Chapter 1

The making of the federal-brokerage state

This chapter examines the rise and consolidation of the Dutch federal-brokerage state. Perhaps the best starting point to do so is the extensive discussions on the fundamentals of the Dutch constitution that occurred merely a few years after the end of the war that established the new-born state as a European great-power. On 18 January 1651 some 300 delegates from the seven provinces of the Dutch Republic gathered in The Hague at the invitation of the States of Holland. This ‘Great Assembly’ came together at a momentous time. Only three years after the Peace of Westphalia the young Republic found itself at the height of its economic expansion and international influence. To emphasize that this was a meeting of victors the meeting hall was decorated with banners that had been captured of Spanish adversaries on land and at sea, a move that had caused some controversy due to the extensive free trade agreement that the Dutch Republic and the Spanish king had concluded barely a month earlier.¹ Internally, the country had moved along the abyss of civil war when Stadtholder William II in July 1650 had brought his troops before the walls of Amsterdam in an attempt to forcefully end a long conflict over military command. But the sudden death of

William II that same year had averted this danger.\textsuperscript{2} For the adversaries of the stadtholderate, the Great Assembly presented an opportunity to solidify a new stadtholderless status quo.

But the regent-rulers gathering in The Hague were also presented with grave challenges. Perhaps the most pressing was the question how to hold together a federal state containing so many conflicting claims for power without an ‘eminent head’, especially at times of great external pressures that were to be expected. In essence, this was the question asked by the Zeeland delegation at the start of the Great Assembly:

‘(...) [I]t is not likely, Highly Esteemed Gentlemen, that this unity will be observed as it should be, when the members of this body would collide because of internal disagreements and misunderstandings, and it is practically unthinkable that there would never arise differences within a government which, as ours, is composed of seven free and sovereign provinces, each in turn consisting of diverse members and cities, (...) and those themselves in turn represented by persons of various moods and interests, and regulated according to various laws, constitutions and customs.’\textsuperscript{3}

The speech of the Zeeland delegation echoed a popular theme in contemporary debates. As one pamphleteer summarized, pointing at the all too recent experience of war with Spain:

‘Inwardly we have perpetuum discordia fomitem [endless fuel for discord], outwardly we have a very powerful neighbor and extremely hostile enemy, who will never shrink from employing all possible means to recuperate what he has had to abandon against his will (...).’\textsuperscript{4}

Given the precarious international situation and the recent clash between Amsterdam and William II, it is no surprise that one of the main sources of discord singled out in these debates was the question of control over the States army. Together with the question of the political constitution of the Union and the place of religion in politics, this was one of the three main items on the agenda proposed by the States of Holland. There was general agreement on the proposition made by the Friesland delegates that military affairs demanded a structure for decision taking that was more centralized and efficient than the one offered by the regular meetings of the States General. The delegates defended this point of view with


\textsuperscript{3} Aitzema, Saken van staet en oorlogh III, 503. All italics are in the original, unless otherwise stated.

\textsuperscript{4} Galeacco de Rivo Ursino, Grondhig bericht, nopende den interest van desen staet, vermidts de doodt van sijn hoogheyt, met het noodstaeckelijcke redres van dien (Rotterdam 1651) 13.
reference to two maxims that belonged to the general repertoire of seventeenth-century statecraft:

‘[T]hat in times of peace, one has to count on war, and that the nature of war brings with it, quod ratio ejus non aliter bene constet quamsi uni reddatur [that its rational does not sit well with anything but unity], both to maintain secret intelligence, without which one cannot be on guard, and which cannot remain secret but among a small number of persons, (...) and to (...) be ready and prepared (...) for all eventualities (...).’\(^5\)

But how to guarantee such unity? Holland and most other provinces straightforwardly rejected the call to install a new stadtholder as captain general of all the Dutch troops. Instead they successfully pushed for a strengthening of the Council of State, the main executive organ of the States General that was composed of representatives of the seven sovereign provinces.\(^6\)

At the same time, however, they made sure that individual provinces received far-reaching authority over the companies and regiments on their provincial payroll. This was a dual victory for the Province of Holland. More than half the states’ troops were paid out of its treasury, so more direct provincial control over the army directly strengthened its position within the state. Furthermore, Holland held the largest vote within the Council of State, that in its composition reflected ‘the unequal contribution and interest that [the different provinces] have in the conservation of the common state’.\(^7\) But other provinces stood to gain as well. In return for continued financing of the soldiers, more power was devolved from the generalty to the provincial level, neatly divided according to the size of their purse. A further strengthening of provincial control over the troops enabled local authorities to make sure potential spin-offs of deployment – in the form of lucrative officer posts, supply contracts or loans for troop payments – were channeled through the paying provinces.\(^8\)

This solution to an important internal conflict was characteristic for the Dutch state as it emerged from its Eighty Years’ War with the Spanish Habsburg Empire, and as it was to be until the collapse of the Republic in the Batavian Revolution. It reflected both the federal character of the political institutions as well as their brokerage nature, integrating economic elites at the heart of the execution of state functions. The mixture of federalist and brokerage

---

\(^5\) Aitzema, *Saken van staet en oorloogh* III, 510.
\(^7\) The formulation is taken from the ‘Deduction of Holland to the Great Assembly’, Aitzema, *Saken van staet en oorloogh* III, 517.
\(^8\) Marjolein ’t Hart, *The Dutch wars of independence* (Cambridge, forthcoming).
elements was particularly clear in the institutions created for the organization of warfare. At first sight, these institutions formed a highly irregular pattern of ad hoc solutions, resulting from endless negotiations between politicians and members of various elite groups at the local, provincial and national level such as took place during the Great Assembly. Their establishment did not follow a pre-ordained plan, but was the result of a long series of historical contingencies. Nevertheless they proved enduring, suggesting there was more to their establishment than a series of historical coincidences born out of a prolonged state of emergency.

This chapter will examine the interplay between contingency and structure in the emergence of the Dutch federal-brokerage state. Section 1.1 provides a short historical survey of how in the course of the Dutch Revolt the federal-brokerage ‘scenario’ gained precedence over three alternative directions of state formation. The three sections that follow analyze the rise of federal-brokerage solutions on a more concrete level. These will focus on the three main areas of the organization of warfare that will be examined in more detail in the rest of this book. Section 1.2 deals with the military function of merchant companies, section 1.3 with the way Admiralty Boards interacted with local capitalist elites in naval production and supply, and section 1.4 with the strong independent position of military solicitors in troop financing. The final section of this chapter looks at the ideological and political underpinnings of the Dutch state structure, consisting of a combination of pragmatic coalition building and a number of powerful integrative notions that provided the language in which Dutch Republican rulers tried to overcome the divisions inherent in the federal-brokerage structure of the state. Together, these sections form an answer to the riddle posed by the Zeeland delegation at the start of the Great Assembly, and help explain why this internally fragmented state could emerge from its long war of independence as leading force within the capitalist world-system.

1.1 The Dutch Revolt and the establishment of the state

The state that successfully challenged Habsburg power in Europe and beyond had strong antecedents. Economically, the Dutch Republic had emerged as the leading commercial power of Europe on the heels of a long cycle of development that had already started in the medieval period. The course of this cycle had left its imprint of sharply uneven regional
development between the highly urbanized seaborne provinces as centers of production and long-distance trade in the West, and the heartlands of capitalist agriculture and small-scale production in the East. In finance, developed urban and provincial structures for taxation and state loans were already in place before the start of the Revolt, forcing both the Habsburg authorities and their opponents into constant negotiation with local elites to fund their struggles. All seaborne provinces employed their own rudimentary navies for the protection of trade and fisheries, and Holland had already shown to be a force to be reckoned with in North-European waters by intervening assertively in the Lübeck wars at the start of the sixteenth century. Burgher elites had already been involved to a high degree in military logistics. Both federalism and strong interaction of provincial state authorities with local economic elites thus were well rooted in the Northern Netherlands’ past.

Yet in 1550, it had by no means been inevitable that out of these medieval roots would grow the particular constellation of institutional arrangements that eventually came about. The basic features of the Republic only took shape during the long wars against the Spanish Habsburg Empire, and were consolidated in the series of internal and external convulsions that accompanied it. The federal-brokerage state was one of the ‘scenarios’ implicit in these confrontations, but only became the dominant scenario with the defeat of three alternative

---


directions for state formation that had been on the table in the mid-sixteenth century: centralization under (restored) Habsburg control, a union of the Dutch provinces with one of the Habsburg Empire’s European rivals, or a devolution of the loose alliance of provinces into its component parts. During the initial stages of the Revolt, each of these scenarios undoubtedly had seemed as likely, if not more likely, than the course actually taken. The first scenario, further centralization under the Spanish crown, had been one of the main reasons for the rise of opposition movements among the higher and lower nobility in the first place. But the nobles who rallied at the Brussels court to demand greater leniency in religious persecution and respect for their local prerogatives were far from advocating independence. Opposition against Habsburg centralization hardened out only in the course of the Revolt that broke out in the late 1560s. Whereas in the 1570s differences over religious toleration had still been the main cause for the foundering of peace talks, by 1588 the acceptance of far reaching autonomy for the States General and the seven individual provinces had become central to negotiations between rebels and rulers. In that year the Union of Utrecht, a treaty concluded in 1579 between the seven Northern provinces, was transformed from a temporary alliance into the political foundation of the Dutch Republic. The document came to be seen as a substitute-constitution, and guaranteed a large measure of autonomy to each of the seven provinces. It transferred to the Generalty level only those issues that had a direct bearing on the interests of all the provinces combined, primarily the defense against ‘external and internal lords, kings, or princes, lands, provinces, towns or members’ that would wage war against the United Provinces. Defending their autonomy in revolution and war bound the core of the provincial elites to the principles set out in 1579. Unless forced upon them by military defeat, a settlement with the Spanish crown that would overthrow this state of affairs and restore the centralization-scenario was no longer feasible.

