Masters of war: state, capital, and military enterprise in the Dutch cycle of accumulation (1600-1795)

Brandon, P.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (http://dare.uva.nl)
Chapter 5

The structural crisis of the federal-brokerage state

The preceding chapters have shown that war did not lead to a transformation from brokerage practices to nationalization, but instead strengthened the federal-brokerage aspects of the Dutch Republican state. However, this tendency was reversed in dramatic fashion at the end of the eighteenth century. The crisis of the ancien régime also was the crisis of the particular state form that had accompanied the development of Dutch capitalism during the most successful part of its cycle of accumulation. No major area of the organization of warfare was left untouched by the revolutionary convulsions in which Dutch society was caught. But in contrast to France or Britain, where major attempts at financial and military reform preceded the age of revolutions and revolutionary war, it was the failure to implement such reforms that radicalized Dutch opposition movements. The current chapter is somewhat different than the three preceding it in that it will not examine the internal functioning of the institutions of the federal-brokerage state, but rather the way in which these institutions became subject to debate between reform-minded administrators and radical oppositionists. For readers familiar with the historiography of the late Republic it will not present a substantially new story, but it will provide a re-examination of familiar sources from a new angle: that of the interrelation between the development of the crisis of the old regime and the state form specific to the Dutch Republic. Thereby, this chapter completes the Gramscian theme introduced at the start of the book where the distinct structure of the early modern Dutch state was explained as the outcome of the historic bloc between a top layer of international merchants oriented on the
world market, and sections of the urban middle classes involved in highly localized systems of commodity production.

Much time has passed since Huizinga could write that historians were ‘arrogant’ and ‘condescending’ about the eighteenth century. Few topics in early modern Dutch history have warranted so much attention among contemporary historians as the changes in political discourse during the last decades of the Republic.¹ Their contributions show how the second half of the eighteenth century saw a complete reshuffling of the terms of political debate. Long-established concepts such as Republicanism, the stadtholderate, federalism, aristocracy, and democracy all became defined, contested, and redefined in radically new ways. In the process the elements of consensus that had bound together conflicting sections of the Dutch ruling class and had formed an ideological basis for compromise on core issues of foreign, military, and economic policy dissipated. Latent contradictions between the seven provinces, between advocates and adversaries of the House of Orange, between regents and the urban lower classes, became the source for major crises.

Three revolutionary moments marked the last fifty years of the ancien régime: the violent restoration of the stadtholderate of 1747, the failed Patriot Revolution of 1785-1787, and the Batavian Revolution of 1795-1798 that put an end to the old Republic.² None of them took place in isolation of international developments. Despite the fact that the eighty years after the Peace of Utrecht saw an almost complete reversal in the proportion of peace and war years compared to the eighty years that preceded it, each major crisis was connected to war. Mirroring the events of 1672 the failure of the stadtholderless regime to prepare effectively for French invasion in 1747 led to the widespread revolts that brought William IV to power. The Seven Years’ War between Britain and France (1757-1763), in which the Dutch Republic remained neutral, nevertheless brought to light the vulnerability of the Dutch empire to


especially British competition, leading to a sharp shift in political sympathies and connecting fears of Dutch economic decline to fierce Anglophobia. The American Revolution inspired opposition against the stadtholderate, and the failure of the Dutch navy in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War gave opposition its revolutionary edge. Counter-revolution could only be successful because of armed Prussian intervention in 1787, further tying the fate of the old order to international power relations. In 1795 French revolutionary armies gave the tottering regime its final push, sparking a native revolution that surpassed all preceding crises in thoroughness and radicalism.

Focusing on the political process that finally resulted in the dismantling of the federal-brokerage state, this chapter will re-examine the main eighteenth-century contributions to the debate on the Dutch state form. It starts with tracing the development of reform ideologies from within the state itself (section 5.1), in order to then investigate the limits of these reform attempts in each of the areas of federal-brokerage organization that were examined in the previous chapters, as well as the rise of radical challenges outside the state. Section 5.2 examines the debates on merchant companies – mainly the VOC – as institutions for trade and warfare, section 5.3 the way in which the divisions between the five Admiralty Boards came to symbolize the defects of the existing state structure, and 5.4 the role of debates on the mercenary versus the citizens’ army in the radicalization of opposition movements between the failed Patriot Revolution of 1785-1787 and the Batavian Revolution of 1795. These sections will show that critique of the ancien régime and debates on the federal-brokerage state form became connected in complex ways. Rather than a linear transgression from the one to the other, a spectacular ‘reversal of positions’ took place in which the centralizing reformers of the existing state became the conservative defenders of the federal-brokerage state, and the ‘restorationist’ oppositionists became the radical modernizers of the post-1795 period. The final section examines the fate of the federal-brokerage state after the end of the Old Republic, and how its afterlife came to haunt the promulgators of a new order.

5.1 The rise and limits of reform agendas

The intensity of the crisis that overtook the Dutch state in the second half of the eighteenth century can only be understood against the background of the end of the Dutch cycle of accumulation. From the early eighteenth century onwards if not earlier it was clear to contemporaries that the Dutch Republic had lost much of its erstwhile dynamism.\(^4\) The fall from its hegemonic position did not occur in the caricatured version popularized by eighteenth century oppositionists and long repeated in modern literature, in which the former dominant power of the world in one stroke became an impoverished state ruled by an incompetent and self-serving clique. Previous chapters have shown how the Dutch federal-brokerage state could continue to draw on the immense wealth of the Republic and mobilize it effectively for warfare, even if on a smaller scale than during the seventeenth century.\(^5\) Decline was unevenly divided over the main sectors of the economy – sharpest in industrial production, only slow to develop in European trade, absent until very late into the eighteenth century in colonial trade and finance, and partly compensated by an upturn in agriculture – and over the different provinces.\(^6\) As late as 1776 no less an authority than Adam Smith could still argue that the Dutch Republic ‘in proportion to the extent of the land and the number of its inhabitants, by far the richest country in Europe, has (...) the greatest share of the carrying trade of Europe’\(^7\), describe it as ‘the only naval power which could endanger the security of England’\(^8\), and ascribe this success to the structure of its state:

‘The republican form of government seems to be the principal support of the present grandeur of Holland. The owners of great capitals, the great mercantile families, have generally either some direct share or some indirect influence in the administration of that government.’\(^9\)

---


\(^5\) Also see Wantje Fritschy, De Patriotten en de financiën van de Bataafse Republiek. Hollands krediet en de smalle marges voor een nieuw beleid (1795-1801) (The Hague 1988) 61ff.


\(^9\) Ibid, 505.
Of course, Smith’s Holland was an ideal type, created for the sake of an argument directed at British society. It only serves to caution modern observers that the outcome of losing the hegemonic position in the capitalist world system was not the degradation of the Dutch Republic into dismal poverty, but its falling back to a position just behind its more successful European competitors.

Nevertheless, that this lagging behind produced was real. For one, both the urban poor and sections of the middle classes involved in production bore the brunt of economic retardation. This translated both into class anger and defensive corporatist responses against those involved in international trade and finance who continued to grow richer and – following the fashion of the time – were fond of showing it. And over the long term the decline in military and naval power relative to its competitors did mean the Dutch state became less effective in protecting the overseas trade of its merchant elites, fueling discontent among leading sections of the ruling class as well. The federal-brokerage state played a particular role in this process. The heart of Dutch decline was not an absolute loss of dynamism, but rather a severing of the links between the main sectors of the Dutch economy that during the seventeenth century had evolved in more or less connected rhythms. As has been shown in the previous chapters, far from merchants losing control over the state to ‘aristocrats’ uninterested in commercial development, the Dutch Republic remained highly attuned to the interests of capital accumulation. But in the circumstances of the eighteenth century the strong ties of the state to conflicting sections of the merchant elite became a lever for uneven development, rather than for combining the strength of each sector for creating greater international competitiveness. The centrifugal tendencies inherent to the federal-brokerage state form facilitated the erosion of its underlying historic bloc.

Those at the helm of the Dutch state did not respond passively to the developing crisis. From the early eighteenth century onwards principled agendas for structural reform were formulated. These started with the writings of Simon van Slingelandt, secretary of the Council of State during the War of the Spanish Succession and its aftermath, and from 1725 to 1737 grand pensionary of Holland. Confronted by the financial crisis that emanated from forty years of warfare with France, and deeply troubled by the unwillingness of many of his fellow

---


11 See Chapter Two, section 6.
regents to take decisive measures to counteract the weakening of the state’s international position, he launched a string of proposals for the regeneration of the Republic. His ideas remained of great influence among reformers from within the state as well as challengers from without throughout the eighteenth century. After having circulated widely in manuscript only, a four volume collection of his memories and proposals was eventually printed in 1784-1785 as part of the debates between Patriots and Orangists in the aftermath of a new crippling war. It is not hard to see why his observations on the defects of the Dutch state made such an impression two generations after his death. The decline of Dutch military and naval power, the inability to enforce compliance to financial obligations equally on all provinces, and the debilitating effects of federalism for decision-making on urgent matters – themes that had once again become central during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War – all figured prominently in the writings of this leading statesman of Holland. Already in 1716 Van Slingelandt had argued:

‘The inconvenience, in which it [the Dutch Republic] has lapsed because of three heavy wars, especially the last one in which it has made much greater efforts than its powers were up to, makes anyone who has the slightest understanding of public affairs judge that a political body can hardly exist that is composed, in the manner of that of the United Provinces, of members who in the first place cannot outvote each other, and accordingly cannot or can only very slowly come to a decision in matters of urgency; who, in the second place, when they have come to a decision, cannot force each other to follow up on the decision that has been taken unanimously; and who in the third place in governing their common affairs are represented by a council [the Council of State], that works without a clear common instruction, without an oath of obligation to the common body [the States General], and without sufficient authority.’

Van Slingelandt already made a connection between these institutional defects of the state and the economic problems that the Republic had encountered in recent years, since ‘a rich household can weather disorders that bring chaos to a poor household’.

In order to prevent further collapse, Van Slingelandt counseled to give special attention to those areas of governance that most clearly determined the power of the Republic: the

---

12 Simon van Slingelandt, ‘Discours over de defecten in de jeegenwoordige constitutie der regeering van den staat der Vereenigde Nederlanden, en over de middelen van redres’ (1716), in: Idem, Staatkundige geschri... Volume I (Amsterdam 1784) 171-314, 186-187.
13 Simon van Slingelandt, ‘Aanwijzing van de waare oorsaaken van jeegenwoordig groot verval in de generale regeering van den staat der Vereenigde Nederlanden, en van de noodige Middelen van Redres’ (1717), in: Idem, Staatkundige geschri... Volume II (Amsterdam 1784) 1-90, 14.
structure of its finances, the Admiralty Boards, and military command. Van Slingelandt’s suggestions for reform concentrated on strengthening the central institutions of the existing state. He proposed to erect a council of government consisting of permanent members without simultaneous duties in provincial government. A finance department, resorting under this council of government, would among other things become responsible for ‘expenditure and control of generalty fortresses, mustering, examining, and closing of the army payrolls’.

One of the positive effects of this concentration of control would be that the provincial paymasters would lose their influence over the States army, strengthening the position of a captain general – a function tied to the stadtholderate that in both stadtholderless periods remained unfulfilled – that was to be newly appointed by the state. Similarly, the appointment of an admiral general – the naval equivalent of the captain general – was necessary ‘to make the Admiralty Boards, that otherwise have little relation to each other and often even obstruct one another, into one body.’

