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Introduction

A small state on the global scene

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DOI

[10.4324/9781315228440](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315228440)

Publication date

2018

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Shaping the International Relations of the Netherlands, 1815-2000

License

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

van Dijk, R., Kruizinga, S., Kuitenbrouwer, V., & van der Maar, R. (2018). Introduction: A small state on the global scene. In R. van Dijk, S. Kruizinga, V. Kuitenbrouwer, & R. van der Maar (Eds.), *Shaping the International Relations of the Netherlands, 1815-2000: A small country on the global scene* (pp. 1-12). (Routledge Studies in Modern European History; Vol. 55). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315228440>

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Shaping the International Relations of the Netherlands, 1815–2000

A Small Country on
the Global Scene

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First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-0-415-78453-5 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-22844-0 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Keystroke, Neville Lodge, Tettenhall, Wolverhampton

Introduction

A small state on the global scene

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One of the most enduring divides in modern international relations is that between ‘small states’ and ‘great powers’. This divide was formally established at the 1814 Treaty of Chaumont. There, for the first time, the notion that all states were equal was done away with. With the treaty, members of the coalition against Napoleon were, de facto, divided into two categories. The first consisted of Great Powers such as the Austrian and Russian Empires, Prussia and Britain – which fielded the largest armies and were therefore shouldered with the main responsibility of (re)shaping the international system after victory. The second category consisted of those countries whose contributions to the war effort had been modest; as ‘small powers’, they were deemed too insignificant to contribute significantly to the international environment.¹ In the Treaty, the Netherlands – which had been one of the most powerful states during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – was relegated to small state status. It would, in the eyes of both its inhabitants and the rest of the world, remain a small state until the present day. This volume deals with the question of how various actors from this small state – from inside and outside the ranks of its government – acted on the global scene and dealt with the issues that emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the wake of great geopolitical forces such as the Concert System, imperial expansion and decolonization, the two world wars and the Cold War.

Our answer to this question departs from the assumption that small does not necessarily mean insignificant. This notion is widely recognized amongst both historians and political scientists interested in international relations since Annette Baker Fox’s 1959 landmark study of small states during the Second World War, showing how countries such as Sweden and Switzerland managed to maintain room for diplomatic manoeuvring during the Second World War.² During the 1960s and 1970s, the field of small state studies emerged in her footsteps, developing in three separate, but not mutually exclusive, directions. The first focused on the search for empirical criteria to separate three distinct categories of states: great, middle and small. But no consensus emerged, as every proposed set of small state criteria was quickly met with a barrage of counter-proposals and examples. The Netherlands is

an interesting case in point.³ Despite being widely regarded as a ‘small country’, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it had quite a large GDP, population size and density. Moreover, it had a varied economic structure and emerged as a vital global trading hub. Finally, it was, for much of the last two centuries, in possession of the third largest colonial empire, which, according to imperial enthusiasts, elevated it above ‘the rank of Denmark’.⁴

A second strand in the field focused not on what small states are, but what they do. Robert Keohane and Robert Rothstein, writing in 1968 and 1969 respectively, suggested that small states, rather than being defined by some measurable quantity or typical behaviour, are characterized by their fundamental inability, recognized by both themselves and others, to provide for their own security.⁵ Others, most notably Michael Handel, have expanded upon this notion and have equated a ‘small state’ with a ‘weak state’.⁶ Because of this fundamental ‘weakness’, historians of international relations have argued, small states are ‘satisfied powers’, uninterested in acquiring more territory as this could potentially bring them into conflict with other, stronger states.⁷ Roderick Ogley has even argued that war, in general, is bad for small states.⁸ Drawing on these notions, many scholars have noted that neutrality seems to be the preferred option for small states, as it potentially insulates them from war and entangling alliances.⁹ But rather than neatly confirming to this small state norm of neutrality, the Dutch case shows a more complex trajectory. During the latter nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century it remained neutral during major conflicts that took place amongst European powers – most notably the First World War.¹⁰ But after the Second World War, which saw the invasion of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany, the country became a member of NATO and joined the process of European unification.¹¹