The establishment of the independent Republic also meant the final collapse of the second scenario, a closer union with one of Philip II’s European rivals. This option had been tried and tested for ten years, and had been the strong preference of the leader of the Revolt

---

17 For the long-lasting impact on notions of sovereignty in the Dutch Republic, see Laura Manzano Baena, *Conflicting words. The Peace Treaty of Münster (1648) and the political culture of the Dutch Republic and the Spanish monarchy* (Leuven 2011) 133ff.
William of Orange up to the time of his death. However, both candidates selected to administer the Netherlands at the behest of a foreign crown, the Duke of Anjou and the Earl of Leicester, failed miserably at their attempts to reign in provincial particularism. The experience of the Leicester-years – when the foreign governor had tried to mobilize his troops, militant Calvinism, and the urban lower classes to challenge the power of Holland, finally to attempt to push through peace negotiations with Philips II against the wishes of the states of Holland – strengthened the ruling elites of the latter province in their determination to secure their own influence by the establishment of a fully independent Dutch state. The strengthening of this conviction should not only be seen as the result of internal party struggles, but also in light of the external developments of the war. The fall of Antwerp in 1585 assisted in the rise of Amsterdam as the center of European bulk carrying trade, while the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 allowed the Dutch to take competition with the Habsburg Empire into the East and the West Indies. The Dutch had become major contestants for leadership within the capitalist world-system, thereby decreasing the likelihood of a permanent union with any of their European competitors.

At the same time, consciousness of the challenges and opportunities encountered by the new-born state on the international terrain also formed a barrier to the third option: provincial devolution. This option had not been on the table as explicitly as the others, but the strength of Holland’s particularism did form a constant threat to the unity of the seven provinces. Nevertheless, the danger was counteracted by other, more powerful forces. Politically, the mutual dependence between Holland and the other provinces was too strong to risk a break-up. The financial superiority of Holland over the other provinces was so great that there could not be any doubt that without it the Revolt would be lost. On the other hand, without the protecting ring of the inland provinces ‘Holland’s garden’ would be too exposed to foreign intrusion to bloom. Even when there was little love, unity between the seven provinces was more than just a marriage of convenience. This was true for economic reasons too. While circuits of commodity production and trade overall remained highly localized, connected to the world market through the nodes of individual trading cities, the Habsburg period and the ensuing Revolt did set off some measure of economic integration between provinces. Burghers of Holland’s towns became major land-investors in the other provinces, a process

21 Tracy, Founding of the Dutch Republic, chapters III.7 and IV.10.
enhanced by land reclamations and the sale of former church property. An impressive network of water-transportation connected the various rural and urban trading-zones. In a real sense, successful engagement in international trade became tied to an economic hinterland that stretched most of the Republic, albeit in highly uneven ways. Without producing anything approaching a ‘national’ ruling class, the local groups of ruling families were connected by more than expediency alone. From the least likely option, the creation of an independent state had become the preferred option for the core of the Dutch bourgeoisie.

By the turn of the seventeenth century the basic contours of the federal-brokerage state were all in place. On the one hand, the federal arrangements of the ‘political’ state – made up of a three-tiered system of local governments, the sovereign Provincial States, and the States General, assisted by a relatively small bureaucratic apparatus – allowed for almost unmediated access of the mainly urban economic elites to the process of policy-making. On the other hand, a powerful set of ‘semi-formal’ and ‘informal’ institutions reserved substantial political influence for particular interest groups within the ruling class, such as the nobility (through the stadtholderly court and military entrepreneurship), the long-distance merchants (through the merchant companies), or the powerful Amsterdam merchant community (through the special role of the Amsterdam burgomasters in the making of foreign policy, as well as through the city’s great financial weight). The fact that the alternative trajectories of state formation were turned aside in the course of the Revolt can be seen as the result of a series of contingencies, the political outcome of a decades’ long struggle that was in no way pre-ordained. But at the same time, the federal-brokerage model reflected deep-seated features of Dutch society that made it more likely that this and not the other three scenarios came out on top. Cumbersome though it might seem, this state form integrated the main sections of the Dutch ruling class, those directed at long-distance trade and those more strongly rooted in local production, as well as creating a framework for coalition building between the ruling class and sections of the urban middle classes. At the same time, the combination of formal, semi-formal, and informal political institutions enabled the Dutch state to tap society’s economic resources for warfare at a scale sufficient to defeat the mighty Spanish Habsburg crown. Summing up this result of the process of state formation during the Dutch Revolt, Charles Tilly wrote:

---


‘They [the seven provinces] made up a surprising state: an archipelago of bourgeois republics, each with its own militia, fiercely defending local privileges against the demands of the Stadhouder and even of their own creature, the States General. Nevertheless, the provinces and the States worked out a remarkably efficient division of labour, the provinces taxing and administering, the States waging war.’

How complete the victory of this particular model was can be gauged from the way in which around 1650 all three alternatives briefly resurfaced, only to be dispelled as ghosts from a distant past. The attack of William II on Amsterdam in 1650 ushered in a pamphlet-war that lasted for a year. In the eyes of the most militant adversaries of the House of Orange, the conduct of the stadtholder had raised the danger of a return to semi-monarchical authoritarianism only two years after the claims of the Spanish crown on the Dutch provinces had been destroyed for good. But, as Poelhekke noted, the tone within the mainstream of debate was much more reconciliatory. Making very liberal use of the notion of sovereignty, the function of the stadtholder as ‘upper-sovereign’ envisioned by his supporters was not one of an absolute monarch, but as a unifying element among the provinces that would remain ‘sovereign and free as a prince in taking their own state-wise resolutions without anyone being able to command them in anything’. From the opposite side, the court-historian of the anti-stadtholderly party, Lieuwe van Aitzema, confirmed the unwillingness of the States of Holland to upset the general framework of the state in the wake of the death of William II:

‘They could have said: we are sovereigns over our province, and over our purse. If we have given some authority to our stadtholder and captain eneral in the past, that is over now, and we take it back. Because of his death (quae omnia solvit) we have inherited it, God Almighty has returned it to us. And if the Danish master of court Ulefelt in 1649 in The Hague had reason to say: if our King is dead, we can not only choose whomever we want, but also have the power to choose none and remain masters ourselves, Holland could speak in the same vein with even more justification. But they have never employed this language. Instead, they have contented themselves to maintain the old and prior style of government of this nation.’

---

28 Aitzema, *Saken van staet en oorlogh III*, 516.
As this remark signals the opposite scenario to royal centralization – provincial devolution – was equally off the cards. Practically the only serious proponent of Holland separatism was Pieter de la Court, the influential political theorist behind Holland’s grand pensionary during the First Stadholderly Period Johan de Witt. In his famous *True Interests of Holland*, he argued that this province alone was capable to maintain a *Pax Neerlandica* at sea, while a desirable cutting back on military expenses only was forestalled by the harmful union with the other provinces:

‘This is the Condition of Holland in a time of perfect Peace; what will it be then when we consider, that the Hollanders must not only scour, or clear the Sea from Enemys, and defend their Towns and Country against all Foreign Force, but that they have also charged themselves with much more than the Union of Utrecht obliged them to, with the keeping of many conquered Citys, and circumjacent Provinces, which bring in no Profit to Holland, but are a certain Charge, being supply’d by that Province with Fortifications, Ammunition-houses, Victuals, Arms, Cannon, Pay for the Soldiers, yea, and which is a shameful thing to mention, with Guard-houses, and Money for quartering of Soldiers?’

In the polemic that followed the publication of the *True Interests*, this aspect of De la Court’s argument was most vehemently rejected. As one of his critics wrote:

‘After he [De la Court] has well defended the interest of the merchants, he starts complaining about the other provinces, which make Holland carry the sole burden of the sea. It seems to me that this complaint has some reason, but when he speaks of leaving those provinces, he puts Holland on a dangerous road. Truly, the King of Spain would have spent many millions if he would have found a way to separate us. (…) When we are united, we are invincible, but separated, everyone can defeat us. The merchandise of Holland is trafficked to the other provinces and that of them into ours, and therefore we cannot be separated from them and they cannot be separated from us.’

Both in its geopolitical, and in its economic dimensions, this argument perfectly summed up why even among the Holland merchants De la Court’s secessionism did not find real support.

---


Perhaps the most curious return to the arguments on state form of the 1580s was the 1651 proposal of Cromwell to form a ‘closer union’ between England and the Dutch Republic. The English ambassador, speaking at the Great Assembly, argued for something that went farther than a normal diplomatic agreement between states, though falling short of a merger of the two Republics. The delegation emphasized that the two young Republics shared their protestant faith, conceptions of individual liberty against royal usurpation, and trading interests against all the crowns of Europe, giving them an interest to join defenses. However the ambassadors, who in the streets and in front of their lodgings were met by hostile Orangist crowds, were hardly received more gently in the Assembly itself. Alluding to the Mercantilist economic idea that the profit of one state could only be the loss of another, the formal reply to Cromwell’s embassy made perfectly clear that the Dutch Republic preferred to follow its own interests, and its own interests alone, in deciding its foreign policy:

‘Commerce and traffic are often most plausibly mixed with great jealousy, especially between neighboring republics. As two twins, they constantly fight and wrestle with each other over their primogeniture, that is, profit. Therefore it can also be compared to connected waters, where the growth at one place is the erosion at another. Therefore many wise and far-sighted persons have judged, that commerce would be driven with more profit and security by this state, if England would remain a kingdom, than if it is turned into a republic (…).’

These debates of the 1650s were substantially different from those of the 1560s to 1580s. What in the early decades of the Revolt still had been real scenarios for the future of the Dutch state now appeared as theoretical excursions with only a faint bearing to the realities of the day.