The sharpness of Van Slingelandt’s formulations indicates his growing sense of disquiet with the existing structure of the state. But it is important to note that Van Slingelandt’s suggestions were explicitly geared towards ‘redress’ of shortcomings within the framework of the existing state, not its replacement by something else. The innovations he proposed, such as the appointment of a captain general and admiral general during a stadtholderless period, were perceived by him only as variants on old and established practices. In later writings even his modest innovations disappeared in favor of shored up versions of the old system. The proposed agents for his moderate restructuring were the ruling regents themselves, and it was to them that he turned his passionate plea,

‘to wake up from their current lethargy, that has so much taken the upper hand, that it has to be feared that many will stay in this condition until at one time or another they will be forcefully woken up, to find out that it might be too late to use the remedies that can now still be employed.’

---

15 Ibid, 214.
16 Ibid, 220.
18 E.g. Simon van Slingelandt, ‘Aanwysing van een korte, en gereede, weg om te koomen tot herstel der vervalle saaken van de Republicq’ (1722), in: Idem, Staatkundige geschriften, II, 93-124, 102, where he argues that instead of appointing an admiral general, the States General should merely use their existing powers over the five Admiralty Boards more effectively.
The unwillingness of the regents to heed his call left most of his attempts at reform completely ineffective.\textsuperscript{20} As Van Slingelandt predicted, an external shock was needed to shake up the institutional framework of the Republic. This shock came with the French invasion of 1747. The Orangist revolution that followed shared many of the characteristics of 1672, but also differed in some important respects. First, popular anger against the regent regime combined with the dire economic circumstances resulting from industrial decline gave mobilization from below an independent dynamic that went far beyond the intentions of the leaders of the Orangist party. This became apparent in the numerous tax riots, the anti-regent revolt in Amsterdam, and unrest among Admiralty workers that continued after William IV’s ascension to the stadholderate, pitting the new regime directly against its more revolutionary adherents.\textsuperscript{21} Second, the weakening of the provincial elites, including those of Holland, allowed the stadholder to move for a more far-reaching concentration of power in his hands, leading to the acceptance by all Provincial States of a hereditary stadholderate.\textsuperscript{22} Third, the old patronage system, centered upon the stadholderly court, princely advisors like the Duke of Brunswick, and the ‘lieutenant stadholders’ in each individual province, attained a much more central role in the appointment of officials than it had previously had.\textsuperscript{23}

The renewed and enlarged power of the stadholder, combined with the financial problems that the Dutch Republic had to face in the aftermath of the War of the Austrian Succession, stimulated debates on the nature of the state among the stadholder’s followers. His personal advisor Bentinck in particular bombarded William IV with proposals.\textsuperscript{24} These were partly inspired by the ‘enlightened monarchism’ that at that time was on the rise across Europe. In his important 1749 plan for reform, Bentinck set out what according to him were ‘les seuls véritables principes sur lesquels un stadhouder à la tête de cette république devroit se conduire, s’il veut se satisfaire et s’assurer un credit solide et inébranlable.’\textsuperscript{25} Like Van Slingelandt, Bentinck envisioned a centralization of the state by strengthening its executive branches. But this time the introduction of a number of special departments would issue directly from the stadholder, furthering the tendencies towards monarchical rule that arose

\textsuperscript{20} Johan Aalbers, \textit{De Republiek en de vrede van Europa}. Volume I: Achtergronden en algemene aspecten (Groningen 1980) 117.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 440 ff.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 169 ff.
\textsuperscript{25} Letter of W. Bentinck to the duke of Brunswick, 4 April 1766, G. Groen van Prinsterer (ed), \textit{Archives ou correspondance inédite de la maison d’Orange-Nassau}. Fifth series, Volume I (Leiden 1910) 1.
from the introduction of the hereditary stadtholderate. The departments would be purely bureaucratic institutions, guided by the decisions of William IV in all important matters:

‘J’entend par département un certain nombre de personnes, chargées de voir et d’examiner tout ce qui arrive et tous les papiers qui entrent et qui ont rapport à telle ou telle sorte d’affaires, d’examiner les retroacta, d’épüler la matière, et de former un avis, qui, suivant que la chose est plus ou moins importante, doit être portée au Prince ou non. Après quoi ces mêmes personnes doivent avoir le pouvoir d’exécuter ou de faire exécuter ce qui aura été résolu, soit sans, soit avec la décision du Prince.’

Bentinck’s ideas did not only go farther than Van Slingelandt’s because of the central, semi-monarchical role he assigned to the House of Orange, they also went beyond the federal-brokerage model of the state in seeing the central state as the real repository of the interests of the nation, to be shielded from the particularist pressures of its component parts. This idea was formulated most explicitly when Bentinck described the tasks of the intended department of ‘Navy and Commerce’:

‘Le Prince a dessein d’ériger un Conseil de Commerce. On lui a fourni des idées pour cela. Et certainement, si la chose est bien exécuté et les gens bien choisis, rien au monde ne seroit plus utile ni plus nécessaire. Le Prince verroit alors quel est l’intérêt général de la Nation, à travers des représentations souvent contradictoires des particuliers, des différentes villes et des différentes provinces. Après quoi l’exécution du détail doit selon les formes du gouvernement être l’affaire du Grand-Amiral et des Amirautés respectives (tant qu’elles ne seront pas combines, ce qui seroit très nécessaire).’

However, just like in the days of Van Slingelandt, very little of Bentinck’s suggestions for reform were put into practice. This was not only the result of William IV’s weak commitment to change, which according to biographer Herbert Rowen made him ‘neither revolutionary nor reformer’, or his early death in 1751 and the minority of age of his heir William V. Their dependency on provincial patronage networks forced the late eighteenth-century stadtholders and their coterie to constantly return to the same source that fed the resilience of the federal-brokerage model. Failing to give the state real independence from the

27 Ibid, 362.
28 Gabriëls, Heren als dienaren, 172-177.
29 Rowen, Princes of Orange, chapter 9.
main regent families they instead promoted their own provincial clientele to the point of paralyzing the state. This created irreparable rifts with those sections among the regent elite that were marginalized or excluded, while tying the stadtholderate more closely to its local supporters. Because of this dependence the power of the stadholders remained far from monarchical, let alone absolutist.  

Nevertheless, the interplay between revolutionary movements from below and criticism from oppositional regents, the pressure of foreign economic and military competition, and the need to formulate answers to the shortcomings of the existing bureaucratic apparatus did give rise to a new discourse among the supporters of the Orangist regime. Already under William IV this had become apparent in the – once again failed – attempts at tax reform to stimulate Dutch trade. Whereas previously such reforms had always been defended as a return to old traditions – in content if not in form – the famous 1751 Proposition for a limited custom free port system boldly declared the newness of its intentions:

‘In this sense (…), the plan of redress has to be a novelty, and to make this more apparent, one only has to reflect on the fact that all of Europe, in respect to commerce, has changed completely. (…) This forces us to adapt our measures, and find solutions that fit our current state and circumstances. For nothing demands such close scrutiny as commerce, that is daily subject to continuous changes, and therefore daily demands new arrangements.’

In the decades that followed, renewing the state to create an efficient and rational form of government while avoiding the twin dangers of democracy and revolutionary anarchy became the shared project of leading Orangist thinkers such as the political theorist and historian Adriaan Kluit, the standard bearer of enlightened conservatism Elie Luzac, and the last grand pensionary of Holland Laurens Pieter van de Spiegel. All in their own way were committed to a ‘rationalization’ of the state, and saw it as the only way to prevent imminent collapse. Despite Van de Spiegel’s contention ‘that the constitution of the United Netherlands is one of the best that a federative Republic can have’, his 1783 ‘Reflections on the defective state of the government of the United Netherlands’, written before his elevation to the position of

30 Wayne Ph. te Brake, ‘Provincial histories and national revolution in the Dutch Republic’, in: Jacob and Mijnhardt (eds), Dutch Republic in the eighteenth century, 60-90, 84.  
31 On the reasons for failure, see Johannes Hovy, Het voorstel van 1751 tot instelling van een beperkt vrijhavenstelsel in de Republicq (Propositie tot een gelimiteerd porto-franco) (Groningen 1966) 610 ff.  
grand pensionary, acknowledged that ‘everyone seems to agree that the defects have now increased to the maximum, and that the Republic can no longer exist on its current footing’.\textsuperscript{34} Approximately at the same time, he spelled out the logic of reform as a dam for revolution in his ‘Second Memorandum’:

‘The constitution of the Republic currently is more vulnerable than ever; the bonds of all direction in government have been loosened, and the people, imbued with thoughts of liberty that it does not distinguish from independence, is ready to shake off a government that has been so incapable of maintaining itself. To leave this urge to its own development is highly dangerous; to counter it is as little advisable. What then remains? Nothing but to take into consideration the nature of the nation, carefully accede and in this way regain trust.’\textsuperscript{35}

Although still capturing their proposals in the language of restoration, the militant Orangists of the late eighteenth century went much further than earlier reformers in proclaiming the indispensability of an ‘eminent head’ to supersede the divisions inherent in the federal constitution of the Republic. Wyger Velema has shown how conservatism and anti-egalitarianism underwrote their vision of the stadtholder ‘as the protector of the people, the guardian of the common good, the helm and the soul of the state’.\textsuperscript{36} The logical conclusion of their theories was, in the words of Van de Spiegel, ‘to put the hereditary stadtholderate on solid ground, and to draw an eternal line between the authority of the sovereign and the preeminence of the Gentlemen stadholders.’\textsuperscript{37}

It is precisely in the Orangist defense of the old order that the erosion of consensus behind the existing state form that took place in this period is most apparent. In the course of the eighteenth century, the proposals of leading statesmen for tackling the dual problem of economic and military decline had shifted from moderate redress, to guarded reform, to a complete reconstitution of the state along centralizing lines. But in the practical application of their suggestions they were hindered from two sides. On the one hand, it proved almost impossible to escape the viscosity of federal-brokerage structures without upsetting the entire established order and destroying the support base of the stadtholderate itself. On the other hand, both in 1747 and more fundamentally after 1784 the danger of reform from above

\textsuperscript{34} Laurens Pieter van de Spiegel, ‘Reflexien over de gebreeken in de gesteldheid der regering van de Vereenigde Nederlanden. September 1783’, G.W. Vreede (ed), Mr. Laurens Pieter van de Spiegel en zijne tijdgenooten (1737-1800). Volume II (Middelburg 1875) 260.
\textsuperscript{35} Laurens Pieter van de Spiegel, ‘Over de tegenwoordige misnoegens tegen den Prins Erfstadhouder’ (Tweede memorie ten behoeve van de Stadhouder, 20 januari 1783), ibid, 91.
\textsuperscript{36} Velema, Republicans, 135.
\textsuperscript{37} Van de Spiegel, ‘Tegenwoordige misnoegens’, 93.
turning into full scale revolution from below seemed too real to ignore. In different ways this dilemma returned for all three areas of federal-brokerage organization discussed in this book.