A third strand of small state studies is closely connected to the second as it highlights the role played by small state agents in promoting the ideal of international peace through institutions and laws. Patrick Salmon, for example, argues that ‘[s]mall states hanker after the world as it ought to be; great powers deal with the world as it is’.¹² A normative preference for working with and through international institutions to promote stability is, according to some, the cultural flip side of the powerlessness of small states.¹³ This would also explain their enthusiasm for international law and institutions as a means to strengthen the international rule of law protecting them from harassment by more powerful states and stabilize the international system to prevent conflict from breaking out. Finally, international institutions allow small states a venue to have their voices heard and allow for coalition-building on specific international issues.¹⁴ And indeed, the Netherlands is no stranger to international institutions. It hosted the two Hague Peace Conferences (1899 and 1907), became an early member of both the League of Nations and the United Nations, and supplied civil servants, observers and, occasionally, soldiers to international monitoring or

peace-keeping missions.¹⁵ However, Dutch membership of international institutions was nearly always fraught with debate and occasionally clashed with other visions of Dutch national duty and mission.¹⁶

Noticeably, despite these thematic overlaps, Dutch perspectives in the international scholarly debate on small state studies are few and far in between.¹⁷ There is, however, a substantial body of literature on the history of Dutch international relations, which looks at this history from an isolated, national perspective. The majority of these studies focus on the role of the Dutch state and are based on empirical research in a classical corpus of diplomatic documents. Prior to the Second World War, historical research concentrated on Dutch official dealings with international law and trade. After 1945, the focus shifted to matters of international politics, surrounding NATO and Europe, and interdepartmental strife and the influence of public opinion at home.¹⁸ And in the course of the 1970s and 1980s historians began to analyse Dutch imperialism and its foreign policy implications, starting a debate on whether or not the Netherlands was an imperial power in the British mould.¹⁹ The 1991 essay collection *De kracht van Nederland* ('The power of the Netherlands'), edited by Niek van Sas, provides a useful overview of the results of this first, empirical phase of historiography on Dutch foreign policy.²⁰

From the 1960s onwards, the empirical case studies on Dutch foreign policy issues were complemented by a more theoretical debate about long-term continuities. Inspired by an agenda-setting article by Hans Boogman, historians and political scientists engaged in a debate on the nature of Dutch foreign policy since 1813.²¹ Several years later, Joris Voorhoeve, a political scientist, focused on internal political and ideological factors, such as competing Dutch power interests and a strong sense of national mission, which he argues even date back to the time of the Dutch Republic in the early modern age.²² Although he does not deny these domestic dynamics, Duco Hellema, also trained as a political scientist, prioritizes external factors, arguing that the Netherlands' geographical position predisposed it to become a vital economic connection between mainland Europe and the Atlantic Ocean, which made a foreign policy based on free trade and neutrality a rational and logical outcome.²³ Another line of criticism on Voorhoeve's thesis came from historians in the 1990s who argued that, based on archive material, the historical practices of Dutch foreign policy appeared to be complex, and thus difficult to capture in abstract notions of the continuities in foreign policy formation.²⁴ Nevertheless, the notion of continuities remains important because it has introduced concepts in the debate on Dutch foreign policy, enabling historians to think beyond a 'general' empirical method.²⁵

The early decades of the twenty-first century have seen the rise of a new cohort of historians working on Dutch international relations expanding on the work of previous generations in various directions. In publications that appeared after 2000 historians moved beyond diplomatic sources in studies

of, often interrelated, topics such as human rights, development aid, solidarity movements and NGOs.²⁶ Other researchers moved away from a singular Dutch-centric perspective by addressing the agency of Dutch actors in boundary-crossing networks, such as the pro-Boer movement around 1900,²⁷ the Interdoc anti-communist network set up in 1963²⁸ and church-based and other dissident organizations in Eastern Europe in the 1970 and 1980s.²⁹ In addition, there is a growing engagement of Dutch scholars with theoretical approaches from international literature. Prime examples are the concepts ‘cultural transfer’, ‘entangled history’ and ‘securitization’ that have been thoroughly discussed in recent Dutch-language publications.³⁰ Contributors to a recently published volume on the history of Dutch foreign policy have further experimented with the use of theories such as constructivism and methods such as discourse analysis in their work.³¹ Our volume builds upon these recent efforts, but seeks to improve on them by systematically connecting Dutch historical research with two leading trends in current international debates.