1.2 Types of brokerage 1: merchant warriors

In the course of the Eighty Years’ War, the main features of the Dutch state had congealed around the federal-brokerage model. But this model left great room for practical variations at the level of individual institutions. The brokerage solutions that the rulers of the Dutch

31 Aitzema, Saken van staet en oorloogh III, 657.
Republic employed in the organization of warfare can be divided into three fundamental types. At one end of the spectrum, there was the situation in which merchants or other types of capitalist entrepreneurs bore full responsibility for the execution of war-related tasks, and governed them as their own private undertakings. The merchant companies, especially the VOC and WIC that held far-reaching prerogatives for possessing and administering colonial territories and waging war, were the clearest example of this form. On the other end of the spectrum stood those cases in which capitalists themselves were appointed as state officials, handling contracts in the name of governmental bodies, managing state enterprises, and introducing entrepreneurial practices in the execution of state tasks. As will be clear when examining the Admiralty Boards, the involvement of members of the local elites in naval administration was structured in such a way that it inhibited the rise of large permanent bureaucracies, instead preserving the personal ties between officials and the market characteristic for brokerage institutions. A third type of brokerage, situated between the two extremes, put state officials in nominal control but left the execution of their tasks almost entirely to entrepreneurs, who did so within confines that were determined and regulated by the state. The large scale involvement of private financiers in the payment of troops will be examined as an example of such ‘institutionalized brokerage’.

Clearly, the first type of brokerage gave capitalists most room for maneuver and the greatest possibilities to push the state into adopting their priorities. The Dutch East India Company was one of the most powerful brokerage institutions of the early modern age. The root of this power lay in its ability to draw on a larger capital than any of the competing foreign institutions, and in the extensive autonomy it had received from the state in its overseas operations. Whereas its first major competitor, the Portuguese Estado da India, always remained the commercial branch of the crown’s territorial ambitions, the VOC was from inception primarily a commercial enterprise, employing violence to protect its profits. The significance of this shift was already emphasized by Niels Steensgaard:

‘Simplifying greatly, one might say that here the relationship between “profit” and “power” is reversed. Estado da India was a redistributive enterprise, which traded in order itself to obtain the full benefit of its use of violence, whereas the [Dutch and English East India] Companies were associations of merchants, which themselves used violence and thereby internalized the protection costs.’

33 Niels Steensgaard, Carracks, caravans and companies. The structural crisis in the European-Asian trade in the early 17th century (Copenhagen 1973) 114. A very similar point was made already by Van der Oudermeulen in his famous 1785 memorandum: ‘The Portuguese and even more so the Spaniards have come to East India not
The first charter of the VOC, drawn up by the States General in 1602, was explicit about the extent to which the company was free to engage in military activities in its own right. Article 35 of the charter established:

‘[T]hat those of aforesaid Company, East of cape Bonne Esperance as well as in and beyond the straight of Magelhaes, are entitled to make alliances as well as contracts with princes and potentates in the name of the States General of the United Netherlands, that is of the high authorities themselves. They are also entitled to build fortresses and strongholds there, summon and employ governors, soldiers, and public prosecutors (...).’

The next article gave the Company the right to act ‘by any means that it can employ’ against encroachments on its commercial activities. Further emphasizing the autonomy of the Company from the state, article 39 decreed ‘[t]hat it is not allowed to take ships, cannons, nor ammunition from said Company to serve the nation, other than with the Company’s consent.’

The willingness of the States General to grant the VOC far-reaching autonomy in the area of colonial warfare was connected to the ambition to carry the war against the Spanish Habsburg crown into the East Indies, and the belief that private interests would commit East India traders to take this task upon themselves voluntarily. The argument was put in so many words in a meeting of the States General of 1 November 1603, little over a year after it had granted the charter to the Company. Representatives of the VOC were sternly admonished to make sure that Company ships would be well equipped and received instructions to engage ‘the enemy’s ships and goods’,

‘by which they will enlarge their reputation, not only to maintain, but to continue and expand their trade, which they would otherwise (...) be bound to lose. And this has been the principal
reason why the Gentlemen States General have procured the unification of the companies, and
granted the charter and authorization to do damage to the enemy.’

While the VOC was a private enterprise, the States General ensured their influence over
company policy in a number of ways. It had the power to withdraw or renew the charter on
which the VOC’s monopoly position in Asian trade rested, although in practice this charter
became fixed for increasingly long periods of time. The company directors (bewindhebbers)
also had an obligation to hand over yearly reports of their trading-results to the States
General. Local governments exerted influence over the governing boards of the VOC
chambers. Strong mutual ties between company and state were consciously fostered.
Especially during the first twenty-five years, when the VOC’s presence in Asia was still
insecure and in Europe the Republic repeatedly had to fight for its survival, privateering,
conquest, and assistance in war often took precedence over trade. At this time, the
relationship between state and company was at its most symbiotic and mutual financial or
military support was frequently given.

This symbiotic relationship sometimes led to vehement arguments among VOC
investors whether too much attention was given to military activities at the cost of trade, and
whether the state benefited more than shareholders from the investments made in the
Company. These were intersected by the sometimes diverging interests of investors in the
Republic and the Company’s representatives in Asia. Later in the seventeenth and eighteenth
centuries, such arguments were reproduced in light of the growing relative weight of the costs
of colonial administration produced by the territorial gains of the VOC. In 1685 the leading
Dutch diplomat and Company director Coenraad van Beuningen famously summed up this
dilemma by stating that the VOC was ‘a company of commerce but also of state’. However,
even a colonizer as ruthless as Jan Pietersz Coen was never in doubt that the ultimate aim of
warfare for the Company was profit. This acknowledgement was the founding stone of the
division of labor between the VOC and the state, which, if maintained, would benefit both:

---

36 H.H.P. Rijperman (ed), Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal van 1576 tot 1609. Old Series (OS), Volume XII (The
Hague 1950) 630 (Henceforward, this work will be referred to as RSG-OS for Old Series and RSG-NS for New
Series, followed by Roman numerals for the individual volume. See bibliography for more information on the
edition). The companies referred to are the ‘pre-companies’ for Asia, united into the VOC in 1602.
37 Victor Enthoven, ‘Van steunpilaar tot blok aan het been. De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie en de Unie’,
in: Gerrit Knaap and Ger Teitler (eds), De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tussen oorlog en diplomatie
38 The latter argument was forcefully advanced in an anonymous pamphlet from 1644, reproduced in Van Dam,
Beschryvinge. Volume 1.2, 514 ff.
‘[T]he General Company wages war for the United Netherlands in East India. If someone would say that it should abstain from this, and that the common country in its turn has its hands full of its own defense, the answer to this is that without the might of arms the trade with India cannot be maintained, nor can the state of the United Netherlands be maintained without the trade with India (…) Send us yearly (we ask you once again, in the interest of our common welfare) a large quantity of ships, men, and money, and Your Honors will in time become masters of the most important trade of the entire world (…).’

One of the most remarkable features of the organization of the VOC is how its internal structure mirrored that of the Dutch state. Six ‘chambers’, situated in Amsterdam, Middelburg, Delft, Rotterdam, Hoorn, and Enkhuizen, organized the sending out of merchant fleets and the trade in East Indian products. At the head of the Company stood a college of seventeen directors elected from the chambers. Five out of six cities with a VOC chamber also housed an Admiralty Board, and the important committee meetings of the seventeen directors were styled after the Admiralty Boards’ joint meetings in The Hague, the *Haagse Besogne*. The VOC thus copied the federal structure of the state, enabling it to develop close links to the ‘political state’ at the local, regional and generality level. An important difference with the regular representative organs of the state, however, was that the commercial character of the VOC allowed it to select its leading cadres even more thoroughly on the basis of class and wealth. The rules for appointing directors strongly favored large shareholders over small shareholders, the rich Amsterdam chamber over the five other chambers and members from the ruling oligarchic families over outsiders.

While the other merchant companies were very much like the VOC in the way they replicated the federal structure of the Dutch state, the balance between trade and power was different for each. Erected in 1621 to gain a commercial foothold in the Americas where Spanish territorial control was much more firmly rooted than in the East Indies, the WIC in practice became a military extension of the Dutch state first, and a merchant company second. Its charter granted the WIC prerogatives for warfare and the conclusion of treaties in terms that were literally copied from the VOC charter. But it is significant that in the WIC charter these conditions were put almost at the beginning of the text, rather than more towards the end.

---

43 Gaastra, *Dutch East India Company*, 32.
44 Henk den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen 1994) 33-34.
the end. Furthermore, extra clauses were added that were absent from the VOC charter promising the WIC extensive state support in the form of soldiers and fortresses.\(^45\) The strong emphasis on war and privateering, coupled to the long drawn out and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to take over Portuguese Brazil, formed a lasting barrier to creating a stable investor base for the first WIC. In 1674 it was replaced by the second West India Company. The debts accumulated by the first WIC were cleared, and a new charter and slimmed administrative structure guaranteed that from now on trade would take precedence over war. The ambitions of the Company were tempered accordingly. The WIC operated from a smaller colonial base than its Asian counterpart, and was forced to accept the partial abolition of its monopoly status in the West Indies.\(^46\) Nevertheless, thanks not in small part to direct military support from the Dutch state, the first and second WIC did provide the groundwork for the profitable role of Dutch capitalists in the transatlantic trade in enslaved human beings, and for the eighteenth century expansion of the Caribbean plantation economy.\(^47\)

The European context again produced a different kind of institutions. There, the intensity of inter-state competition and the tightly woven pattern of diplomatic relations left no room for merchant companies to wage war or make treaties with foreign states at their own calling. But the widespread use of forms of irregular warfare such as privateering and piracy did force the Baltic, Norwegian, French, Mediterranean, and Levantine merchants to pay serious attention to military protection. In the early years of the seventeenth century some trading companies were erected using the model of the VOC, but within those companies regulating the market soon gained precedence over military functions.\(^48\) The monopolistic tendencies inherent in the structure of the colonial companies did not sit easily with the extent and accessibility of most of European trade. Therefore a different model of cooperation arose in the form of merchant directorates. Basically these were self-regulatory bodies consisting of a number of the leading members of a merchant community.\(^49\) The directorates attained the right to enforce that all merchants of this community would take protective measures, such as sailing in convoy, carrying cannons, or having soldiers on board. They also functioned as

\(^{45}\) Conditions ii-vii of the charter. Octroy, by de Hooghe Mogende heeren Staten Generael verleent aende West Indische Compagnie, in date den derden Junij 1621. Mette Ampliatien van dien, etc. (The Hague 1637).