5.2 The merchant warriors and the debate over free trade

None of the conflicting parties doubted the importance of trade, especially colonial trade, for the continued existence of the Dutch Republic. As late as 1783 the oppositional paper *Post van den Neder-Rhijn* could write that ‘except for the truth of the Gospel, it is of nothing so convinced as that this country, that has become great at the same moment as the VOC, will stand or fall with it.’ From its foundation in 1602 the VOC had been one of the pillars of the federal-brokerage state. The maintenance of its commercial empire depended on its ability to wield military power on a state-like scale. Its organizational structure paralleled that of the Republic as a whole, in particular the navy. Hundreds of formal, informal, and familial ties connected the enterprise to the state. War had allowed it to strengthen its independent position as a state within the state, creating a de facto division of labor in which the Company paid for state protection in European waters while maintaining a free hand in all commercial and military affairs in Asia. But the second half of the eighteenth century saw the breakdown of this division of labor under the combined pressure of foreign economic competition, declining profitability of the Asian branch of the trading empire, and the bad performance of the Dutch navy against the English. Together these forces eroded the company model of trade itself. Many practical suggestions were made for better direction of the company, but more and more, these became coupled to proposals for radical change in the relations of company and state. Discussion on the future of the Company became tied up to the ideological battles over the regeneration of Dutch commerce and the merits of economic liberalism.

The main lines of debate went in two seemingly opposite directions: on the one hand increasing state intervention in military affairs in Asia combined with centralization of the VOC under more direct bureaucratic control, and on the other hand the partial admission of free trade. In practice these two trends did not collide, but were intimately connected. Both arose from the same set of problems, some of which had already come to light during the

---

1740s when the VOC still managed to make substantial profits on its inter-continental trade.\(^{39}\) Armed conflicts with Asian rulers, combined with the growing military and commercial presence of the English and French, led to the decline and eventual loss of Dutch dominance in India and the Arabian seas.\(^{40}\) One of the ways to counter declining incomes for local factories of the VOC was to start engaging in illegal private trade on a larger scale. This was the case with the Dutch director of Surat Pieter Laurens Phoonsen, who was recalled to Batavia in 1740 at the charge of setting up a considerable trade in VOC spices for his own account.\(^{41}\) However, the VOC governors in Batavia itself had strong private interests that partly collided with those of the VOC directors in patria. The extent to which this process eroded the coherence of company power in Asia is described by Julia Adams as a classical ‘principal agents problem’, exacerbated by the already fragmented political structure of Company control at home.\(^{42}\) In this context VOC governor general Van Imhoff suggested the introduction of limited free trade in ‘ante-Asia’ (Persia, the Indian coast, Dutch Ceylon). This could have the triple advantage of allowing the VOC to withdraw from unprofitable areas of trade, boosting Batavia’s position as Asia’s main trading center by attracting private traders from different nations, and enabling the VOC to levy a tax on existing trade flows that remained off the radar as long as private trade was illegal.\(^{43}\)

Van Imhoff’s suggestions echoed concerns about the VOC’s ability to take resolute measures restoring its profits in Asia also levied by the States General. However, in 1740 the directors of the VOC were still able to brush off attempts by the Dutch state to intervene in what they considered as private affairs and forestall any serious attempt at reform.\(^{44}\) During the second half of the eighteenth century this balance of forces changed completely. For the first time since the early decades of the seventeenth century the VOC came to depend on military and financial support of the state. From the War of the Austrian Succession in the 1740s onwards Britain and France increasingly employed state troops overseas in support of their commercial companies, transforming military confrontations in the colonies into extensions of inter-state warfare in Europe. Although the Dutch Republic managed to stay

\(^{40}\) George D. Winius and Marcus P.M. Vink, *The merchant-warrior pacified. The VOC (the Dutch East India Company) and its changing political economy in India* (Bombay etc. 1991) 87ff.
\(^{41}\) Ibid, 94.
\(^{44}\) Ibid, 42.
neutral during the Seven Years’ War – the first truly global Anglo-French confrontation – the growing presence of rival European armies in Asia started to make itself felt. In 1759 an armed expedition of the VOC to Bengal was routed in a half-an-hour’s battle against superior English troops, affirming the superior position of the British East India Company in this part of the Indian subcontinent. The weakness of the VOC vis-à-vis its competitors was shown even more decisively during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War. In the mid 1760s, VOC forces had managed to defeat the Kingdom of Kandy strengthening Company rule in Ceylon. But in 1782 the British navy used the circumstances of war to conquer important footholds on the island, and the VOC had to rely on the French navy to hold its advance. Confronted with this shifting balance of power, the VOC had no choice but to ask for naval assistance from the Dutch state. In December 1782 the States General decided to send six men-of-war to Asia, and after the war the former division of labor in which the VOC was the sole wielder of Dutch military power beyond Cape Hope was not restored. The company’s complete dependence on state support during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War created a situation in which its directors had to accept the transfer of military power to the state and its officials in even the minutest details. As Jaap Bruijn notes, ‘[t]he instructions for the squadron commander in 1782 were drawn up by the state. Although the company was asked for comment, only minor adjustments were made to the orders.’

Collapsing profits, escalating debts of the Company to the States of Holland and Zeeland, and the changing military role of the state in Asia fundamentally shifted the debate on the relations between the VOC and the state. Constitutional restoration, one of the programmatic texts of the Patriot opposition movement, drew attention to the sorry state of Dutch rule in the East and the West:

‘The direction of the state, defense, and the entire financial condition there is so dramatic, so bad, so desperate, that the security provided by the recent state support for the VOC can have no other basis than general, radical reform.’

---

45 Winius and Vink, Merchant-warrior, 126ff.
48 Grondwettige herstelling van Nederlands staatswezen, zo voor het algemeen bondgenootschap, als voor het bestuur van elke byzondere provincie, geschikt om het voornaam doelwit aan te toonen, waar toe de pogingen van goede regenten en de requesten van vaderlandlievende burgers moeten strekken (Amsterdam 1785) 9.
From the other side of the political spectrum, grand pensionary Van de Spiegel in 1788 summed up the main lessons drawn from the experience of the past decade:

‘Before, the Company did not have to fear wars in which the Republic was involved in Europe, or those of the Company itself against the indigenous population. But today, it has to imagine that its main possessions will be the toy of other powers. Immediately at the outbreak of war they will take into custody our possessions and harbors to make sure that the other party will not profit from them. Such a defenseless and precarious state cannot continue without making the Company despicable to Indian rulers, and eventually make it lose its trade. But on the other side, it has to be feared that the finances of the Company will not suffice to carry the burden of the kind of military establishment that her situation requires. This again proves the necessity that the Company and the government of the Republic will be connected more closely.’

These were not empty words. Already in 1786 Patriot influence on the States of Holland led to the introduction of a ‘Fifth Department’, a state agency designed to exercise direct control over the VOC directors. The anti-Patriot counter-revolution of 1787 prevented this institution from ever becoming effective, but it is significant that after stadtholderly restoration it was not formally abolished. In 1790 the Holland-Zeeland State Committee was erected to fulfill a similar supervisory task.

That supervision was left to those two provinces rather than a committee consisting of representatives of all seven provinces reflected the fact that they alone provided the enormous loans that kept the Company afloat. They also show a tacit acknowledgement that the old federal framework did no longer provide viable solutions to the challenges that the Republic had to face – an acknowledgement that extended to the federal make-up of the VOC itself. Van de Spiegel argued: ‘The Company should be characterized as one house of commerce that organizes its expeditions from different harbors, but on one single account.’ However, the vested interests of the towns in which the chambers were located remained a solid barrier against any attempt at structural reform, and all supervisory institutions that were created foundered on the rocks of local conservatism. Furthermore, the precarious situation in which

---


52 Steur, Herstel of ondergang, 194.
the state found itself such a short time after the defeat of the Patriots and further disturbed by the outburst of revolution in France also formed a dire warning against anything that could lead to an implosion of one of its oldest pillars. As four ‘plenipotentiaries for the affairs of the VOC’ wrote in 1790 to the States General:

‘These measures that have to be taken will be subject to insurmountable troubles, when news of the impending or actual collapse of the Company would precede them. Yes, to what surprising and unexpected revolution would such news inevitably lead (…); and this at a time, in which a certain tumbling spirit has taken a hold of so many nations and has made them lose their ways.’

While the final decade of the Republic did see a rapid transformation of ideas on company-state relations, the integration of Company and state advocated by Van de Spiegel thus was not achieved.

A similar situation can be seen in the debates on (partial) liberalization of East India trade. Even among the Patriots of the early 1780s, generally more inclined to free trade, hardly any writer advocated the complete abolition of the VOC monopoly. Similarly, within the Company itself debates on reform still took place within the parameters set by the existing charter. In his famous 1785 memorandum ‘for the benefit of the VOC and the utility of every inhabitant of the commonwealth’, VOC director Van der Oudermeulen defended a slimmed down version of monopoly trade. Repeating suggestions that he already had made in two earlier memoranda in the 1770s, he argued for ‘navigation from port to port in the Indies [to be] handed over to our free citizens, except for a number of products’. He further suggested that unprofitable offices in Asia would be closed, but the most profitable areas of trade to remain firmly in the hands of the VOC. Without the Company, Van der Oudermeulen argued, all trade of the Dutch Republic would be lost. Not surprisingly, Van der Oudermeulen’s limited liberalization always remained the outer limits of what most VOC directors were willing to contemplate. But the early 1790s did see the rise of a significant minority position within the VOC establishment that argued for a much more far-reaching

55 Ibid, 284.
liberalization. One of the principal stakeholders, Guillelmus Titsingh, wrote a memorandum to convince his colleagues of the advantages of free trade in Asia and between Asia and Europe:

‘What liveliness and activity will this freedom of export (…) give for all factories, traffics, artisanal production, and retail trade, in this land where everyone knows a way to employ his funds! What liveliness in India’s capital that will rise as a great trading city, while today it dwindles because it is ruled by an all-powerful despot [the VOC] which alone wants to master all the profits, and leave nothing to its subjects but the necessity to lie and rob, as grossly as they can, in order to escape from his oppression as soon as possible!’

Such considerations were taken up positively by the leading VOC official Van Nederburgh, and also underlay proposals for reform by VOC directors Falck, Craayvanger and Scholten.

In March 1791 the directors of the Company discussed liberalization in remarkably favorable terms:

‘That these disadvantages [i.e. the problems of the existing structure of Company trade] could be prevented when commerce could be left to private traders, provided that precautions could be made to prevent that the Company would ever lack such articles that are indispensable for its maintenance’.

In the same year an experiment was made under Company direction allowing private traders to carry certain goods on VOC ships on their own account. All this debating and experimenting did not lead to a real attempt to dismantle the VOC monopoly from within. But they did mean that the revolutionaries of 1795 could fall back on a long line of argument combining trade liberalization – in part or in full – with centralization of colonial management under state control.