With this purpose in March 2016 a group of historians, at various stages of their careers, came together at the University of Amsterdam to discuss the current state of international relations research in the Netherlands and its future. The chapters in this collection are based on the papers that were presented at that symposium. We asked contributors to reflect on the role of *non-state actors* beyond politicians and diplomats, and on the *transnational connections* that shaped the international relations of the Netherlands, such as (post-)colonialism and internationalism. All contributions in this volume engage with least one of these central concepts, either seeking to offer new interpretations of documents that can be found in official archives that have been used previously, or by exploring sources that up until now have largely been overlooked in historiography. The goal of this effort is to move from the study of Dutch *foreign policy* – a purely state-centred approach based on the notion of a country’s governing apparatus as a single rational actor interacting with other, equally rational actors – to a study of Dutch *international relations*, which presupposes a much wider array of intersecting and possibly even conflicting interactions between Dutch and non-Dutch actors.

In addition this collection of Dutch case studies makes a relevant contribution to the international debate as our approach allows the authors in this volume to engage critically with the related concepts of transnationalism and non-state actors. Less a clearly defined research methodology than an all-encompassing research agenda for history and the social and political sciences, transnationalism, according to Pierre-Yves Sauner, emphasizes how in the twentieth century ‘flows of capital, people, ideas or images were making nation states insufficient or irrelevant as units of analysis’.³² Although the rise of transnational history has been associated with globalizing movements that emerged since the latter half of the twentieth century, more recently historians have cast their glances further backwards in time.³³ There

is a danger here, because of the tendency to dismiss completely the role of the state and focus exclusively on those types of easy-to-identify transnational actors: those who cross boundaries, institutional or otherwise, as a matter of course, as part of their engagement with, for example, NGOs or multinationals.³⁴

However, Penny Von Eschen rightfully observes that even in the case of these transnational organizations, actors both challenged *and* intersected with the projects of states, including, but not limited to, legal and ideological limits imposed and cultural values sponsored by them.³⁵ Mark Mazower suggests that even in transnational organizations and institutions, erected since the early nineteenth century to regulate and in some cases reorder global society, there existed a complex relation between state interests and transnational ideas and the institutions that emanated from them.³⁶ This volume will therefore emphasize not how Dutch transnational agents replaced Dutch national agents, but how the two categories intertwined, leading to conflicts and compromises that together shaped the way the Netherlands, as a small state, acted on the global scene. Although the following chapters address fascinating topics in their own right, the collection as a whole serves to further advance the historical study of modern international relations in the Netherlands. Indeed, as we explain in the final chapter, the relevance of this volume extends beyond the confines of Dutch historiography as it contains the building blocks of a new approach to the field of small state studies.

Chapter outline

The following chapters offer eleven original case studies in chronological order, ranging across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In his chapter, Joep Schenk demonstrates that the new European order during and after the Congress of Vienna in 1814–1815 was not just determined by the Great Powers. A small nation such as the Netherlands played a significant part in drafting and implementing at least two key results in terms of institutionalized international cooperation that flowed from the Congress: the declaration of the principle of freedom of navigation on international rivers and the constitution of the Central Commission for Navigation of the Rhine (CCNR). The flow of the Dutch decision-making processes on a new transnational Rhine regime highlights how, at crucial junctions, the Dutch position was influenced by the need for a balance between shared European economic interests and Dutch national interests. Moreover, this contribution shows that the way these interests were interpreted hinged not just on Dutch officials, but also on non-state actors.