\(^{46}\) Den Heijer, WIC, 111 ff.


\(^{48}\) This for example was the case with the Nordic Company, erected in 1614 mainly to limit competition in the whale trade and share the losses from English attacks on the whaling fleet. Van Brakel, Handelscompagnieën, 27-29.

\(^{49}\) These directorates should not be confused with the Directies, which were urban bodies that organized convoys on important trade routes next to the Admiralty Boards until the mid-1650s. See Chapter Two.
organized lobbying groups, advising Admiralty Boards in the organization of cruising and convoying, protesting custom raises or suggesting protective measures for their trade, and fulfilling limited diplomatic functions. The first and probably most successful example was the Directorate of Levantine Trade, which was erected in 1625 at the request of 37 merchants to organize protection against ‘the robberies up to the Davis Strait by those of Algiers, Tunis and others’. Much later, directorates for the Eastern and Moscovian trade were also erected along similar lines.

Despite differences in the balance between trade and warfare, monopolistic or free trade policies, internal organization, wealth, and influence, these merchant companies and directorates shared important characteristics as brokerage institutions. All were private or semi-private institutions, engaging in warfare or armed protection as extensions of their commercial activities. Where warfare seemed to overtake commerce in prominence, as was the case in the first WIC, it directly threatened the vitality of the institutions themselves. State and merchants thus had a mutual interest to maintain the independence of these brokerage institutions. The federal structure of the state also made it harder for authorities to encroach upon this independence, since every move by a regional group of rulers to try and gain greater control over sections of the merchant companies could be counteracted by rulers and merchant from other regions. In this way, particularly the colonial companies could gain and maintain their exceptional influence as states within the state.

1.3 Types of brokerage 2: merchants as administrators

Forms of brokerage in the organization of state navies differed substantially from those centering on the activities of merchant companies. Nevertheless, while more bureaucratic in nature than their commercial counterparts, capitalists were still employed at every level of naval organization and often in ways that gave them decisive influence on planning and decision making. Until the rise of the modern factory, the building and equipment of a fully armed warship remained the largest, most concentrated form of investment in material goods.

that either the state or private entrepreneurs could undertake. As bureaucratic institutions, naval administrations had to develop strong links to the market to be able to execute their tasks. The way in which this was done differed from country to country, varying between cases in which the state firmly controlled most stages of production and supply to cases in which much initiative was left to private capital. The Dutch Republic was an example of the latter. In his comparative study of early modern navies, Jan Glete noted that ‘[t]he connection between the interest base and the composition and operations of the state navy is unusually clear in the Dutch case.’ For an important part this was due to the organizational structure of Dutch naval administration in which five independent Admiralty Boards – located in the main ports of Holland, Zeeland and Friesland – were governed by colleges consisting of delegates from the different towns and provinces. The States General, which supervised the Admiralty Boards, consisted of delegates from the same towns and provinces. The main permanent source of funds for the navy was provided by customs, and thus directly linked to trade. A strong social bias in the selection of delegates to the colleges further strengthened the ties between naval administration and local merchant communities.

The division of naval administration into five separate institutions was a child of the Dutch Revolt. During the 1570s, the motley crews of the disorganized Sea-Beggar fleet were transformed into a rudimentary navy. Initially, this was done on a purely local basis. However, the conclusion of a ‘Closer Union’ between the two core rebel provinces Holland and Zeeland in 1576 led to the formation of a joint navy under the leadership of William of Orange. Since Amsterdam at this time was still loyal to the Habsburg rulers the insignificant port city of Rotterdam became the location of the Admiralty Board. This could have worked in favor of the creation of a centralized naval administration, since Rotterdam had little political weight of its own and was located near Delft as the seat of the Prince of Orange and

---

The Hague as the bureaucratic center of the Republic.\textsuperscript{55} However, Zeeland administrators rejected what they perceived as Holland domination over the new naval institutions. Before the Revolt, the Zeeland town Veere had housed the principal institutions of the Habsburg navy, and now the province refused to give up its powerful position so easily.\textsuperscript{56}

Tensions between centralizing and particularist tendencies became even more pronounced after the murder of William of Orange in 1584, during the troubled governorship of the Earl of Leicester. Leicester strove to bring naval direction under the supervision of the Council of State. In order to placate the opposition against the accumulation of power into central hands, he agreed that executive power would be divided over three rather than one Admiralty Boards. Next to a Rotterdam Admiralty Board, he proposed one in Zeeland and one in the Northern Quarter of Holland, which would reside in the important Zuiderzee port-city Hoorn. However, Hoorn had its own reasons to refuse at this point, and Amsterdam – which by now had joined the revolt – managed to maneuver itself into position to claim the third Admiralty seat. When Leicester left, fragmentation went even further. Central authority over the navy was shifted from the Council of State to the States General, in which provincial and local interests were reflected much stronger than in the former institution. Meanwhile, the Northern Quarter of Holland protested against the usurpation of its seat by Amsterdam. A fourth Admiralty Board was established that was shared between the two Northern Quarter towns Hoorn and Enkhuizen. Finally, in 1596 the two northernmost provinces Friesland and Groningen managed to enforce the establishment of a fifth Admiralty Board, located first in Dokkum and later in Harlingen. The naval instruction issued by the States General in 1597 affirmed this division into five independent Admiralty Boards, allowing each far-reaching administrative independence, the choice of naval officers including their own admirals, and the right to fit out convoying expeditions as long as this was done ‘in good correspondence’ with the other Admiralty Boards and the States General.\textsuperscript{57}

The manner of allocating funds was another factor strengthening the federal and brokerage character of the navy. The Admiralty Boards drew their income from two principal sources. The first, permanent source of revenue was formed by customs (\textit{convooien} and \textit{licenten}).\textsuperscript{58} The Admiralty Boards themselves were responsible for the collection of these

\textsuperscript{56} Sicking, \textit{Neptune and the Netherlands}, 407.
\textsuperscript{58} ‘t Hart, \textit{Bourgeois state}, 100 ff.
taxes in the cities where they were located and in a series of offices along administrative borders (the buytencomptoren or outside offices). The costs of administering the collection of these taxes were high, and the efficiency of the Admiralty Boards in fulfilling their duties in this respect was often questioned. Furthermore, given the great variations in economic strength of the Republic, financing naval power through a tax on trade tended to emphasize the existing inequalities in the weight of the different Admiralty Boards. However, direct control over the raising of customs gave the towns in which the Admiralty Boards were situated powerful influence over an important instrument of economic policy. This advantage to the local elites far outweighed any potential disadvantage arising from the inefficiencies of localized collection, and they henceforward defended the privilege of housing their own Admiralty Boards tooth and nail. The system of funding also strengthened the sway of merchants over the employment of the navy, since they could argue that paying for the upkeep of the fleet entitled them to the benefit of naval protection. The fact that the Dutch name chosen for the ordinary customs was ‘convoy’ affirmed this direct link.

The second source of income of the Admiralty Boards equally strengthened local control. This was formed by subsidies decided on by the States General, earmarked for particular purposes such as the building or fitting out of a number of warships. As was the case with all other funds allocated by the States General, the actual collection of these subsidies was distributed over the different provinces through a quote system. Each individual subsidy or ‘petition’ had to be approved by every single province in an often painstaking process of negotiation. Even when approval was given, provinces could forestall payment for many years, or sometimes forever. Especially during times of war, these subsidies could far outstrip the income from customs, and none-compliance of individual provinces could seriously harm naval performance. Again, this provided a political route for merchants to pressurize the navy boards by using their influence on the Provincial States.  

Of course, the rulers of the Dutch Republic were not blind to the need for coordination between the five Admiralty Boards. Soon after the establishment of the federal navy attempts were made to increase the level of cooperation, sometimes going as far as proposing full administrative centralization. Already in 1589 stadtholder Maurits of Nassau tried to establish a ‘College of Supervision’ (College van Superintendentie), but failed in the teeth of opposition from the more peripheral provinces Zeeland and Friesland fearing Holland control over the new institution. Significantly, in the run up to the instruction of 1597 formalizing the

---

59 Bruijn, Dutch navy, 6-9.
federal nature of naval institutions, centralized alternatives were seriously contemplated once again. Just preceding the acceptance of the final version of the new instruction, a resolution noted that there had been thorough discussion

‘how and in what way the administration of customs and the policy of the affairs of the Admiralty Boards, with their appurtenances, could be accounted for to the greatest advantage of the Generality and contentment of the United Provinces; either by the introduction of a general college, with deputies thereof in the respective quarters, or by the erection of several colleges (…).’

This discussion in the run up to the instruction of 1597 was certainly not the last time that centralization was contemplated. In the 1630s stadtholder and admiral general Fredrick Henry undertook several attempts at administrative centralization. He proposed to separate convoying, which he intended to remain in the hands of the five Admiralty Boards, from the fitting out of the blockading fleet for Flanders, which he tried to organize through a directorate operating from Hellevoetsluis. This directorate would be supervised by

‘a permanent college with its necessary officers, which would reside in The Hague, for which the most able and experienced Gentlemen Councilors from the respective Admiralty Boards would be employed, or some other pious, experienced, and able persons that will be selected for this task (…).’

However, the proposal suffered the same fate of its predecessors, this time because of opposition from the Amsterdam burgomasters.

