5 million. In order to handle such amounts of money, an entrepreneur in the Dutch Republic had to be rich and very well connected. Of course, Gebhardt could not advance approximately half a million guilders per year from his own accounts. In order to do so, he had to find credit on the capital market, using the ordinances as collateral.\(^82\) The extensive financial dealings that he thus had to engage in required the skills of a private banker. Gebhardt’s account books are proof of such specialization.

A similar process can be detected in the business of Hendrik van Heteren, the only other solliciteur militair whose extensive business archives are available. Van Heteren came to soliciting through his political connections. His father and grandfather (Hendrik I and Hendrik II) had slowly worked themselves up as ushers at the offices of the States of Holland and the Receiver General.\(^83\) Gradually, Hendrik van Heteren’s father had built his network, acting as a solicitor (in the general sense) of a number of diplomatic representatives. Both predecessors had engaged in business with the army, but only as a secondary part of their enterprises.\(^84\) This changed for Hendrik van Heteren III. Born in 1672, his father had secured him a job at the office of the Receiver General in the closing years of the seventeenth century. However, his political functions would soon become secondary to his functions as a military financial agent. It was the War of the Spanish Succession that laid the foundation of his fortune. He had already acted as financial agent for a select group of diplomats in

\(^81\) All figures are calculated from the liquidation book of Gebhardt.
\(^83\) Knevel, Haags Bureau, 109-110.
\(^84\) For Hendrik van Heteren I: RGSH, no. 3014, 23 June 1665, and for Hendrik van Heteren II: NA, Family Archive Van Heteren, 3.20.24, no. 8.
the service of the Republic before the start of the war. But the outbreak of hostilities allowed him to expand his clientele into highly profitable directions. Among his newly acquired clients were field-marshall Hendrik van Nassau-Ouwerkerk, lieutenant-general Tilly, quartermaster-general Pieter Mongeij and wagonmaster-general Zuerius. By far the biggest contract he managed to lay his hands on was in the ‘soliciting’ of oats and hay. Feeding horses was probably as important to early-modern warfare as supplying oil in the age of the tank. No battle could be waged and no siege cannon could be moved without horse-power. This is reflected in the size of financial advances required to guarantee the delivery of fodder. Between 1706 and 1711, Van Heteren handled contracts worth a total of 4.2 million guilders. Since the terms of the contract gave Van Heteren the right to a 1 percent fee on the total amount of money received, this must have provided him with the attractive sum of over 40,000 guilders, not counting the over 10,000 guilders he received in compensation for expenses over the same period. His correspondence with Martinus Robijns, one of the main suppliers of oats and hay for the Dutch campaigns in the Southern Netherlands, contains negotiations over deliveries, down payments and discounts. An account over the period 1706-1708 shows Van Heteren doing business with 24 regiments, himself using the financial intermediation of 31 other solliciteurs militair located in cities as far apart as Leeuwarden, Groningen, Maastricht, Zwolle, Arnhem, Amsterdam and The Hague. This spread of his partners over the entire area of the Republic suggests that businessmen like Van Heteren in wartime helped to overcome the problems created by the federalist structure of Dutch financial administration.

During the Nine Years’ War and the War of the Spanish Succession, solliciteurs militair remained central in military financial logistics. It is hard to see how the Dutch state, suffering under the strain of a crippling state debt (figure 6), could have avoided major mutinies during the final war years without taking recourse to their services. But once the war was over, the increased debt burden also was a strong motivation for trying to break this dependency on a costly layer of wealthy middlemen.

85 Archive Van Heteren, nos. 26 and 32.
86 Ibid, no. 28.
87 Ibid, no. 63.
88 Ibid, no. 118.
1721: The second reform attempt

In the decade and a half following the War of the Spanish Succession, the energetic statesman Van Slingelandt tried to break through the financial and administrative impasse that accompanied the decline of the Dutch Republic as a great power. In his ‘Memory (…) of redress of Finances’, he concluded

‘that the last war, in which the State has made greater efforts than her forces allowed for, has deranged the already very troubled finances of the Province of Holland and West-Frisia to such extent, that the whole State is in danger to be lost at the first inopportunity that will arise’. 89

In order to counter this problem, he launched a long list of reform proposals aimed at the fragmented structure of the state apparatus, military command structure and army finances. His hope was that this would make

‘the Regents wake up from their current lethargy, that has gained the upper hand to such extent, that it is to be feared, that many will stay sleeping, until at one time or other they will be rudely awakened, when it will be too late to use the remedies, that now are still timely.’ 90