Developments across the Atlantic also fed into the debates on the place of the VOC within the Dutch state. As was shown in Chapter Two, already in the 1730s the West India Company monopoly had collapsed under the weight of private competition. But the Company did retain a significant role in trade, as well as a typical brokerage-function in colonial management and the organization of protection. During two short periods this dual position

56 [Guillelmus Titsingh], Consideratien van een hoofdparticipant der Generale Nederlandsche Oostindische Compagnie, bevattende den staat derzelve zoo hier te lande als in de colonien, mitsgaders de voordeelen van een vrije vaart (s.l. 1791) 52.
57 Steur, Herstel of ondergang, 181 and 185-186.
seemed to open the way for restoring long term company profitability. The Seven Years’ War (1756-1763) and the American War of Independence (1776-1780) put Dutch traders in a position to undercut the trade of its major European competitors. But temporary successes had to compete with strong long-term tendencies that undercut the WIC and connected institutions such as the Society of Suriname. The high costs of warfare – especially expeditions against runaway slaves fighting a determined guerrilla struggle against the planters in Suriname – and the strengthening of regional trading networks outside Company control created strong opposition, mainly concentrated in the Republic itself, against prolonging Company rule. The Maroon Wars undoubtedly posed the most fundamental threat to Surinam white rule. Between 1730 and 1770 the number of troops involved in fighting the formerly enslaved increased from 300 to over 3000. For the 1750s, the total cost of warfare was calculated at f3.5 million, excluding ammunition, fortifications and militia costs. This equaled over ten percent of the value of goods exported from the colony. For the years 1770-1776 the combined costs of warfare had increased to f8 million. After already providing a regular convoy to Suriname from 1748 onwards, the Dutch state now also had to send troops in large numbers to defend the planter colony. Similar problems arose in other West Indian possessions, with slave revolts in Berbice in 1763 and Essequibo in 1772, fuelling concerns within the Dutch Republic that commercial societies would be unable to defend Dutch interests overseas. These fears were confirmed by the ease with which the British navy in 1781 conquered St. Eustatius, Saba, St. Maarten, Demerary, Essequibo, and Berbice.

At the same time, strengthening trading connections between local elites within the region, especially after the American War of Independence, provided a strong West Indian interest in free trade. Earlier than in the case of the VOC, Patriots started to argue against the company structure of rule itself. In the Letters of Aristodemus and Sincerus (1785), a Patriot author argued for the taking over of all West Indian colonies by the Dutch state, assuming full

---

59 Henk den Heijer, De geschiedenis van de WIC (Zutphen 1994) 186.
60 Famously captured by the eyewitness account of one of the soldiers sent to suppress the revolt of 1772-1777, who stated that in 1772 the uprising ‘had nearly given the finishing blow’ to the colony, J.G. Stedman, Narrative of a five years’ expedition against the revolted negroes of Surinam (Amherst, MA 1972) 46. One-and-half century later, these revolts figured prominently in Anton de Kom’s hard-hitting indictment of Dutch colonialism, Wij slaven van Suriname (Amsterdam 1934).
62 Ibid, 216.
63 Cornelis Ch. Goslinga, The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas 1680-1791 (Assen / Maastricht 1985) 580.
64 Schutte, Patriotten en de koloniën, 54.
responsibility for defense, the daily governing of the colony, and its judicial system. At the same time, he advocated the destruction of all remnants of the Company monopoly. In 1791, the Orangist States General put this program into practice. They refused to prolong the WIC charter, and bailed out its stock holders by buying their shares at thirty percent of their nominal value, still eight percent above current prices at the Amsterdam stock exchange. Rule over the former WIC possessions was brought into the hands of the state, through a Committee for the Affairs of the Colonies and Possessions on the Guinean Coast and in America.

Chapter Two showed the contrasts between the models of control applied by the WIC and the VOC, resulting in very different divisions of labor between state, company, and private traders in both areas. During the 1780s and 1790s the growing integration of commercial empires around the globe, as well as the challenges to the model of the Dutch Republican state at home, finally brought the two colonial companies back into the same stream. The debates that accompanied the trajectory towards the abolition of the VOC, connecting (partial) free trade to the need for a strong and interventionist state in full control of its overseas territories, mirrored those leading to the slightly earlier dissolution of the WIC. Neither in the West nor in the East did the merchant warrior meet the requirements of the new age. But the connections between East and West, or between free trade and interventionist state, did not become apparent to the participants in the debates of the 1780s and 1790s in a single stroke or a straight line. Perhaps the best illustration of this can be found in the person of Guillelmus Titsingh, the writer of the 1791 challenge to the old Company model of trade in the East Indies. Ten years earlier, this same Titsingh in his capacity as representative of Suriname traders had been the driving force behind the fitting out of a private convoy of armed merchant-men to protect the Suriname trade. Thus, as late as the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War the answer to the failure of the federal-brokerage state to provide protection to its commercial elites could still be a return to the most classical forms of brokerage warfare. Although the ensuing crisis of the Dutch state gave debates on commerce and the state a growing ideological dimension, the main protagonists on either side remained pragmatists looking for the surest way to secure profits.

66 Den Heijer, WIC, 187.
5.3  Admiralty Boards at the center of the storm

No section of the federal-brokerage state came under such heavy fire at the end of the eighteenth century as federal naval administration. Chapters Two and Three showed how the five Admiralty Boards tied the global commercial interests of the Dutch ruling class to highly localized spheres of production and political influence. Their strong connections to the leading merchant families stimulated naval administrators to prioritize direct commercial protection over long-term power projection in the employment of warships. The Dutch navy of the eighteenth century was far from passive or lethargic in its execution of this primary task. But the shifting strategic geography of trade made Admiralty Boards inclined to concentrate on the specific task of securing long distance trade, and rely heavily on the British ally for European power projection. By the time the Anglo-Dutch alliance broke down in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Dutch Republic did no longer possess the kind of navy capable of holding at bay its main European competitors, and the Dutch had lost all vestiges of their former naval supremacy in the Baltic and the Mediterranean. The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784) brought this failure into broad daylight. The complete supremacy of the British fleet prevented even the sailing out of regular convoys for the commercial fleet, bringing the foreign trade of the Dutch Republic practically to a standstill.

The dismal performance of the Dutch navy further charged the already highly politicized climate, in which commercial decline, misdirection of the armed forces, and the supposed Anglophilia of stadtholderly foreign policy in the eyes of the Patriots had all become tied into one big knot. Already in the first year of the war, the Patriot’s influential spokesman Joan Derk van den Capellen tot den Poll merged these themes into a single narrative of the historic betrayal of Dutch interests by the House of Orange. In his call to arms To the people of the Netherlands, he turned this anger directly on William V:

‘You did not want protection at sea, where thousands of defenseless seamen, and treasures that surpass the combined value for the Republic of the three inland provinces Guelders, Utrecht, and Overijssel together (…) are being exposed daily to the rapacity and cruelty of your English friends [sic!]. The wailing voice of the merchants, who spoke, prayed, and begged thousands of times for the preservation of the entire fatherland, was scorned by you. The blood of your fellow countrymen – abused, tormented, tortured, killed by your English friends at sea – called for revenge and protection in vain.’

[Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Poll], Aan het volk van Nederland (s.l. [1781]) 59.
In some ways the vitriol directed towards the stadtholder in *To the people of the Netherlands* deflected from a more thoroughgoing critique of the functioning of the navy. Its program of a fictitious restoration of the ‘old constitution’ precluded an attack on one of the anchors of the existing federal state form. Nonetheless, at this point a fundamental rethinking of federal naval administration was already in the offing.

As was the case with the merchant companies, emerging revolutionary discourse was fed by the rise of reform tendencies from within the institutions itself. In the case of the Admiralty Boards, these went back as far as the discussions on the introduction of a custom free port system after the Orangist revolution of 1747. The Admiralty Boards played a prominent part in the 1751 *Proposition*, given their responsibility both for the levying of customs and for the organization of armed convoys for the merchant fleet. Successive generations of reformers wrestled with the question how to lower the customs that were the main source of income for the navy, at the same time as increasing the size and effectiveness of the Dutch war fleet. One of the most common answers was to look for the source of financial problems of the navy not in the low custom rates, but in the unequal footing on which those were collected by the five Admiralty Boards. Eighteenth century observers were convinced that especially the Zeeland and Friesland Boards used their ability to under-charge local merchants as a tool to provide ‘their own’ merchant communities with competitive advantages over those of other provinces. The 1751 *Proposition* singled out this practice as one of the major weaknesses of Dutch trade policy:

> ‘If the same commodities and merchandise pay higher duties in one part of the Republic than in the other, or if some merchants keep on paying them while others because of fraud and evil practices are relieved of this duty, this again can only be of the utmost damage to our commerce.’

In the same spirit, a 1754 report of the Generalty Audit Office lambasted the excessive overhead costs of maintaining a separate bureaucracy for the five naval establishments. Many of the ‘inutile servants’ apparently did not fulfill any other function than ‘making an extra man’ on the payroll. This, the report argued, was particularly true of the personnel of many of the ‘outside offices’ for custom collection, the system of offices maintained by the Admiralty Boards outside of their home towns to prevent tax evasion. To show the ineffectiveness of these outside offices – deliberate ineffectiveness, as was at least suggested

---

69 *Propositie*, 56.
by the inspectors – one of the appendices of the report mentioned forty-two outside offices of
the Rotterdam Admiralty Board that collected less customs than they spent on office
personnel and maintenance. Most illustrative were those offices like ‘t Spuy, that brought in
thirteen guilders over the course of a year, but spent £1,180 on the clerk, rowers, and
administrative costs to collect this meager sum.71 Far from seeing this as an incident the
writers of the report used it as an example to show the inherent problems of federal
administration:

‘As long as there are five Boards of the Admiralty, and in the Northern Quarter of Holland
two or three shipyards, and as long as there have to be so many councilors as is required
within the old institutional setting – which can hardly be avoided within the existing
constitution of our government – all attempts at administrative reforms will come to little.’72

The heated debates on fleet augmentation of the 1770s, and then more forcefully the Fourth
Anglo-Dutch War, turned such suggestions from abstract ideas on the future of naval
administration into concrete interventions to change the nature of the state. Shortly before the
outbreak of the war an official memorandum directly proposed the ‘unification of the five
Admiralty Boards into one single body’. It contained scathing commentary on the lack of
effectiveness of the existing administrative structure, which pitted the different provinces
against each other:

‘It is strange that the direction of naval affairs in this Republic is divided into various
departments, and that while they should together form one complete or general direction, the
separate Boards consider themselves as completely alien one from the other, and often think
they have contradictory interests. And for this reason, the direction that should be the same in
the entire Republic and founded on one unified basis, is practiced in a different way by the
different Boards, leading to many disputes and disagreements to the detriment of the common
cause.’73

The report acknowledged that established interests in the provinces and towns harboring the
five Admiralty Boards formed a real barrier for realizing the proposed unification.
Characteristically for most reform attempts from within the state, rather than challenging the

71 Ibid, appendix.
72 Ibid, 2.
73 NA, Archief J.C. van der Hoop, no. 153. ‘Memorie van eenige Elucidatien op de voorgeslaagene Poincten van
Redres in de Collegien ter Admiraliteit &c &c by resolutie van 1 april 1778’.
federal principle of looking at the functioning of the institutions from a primarily local point of view, the document argued that local interests would actually be served by unification:

‘Since in this way the same provinces far from damaged will be favored; presuming that the shipyards and storehouses will remain in the same cities where they are located now. It does not need arguing that the lack of some offices and committees (...) cannot be compared with the benefits that the same Provinces would gain because of the building and equipment of a greater number of warships on their respective wharves, by which much money could be made in those provinces. For the unified Navy Board should build on all those shipyards without discrimination.’