The structure of naval administration assured strong influence of local elites. At the head of each of the five Admiralty Boards was a college made up of representatives from towns and provinces. As was the case in all sections of the Dutch state, an intricate system of cross-representation had to ensure that all major towns and regions could take part in decision making (see table 1.1). However, in each case the province in which the Admiralty Board was located was assigned the biggest delegation, containing half or more of the seats. With dominance over three out of five Admiralty Boards, and two fifths of the total number of seats

60 RSG-OS, IX, 516.
61 Bruijn, Dutch navy, 27-28.
63 Ibid, 595-597, and Bruijn, Dutch navy, 28.
Table 1.1  Federal representation in the five Admiralty Boards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Holland</th>
<th>Zeeland</th>
<th>Guelders</th>
<th>Utrecht</th>
<th>Friesland</th>
<th>Overijssel</th>
<th>Groningen</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rotterdam</strong></td>
<td>7 *</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admiralty Board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1644-1795)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amsterdam</strong></td>
<td>6 **</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admiralty Board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1606-1795)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zeeland</strong></td>
<td>2 ***</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admiralty Board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Quarter</strong></td>
<td>6 ****</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admiralty Board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1606-1795)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friesland</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admiralty Board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(first half 17th century-1795)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of representatives</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>54/55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Nobility, Dordrecht, Delft, Rotterdam, Gorinchem, Schiedam, Den Briel
** Nobility, Haarlem, Leyden, Amsterdam, Gouda, Edam
*** Permanent: Amsterdam / on turn: Dordrecht, Delft, Rotterdam
**** Amsterdam, Gorinchem, Alkmaar, Hoorn / Enkhuizen, Monickendam, Medemblik


in all Admiralty Boards, Holland’s share of control over naval administration exceeded that of the other provinces. Permanent seats in three out of the five Admiralty Boards gave Amsterdam an institutional advantage over the other Dutch towns. Besides the advantages in the distribution of seats, delegates from the home province of each Admiralty Board also benefited from closer proximity. In Amsterdam, for example, the representatives of Groningen, Friesland and Overijssel were mostly absent from important meetings, so that Holland’s representatives could easily carry the vote.64

64 Bruijn, Admiraliteit van Amsterdam, 41.
Prosopographic research confirms the ways in which the system of selection of personnel tightened the links of Admiralty Boards to sections of the political and economic elites. Annex One and Two contain two lists of Admiralty councilors: that of the representatives from Holland on the Amsterdam Admiralty Board, and of the Zeeland representatives in the Zeeland Admiralty Board. Table 1.2 sums up the extent to which Admiralty councilors engaged in political careers at the local, provincial and national level of the Dutch state. The table affirms in particular how well integrated the Admiralty councilors were into the world of urban politics. Not only did almost all representatives of the towns gain their position on the Admiralty Boards through local office, often they had been or later became aldermen or burgomasters, the highest functions in urban politics. In Zeeland, strong local representation and strong integration into provincial politics went hand in hand. With fifteen years, the average length of service to the institution was quite long. In contrast, Holland councilors on the Amsterdam board only served for periods of five to six years and were, by nature of the system of appointment, less tied to provincial politics than their Zeeland counterparts. Quick replacement helped to ensure that naval administrators remained true to the interests of their hometowns, therefore inhibiting the emergence of a strong bureaucratic culture focused on the institution they served.

The two lists also affirm a second point. Members of the Admiralty councils were not only selected for their ties to local and regional politics. Their collective biography reads like a Who is Who of Dutch Republican commercial elites. Out of the 287 Holland councilors, 54 also served as directors of the VOC, WIC, or the Society of Suriname. Among the Zeeland representatives ties with colonial trade were weaker, with eleven out of ninety-three councilors holding positions as directors of the local chambers of the VOC or WIC. But as Annex Two shows, many had strong family ties that connected them to one of the two Companies. Perhaps more important is that at least in Amsterdam, from the last quarter of the seventeenth century onwards the position of Admiralty councilor and VOC director were often combined. This ensured that at most times the VOC had at least one and sometimes more than one direct representative within naval administration. The connections between the Admiralty Boards and the colonial companies did not end there. Personal and family connections bound these two sections of the brokerage state even closer together. During the first half of the seventeenth century, the Amsterdam Admiralty Board contained three sons of

---

65 This had an administrative reason: in Zeeland, membership of the Provincial Government was coupled directly to the position of Admiralty councilor.
Table 1.2 Political ties of members of the Admiralty Boards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Number of councilors</th>
<th>Average years in function</th>
<th>Function in local government</th>
<th>Function in provincial government</th>
<th>Function in national government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representatives from Holland on the Amsterdam Admiralty Board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1586-1699</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>151 (89%)</td>
<td>66 (40%)</td>
<td>29 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700-1795</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>107 (92%)</td>
<td>43 (37%)</td>
<td>26 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives from Zeeland on the Zeeland Admiralty Board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1584-1699</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>45 (80%)</td>
<td>55 (98%)</td>
<td>13 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700-1795</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>36 (97%)</td>
<td>37 (100%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: See Annex One and Two.

founding traders of the VOC: Andries Bicker, Pieter Pietersz Hasselaar and Jacob Poppen. Jacob Cornelisz van Neck, known as one of the most influential Amsterdam Admiralty councilors of this period, had been admiral and investor in the 1598 East India fleet.66

Thanks to Elias’ major study of the Amsterdam elite, much is known about the economic background of the Amsterdam Admiralty councilors. Table 1.3 gives an overview of the extraordinary wealth and connections of this group. Members of the Amsterdam Admiralty Board did not simply represent the wealthy merchant houses. They were part and parcel of them. In fact, their estimated wealth places them at the highest rungs of the economic elite.67 Though more sparse, the data on wealth and income of the other councilors included in Annex One and Two affirm this image. Of the fifteen Leiden representatives for whom such figures are available seven bequeathed an inheritance of over f 100,000, putting them among the richest of their town.68

Close ties to the merchant community at large were not only characteristic for the Admiralty councilors, but also for the small bureaucratic staff that served the Admiralty Boards. In Amsterdam, from 1641 until 1795 the position of secretary of the Admiralty Board was held by only two families, De Wildt and Backer. David de Wildt, who was secretary from

---

Table 1.3  Wealth and connections of members of the Amsterdam Admiralty Board

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Nr. of councilors</th>
<th>Director for VOC or WIC (Elias)</th>
<th>Active merchant (Elias)</th>
<th>Son or son in law of active merchant (Elias)</th>
<th>Estimated wealth * (in guilders)</th>
<th>Estimated yearly income * (in guilders)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1586-1650</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>329,000 (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1651-1700</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>245,000 (8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1701-1750</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1,795,000 (2)</td>
<td>22,000 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1751-1795</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>448,000 (5)</td>
<td>13,000 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>465,000 (21)</td>
<td>17,000 (12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Average, number of councilors on which the figure is based within parentheses

Source: Johan E. Elias, *De Vroedschap van Amsterdam 1578-1795*, Volumes I-II (Haarlem 1903-1905).

1641 to 1671, was the son of Haarlem representative and magistrate Gillis de Wildt.\(^{69}\) In all likelihood his father was not of extraordinary wealth. But in 1674 David de Wildt’s widow bequeathed a sum of f 200,000. Two of David’s daughters married merchants that were involved in trade with the Admiralty Board, the rich rope makers Hendrik and Jan Lijnslager.\(^{70}\) His son Hiob de Wildt took over the position of secretary, which he held until 1704.\(^{71}\) He married twice, first to Susanna Reael, daughter of governor general of East India Laurens Reael, and after her death with Barbara de Neufville, daughter of the head of one of the leading Amsterdam merchant houses. Hiob de Wildt himself took to the ox trade, a profession that was closely related to victualling the VOC and the navy. His estate amounted to f 170,000. His son David was secretary until 1729.\(^{72}\) Two of his daughters were married into leading merchant and banker families, that of Bicker and De Pels. His son Job did not become secretary of the Amsterdam Admiralty Board, but receiver general of the same institution.\(^{73}\) In 1742 his yearly income was estimated at f 12-14,000. The post of secretary went over to the then treasurer of the Admiralty Board, Cornelis Backer, and after him to his

---


\(^{70}\) In 1691, Anna de Wildt in the capacity of Hendrik Lijnslager’s widow supplied the Amsterdam Admiralty with f 197,812:8 worth of rope, thereby acting as by far the largest single supplier to the Admiralty that year. NA, Archief Admiraliteitscolleges, no. 1930. ‘Register ordonnantien Admiraliteit van Amsterdam, 1691’.


\(^{72}\) Ibid, Volume I, 393-394, and Volume II, 807 and 899.

\(^{73}\) Ibid, Volume I, 393-394, and Volume II, 807 and 899.
son Cornelis Cornelisz, who married the daughter of leading Amsterdam merchant banker Pieter Clifford.\textsuperscript{74}

Although office holders everywhere in Europe were selected from the upper middle classes and the rich, the strength of political and economic ties of Dutch naval councilors to the urban ruling classes was exceptional. In countries like Sweden, France and England a professional naval administration developed much earlier, selected respectively through aristocratic background, patronage of the crown, or service as naval officer.\textsuperscript{75} Even though the Dutch navy formally became a state navy very early, the complete integration between naval administration and the top layers of the commercial elites signified the continuation of brokerage, albeit in a form that was more integrated into the state than that practiced by the merchant companies.

1.4 Types of brokerage 3: financial intermediaries in troop payments

The third type of brokerage solutions was one in which a task that nominally remained in the hands of state officials was in practice executed by entrepreneurs, operating on their own capital and initiative but within confines that were determined by state regulation. One such group of entrepreneurs was that of the military solicitors (solliciteurs militair), financial agents who were responsible for the regular payment of troops. These solicitors were financial middlemen, who often handled large sums of money which they drew on their own account on the credit market to cover for the arrears of the provincial treasuries that issued the payment ordinances.