It was in this context that in 1721 a proposal was filed to erect a Military Office, ‘by which, with benefit (…) to the Province of Holland, and with greater order and service to the State, could be paid the ordinary wages of the Militia, the Artillerists, the salaries of the Generals, Colonels, Engineers, reformed Officers, etc. (…), as is done at this time by the respective solicitors (though somewhat defectively).’ 91

This proposal went considerably further than the one of 1673. It anticipated a system of payment that was administered directly through provincial institutions, cutting out all mediators. The accompanying document mentioned a number of advantages. It questioned the usefulness of soliciting, arguing that solliciteurs militair used their position to enforce higher rates of interest than would be paid elsewhere, while they often did not succeed in paying the troops once the provincial government

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89 Staatkundige geschriften, opgesteld en nagelaaten door Mr. Simon van Slingelandt. Eerste deel (Amsterdam 1784) 151-152.
90 Ibid, 250.
91 SoH, 3.01.04.01, no. 2030, Documenten die gedrukt en niet geinsereert zyn in de gedrukte registers van haar Ed. Groot Mog. 1720-1728, ‘Project tot het oprechten van een Militair Comptoir’, no. 30
fell into arrears. On the side, paying off the £5.7 million that Holland still owed the solicitors would be a welcome stimulus to the capital market, which was still recovering from the blow of the South Sea Bubble. However, those arguments largely depended on a very rosy take on the actual financial position of the province. In order to liberate itself from the hold of the solicitors, the provincial authorities had to be willing to pay more in down-payments than they already contributed to that year’s war budget.92 This proposal came at a time when financial problems already abounded. At £306 million, Holland’s debt was hardly reduced from its post-war highpoint. A proposal made in 1720 to clean up the provincial finances had come to nothing.93

A combination of the financial distress in which the Dutch Republic was now caught and the lack of a strong centralized state that could take the emergency-measures required, allowed the solicitors to insist successfully on the maintenance of their role as brokers. On 14 April 1723, the States of Holland discussed a letter from solicitors protesting against the proposed reform.94 The request, extraordinarily long and signed by 28 solicitors, took recourse to every argument that one would expect from a group of influential financiers seeing an important source of their profits threatened. The execution of the proposed reform, they alleged, would be ‘of ruinous and unmanageable consequence in relation to their particular [interest] and [that of] the Country in general’. The solicitors then gave a long elaboration of both points, though dwelling considerably longer on the dreaded consequences for their private interests. In their opinion, the captains, when asked, would not want to change to a more centralized form of payment, and creditors in the past had shown ‘that everyone wants to give his money rather to the solicitors than to the country’.

After calling in mind their great contribution to the survival of the Dutch army during the last war, they added the hardly concealed threat of capital flight, saying that ‘many would be easily forced by necessity to leave the province or their fatherland in order to find their livelihood elsewhere’. They displayed a great sense of drama when describing the sense of betrayal they felt, explaining that

‘it would be the hardest thing in the world that those who have behaved themselves as loyal solicitors and subjects, furthermore having sacrificed their money and credit to the service of the country’s militia in the most vigorous

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92 Staat van Oorlog 1721, Archive States General, no. 8161.
94 Request of the Military Solicitors to the States of Holland, 14 April 1723, and resolution of 14 April 1723, SoH, no. 157, fo. 375.
moment of the heaviest war ever known (…), now, when one is just only shortly experiencing the effect of a pleasant peace (…) [would be] stripped of their office’.

After spending more than half of the letter complaining about their own fate, the request then stated boldly that execution of the proposal would lead to disaster. The authors reminded the States of the ‘excessive sum of money and credit that is required, which the country itself, with all due respect, for many times was unable to furnish, and that without the solliciteurs militair, the militia must have been destroyed.’

This way of putting the argument was a bit too much to stomach even for a political body quite used to the crassest forms of self-promotion. Two days later, the States of Holland declined the request on the basis:

‘that in every way it is transparent, that the first [i.e. private rather than public interest] is the motivation for their request, that the loss of profit following the discontinuation of their employment is made to seem a special damage, and even their ruin, using inappropriate expressions to do so’.95

On 2 June, the solicitors again requested interrogation on the disadvantages of the new system, this time prudently focusing solely on the damage it would do the public interest.96 Exactly how they were able to convince the States of Holland remains unclear. But probably they did not need much convincing, the economic situation of the Province having already done its work on their behalf. All too well aware of the dire straits into which the Dutch Republic was now sailing, the regents lacked both the means and the political determination to break out of their dependency on financial middlemen in troops’ payment.