It is not surprising that after the crushing defeat of the Dutch navy in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, the arguments about the need for structural reform of naval direction gained new speed. The Patriots’ programmatic Constitutional restoration suggested the ‘reduction of the number of Admiralty Boards’ as one of the solutions for the ‘affairs of great weight that have to be repaired in our general system of state’. And the Personal Committee for Defense that was instigated by the Patriot-leaning States of Holland in 1785 as one of the two great investigative committees to lay bare the defects of the existing state, put much emphasis on the need for unification of the navy. Its final report, that only appeared two years after the defeat of the Patriots in 1787, squarely advocated the integration of the Admiralty Boards into one single department for the navy, and did so without harking back to the Republic’s old constitutional forms:

‘We are of the opinion that the affairs at sea should be reduced to their first principles – not so much by the erection of a College of Superintendence [a reference to sixteenth century proposals to add an overseeing body to the existing federal navy] (...) but by the erection of one single department, or Admiralty Board, located permanently in The Hague close to the high colleges of government, and thus placed directly under the eyes of the same, and in the line of sight of the Lord admiral general.’

The arguments for this unification put forward by the committee show how far enlightened administrators had moved away from the traditional, federal-brokerage thinking on the nature of state institutions, and how the different strands of criticism underlying debates since the

74 Ibid.
75 Grondwettige herstelling, iv-v.
1750s merged into a single narrative of centralization, rationalization and national interests. Through the unified Department of Naval Affairs, the state would

‘gain control over the collection of customs, which then would no longer be raised by the various towns and provinces on an unequal footing; but to the pleasure of the allied provinces and strengthening of the nation’s finance, everywhere be executed on the basis of an equal practice. And in this way, provincial and urban influence will be eliminated also in this area. More than is possible now, it will oversee the interest of all commerce. It will observe the state of all branches of negotiation from one single point of view. It will search for the causes of the growth of this branch, and the decrease of that, and with more knowledge of affairs propose such measures as the conditions require.’

While the fact that an official committee could reach such revolutionary conclusions two years after the Orangist restoration of 1787 again confirms the measure to which the federal-brokerage consensus had dissipated among the leading circles within the state itself, this does not mean it went entirely unopposed. In October 1786 the five Admiralty Boards sent a joint letter to the members of the committee that contained an explicit defense of the old structure of federal navy boards, closely tied to the commercial elites:

‘It seems to us (...) that the interests of commerce, being so closely tied to the existence and happiness of the state itself, demand the maintenance of a close connection between this and the nation’s power at sea, capable to protect and defend our commerce and navigation against all foreign violence. And therefore, it seems to have been the concern of our forefathers to give the navy of the state a seat in those places where trade flourished most (...). In our opinion, this connection would be weakened if all Admiralty Boards would be mortified, and in their place erected in this city [The Hague] a single college or council for the Navy. Such a college, farther removed from its commercial objects and requirements that are now immediately brought at hand and close to the eye, could not so quickly acquaint itself with them, nor be supplied with them at the same speed.’

As this exchange of arguments shows, in the course of the 1780s the very nature of Admiralty direction had become contested. But as in many other areas of state policy the ideological dividing lines between Patriots and Orangists remained blurred. For many of the federal-minded Patriots local control over Admiralty institutions became a major guarantee against

77 Ibid, 29.
fears of ‘Orangist usurpation’. At the same time, enlightened conservatives often envisioned far-reaching centralization under a stadtholder with royal prerogatives.

In the heated end phase of Patriot mobilization the very premises of the naval establishments became physical battlegrounds. Appealing to anti-regent sentiments, in the spring of 1787 Orangists started to gather signatures among Amsterdam shipwrights against the Patriot city government. The shipwrights’ pub opposite to the entrance of the naval shipyard, appropriately called ‘The unfinished ship’, became a center of Orangist agitation. At the same time the Patriots mobilized their supporters within the Free Corps militia and societies against Orangist regents and Admiralty Councilors. At the end of May these tensions erupted in violent clashes in the borough around the naval storehouse, leaving numerous dead and wounded. Seven houses of Patriots and seventeen of Orangists were completely ransacked, including the houses of prominent Orangist regent and Admiralty administrator Rendorp. Master of equipment Maij together with his wife and children fled from the shipyard to Nieuwendam by boat to escape popular violence. The failure of William V to dislodge the Amsterdam government in this way consolidated the power of the Patriots, starting the series of events that culminated in the arrest of his wife Wilhelmina by Free Corps at Goejanverwellesluis. But a Prussian invasion quickly dispelled the revolutionary illusions of the new government. The restoration of the stadtholderate was celebrated in Amsterdam with a parade of the ‘axes’ at the terrain of the naval shipyard.

Restoration did not give an impetus towards thoroughgoing centralization of the navy under stadtholderly direction. On the contrary, the fact that the Orangist regime could only be saved by foreign arms led to complete deadlock in the center of the state. The outbreak of revolution in France further strengthened conservative tendencies at the top of the state. The reshuffling of political positions on state reform between Patriots and Orangists that followed between 1787 and 1795 can be written as a tale of two administrators. On the one side stood Pieter Paulus, fiscal advocate of the Rotterdam Admiralty Board and leading Patriot, who was

---

79 Orangist incitement of lower class rebellion, playing on class anger against local regents, was a widespread phenomenon during the Patriot period. C.H.E. de Wit, De Nederlandse revolutie van de achttiende eeuw 1780-1787. Oligarchie en proletariat (Oirschot 1974) 30ff.
80 De Oost-Wit- en Kattenburger wandelaar. Verhaalende al het gebeurden, zo omtrent de drie voornaamste plaatsen, als ook de gesprekken in het wynhuis het Onvolmaakte Schip (s.l. [1787]), Schama, Patriots and liberators, 114-117.
81 Echte beschryving, van het tumult binnen Amsterdam. En byzonder op het eiland Kattenburg, voorgevallen op den 29 May 1787 en eenige volgende dagen, met de overwinning (Amsterdam [1787]) 14-15.
82 NA, Archief Admiraliteitscolleges XXXIX, Van der Hoop, no. 150. ‘Getuigenissen’.
ousted from his position in 1788 to become the radical first president of the National Assembly after the Batavian Revolution. On the other side stood Joan Cornelis van der Hoop, the reform-minded fiscal advocate of the Amsterdam Admiralty Board, confident of William V and Pieter Laurens van de Spiegel, and organizer of the counterrevolution, who in 1813 was to return as the first minister of the navy under king William I.

Pieter Paulus was a self-made man. The son of a small-town burgomaster he had started his career in 1772 writing a youthful eulogy on the stadtholderate at the occasion of the birth of a heir to William V. Even in this work some of Paulus’ later development was already visible, most clearly in the claim that the monopolization of Dutch political life by the ruling elites barred entry to the ‘middle groups’ – to whom Paulus himself of course belonged. Merely three years later he made the almost obligatory turn to history by writing a four volume study of the origins of the Dutch constitution, moving more explicitly into the confines of opposition politics. Promoted to the post of fiscal advocate at the height of Patriot agitation in 1785 he became responsible for investigating the failure of the Dutch fleet at Brest, one of the key events building the story of William V’s betrayal of Dutch interests during the recent war. Soon, he developed into one of the main Patriot spokesmen. But there is little to suggest that he used this position to promote far-reaching reform in the practical management of the institution that he served. His removal from office was based on an alleged attempt to use the Rotterdam Admiralty Board as an center for the defense against the advancing Prussian troops. Against these charges Paulus argued that he had always loyally fulfilled his obligations to the Union. Only after his ostracism did Pieter Paulus become true to both his apostolic names, in 1793 formulating the doctrine of Batavian egalitarianism by writing its defining text and after 1795 becoming the first president of the National Assembly and the organizational rock on which the new state was founded.

Joan Cornelis van der Hoop’s career was diametrically opposed to that of Pieter Paulus. Son of a secretary of the Council of State, married to the daughter of the influential Orangist

---

86 Pieter Paulus, Het nut der stadhouderlyke regering, aangetoond by gelegenheid der geboorte van Willem Frederik, prince van Oranje en Nassau, erfstadhouder, capitain-generaal, en admiraal der Verëngide Nederlanden (s.l. 1772).
87 Schama, Patriots and liberators, 94.
89 His ‘Republican Catechism’ was laid down in Pieter Paulus, Verhandeling over de vrag: in welken zin kunnen de menschen gezegd worden gelyk te zyn? En welke zyn de regten en pligtten, die daaruit voorvoloeien? (Haarlem 1793).
Salomon Dedel, his two brothers a major general of the States army and the thesaurus general, he could hardly have been more integrated into the leading regent families of the late eighteenth century. After a spell as director of the Society of Suriname, he became fiscal advocate of the Amsterdam Admiralty Board in 1781. In his private correspondence he showed a keen interest in structural reform of the Dutch state. In a 1782 letter to Van der Oudermeulen he inquired after the possibilities to introduce free trade to the East Indies.\(^90\) In facing the challenge of rapid expansion of the war fleet, he favored far-reaching cooperation between the five Admiralty Boards.\(^91\) And in response to the widespread rumors of betrayal directed against William V he tried to impress on the stadtholder the need for reforms that could take away the real defects behind the failure of the fleet, since

> ‘rejection turns into dissatisfaction and suspicions, if one does not look with calm into the reasons, causes and true motives (…), and lets oneself be carried away by phantoms, while the true problem is not penetrated.’\(^92\)

Writing to Pieter Paulus, who was then an ordinary lawyer and not yet fiscal advocate of the Rotterdam Admiralty Board, he chastised the Patriots for not seeing the causes for naval failure as clearly as William V, and determined the existence of the five separate Admiralty Boards as the prime defect.\(^93\)

For Van der Hoop, however, social conservatism always overshadowed his enthusiasm for rationalization of the state. When in 1786 Van de Spiegel proposed to form a secret party of Orangist loyalists to oppose Patriot agitation in Holland, he could fall back on a long period of organizational preparations in which Van der Hoop had played a major role.\(^94\) The logic of their position was summed up in the debates over the erection of a single department for the navy that followed on the heels of the 1787 restoration. A ‘Rough draft for the formation of a new government in naval affairs’, sent around among leading statesmen in 1791, concluded:

---

\(^90\) Van der Hoop to Van der Oudermeulen, 8 February 1782. NA, Archief Admiraliteitscolleges XXXIX, Van der Hoop, no. 54. ‘Correspondentie’, 93.

\(^91\) Van der Hoop to grand pensionary Van Bleiswijk, 4 June 1782, ibid, 216.

\(^92\) Van der Hoop to William V, 30 July 1782, ibid, 251.

\(^93\) Van der Hoop to Paulus, 7 December 1782, NA, Archief Admiraliteitscolleges XXXIX, Van der Hoop, no. 55. ‘Correspondentie’, 30-31.

\(^94\) Van de Spiegel to Wilhelmina, 24 June 1786, in Vreede (ed), Van de Spiegel I, 452, and the coded correspondence between Van der Hoop and Van de Spiegel on party affairs, e.g. Van der Hoop to Van de Spiegel, 26 September 1783, NA, Archief Admiraliteitscolleges XXXIX, Van der Hoop, no. 55. ‘Correspondentie’ 147.
‘Indisputably, there are two principal motivations that have to be imagined in such a plan: unity in government, from which order in execution is born, and unity in maintenance. But when these principal aims cannot be reached, it would be better to keep affairs in their present state, than to displace the old foundations.’  

Commenting on those two options, William V wrote to Van de Spiegel and Van der Hoop:

‘[T]hat to me it would seem very dangerous to reject institutions that are almost as old as the Republic, and that in my opinion it would be better to try to bring an improvement in the government of the navy and equity in the levying of customs, without making such a big change as the abolition of the Admiralty Boards’.  