In 1650 the political and military handbook 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 payment office is almost depleted or becomes impoverished’.\textsuperscript{76} Military solicitors helped to solve this problem. The term ‘solicitor’ in the early modern Netherlands had a wider use for brokers in politics and trade. The services of professional solicitors were used, for example, for sending requests to the Provincial States or

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid, Volume I, 362, and Volume II, 680-681, 757, 894, and 913.
\textsuperscript{76}M.Z.Boxhorn, Verbetert en vermeerdert politijck en militair hantboecxken vanden staet der Geumierde Provintien (The Hague 1674 [1650]) 63.
the States General. In exchange for a fee, a solicitor would make sure all the required formalities were attended to, and a well-connected solicitor 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.77

Military solicitors did fulfill such general brokerage functions, handing in requests and filing complaints for the captains or colonels they served. But as Boxhorn’s description makes clear, by the 1650s their primary function was financial. During the first half of the seventeenth century, military solicitors became the crucial link between the provincial treasury and the troops in the field. The process of troop payment started with the issuing of an ordinance by the Provincial States. The task of military solicitors was to collect the money from the provincial treasury (comptoir) and transfer it to the company captains, who were responsible for paying the soldiers. If the state ran out of funds (as happened more often than not), the solicitor guaranteed the continuing of payment ‘either by his own means or by money received from others on interest’. In executing these tasks, Boxhorn acknowledged, ‘those solicitors are driven by the hope for a large and secure profit’.78 The captains had to pay the solicitors a salary out of the money they received from the States, and above this sum the solicitors received an interest over the money they advanced. Especially in times of war, the earnings from interest payments could far surpass the salaries paid to the agent.

When and how this system of ‘military soliciting’ started remains unclear. According to Zwitzer, the first mention of military solicitors in the resolutions of the States General and the States of Holland dates from the years 1610-1611.79 However, military solicitors 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, chacun sur sa province respectivement, pour recepvoir paiement, qui sera ausdictes provinces défalcqué sur leur moyens généraulx’.80

78 Boxhorn, Hantboexken, 63-64.
80 RSG-OS II, 248.
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 1590s still mention frequent cases in which companies were not paid at all for many months, sometimes resulting in mutiny. Similar problems continued to plague the Dutch Republic throughout the Eighty Years’ War. Various emergency solutions were put into practice, from asking the rich States of Holland to advance the money for poorer provinces, to levying forced contributions on the Dutch countryside, or drawing on the personal credit of high financial officials. Considering this administrative chaos, the need for a broker presenting their case to the state 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 1580s 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. For this early period military solicitors are mainly mentioned in connection to foreign companies. The German companies of Hohenlohe already employed a ‘solicitor or servant’ in the late 1580s, who made requests for payment to the States General. In the first decade of the seventeenth century, the French regiments were served by the solicitors Esaias Châtelain and Pieter Parret. The English companies employed several solicitors as well, who, apart from finance, also played a role in finding accommodation.

During the first decades of the seventeenth century more and more companies employed military solicitors, 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

81 RSG-OS VII, 154-158.
85 RSG-OS VI, 123-124 and 129.
86 RSG-OS XIII, 143, 145, 392, 393, 705, and RSG-OS XIV, 193 and 521.
87 RSG-OS XIII, 682, and RSG-NS I, 72, 145, 432.
summoned by the States General to take an oath, promising to observe the existing regulation for troops’ payment. And in 1608 the members of the Provincial Government of Holland (Gecommitteerde Raden), the functionaries responsible for the daily management of the affairs of the Provincial States, issued their first general order for the payment of soldiers through the intermediation of ‘the solicitors of the companies in The Hague’. 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 1650s. 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 per month, and a mere one month term for repayment. The Council of State did not agree on those conditions, considering them exorbitant. To the complaint about the high interest rate it added 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, and high interest rates might well have been a compensation for great risks. 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 after the Province of Holland had supplied the funds, since neither the solicitors nor the captains were willing to share the risks of transport.

Military soliciting only became applied across the board during the relative quiet of the Twelve Years’ Truce with Spain (1609-1621). Resolutions dealing not with individual financiers but introducing regulation for military soliciting in general started to arise in the 1620s and 1630s, when the war resumed in full force. A resolution by the Provincial Government of Holland from 1622 strengthened the position of military solicitors 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 Provincial

88 RSG-OS XIII, 673.
89 National Archive (NA), Archief van de Gecommitteerde Raden van de Staten van Holland en Westfriesland, no. 3291, Indices op de Resoluties 1624-1659.
90 RSG-NS II, 430.
91 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.
92 RSG-NS II, 329.
Government. And in 1632 they resolved ‘to free and secure [the solicitors] 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. The introduction of such regulations transformed military soliciting from one of many temporary solutions to the problem of non-payment to the preferred way to organize the payment of troops. At one and the same time, this enabled the state to draw funds on the capital markets more easily, and strengthened the position of private intermediaries within the system of military financing.

1.5 Political and ideological foundations of the federal-brokerage state

As the example of military soliciting shows, the formation of federal-brokerage practices could occur through a long series of more or less ad hoc decisions, aimed at solving immediate crises in military organization. However, the persistency with which such solutions came to the fore suggests a deeper underlying consensus on the desirability of structures that maintained both the federal character of the Republic and strong interaction between state and entrepreneurs in the organization of warfare. To understand the foundations of this consensus, it is necessary to take a look at the political and ideological sources for unity within the state more generally.

All states rule through a mixture of coercion and consent, and the Dutch Republic was no exception. The idea that the strength of the state emanates from harmony between citizens, and that the aim of politics was to overcome the sources of division, was deeply ingrained in Dutch political theory. But how could a state consisting of so many conflicting and overlapping institutions maintain the adherence of the competing sections of the ruling class,

---

95 E.g. Fransiscus Burgersdijck, Idea oeconomicae et politicae doctrinae (s.l. 1649) 35: ‘Finis doctrinae Politicae est, felicitas universae Reip. quae in eo sita est, ut omnes pie probeque vivant: deinde ut omnia iis, quatenus fieri potest, suppetant, quae ad vitam commode degendam necessaria sunt, & ad res communes, & communia jura civitatis adversus vim externam, defendenda. Ex hisce duabus rebus tranquillitas oritur & concordia civium, quod est maximum Reipub. robur.’ [The aim of political learning is the happiness of the entire state. This happiness consists of all people living piously and justly. Furthermore that the people receive all things, as far as possible, which are necessary to live a comfortable life, and which serve to defend the common interest and the common rights of society against force from outside. From these two conditions arise tranquility and harmony between the citizens, which is the most powerful strength of the state.]
let alone of the population at large? Simon Stevin, the theorist and mathematician behind Maurits’ army reforms at the end of the sixteenth century, neatly summed up the problem:

‘In civic questions, one favors war and the other peace, this person considers it necessary to engage in taxation and making public costs and that opposes it; meaning that whichever side the ruler chooses, he receives the ingratitude and hatred of a large crowd. Yes, even when he is God-fearing, loyal and just, they will still call him a blasphemer, traitor and thief of the common means (…).’

The federal-brokerage character of the Dutch state represented an elaborate compromise between strongly institutionalized interest groups. The prize of this compromise was a state that was internally cartelized, and therefore politically unstable. War brought internal tensions to the fore, and revolutionary crises accompanied every major shift in the international situation (see table 1.4). However, given the volatile nature of early modern politics in general, the most surprising fact perhaps is the ease with which the Dutch Republic overcame these moments of contention. Despite violent shifts between stadtholderly and stadtholderless regimes in the two centuries between the 1590s and the 1780s, the Dutch ruling classes managed to avoid the sort of long-term paralysis that plunged both the English and the French into civil war. Until the end of the eighteenth century revolts were aimed at shifting the balance of power within the framework of the federal-brokerage compromise, not at overthrowing it. The stability of the central institutions of the state in the face of recurrent political conflict points towards the strength of their socio-political underpinnings, or, in Gramscian terms, their underlying ‘historic bloc’.

One source of stability was the organization of political life beneath the level of party conflict. Because of the central role of the House of Orange in all major turning points, traditional historiography emphasized the importance of the political divisions between the adherents and opponents of the stadtholderate within the Dutch state. In his 1961 dissertation D.J. Roorda criticized this view by arguing that regionally or locally oriented ‘factions’ formed the real core of political life. Not fundamental ideological differences over issues of domestic and foreign policy, but climbing the social ladder by strengthening one’s local

---

### Table 1.4 Revolutionary crises in the Dutch Republic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Nature of the crisis</th>
<th>International context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1617-1618</td>
<td>Power struggle between Maurits and Oldenbarnevelt, accompanied by religiously inspired urban revolts</td>
<td>End of the Twelve Years’ Truce (1609-1621)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1650-1653</td>
<td>William II’s attack on Amsterdam, beginning of First Stadtholderless Period in the midst of rioting</td>
<td>Peace of Westphalia (1648) and First Anglo-Dutch War (1652-1654)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1672-1673</td>
<td>Orangist uprisings in many cities lead to fall of the De Witt regime and installation of William III as stadtholder</td>
<td>Combined attack on the Dutch Republic by France and England (1672)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1703-1706</td>
<td>Death of William III leads to widespread rioting against client regents in Guelders and Overijssel, beginning of the Second Stadtholderless Period</td>
<td>War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1747-1750</td>
<td>Orangist revolution installs William IV as stadtholder with extended powers</td>
<td>French invasion leads to intensification of the War of the Austrian Succession (1747)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1785-1787</td>
<td>Patriot Revolution, ended in failure and restoration of William V’s regime by Prussian troops</td>
<td>Major defeat in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795-1801</td>
<td>Batavian Revolution, end of the old republic</td>
<td>French Revolutionary Wars (1793-1795)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


connections was the main motivator behind these networks of regent families. Even though successive stadtholders tried to gain greater influence over the system of appointing functionaries at the local or regional level, they only managed to do so for the long term in the peripheral provinces. Thus, factions remained more important in deciding who was in and

---


who was out than the two vying parties. And although every major shift of power between Orangists and anti-Orangists had consequences for individual adherents of the loosing factions, the core networks behind these factions proved highly adaptable to changing political conditions. Surely, the factions did not annul the impact of violent temporal clashes over general policies, sharp political and personal divisions, or popular mobilization behind one of the two major parties. But they did provide a lasting framework for the reintegration of the top layers of both contending parties into the local, regional and national power-structure.