_Persistence of brokerage_

The failure of the 1721 reform attempt led to the persistence of military soliciting for the rest of the eighteenth century. Although a gradual consolidation of military contracts in the hands of less and less solicitors took place, the basic features of the

95 SoH, no. 157, 382.
96 Ibid., 426.
system remained unchanged until the Batavian Revolution of 1795. The international position of the Dutch Republic helped to create the circumstances for relative stability in military organization. After the traumatic Peace of Utrecht, the Dutch Republic effectively strove to a policy of abstention from international great power conflict. It thus managed to avoid the immediate strain that a major war put on military finances and organization. It kept aloof from the major confrontation of the 1730’s, the War of the Polish Succession (1733-1738), and only entered the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) in its final year. Olaf van Nimwegen showed that this did not lead to neglecting the armed forces. When it entered the War of the Austrian Succession, Dutch military organization was still relatively up to date. In fact, the situation from the 1720’s to the late 1740’s can best be described as an armed peace, in which the Dutch Republic maintained a significant army in order to guard its ‘barrier’ of garrison towns in the Southern Netherlands. The real shift in relative military strength only came during the second half of the eighteenth century. Whereas France, England and especially Prussia entered a new period of innovation in army organization, the Dutch became increasingly conservative and inward looking. Only in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784) did the Republic again engage in a major war with another great power, but this confrontation ended in dramatic failure for the Republic, and showed how far its position as a major military power had by then diminished.

Of course, the end of the War of the Spanish Succession and the ensuing decline of military expenses also created a major change in business opportunities for solliciteurs militair. The case of Hendrik van Heteren shows how financiers could survive this shift by using a variety of strategies that were common to early-modern merchants. In the aftermath of the War of the Spanish Succession, Van Heteren aggressively used his family connections in order to consolidate or expand his business. In 1718, his marriage with Margaretha Lormier, daughter of the solliciteur militair Claudius Lormier, strengthened his ties with a family of solicitors. Willem Lormier, brother of Margaretha, had been an associate of Van Heteren since at least 1711, when they jointly handled the fodder contracts of the Danish troops. Around

98 De Navorscher, LXXXV (1936) 262-263.
99 Archive Van Heteren, no. 124.
the time of the marriage, he inherited his father’s business, giving him a yearly income of £9000. After the death of his mother, Willem also inherited the family capital of £80,000, at that time a sizeable sum.\(^{100}\) The marriage also connected Van Heteren to Adriaan van der Kaa, who was married to Margaretha’s sister Woutrina Lormier. During the war, Van der Kaa as well had been involved in fodder contracts with Van Heteren, and from 1724-1739, he held the desirable post of Contractor of the Fodder Storages.\(^{101}\) Another family connection that provided Van Heteren with important business opportunities was that with his nephew Leonard Vermeulen, who like Van Heteren came from a family of officials in state finances that had made the transition to soliciting.\(^{102}\) In the immediate aftermath of the War of the Spanish Succession, Vermeulen had become the agent of Wilhelm of Nassau-Dillenburg, a high ranking officer in the States’ army and member of the House of Orange.\(^{103}\) In 1724 he became solicitor for Wilhelm’s brother Christiaan, a position that Hendrik van Heteren took over in 1730 when Leonard Vermeulen died.\(^{104}\)

Using his family connections was not the only important element of Van Heteren’s business strategy. His papers show him actively diversifying his clientele as a financial agent. He took on both military contracts, largely in extension of his previous business as solicitor, and non-military contracts, for example handling the salaries of a number of Dutch diplomatic envoys. He also solicited contracts for equipment and the maintenance of barrier fortresses. The largest of those was a contract for the deliverance of palisades worth £117,187.\(^{105}\) Although this shows that the size of Van Heteren’s individual contracts declined sharply from their war height, the expansion of his businesses into other areas allowed him to maintain his wealth and status. At his death in 1749, he was able to pass on a large inheritance to his son Adriaan Leonard, appropriately named after his two brothers-in-law who had played such an important role for the continuation of his business. Van Heteren’s yearly income around the time of his death was £8000, and among his possessions were a house with a rent value of £550 per year, a small country estate and a valuable

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\(^{100}\) P.C. Molhuysen and P.J. Blok (eds), *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek* I (Leiden 1911) 1097-1098.