While convinced of the necessity of unification, fear of a further destabilization of the existing state turned the reformers from within of the previous era into the conservative defenders of the ‘ancient constitution’.

### 5.4 From citizens’ militias to the Batavian legion

Debates on the army followed the by now familiar pattern. Denouncing William V as ‘usurper of power’ for his attempts at centralizing control over the military and as betrayer of Dutch interests for his alleged secret dealings with the English and Prussian crowns, the Patriots presented themselves as defenders of the old constitution. Modeling their plans for the army on Swiss and American examples, they advocated a fictitious ‘return’ to national defense based on citizens’ militias under local supervision. These free corps militias should assist a small, and therefore cheap, mercenary force for purely defensive tasks, while military investment should mainly be directed towards the rebuilding of Dutch naval power. Against this the Orangist party nominally acted as the defender of the ideal of a strong, centralized, well funded army. The 1789 ‘Report of the Committee of Defense’ even proposed to transfer the payment of troops from the provincial paymasters to the generality level, and asked the Council of State ‘to take the necessary measures by which the payment of the militia can

---

95 NA, Familiearchief Fagel, no. 1084. ‘Ruw ontwerp van het te formeeren bestuur van zee zaaken in 1791, met enige aanmerkingen.’

96 Ibid, ‘Concept advys over de redressen in het bestier der marine’.
occur in the easiest, best regulated manner’. However, in practice the post-1787 regime was so utterly dependent on the existing federal support base of the state and the army so infested by the policy of patronage that formed the final refuge of William V’s stadtholderate, that any attempt at fundamental reform came to naught. Meanwhile, the French revolution won over the leading section of the former Patriots to a whole new thinking about the army as a national force.

Debates on the army throughout the 1770s had been characterized by the sharp antagonism between on one side William V, his principal advisor in military and political matters the Duke of Brunswick, and the political representatives of the inland provinces, and on the other side the States of Holland led by Amsterdam. While it is a caricature to say that the former favored the army and the latter the fleet, the two groupings differed fundamentally on the question which of the two should be prioritized. During the second half of the decade the debate became tied to the growing tensions over foreign policy, especially the position to be taken towards Britain as a commercial rival. A strong antipathy towards standing armies as tools of uncontrollable monarchical power against the people, such as existed in British political discourse, did not yet play a great role in these discussions. Both groups based their arguments primarily on conflicting perceptions of the core interests of the Dutch Republic in a new international configuration of power. But the tone of the debates changed completely with the intensification of Patriot propaganda. Drawing on examples from a distant past such as William II’s 1650 attack on Amsterdam, Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Poll’s *To the people of the Netherlands* depicted the controversy over army augmentation as one immediately touching on the ancient liberties and sovereignty of the people. Claiming that ‘there has not been any freedom in Europe, since princes started to maintain standing armies’, he went on to depict the consequences in terms that directly linked this danger to all the vices ascribed to William V:

‘He, who controls the army, can do whatever he wants. He can hand over the best part of our commerce, our warships, and our colonies to our enemies. Yes, he can even make himself the Sovereign! The unarmed, defenseless people cannot do anything against this, but have to

---


accept this in tranquility. Therefore, a people that wants to act sensibly and with care should always make sure it remains the strongest party within the country."  

The latter part of his argument led to the rousing call with which Van der Capellen ended his pamphlet: ‘All of you arm yourselves, elect those who have to command you, and proceed in calmness and moderation, like the people of America where not a drop of blood was spilled before the English first strike.’  

Citizens’ armament became one of the cornerstones of Dutch republicanism, an ideal supported by examples from classical antiquity, the American Revolution, and the Swiss federation. From 1782 onwards free corps and societies for the exercise of arms became the organizational centers of Patriot mobilization, and many thousands of citizens were actively involved in societies with resounding names such as ‘Pro Patria et Libertate’.  

Despite their rejection of standing armies under princely command, the Patriots did not advocate the replacement of the States army by the citizens’ corps, which would leave the Republic without defense in an era of military buildup. Van der Capellen himself argued that the Dutch state needed a well paid force of 36,000 to 40,000 soldiers in times of peace. In the face of war this amount should be doubled. While he presented this as a way to cut back on army expenses, the number of 40,000 soldiers matched the actual size of the States army at that time, and even after the declaration of war with France in 1793 the strength of the army did not come close to the 72,000-80,000 he proposed. Later Patriot texts such as the influential 1785 Leiden Draft also advocated ‘the out- and inward defense and security of the country and civil liberty by the armament of the entire nation’, but in practice saw the citizens’ militias as auxiliary force for the existing professional army. The Patriots argued for important changes in the structure of the army, such as devolution of military jurisdiction from the stadtholder as captain general to the provinces and towns in which the soldiers were garrisoned, the limitation of the stadtholder’s rights of appointment of officers, and the erection of academies for the training of officers. They wanted to stimulate the ‘national

100 [Van der Capellen tot den Poll], Aan het volk van Nederland, 19. 
101 Ibid, 76. 
102 Klein, Patriots republikanisme, 167-176. 
103 Israel, Dutch Republic, 1102. 
104 [Van der Capellen tot den Poll], Aan het volk van Nederland, 71. 
105 Zwitzer puts the total strength of the States army at 41,413 men in 1772 and 58,083 in 1793. Idem, ‘Militie’, 176. 
106 [Wybo Fijnje and Pieter Vreede], Ontwerp, om de Republiek door eene heilzaame vereeniging der belangen van regent en burger, van binnen gelukkig, en van buiten geducht te maaken (Leiden 1785) 4 and 68. 
spirit’ of the troops by limiting the number of foreign soldiers and officers serving in the States army. But they equally acknowledged that a professional army in a small country like the Dutch Republic would always depend on recruitment outside national borders.108

As could be expected, the Patriots who went through the experience of the French Revolution if anything became more committed to the idea of a ‘citizenry in arms’ as the basis of national defense. But in the short period between 1789 and 1795 they completely redefined the meaning of this phrase. The arduous revolutionary writer Gerrit Paape later argued that by expelling the leading Patriots to France and the Southern Netherlands, ‘Orange (…) did nothing else but sending them to the polytechnic of Patriotism and revolution’.109 However, as Joost Rosendaal put it in his major study of Dutch refugees in revolutionary France,

‘the French Revolution was not a school in the sense that the Dutch became apprentices of the French. It was a school in which the Dutch and the French jointly passed the revolutionary curriculum, with as sole schoolmaster the dynamics of the revolution.’110

It was not merely a school for revolutionary politics that the Dutch refugees attended. It was a school for revolutionary warfare as well, in which the relation between the army, the nation, and citizenry was fundamentally redefined.111 The Dutch participated actively in this process. From 1791 onwards the idea of forming a ‘légion Batave’ to assist the French armies in the liberation of the Netherlands from the House of Orange and its Prussian-English backers circulated in refugee circles.112 End of May 1792 a delegation of Batavian refugees headed by the later general Daendels spoke about these plans to the French minister of Defense.113 After complicated political negotiations the National Assembly in July 1792 agreed to the formation

[References]

108 Klein, Patriots republikanisme, 180-182.
110 Joost Rosendaal, Bataven! Nederlandse vluchtelingen in Frankrijk 1787-1795 (Nijmegen 2003) 454.
112 Rosendaal, Bataven!, 311.
113 ‘Projet de la formation d’une légion Batave’, Colenbrander, Gedenkstukken 1, 35-36.
of this unit under the name of Légion Franche Étrangère. This was not a free corps, but a part of the French army that from 1793-1795 was at war with the Dutch Republic, consisting of 2812 men and 500 horses under the supervision of a committee of six Dutch refugees.\footnote{Rosendaal, \textit{Bataven!}, 316-317.} The members of the committee saw themselves as nucleus of the future government of a liberated Batavian Republic – a view not always shared by their French allies – and started formulating their vision for the future state.\footnote{Raymond Kubben, \textit{Regeneration and hegemony. Franco-Batavian relations in the revolutionary era 1795-1803} (Leiden/Boston 2011) 162.} In touch with the tenor of the times, and actively encouraged by their revolutionary friends, their plans all hinged on the institution of a republic that was ‘one and indivisible’.\footnote{E.g. by Condorcet in his ‘Adresse aux Bataves’, \textit{Oeuvres complètes}. Volume XVI (Brunswick / Paris 1804) 343, where he asks: ‘Bataves, voulez-vous être libres? que vos sept républiques, confondues dans une seule, n’aient plus qu’une seule volonté, que tous les citoyens aient un égal intérêt à défendre des droits qui soient les mêmes pour tous; alors, vous verrez le peuple fouler aux pieds la honteuse couleur de la servitude pour arborer celle de la liberté.’} The ‘Acte d’association des amis du rétablissement de la liberté Batave’ of 22 October 1792, undersigned among others by J.C. de Kock, who was one of the six committee members, and P.A. Dumont-Pigalle, who had been the liaison between the Patriots and the French government, stated as its first aims:

\begin{quote}
1o. A employer tous les moyens que nous avons, et tous ceux que les circonstances pourront nous offrir, pour abolir dans notre patrie le despotisme stadhouderien, et repousser tout système ou tout établissement aristocratique quelconque que l’on pourrait tenter de subsister à ce despotisme.

2o. Afin de mieux parvenir à ce dernier but, nous nous engageons à employer tous nos efforts pour faire disparaître de notre pays cette diversité de provinces souveraines, cette funeste fédération qui existe entr’elles, et qui a causé tant de maux à la République.

3o. Nous employerons aussi tous nos efforts pour y faire aboli cette disparité de lois, de costumes, de droits et de privilèges locaux, ainsi que toutes corporations quelconques, toutes distinctions, exemptions, prérogatives et privilèges personnels, soit héréditaires ou casuels.

4o. Nous employerons également tous les moyens possibles pour qu’après l’abolition de ces diverses choses nous puissions voir le territoire entier de la République ne plus former qu’un tout, distribué en départements, districts, cantons etc., et y voir régner des lois et des droits uniformes et communs à tous; par conséquent la liberté et l’égalité naturelle y être le partage de chaque individu, et notre patrie jouir d’une constitution semblable à celle que la République française va se donner.\footnote{‘Acte d’association des amis du rétablissement de la liberté batave’, Colenbrander, \textit{Gedenkstukken} I, 41.}"
\end{quote}
By that time, the idea that the Republic should be replaced by a unitary national state had become accepted even by most of the moderate refugees. In a ‘Draft project of the new form of government of the Batavian Republic’, two leading representatives of the moderates worked out the meaning of the abolition for all major institutions of the state, including the colonial companies, the army, and the navy:

‘The Companies of East and West, Society of Suriname, Berbice, and all others (...) to be destroyed. The colonies opened up to free trade, members of the union, and represented in the General Assembly by their own deputies.

(...) All foreign troops, especially Swiss and German regiments, discharged. The army reduced to at most 16,000 men and only for the protection of frontier towns. All citizens and inhabitants, without exception, forced to bear arms to maintain order internally and to counteract foreign violence if necessary.

(...) All the Admiralty Boards abolished, as well as the outside custom offices that in many places absorb more than they receive in taxes.’