The lists of Admiralty councilors in Annex One and Two provide a good illustration of the basic continuity among the ruling families throughout periods of political crises. After the constitutional crisis of 1618 two out of five Holland councilors in the Amsterdam Admiralty Board were replaced because of their party adherence, but the others remained in position. In 1672 Cornelis de Vlaming van Outshoorn lost his seat, but only to re-enter the political establishment as burgomaster of Amsterdam a few years later. It was not until the 1747 revolution that brought to power stadtholder William IV that a full half of the Holland Admiralty councilors was replaced for political reasons. In Zeeland, none of the councilors from the province itself were removed due to party struggle in those three years. Only in 1703 did the inception of the Second Stadtholderless Period lead to political shifts within the Admiralty Board, when some of the administrators most closely associated with the old regime became the bud of popular rioting over upper class corruption.99

The factions provided a lasting mechanism for the distribution of jobs among the leading families within the Dutch elite and a way to ensure long-term continuity of power within a strongly divided constituency. But they do not suffice to explain how a state that institutionally cemented the sectional interests of each of its component parts managed to overcome these divisions to such an extent that it could play the role of a hegemonic power. Two other sources of stability must be briefly examined. The first is the special position of the Province of Holland, and within Holland the special position of Amsterdam, as economic lynchpins of Dutch power. The second is the availability of a number of powerful ideological notions that helped to present the strong class-biases and local particularism entrenched in the Dutch state as reflecting the interests of the nation as a whole, thereby providing an ideological basis for consent.


The special position of Holland and Amsterdam in Dutch Republican politics needs little elaboration. It has left such an imprint, that the name of the province still functions as *pars pro toto* for the Netherlands at large. As the richest province, and within that, the richest town, these two entities held great sway over public finances and the determination of state policy. Demographically, Holland was by far the most dynamic part of the country until the end of the seventeenth century. Its population more than tripled between 1514 and 1680, when this province alone housed 883,000 people, or almost half the less than two million inhabitants of the Republic. In the course of the century between 1550 and 1650, the population of Amsterdam quadrupled. The city gave home to around 220,000 inhabitants at its high-point of urban expansion. With an overall urbanization rate of 40 percent, the Republic was an anomaly in the pre-modern world. But within this anomaly, Holland itself was the exceptional case with its urbanization rate of over 60 percent.\(^{100}\) The economic weight of the province was even greater. Formally, Holland paid 57.7 percent of ordinary war budgets during most of the seventeenth century, but the actual share paid by this province often was even larger.\(^{101}\) Politically, the grand pensionary (*raadspensionaris*) of Holland acted as a substitute-prime minister to the Republic as a whole, especially during the two Stadtholderless Periods. Amsterdam always loomed largely in their considerations. Grand pensionary Johan de Witt acknowledged as much when contemplating Dutch policy in the Baltic region in 1657, writing in a letter to an Amsterdam burgomaster:

‘(...) and your honor can rest assured that I, in this case as well as in any other of weight and importance, will always (...) have my eyes singularly directed at the city of Amsterdam and the sentiments of those governing this city, since their considerable interest in the state makes that it deserves to be held in high consideration above all others.’\(^{102}\)

Holland and Amsterdam particularism could be the cause of great friction within the state, slowing down decision making processes over proposals that were not directly to the benefit of the sea-provinces. In the same year that De Witt wrote the above letter, he also could complain bitterly about the unwillingness of Amsterdam to consider intervention in the affairs of the bishop of Munster, strongly favored by the inland provinces:

\(^{100}\) De Vries and Van der Woude, *First modern economy*, 52,61, and 64-65.  
\(^{101}\) ‘t Hart, *Bourgeois state*, 80-81.  
Deliberations in the current extraordinary meeting of the Gentlemen States about the Munster affair have unexpectedly turned sour and uneasy, since the Gentlemen deputies of the city of Amsterdam have with great seriousness opposed the general inclination of said meeting on aforementioned subject. And since this essentially hurts the interest of the inland provinces, that I feel are greatly annoyed by the slowness of the Province of Holland in a matter of their interest, (…) it has to be feared that if the Province of Holland will maintain this retardation, the other provinces will in turn hold back their support in cases most harmful for the interests of the trading provinces (…).^103

Dutch Republican politics thus often took the form of pragmatic haggling. But it was haggling between partners that were mutually dependent – as was shown painfully during the 1672 invasion, when Holland only survived the joint Anglo-French-Germanic attack by using the Southern and Eastern provinces as a buffer zone – and haggling between partners that at the same time were fundamentally unequal. Characteristically for the federal-brokerage nature of the state, the States of Holland could operate at one and the same time as the core constituent element of the States General, and as a pressure group for the interests of Holland or Amsterdam merchants.^104 This dual position helps to explain why Holland politicians jealously guarded the independence of action granted to them within the federal-brokerage structure of the state but were willing to act as financial guarantors to the Republic whenever called for. And given the imbalance in wealth, the other provinces could try to counterbalance the central role of Holland, but never to unsettle it completely. In a polemical pamphlet directed against the Hollando-centrism of Pieter de la Court’s *True Interest of Holland*, Constantijn Huygens pointed out that the interests of Holland could never again be threatened the way William II had done in 1650,

‘(…) since the States of Holland have now become so powerful and well established, that not only lickspittles and slavish people, but even the stadtholder will guard not to try anything tending to this, not to cause general ruin (…).’^105

Much of the negotiations between the different power-groups within the Dutch state rested on the case-to-case balancing of particular interests, pushing ideology into the background in

---

^103 Johan de Witt to Cornelis de Graeff van Zuidpolsbroek, 18 October 1657, in Ibid, 514.
^104 For example, while decisions over convoying were formally taken by the Admiralty Boards in concordance with the States General, the States of Holland often discussed and acted upon requests by merchants to pressure these institutions for increased protection. See section 2.5.
^105 Constantijn Huygens, *Den herstelden Prins tot Stadt-houder ende Capiteyn Generaal vande Vereenighde Nederlanden, ten dienst ende luyster vande loffelijcke en de wel geformeerde Republijck vande Geunieerde Provincien, &c.* (Amsterdam 1663) 93-94.
favor of sometimes astonishing candor in political affairs. Pragmatism is a luxury that is
affordable to the successful. The theorization of the spectacular rise of Dutch power was an
obsession among those that wanted to follow the same trail. But that does not mean that the
political haggling behind the making of Dutch foreign policy was completely void of
theoretical principles. Dutch seventeenth century political theory developed a number of
powerful theoretical notions that helped to provide ideological coherence to an internally
divided state. Next to mutual economic benefits distributed through the faction networks of
elite-families and the institutionalized power-negotiations through the ‘political state’, these
notions formed a third source of stability cementing the historic bloc between large
international traders, urban oligarchs and their middle class constituencies. They were the
sources of ‘hegemony’ behind the Dutch state. A full examination of such notions goes
beyond the confines of this study, and should at least include the dual role of Calvinism in
creating a shared sense of purpose among the elites as well as challenging lower-class dissent,
seventeenth-century Republicanism and theories of the mixed constitutions as sources of
legitimization of the state’s constitution, and the role of the family in mediating the space
between public and private life. But a particularly powerful set of notions arose to justify the
role of the state in Dutch commercial expansion, and for the purposes of the present study an
examination of these suffices to illustrate the ideological components of the Dutch historic
bloc.

The most famous of these integrative notions is Grotius’ development of international
law, shaped directly to fit the requirements of Dutch expansion in the East Indies. Grotius’
concept of *Mare Liberum* was a ‘true fiction’ par excellence, reflecting real interests in
mystifying ways. As many contemporary and later observers have noted, the Dutch were
interested in free seas for themselves, not for the English East India Company, the Portuguese
Empire, or for inland traders with the Malaccas. They operated on the basis of ‘mare liberum’
when dealing from a position of strength, as was the case with a whole string of trade

---

106 Ida J.A. Nijenhuis, ‘Shining comet, falling meteor. Contemporary reflections on the Dutch Republic as a
commercial power during the Second Stadholderless Era’, in: Jan A.F. de Jongste and Augustus J. Veenendaal,
107 Recently, this political background behind the formulation of Grotius’ theories has come under close scrutiny
theories and the rise of Dutch power in the East Indies 1595-1615* (Leiden/Boston 2006), Eric Wilson, *The
savage Republic. De Indis of Hugo Grotius, Republicanism, and Dutch hegemony within the early modern
world-system (c.1600-1619)* (Leiden/Boston 2008), and Andrea Weindl, ‘Colonial design in European
international law of the seventeenth century’, in: Olaf Asbach and Peter Schröder (eds), *War, the state and
international law in seventeenth-century Europe* (Farnham / Burlington 2010) 231-246.
agreements concluded immediately following on the Peace of Westphalia. But they were willing enough to ‘close the seas’, as they did with the Flanders coast after the fall of Antwerp, if it fitted their interests better. Nevertheless, Grotius’ theory provided more than an ideological prop. As Grotius himself explained, the general freedom provided to the trading communities in the Dutch Republic gave them a superior justification for commercial warfare over their competitors, especially the Portuguese, ‘since their profit is mixed with the profit of the whole human race, which the Portuguese try to spoil’. By thus universalizing Dutch trading interests, the fiction of ‘mare liberum’ provided Dutch foreign policy both with a source of justification and with a moral economy of conquest.