\(^{101}\) *Archive Van Heteren*, nos. 129 and 131.

\(^{102}\) In 1635, a Leonard Vermeulen (probably the grandfather of Van Heteren’s nephew) was admitted as ordinary clerk in the Accountants Office of the Generality. Ibid, no. 19.

\(^{103}\) Ibid, no. 20.

\(^{104}\) Ibid, nos. 21-24.

\(^{105}\) Ibid, no. 113.
collection of paintings, that later became one of the founding collections of the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum.\textsuperscript{106}

The strategies that Van Heteren used to secure his business when the income from military soliciting proper declined - relying on family networks, diversification of financial investments - were common to eighteenth century entrepreneurs. However, solicitors could also use less savory means of compensating for their loss of income. An anonymous tract, probably written by a captain in the late 1730’s, warns officers for the tricks used by military solicitors to muddle their accounts at the captains’ expense.\textsuperscript{107} The writer complains that ‘the general abuses are so widespread, that only few of them are still noted’. As examples of illegal practices he mentions among others the (prohibited) charging of interest on interest, charging for costs that according to regulation should be on the expense of solicitors, and refusal to return interest when solicitors failed to pay in time. All those practices demanded ‘careful inspection of a solicitors account, the method of which is fully unique and [used] nowhere but in the act of soliciting, in particular being a labyrinth to someone, who is not well versed in this subject.’\textsuperscript{108}

How far things could get out of hand in the private dealings between captains and solicitors is shown by the case of the captain Rudolf de Salis. This captain, whose company resorted under the province of Utrecht, turned to the province of Holland on 24 October 1725. Being under even more serious financial strains than Holland, arrears of the province to De Salis’ company had run up to the staggering sum of £89,433. This had forced him to indebt himself deeply with a number of solicitors, bankers, suppliers and other ‘good citizens’, who now started to demand repayment. In despair, De Salis turned to the province of Holland to guarantee another loan from Holland’s solicitors, to acquiesce some of his most obtrusive creditors. ‘To rescue him from his labyrinth’, he explained, ‘he would be helped a great deal, if henceforth he could pay to his screaming creditors a sum of twelve thousand guilders’. Two Holland-based solicitors, Heeneman and Vrind, took upon themselves the redemption of De Salis’ debt.\textsuperscript{109} Such debt problems remained rather common, as is shown by a


\textsuperscript{107} The whole text of this tract was printed by Zwitzer in his ‘Controle op de rekeningen’, 86-95.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, 95.

\textsuperscript{109} ‘Requeste Rudolff De Salis, 24 oct. 1725’, NA, Documenten tot de resoluties van de Gecommitteerde Raden January-March 1726, 3.01.05, no. 3540.
resolution of 24 July 1753, which prohibited solicitors to grant credits to captains and other officers that exceeded the sum of the ordinance for payment.\footnote{RGSH, no. 3110, fol. 1147, 24 July 1753.}

Although no new reform attempts were undertaken until the end of the Republic, the Gecommitteerde Raden did try to bring some order in the ‘labyrinth’ of soliciting. Their main way of doing so was by slowly reducing the number of solliciteurs militair. Overall, the number of new solicitors appointed seems to have declined drastically in the course of the eighteenth century. Between 1734 and 1794, 58 new solicitors were appointed by the States of Holland. More than half of those new appointments took place in the 1730’s and 1740’s, with a sharp peak in 1747 when Dutch entry into the War of the Austrian Succession led to the hurried admission of ten new solicitors by the Province of Holland.\footnote{SoH, 3.01.04, no. 5775.} In 1753, a resolution limited the maximum number of solicitors to 28. But with characteristic caution, rather than firing a number of solicitors this reduction was spread out by not filling the position of some solicitors who passed away.\footnote{RGSH, no. 3110, fol. 1146, 24 July 1753.} Figure 7 contains the number of newly appointed solicitors per decade, showing the sharp decline in the second half of the eighteenth century. While the number of newly appointed solicitors declined, the greater stability of military expenses and the specialization of the financiers involved meant that solicitors often maintained in function for many decades. For 16 out of the 58 newly admitted solicitors, it is possible to establish the exact year in which they stopped being solicitors. In six cases, they had been in business for under a decade (all of them from 7-9 years). On the other hand, seven of them only ended their careers as solicitors after 30 years of service or more. Out of those 16, ten continued working as a solicitor until they died. Three had their sons admitted as their successors.