The failure of the first invasion of the Netherlands, combined with the radicalization of the French revolution, solidified the adherence of Batavian refugees to this new model of the state, and on 10 August 1793 a Dutch journalist in Paris translated the reports on the ‘Fête de l’Unité et de l’Indivisibilité de la République’ and published them for an audience in the Netherlands. That the radical anti-federalist ideas from France had by that time won a following among revolutionaries within the Dutch Republic can be seen from a pamphlet written by Bernardus Bosch, Patriot firebrand and after 1795 one of the leaders of the radical fraction of the Batavian Revolution.

Vrijhardt [Free-heart] to the people of the Netherlands on the true constitution, apart from arguing for elections by universal male suffrage, forcefully defended the unitary national state. It also contained perhaps the most pointed pre-1795 explanation why the brokerage-organization of the Dutch army had to be replaced by that of a national citizens’ army:

‘No longer will fortifications be made in the first year, and flattened or destroyed in the next just to make contractors grow fat (...) – no army to show off in ante-chambres or in military books – no army to catch rabbits, and what is more – no army that empties the state treasure, and still leaves the officer and soldier poor and desperate (...) – no army to oppress society,'

---

118 ‘Schets-project der nieuwe regeeringsform voor de Bataafsche Republiek’, idem, 56.
and make its members into the slaves of an usurper – no military caste will be for sale to the highest bidder, or serve as bait for swindle of corrupt and dishonorable creatures (…) – no ordinary man will be forced to eat bread of charity at the cost of a state, that he cannot nor cares not to defend. No, an army of men, of free human beings, defenders of the fatherland, noble, great, and feared only by the enemy; citizens in society, led by few men, but by men worthy to lead and go in front of free human beings, this will be our entire defense.\footnote{121}

Bosch’ staccato stream of disqualifications integrated the old themes of stadtholderly usurpation through reliance on a standing army and aristocratic patronage in the appointment of officers to a radically new concept of the national army, bypassing the old language of the restored civil militias. In this sense, his formulations form a bridge between the militant federalism of the 1780s and the nationalism of the Batavian Revolution and are representative for the political trajectory of many former Patriots.

In another respect, however, Bosch went considerably further than most of the leading Batavians in exile. His language of naked profiteering through military contracting and ‘swindle’ surrounding army regiments, all too familiar from British oppositional discourse at the time, did not constitute an important theme in the arguments of the Batavian exiles in France who prepared the transition to the new Batavian order. This is surprising, since both the high costs of maintaining a standing army and the evils of ‘financial oligarchy’ in general figured in the debates of the 1780s.\footnote{122} Furthermore, as has been shown in the previous chapter, the dealings of military solicitors and army contractors had been subject of critique and reform attempts earlier in the eighteenth century. One possible explanation for this might sound crude, but still deserves a mention. The Batavian opposition was far from confined to the poor – on the contrary, substantial lower-class support was only won in the process of the revolution itself. Among the leadership of the exile community were many from extremely well-established regent families. They were connected to the very financial circles that Bosch held responsible for corrupting the army. Daendels, the future general of the Batavian armies, had set up a successful trading firm while in exile. This firm assisted the French government in the acquisition of 40,000 guns in London. The transaction itself was carried out by Abbema, one of the authors of the 1792 moderate ‘draft project’ and banker for Daendels’

\footnote{121} [Bernardus Bosch], \textit{Vrijhart aan het volk van Nederland over de waare constitutie} (s.l. ['in Holland'] 1793) 18-19.
In May 1792, before the French National Assembly agreed to the erection of the Légion Franche Étrangère, leading Batavian refugees had managed to purchase 300,000 livres worth of arms in England. Johan Valckenaer, active participant in the formulation of radical plans for a new constitution, tried to convince the French government that the ousting of the stadtholder would give it access to the strong Dutch credit market, ‘la poule aux œufs d’or’ for the French Republic. Such activities were hardly conducive for formulating diatribes against the malicious working of high finance, and it seems no coincidence that the development of this part of the critique on the old army structure was left to a radical outside the top circles of Batavian emigration.

There might also have been a second, less self-serving reason why brokerage structures in army finance did not attract the same level of debate as those in colonial warfare and Admiralty management. The previous chapters have shown that not every form of brokerage organization was equally inimical to the introduction of bureaucratic centralization. Of the three major areas of brokerage warfare discussed in this book, military soliciting most closely resembled forms of regulated interaction between state officials and entrepreneurs that characterize modern capitalist states – and came to resemble this more with the concentration of soliciting contracts into the hands of a layer of professional bankers. While both the federal direction over army finances and the independent entrepreneurial role of military officers eventually came to be seen as obsolete by the advocates of state rationalization, strong connections between the state and capitalist finance per se did not – or at least, not to those whose ambitions were limited to the rationalization of the bourgeois state.

5.5 The afterlife of the federal-brokerage state

Patriot thinking had come a long way when in January 1795 a revolutionary wave advancing in front of the French bayonets destroyed the old regime. Ten years earlier the Leiden Draft had still praised the federal and brokerage character of the Dutch state as the surest means to advance the ‘common interests’ of the nation, defined as ‘the protection and advancement of navigation, trade, and manufacture’ and the ‘maintenance of the Union and protection of its respective forms of government’:

---

123 Rosendaal, *Bataven!* , 312-313.
124 Ibid, 314.
125 [Johan Valckenaer], *Le noeud gordien débrouillé, du solution d’un grand problème politique* (Paris 1795) 16.
Each part of society in general here governs those affairs that touch on it alone and others have no business in. These particular societies together from their midst form one body of state, capable of governing the joint interests of an entire province; and these provinces in their turn form a general assembly of state, that only occupies itself with the external interests of the entire Union.  

In September 1795 representatives of revolutionary clubs gathered in The Hague for a ‘Central Assembly’ with the aim of pushing the States General for the convocation of a National Assembly could write in a completely opposite vein:

‘Cannot the cause of all disasters of the Netherlands be found solely in the form of government that exists there? Is not that seven headed monster, that union-ogre, the result of motives of particular self-interest? Is that not the source of confusions? (…) Therefore, it is high time that this despicable hole will be filled, to build on the flattened ground a system of state for the Netherlands that affirms the unity and indivisibility of all the various territories of this Republic. One National Assembly, one law founded on the law of nature that guarantees each inhabitant his civil and social relations, those alone are the means that can save the Netherlands.  

Eight months after the flight of the stadtholder, institutional realities still lagged far behind the ideas of the more radical fraction of the Batavian Revolution. The revolutionaries inherited the old state form more or less intact, and met with fierce opposition from the old apparatus as well as from the more conservative elements within their own ranks in their attempts to put their plans for structural reform into practice. The first years of the new order were dominated by the political struggle between the advocates of a unitary state or ‘Unitarians’ – in large part overlapping with the more democratic, radical, or, in the eyes of their enemies, ‘Jacobin’ elements of the revolution – and on the other side the advocates of a settlement closer to the old federal state – largely confined to the moderate elements, and derided by the radicals as ‘aristocrats’ or ‘slimy fellows’. On the national level this conflict became focused on the design of a new constitution. It was heavily influenced by international developments, primarily the trajectory taken by French politics and fears of the return of Orange on the back of an English invasion. On the local level it was intersected by popular mobilization, often

126 [Fijnje and Vreede], Ontwerp, 9-10.
encouraged by the radical Unitarians but paradoxically also closely connected to demands of local autonomy to counteract moderate provincial governments.  

Despite these political difficulties, the formal dismantling of key institutions of the federal-brokerage state started soon after the overthrow of the old order. If any proof was needed for the revolutionary nature of the 1795 overturn, it could be found in the speed with which it abolished arrangements that had accompanied the Dutch Republic almost from its birth, and had shown such resilience throughout its existence. Already on 17 February 1795, the States General agreed to the proposal of the Committee for Public Welfare to abolish the existing federal structure of the navy and place at the head of the five former Admiralty Boards a Committee for the Marine, consisting of twenty-one representatives chosen ‘from all the provinces, or rather from the entire Republic, without distinction, either three from each province, or so much more or less as is justified by circumstances’. The committee would be assisted in its work by one single fiscal advocate and one secretary. The decree made explicit, that

‘the general supervision of all mentioned tasks should rest with the committee in its entirety, and the subdivision of work in departments (…) according to statute should only be a matter of convenience and order.’

Four days earlier, lieutenant admiral Van Kinsbergen and Amsterdam fiscal advocate Van der Hoop had been put under civil arrest.

In colonial policy, likewise swift measures were taken. Since the WIC had been abolished in 1792 it was not a hard decision for the new provisional government to reorganize...


\[129\] Nieuwe Nederlandsche Jaarboeken, of vervolg der merkwaardigste geschiedenissen, die voorgevallen zijn in de zeven provin ciën, Bataafsch Brabant en Drenthe, en de buitenlandsche bezittingen. Volume XXX, part II (Amsterdam 1795) 698-699.

\[130\] Ibid, 671.
colonial administration of the West Indies along national lines. Already in March 1795 the provisional authorities of Holland decided to bring together all former WIC territories under the control of a Committee for the Affairs of Colonial Possessions on the coast of Guinea and America, whose members were installed by the States General on 9 October of the same year. Debates over the future of the VOC lasted somewhat longer, partly because they involved an intervention in what still nominally was a private company and therefore touched on the inviolable right of private property that moderates and radicals equally adhered to.\textsuperscript{131} Nevertheless, as a Committee for the Affairs of the VOC assured the provisional administration of the Province of Holland in June 1795, the ‘indescribable weight’ of the Company for the common wealth made determined action imperative.\textsuperscript{132} On their instigation the Holland administration on 15 September 1795 issued a ‘decree for the destruction of the present direction of the VOC’ that summoned the firing of all Company officials and the replacement of the six chambers by a Committee for the Affairs of the East Indian Trade and Possessions modeled after that for the West Indies. Breaking with old practices of equity between the provinces, the committee would consist of twenty-eight persons, twenty of whom should come from Holland as the main guarantor of the Company’s huge debts.\textsuperscript{133} In December 1795 the States General affirmed the main lines of this decree, de facto nationalizing the Company.\textsuperscript{134}

The reconstitution of the army on an entirely new basis was viewed by the new regime as a matter of great urgency. Already on 17 February 1795 the States General decided ‘that it is of the highest priority that this Assembly directs its attention to the army of the state, as well as the general administration of affairs, (…) that cannot continue on the present footing’.\textsuperscript{135} At the start of that month the Finance Committee had already decreed

‘as a concession to the military solicitors to order the issuing of pay ordinances according to the old system for the current month, but with the explicit affirmation that this will be for the last time.’\textsuperscript{136}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{131} Schutte, Patriotten en de koloniën, 107.
\footnote{132} Rapport van de gecommitteerden tot de zaaken van de Oostindische Compagnie, aan de provisionele repraesentanten van het volk van Holland. Ingeleverd den 15 Juny 1795 (The Hague 1795) 3-4.
\footnote{133} Decreet tot de vernietiging van het tegenwoordige bewind der Oost-Indische Compagnie. Gearrayeerd by de provisioneele representanten van het volk van Holland, den 15 September 1795 (The Hague 1795) 19-20.
\footnote{134} Schutte, Patriotten en de koloniën, 115.
\footnote{135} Nieuwe Nederlandsche Jaarboeken. Volume XXX, part II, 712-713.
\footnote{136} Ibid, 576.
\end{footnotes}
Like in all other important areas of reform a committee was put to work, and on 8 July 1795 its ‘Plan for the organization of the army’ was accepted by the States General. In one stroke the plan ended the existence of the independent ‘Kompaniewirtschaft’, ordering that the companies would now belong not to their officers but fully ‘to the nation’, and ‘would be paid out of one and the same generality pay desk’. Direction over payment was put into the hands of one central agent, assisted by three ‘solicitors’, who only in name resembled their predecessors. The same month Hendrik van der Burch, Jacobus Tielleman de Schenk, Carel van Hulst and Hendrik Jenny, all inhabitants of The Hague, at their own request were appointed respectively as agent and as solicitors. Problems in the financing of the army, however, continued to haunt the state, and colored the ensuing debates on the institution of a professional national army.