Equally, Dutch development of political economy was not as empty of theoretical assumptions as is often assumed. There has been a long debate whether or not Dutch Republican rulers were Mercantilists in their economic thinking. If the concept is narrowly defined as a specific set of policies to ensure a positive balance of trade, increase the quantity of precious metal within national borders and stimulate national industry by state intervention, Dutch rulers at most acted – in the words of Voorthuysen – as ‘occasional Mercantilists’. Increases in trade tariffs were particularly unpopular among the elites for their perceived negative effects for the large overseas merchants. Protection of industry was generally seen as a task for provincial or urban politics. However, as Van Tijn has shown in a study of four seventeenth century economic thinkers, rejection of these practical proposals associated with Mercantilism often went hand in hand with the acceptance of most or all of its core theoretical propositions. Non-Mercantilist Dutch writers agreed with their foreign counterparts on three fundamental points: first, that the power and wealth of a state depend on the number of economically active inhabitants, especially the proportion of the population engaged in manufacture and trade; second, that foreign trade is the source of wealth, especially when it is

---

108 E.g. Traicté de la marine, faict, conclu & arresté à la Haye en Hollande, le 17 du mois de Decembre 1650 entre Messire Antoine Brun, Ambassadeur ordinaire du Seigneur Roy d’Espagne d’une, & les Srs Deputez des Seigneurs Estats Generaux des Provinces Unies du Pais-bas d’autre part (The Hague 1650), opening with the establishment of the right of free trade with all countries with which the Republic was not at war: ‘Premierement les Subjects & Habitants des Provinces Unies du Pays Bas, pouront en toute seureté & liberté naviger & trafiquer dans tous les Royaumes, Estates & Pays, qui sont, ou seront, en paix, Amitié, ou Neutralité avec l’Estat desdites Provinces Unies.’ (2vso).
109 Hugo de Groot, Vrye zeevaert ofte bewys van ‘trecht dat den Hollanders toecompt over de Indische coophandel (Leiden 1614) 77.
111 W.D. Voorthuijsen, De Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden en het mercantilisme (The Hague 1965) 130.
112 The important, though ideosyncratic economic and political thinker Dirk Graswinckel argued that daily policy in matters concerning industry should be the prerogative of towns and provinces, and that only in cases where manufacturing interests clearly exceeded provincial borders should it be brought before the States General. Dirk Graswinckel, Nasporinge van het recht van de opperste macht toekomende de Edele Groot Mogende Heeren de Heeren Staten van Holland en Westvriesland (Rotterdam 1667) 725.
connected to home manufactures; and third, that the total volume of world trade is constant, so that the economic gain of one country of necessity is the loss of another. Together these theoretical principles, repeated and elaborated in popular debates, political literature, and moral tracts, helped to explain how the expansion of trade was not only the well-understood self-interest of the merchant class, but in fact served the interests of the nation as a whole. They provided a theoretical foundation for the extraordinarily strong identification of principles of trade and state, so characteristic for the Dutch Republic.

Especially the third theoretical position summed up by Van Tijn also provided a framework to think about the interrelation between war and commerce. If all trading nations could only advance directly at the cost of their neighbors, war became not just an important instrument for economic development, but its necessary corollary. This question, pushed to the background by the development of free-trade ideologies in the nineteenth century, was still absolutely central to the project of seventeenth century economic thinkers. For them, the choice between war and peace always remained one of expediency and preference, not of principle. Global competition did not allow for a foreign policy that completely excluded trade wars. The reason for this was summed up in an unpublished memorandum by Gerrit Schaep to the notoriously peace-minded magistrate of Amsterdam: ‘Because everyone knows as clearly as the light of day, that the prosperity and welfare of all people is envied, discussed, and fought by their friends and neighbors as well as by their enemies and strangers’. The basic position was as much accepted by the advocate of peace and free trade Pieter de la Court, who argued that although peace was the ‘true interests’ of Holland, it was simply unattainable given the competitive nature of international relations:

‘If we consider the uncertainty of this World, especially in Europe, and that we by Traffick and Navigation have occasion to deal with all Nations, we ought to hold for a firm and general Maxim, that an assured Peace is, in relation to Holland, a mere Chimera, a Dream, a Fiction, used only by those, who like Syrens or Mermaids, endeavour by their melodious

---

114 A fairly typical example of this can be found in the anonymous pamphlet Consideratien wegens de commercien ende navigatie in de Oostzee, By de tegenwoordige conjuncturen wederom in haer oude vryheyt en fleur te herstellen. By een liefhebber van 't vaderlandt tot naeder overleg opgegeven (s.l. 1675) 4, where the author argues ‘[t]hat everybody knows (...) that on the growth and protection of commerce alone is built the wealth of this state’.
singing of a pleasant and firm Peace, to delude the credulous Hollanders, till they split upon the Rocks.”

Based on the demonstrable preponderance of such ‘realism’ in Dutch Republican political literature, modern writers who see Mercantilism primarily as a theory linking the international employment of state power and commercial expansion have little hesitation including the Republic among early modern Mercantilist states.

Combined, the faction- and family-networks at the base of Dutch politics, the special role of Holland and Amsterdam as power-brokers in all fundamental questions of foreign policy, and the existence of a number of powerful shared notions providing this policy with a universalizing rational and moral calling helped to overcome the structural division within the federal-brokerage state. But their cohesive capacity was not limitless. The nature of this historic bloc is noticeable for whom it left out, as much as for whom it managed to include. The structural inequalities in political access between sea-provinces and inland-provinces, between Amsterdam and the other trading towns, between the wealthy international merchant-industrialist or merchant-financiers and the urban small trader – let alone the day-laborer, soldier, sailor – never ceased to hunt the rulers of the Dutch Republic. Nevertheless, the federal-brokerage state provided a framework in which such divisions could be temporarily resolved, even if this sometimes happened only after violent crises. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, there were long-term economic limits to the integrative capacity of the state. Above all, it rested on the continued positive interplay between overseas commercial expansion and a flowering of the main productive sectors at home that created a real convergence of interests between the urban middle classes and large international merchants and financiers. Under pressure of the gradual uncoupling of trade and finance on the one hand and home-production on the other, the disintegrative aspects of the structure of the Dutch state became more apparent. However, as long as the Dutch Republic moved from strength to strength, economically and militarily, these centrifugal tendencies did not undercut the hegemony of the federal-brokerage state. Rather, success tended to solidify the essential features of the Dutch state as it emerged from its long war against the Habsburg Empire.

116 [De la Court], True interest, 242.
Conclusions

This chapter has shown how the federal-brokerage institutions of the Dutch state arose from a series of historical contingencies, connected to the direct requirements of the rebellious forces fighting the Spanish Habsburg crown, and reflecting the strong particularist pressures among the different components of the Revolt’s power base. In 1550 three scenarios of state formation had seemed feasible that each differed fundamentally from the one that proclaimed itself so triumphantly in the Great Assembly of 1651. Until the establishment of the Republic in 1588, monarchical centralization under the Habsburg crown, a close political alliance between the seven rebellious provinces and one of Spain’s European enemies, or an even more far-reaching devolution of power to the separate provinces had each been on the table. Their defeat in favor of the creation of an independent federal state was one of the many unforeseen outcomes of revolutionary upheaval. The same can be said of the formation of the individual institutions that formed the backbone of the federal-brokerage state. Each of the specific institutions examined here arose after a period of political haggling, experimenting, and sometimes intense competition for influence between towns, provinces, merchants, the stadtholder, and various other contenders. In the case of the Admiralty Boards, attempts to form a unified navy under the direct command of the central state were actively blocked by trading ports hustling for influence over naval employment and customs collection. The VOC and WIC, supported financially, militarily, and politically by the States General for their ability to challenge the Habsburg Empire in its farthest corners, had conflicts over priorities between war and profit built in to their very structures. And in troop payment, systems of financial intermediation between state and market were only slowly regulated as the most pragmatic solution for otherwise almost insurmountable financial problems.

Nevertheless, this apparently chaotic combination of improvised institutions exhibited a pattern that reflected some of the essential features of Dutch society. The way in which every new arrangement for the organization of warfare was designed to match the highly localized structure of political power, as well as involving substantial sections of the economic elites, allowed for the integration into the state of two different but connected interest bases: the leading merchants oriented on international trade, and the top and middle layers of the urban small producers. These connections could be organized in three very different ways. In the case of the commercial companies, especially the VOC and WIC, warring tasks were relegated to commercial institutions wholesale. The Admiralty Boards exhibited an opposite
pattern, in which the top layers of the merchant elites, together with provincial and local political elites, were directly integrated into the running of state institutions. A third form was presented by the military solicitors, who acted as financial middlemen at the behest of the state and within the confines of bureaucratic regulation, but still managed to secure for themselves substantial independence in order to run state functions as their own private business. Each solution in its own way reproduced the federal-brokerage nature of the state at large. Taken together, these institutions enabled the state to tap into the great wealth generated by the early expansion of capitalism, and to enlarge the geographic base for accumulation internally as well as externally. In doing so, the Dutch state proved uniquely capable of transforming the groundwork of capitalist development, laid in the medieval phase of the cycle of accumulation, into a launch pad for hegemony within the world-system.

Consisting of a complex network of overlapping and sometimes conflicting institutions and constituencies, the structure of the state was likely to become subject to sometimes violent internal divisions. However, these divisions could be overcome by the strength of the ‘historic bloc’ underlying the Dutch state, tied together by the real political and personal connections between the ruling families through their faction networks, constant political coalition-building and haggling centered on the unevenly divided powers of provinces and towns, as well as a number of powerful integrative political and economic notions shared among adherents of the different sections of the ruling class. Only under the pressure of sustained economic and military setbacks of the late eighteenth century would the basis for this consensus finally dissipate. But in 1651, gathered in their meeting-hall in The Hague under the banners of their defeated adversaries, the rulers of this state could well imagine themselves standing at the center of the world.