Zwitzer rightly concluded that by the end of the eighteenth century ‘the office of soliciting had become the business of a limited number of persons’. In 1794, a year before the end of the Republic and of the old system of military soliciting, 31 solliciteurs militair operated in the whole of the Republic, 14 of whom lived in The Hague and operated in the province of Holland. By then, ‘the financially weaker brothers had been weeded out and the office was only held by persons who could wield over a large amount of capital’.\footnote{Zwitzer, ‘Militie van den Staat’, 97-98.} Although brokerage practices had survived the eighteenth century, the role of intermediaries in troops’ payment had shifted from the rather large group of non-specialized or semi-specialized investors of the early seventeenth century, to a relatively small group of large scale professional financiers.
Military soliciting in perspective

Throughout the ‘long 18th century’, the system of military soliciting as the foundation of Dutch troops’ payment showed a great resilience. Despite continuing complaints about inefficiency, corruption, the intermingling of public and private interests, and despite the perceived advantages in cost and control over the troops from a system of ‘direct payment’, brokerage practices survived the 1673 and 1721 reform attempts. Military soliciting was only replaced by payment through a small number of state appointed directors in 1795, when a revolution triggered by French arms shook up the whole federal structure of the old Republican state.

Perhaps the simplest explanation for this persistence is that within certain limits, military soliciting did solve the problem for which it was originally introduced. Throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, it allowed the Dutch Republic to mobilize effectively the main factor that underpinned its military strength – large amounts of credit to pay for an army out of all proportion to the size of its population. Solliciteurs militair were a key element of what Jan Glete rightly described as ‘an impressive fiscal-military machine that raised more resources per capita than any other seventeenth-century state and organized these resources into large permanent armed forces of high quality’. The continuity in army payment resulted from the direct relationship, established by private entrepreneurs, between the structures for troops’ payment and the credit market. In case of emergency, the Dutch Republic could always rely on a wide network of creditors, and military solicitors were a key link in providing the state access to those funds.

One proof of the relative efficiency of the Dutch system of payment is the absence of major cases of financial collapse. Of course, as we have seen, the States’ Army like any other early modern army was periodically plagued by disruptions caused by escalating arrears. But already during the Eighty Years’ War, the young Republic had managed to build a consistency in troops’ payment that allowed it to avoid the major mutinies that crippled their Spanish adversary at important junctions

of the war. The further development of military soliciting helped the Dutch Republic to survive the enormous financial strains created by the escalation of great power struggles in the second half of the seventeenth century. It did so considerably better than more bureaucratized states with less developed networks for brokerage between state and market. The French army, to give the obvious example, remained plagued by financial crises throughout this period. In the 1630’s, the lack of funds was endemic, and in 1637 there was a complete collapse of the army at Valtelline ‘faute d’argent’. During the 1660’s, the thoroughgoing reform of army finances under minister of war Le Tellier helped to overcome some of the worse chaos in French army payment. But unlike the Dutch, the French could not rely on a strongly developed private credit market. Instead, payment depended on the funds of a very small number of large financiers, headed by two trésoriers de l’extraordinaire. It remained vulnerable to both extreme corruption and the precariousness of the private fortunes to which the fate of the army was bound. In 1701, with the first campaign of the War of the Spanish Succession well underway, trésorier de l’extraordinaire La Touanne went bankrupt. His assets and credit to the value of 6 million livres were not sufficient to cover his 9.8 million in documented borrowings from private investors and another 400,000 that he owed the king’s forces. Grudgingly, Louis XIV had to undertake to pay 7 million livres out of his own funds in order to prevent a military disaster. La Touanne was jailed for financial malpractices. The use of a wide network of solliciteurs militair certainly helped the Republic to avoid crises of such severity.

The only country that from the end of the seventeenth century onwards could fall back on a credit market as developed as the Dutch was England. The system of troops’ payment that developed there shared many features of the Dutch. Regiments employed their own financial agents, who in case of arrears secured the continued payment of the troops. According to John Childs, by the end of the seventeenth century ‘agents were the lynchpins of the army’s pay system and although a number of agents came in for a bad press, most were competent and some were exceptionally

115 Geoffrey Parker, The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road 1567-1659. The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries’ Wars (Cambridge 1972) 185 ff.
efficient.’¹¹⁹ In the second half of the eighteenth century, troops’ payment had fallen into the hands of at the maximum a few dozen of those regimental agents. As A.J. Guy writes: ‘In 1745 there were twenty-three agents operating in London, Captain Wilson enjoying the greatest volume of business. The same number were active in 1750 and, with the disappearance of some familiar names and the advent of a few new ones, including Calcraft, the number rose by only six or seven during the Seven Years War. At the close of the war, the number had actually fallen to nineteen.’¹²⁰