Out of the flood of committee meetings and proposals of ‘Year One of the Batavian Liberty’ emerged a coherent view on the role of the national state in managing warfare. In July 1796 the committee for the preparation of a new constitution among others presented the following points to the National Assembly:

‘That everything belonging to the administration of objects of the outward defense and inward good order of the nation should be put under the special direction of the executive power; and especially

a) The organization of the national army and armed citizenry, the moving and employment of those – as far as the army is concerned – to wherever is necessary. Further the maintenance of the necessary storehouses and factories that serve those; fortresses and everything that can be used to resist the enemy at times of war.

b) The administration of affairs concerning armed navigation; the building and equipment of the nation’s fleet, for the protection of commerce as well as of the nation’s colonies; the direction over the nation’s shipyards, iron foundries, sea harbors, coasts, and sea entrances.

c) The administration of possessions and trade both in East and West India and further coasts, in all matters concerning defense, and in matters of political administration.’

Putting those points into effect, however, even more than on practical conditions depended on the political struggle over the fate of the revolution itself. On this terrain, centuries old
traditions of localism took their revenge on the nationalizing revolutionaries. In a recent article on the successive attempts at nationalization undertaken by the Unitarian leadership, Thomas Poell described how they came to be pulled between their original democratic intentions and the wish to push through their particular vision of state modernization in the teeth of local resistance. Their failure to reunite these two strands took shape first in their attempts to break through the hold of federalism by popular mobilization in the period of 1795-1797, then in a series of coups and countercoups that dressed up in the language of radical democracy but had lost its substance, and finally in their alliance with the French state to modernize from above that formed the basis for the conservative consolidation of the national state of 1813. It formed the real enigma of the Batavian episode.

The revolution of January 1795 gave an immense impetus to the creation of a new type of state, but did not clear all the remnants of the old order in one clear sweep. Many of the more moderate revolutionaries, fearful of the consequences of a complete unsettling of the old order, wanted to leave considerable authority in the hands of the old provincial administrations. They were strengthened by the influx of former Orangist officials into the ranks of the revolution, which gave greater social weight to their party. Against them the leading Unitarians mobilized a motley crew of revolutionary clubs, radically oriented ‘neighborhood-assemblies’ that formed the lowest rung of the electoral system, and their supporters among the lower and lower-middle classes. While on the national level conflicts between the two parties concentrated on the institutional make-up of the new state, locally this democratic coalition centered around a classical revolutionary repertoire of cleansing the state of adherents of the old regime, firmer measures against unemployment and other social problems affecting the lower classes, and the extension of the rights of democratic participation. The radical press that had emerged in the wake of January 1795, ranging from the serious and state-minded De Democraten (The Democrats) of Gogel and Ockerse to the more rousing Politieke Blixem (Political Lightning) to which Bernardus Bosch contributed, served as a vehicle to connect the two processes.

The establishment of a National Assembly in March 1796 did not dampen these contradictions. Rather, it transferred them even more visibly to the level of national politics. At the local level, the revolution seemed to have run into a rut. Revolts in Amsterdam in

---

142 Schama, Patriots and liberators, 415.
143 Prak, Republikeinse veelheid, 246ff.
144 Jourdan, Révolution batave, 415-420.
November 1795 and April 1796 had come to nothing.\textsuperscript{145} In Friesland one of the few radical provincial governments was met with strong opposition, resulting early in 1797 in the Orangist uprising in the village of Kollum envisioned by the radicals as a Dutch Vendée.\textsuperscript{146} The failure of the National Assembly to accept a Unitarist constitution that had so painstakingly been prepared during Year One and Two became the ultimate proof that the revolution did not yet go far enough. Already in May 1796 the radical spokespersons Pieter Vreede, Bernardus Bosch, and Johan Valckenaer – all of whom had been centrally involved in formulating the Unitarist agenda in the pre-revolutionary period – called for popular armament to force the National Assembly into action.\textsuperscript{147}

A seemingly innocuous incident that occurred in Leiden in January 1797 can serve to illustrate the reasons for the failure of the democratic coalition to break through the stalemate in national politics.\textsuperscript{148} A coalition of well-known local radicals had sent out a call to societies and neighborhood assemblies throughout the country. In it, they invited them to send delegates to a national meeting of representatives of these rank-and-file organs of Batavian radicalism ‘in which the people, as it were, could speak with one voice’. The gathering was to convene in Leiden on the second birthday of the overthrow of the old order.\textsuperscript{149} The moderates responded with viperous rage. The provincial authorities of Holland sent representatives to take into custody the originators of the call. An investigation into the lawfulness of this action later concluded, that

‘one should be willingly blind if one does not see that this letter has the aim (...) to constitute an Assembly that would very soon have rivaled this Assembly [the Provincial authority of Holland], yes, if possible, to take from it the power that has been trusted to it by the people of Holland. And therefore, it can be seen as an attack on the sovereignty of the people of Holland, and one should be an advocate of chaos and anarchy, if one would be able to find salutary intentions behind measures that tend to reverse the established order of affairs and our adopted principles.’\textsuperscript{150}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{145} Jourdan, Amsterdam en révolution, 23-30.
\textsuperscript{146} Kuiper, Revolutie ontrafeld, 256 e.v.
\textsuperscript{147} Voorlichting aan de Grondvergaderingen, indien die moeten raadpleegen over het voorstel ter Nationale Vergadering gedaan, tot uitbreiding van derzelver magt (Arnhem 1796).
\textsuperscript{148} The incident is described in more detail in Brandon and Fatah-Black, ‘Oppermagt’.
\textsuperscript{149} The text of the invitation was read out in the National Assembly on 16 January 1797. Dagverhaal der handelingen van de Nationale Vergadering representeerende het volk van Nederland. Volume IV (The Hague 1797) 486.
\textsuperscript{150} Rapport der Personeele Commissie op het berigt van het Provinciaal Comité enz. mitsgaders het request van P.H. Trap c.s. (The Hague 1797) 3.
\end{flushright}
In the National Assembly the leading moderate and future head of the Dutch state under French control Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck argued that the meeting would even rival the National Assembly. Undoubtedly in part because of these reactions, the arrest of the Leiden radicals briefly became a cause célèbre among democrats and Unitarians nationwide. Remarkably enough, however, it became so not primarily as a challenge to the moderates in the provincial governments and the National Assembly, but under the slogan of the defense of local autonomy against the infringement of the provincial arresting team. The leading Unitarians proved as incapable of replacing the old federalist language in which popular mobilization traditionally was framed, as they were in forging a real national movement to push through their program against federalist opposition.

The period between the failed Patriot Revolution of 1785-1787 and the start of the Batavian Revolution had seen a dramatic reversal in perceptions of the state, in which the restorers of ‘the Ancient constitution’ of yesteryear were transformed in full-blown Unitarians. The failure of 1795-1797 to push through this Unification by revolutionary means set the stage for a second reversal, in which radical democrats became state-rationalizers from above. The main vehicle for this reversal was the ‘financial coalition’, that came about after radical coups and countercoups did not solve the impasse around the constitution. Leading representatives of moderates and former radicals, primarily Schimmelpenninck and Gogel, worked out a compromise that consisted of major financial reforms at the central level without the threat of popular involvement in politics of the first years of the revolution. Symbolic for the anti-populist character of the new coalition was its insistence on the abolition of the guilds, indispensable part of the liberal economic outlook of men like Gogel and for the breaking down of local particularism but widely perceived as an attack on the living standard of craft workers. Similarly, the introduction of new taxes and of military conscription for the wars fought in collusion with Napoleonic France evoked popular anger. In the first decade of the nineteenth century the pendulum of popular mobilization swung back towards the old tradition of Orangist populism. Schimmelpenninck and Gogel became the leading statesmen when after 1806 the former Dutch Republic was integrated into the French Empire. Under the aegis of Napoleon Bonaparte and his brother Louis Bonaparte who in 1810 was installed as the first Dutch monarch, they drove through a program of national

151 Dagverhaal IV, 520.
154 Prak, Republikeinse veelheid, 281-283, 291.
modernization. Thus, king William I inherited from his enemies the centralized bureaucratic state that his father’s regime had been unable to create.

**Conclusions**

The federal-brokerage character of the Dutch state had been strengthened, not weakened, by warfare in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. The fundamental character of the state remained intact during the remainder of the eighteenth century, despite grave revolutionary crises in 1747 and 1785-1787, and despite the disintegration of the historic bloc underlying the state. Only the Batavian Revolution of 1795 heralded the end of the Old Republic, laying the foundations for the unitary state. The administrative measures taken at lightning speed during Year One of the revolution had been prepared by long debates over state reform in every major area of the organization of warfare, and in each of the key institutions of the brokerage state. From the days of Van Slingelandt onwards, administrators who wanted to rationalize the existing state apparatus had pointed out the debilitating defects of the federal state structure. By the final decades of the century these defects had become almost generally acknowledged, both by reformers within the state and by Patriot oppositionists. Many plans were formulated to create state control over the colonies, break down trade monopolies that came with the brokerage functions of the commercial companies, unify the five Admiralty Boards into one single Department of the Navy responsible for the protection of merchants and equalizing the collection of customs, and bring the army under one unified command and state-centered structure of payment. However, almost every single plan foundered on the inability of central administrators to go against their own support base among the federal elites, as well as their fear of reform spilling over into revolution.

This chapter has shown how the years after the failed Patriot revolution of 1785-1787 saw an almost complete reversal of positions on the aims of state reform. While centralizers within the Orangist administration, despite their intentions of bureaucratic rationalization, clung to the vestiges of the federal-brokerage state to protect the old order, radical revolutionaries dropped their program of ‘reconstitution’ of the old republic and became advocates of the unitary state. Clearly reflected in the pages of the radical press that emerged in the course of 1795, the aims of ‘democracy’ and ‘state unification’ had been pushed together. Once the backbone of the old order had been broken by a combination of French
revolutionary arms and local uprisings, the old state institutions were easily destroyed. However, replacing them by a functioning centralized state proved much more difficult. The revolutionaries of 1795 faced one of the many ironies of history, expressed in a second reversal of positions that was hardly less dramatic than the first. Failing to achieve the rationalization of the state that they envisioned from below, the majority of the Unitarian leaders turned towards solutions from above – first revolutionary coups, then reliance on the French army, and eventually bowing for a Bonaparte in France and one in The Hague. To a large extent they were successful in their aims of a renewal of the Dutch state along nationalizing lines. The restoration of 1813 left most of their innovations in state management intact, and the old federal-brokerage framework was never to re-emerge. But the institutions they created were neither democratic, nor the result of popular mobilization. The revolutionary moment of the national state had died before its birth.