The major difference between the Dutch and the English system of troops’ payment was that in the latter, regimental agents were more closely integrated into a single national hierarchy, headed by one Paymaster General. This paymaster oversaw the process of army payment, but also had a function in finding the credit to guarantee the swift fulfillment of ordnances.¹²¹ In this, successive paymasters were greatly assisted by the establishment of the Bank of England. But this did not mean that brokerage practices were actually superseded. Even in the late eighteenth century, a Paymaster General like the conspicuous sir Henry Fox still managed troops’ payment as his private business, building himself a financial empire in this way. The combination of large scale brokerage practices at the central level, combined with a wider network of financial agents supplying funds at the regimental level, gave rise to exactly the same malpractices as across the channel. As Brewer notes in his study of British state finances and war: ‘Perhaps the most frequently made complaint about the expansion of the eighteenth-century fiscal-military state was that it had created a “financial interest”, a consortium of bankers, “monied men”, investors, speculators and stock-jobbers who lived parasitically off the state’s need to borrow money to fund its wars.’¹²²

Even more centralized states like France and England thus relied heavily on the intervention of private intermediaries in order to pay their troops. Even if central institutions, in the form of the two trésoriers or the Paymaster General, had slightly more control over the handling of regimental finances than the Dutch Gecommitteerde Raden, they hardly represented a form of ‘modern’ state control. Rather, they operated as large scale brokers themselves. No major state managed to do away with such practices until the final half of the eighteenth century. What made the Dutch Republic

¹²² Brewer, Sinews, 206.
special, at least in the seventeenth century, was not the important role of brokers in itself, but the extent to which the Republic managed to organize brokerage practices into a functioning, well regulated whole, thereby minimizing the risks for the continuity in troops’ payment. A strong capitalist economic base, translated in a well developed and widespread credit market, combined with the federal structure of the state weakening the possibilities for centralized control, shaped the specific form in which those brokerage practices arose. And once these practices existed, the solliciteurs militair themselves fought tooth and nail to protect their influential and profitable position.

The course of development of the Dutch system of troops’ payment raises important questions for one important tenet in the debate on war and state formation; namely, the assumption that increases in the costs of war, caused by escalating great power conflicts, in themselves pushed the states involved towards the introduction of centralized bureaucracies. The Dutch trajectory seems to have been in the opposite direction. Like in other countries, troops’ payment formed one of the main elements of the rising costs of warfare. But although the introduction of a system of ‘direct per capita payment’ was seriously discussed in 1651 and 1721, and actually tried in practice in the stormy days of 1673, it never got off the ground. Instead, the dramatic increase in troops’ expenditure between the Peace of Westphalia and the Peace of Utrecht greatly strengthened the position of the solliciteurs militair. And when in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the number of active solicitors started to decline, this was not an expression of a tendency towards centralization or nationalization, but the result of the general decline of the Republic as a great power and the oligarchization of its financial market. Political change rather than military pressure opened the way to nationalization in the final years of the eighteenth century. Brokerage practices were strongly wedded to the Dutch ancient regime, and only died with it.
Appendix: Figures 1-7

Figure 1

**Strength of the States’ Army according to the War Budget (Ordinary and Extra-ordinary)**


![Graph showing the strength of the States’ Army from 1595 to 1795.](image)

Figure 2

**Military expenses (excluding navy) of Holland 1621-1794**


![Graph showing military expenses excluding navy from 1621 to 1794.](image)
Figure 3

Holland's planned monthly costs of troops payment 1644-1785
(according to the ordinary and extra-ordinary War Budget)

Figure 4

Troops payment as a percentage of ex ante military expenditure

Source for figures 3 and 4: NA, Archive of the States General 1550-1796, 1.01.05, nos. 8054-8058, 8060-8094, 8096-8281, Ordinaris en extra-ordinaris Staat van Oorlog 1644-1785.

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Figure 5

Gebhardt's business during the Nine Years' War

Source: NA, Archive Paulus Gebhardt, 3.01.47, no. 77, Liquidatieboek van interesten 1689-1698.

Figure 6

Debts of Holland (1621-1796)

Source: NA, Archive Staten van Holland 1572-1795, 3.01.04.01, no. 5775, Commissies Staten van Holland
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