Erik de Lange zooms in on the bombardment of Algiers in 1816, carried out by a combined Anglo-Dutch fleet. This devastating cannonade forced Regent *dey* Omar Agha to issue a declaration forever renouncing ‘Christian slavery’. At the time, Dutch authors lauded this result as a victory of

European significance, which finally abated the transnational threat posed by the Barbary corsairs. Therefore De Lange argues that the bombardment of 1816 must be situated in the context of post-Napoleonic European security politics, which was not simply dominated by the Great Powers as is often assumed. In fact, he shows that Anglo-Dutch cooperation came about as a result of diplomatic efforts by small states in combination with the pressures of public opinion which had an impact on the dynamics of the new European order. De Lange not only stresses the role of non-state actors in this matter, but he also draws attention to the often overlooked Dutch involvement in imperial interventions in the Mediterranean at the beginning of the nineteenth century that were carried out under the banner of security.

Beatrice de Graaf and Wouter Klem discuss Dutch reactions to anarchist terrorism in the last decade of the nineteenth century. They primarily focus on the efforts of police officials to counter this transnational threat. Although the Netherlands was not hit by a large-scale attack at the time, fear of anarchists was disseminated through newspapers which extensively reported on bloody incidents that occurred in other countries. Addressing public anxieties, public prosecutors and local police commissioners in the Netherlands succeeded in putting the struggle against anarchism high on the national security agenda which enabled them to instigate large-scale police reforms in terms of bureaucratization, standardization and centralization. In this process they focused on importing new technologies and practices from abroad which put them in touch with colleagues from other countries. Through this network several Dutch police officials attended international anti-anarchist conferences in 1897 and 1898, where they successfully lobbied for harsh measures. By doing so these actors, who did not belong to the Dutch diplomatic corps, managed to leave their mark on Dutch international relations at the turn of the twentieth century.

In his contribution, Pelle van Dijk focuses on Dutch public diplomacy between the First and Second World Wars. He actively engages with recent literature on public diplomacy which seeks to broaden the field by including cases predating the Cold War and by analysing the agency of non-state actors. Van Dijk shows that these insights can successfully be applied in Dutch historiography by analysing the National Bureau for Documentation on the Netherlands (1919–1935). The purpose of this organization, that was set up by the former parliamentarian F.J.W. Drion with the aid of Dutch businessmen, was to improve the public image of the Netherlands abroad via a network of ‘silent press attachés’, consisting of Dutch journalists who tried to promote the Dutch image by influencing foreign media. Although high officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stood in close contact with Drion and even provided the lion’s share of his funding, the Dutch government wanted to keep these connections a secret. A close reading of the correspondence between Drion and his attaché in London, journalist and historian P.C.A. Geyl, reveals the complex interactions between official and non-official actors in Dutch public diplomacy.

Anne-Isabelle Richard analyses the Dutch European movement in the interwar period in the context of debates on Dutch internationalism. Her chapter proves that a European movement existed in this period and it shows the movement's relevance for understanding support for European cooperation post-1945. The interwar European movement only becomes visible if we adopt a civil society approach that looks at the wider foreign policy network of business people, intellectuals and grassroots activists as well as Foreign Ministry officials. This chapter focuses on the *Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede* (VeV), the Dutch League of Nations Union, which is a perfect case study to examine debates about internationalism.

Using a comparative method, Susanna Erlandsson challenges assumptions about Dutch history and the role of alignment in small state security. She argues that the Dutch road from aloofness to NATO membership was not primarily about the experience of failed neutrality, or about fear of the Soviet Union or a new war: it was not, as it has often been depicted, a sacrifice of (peace-time) sovereignty for (wartime) security. On the contrary, Erlandsson claims that the changed course was in fact about retaining sovereignty, not only in wartime but in times of peace. A close comparison with the Swedish case reveals that the Dutch decision to ally was based on the same considerations that caused the Swedish government to opt for nonalignment. Both were motivated by a desire to safeguard regional stability and cooperation in order to maintain margin for manoeuvre in a world where small states were no longer expected to be able to survive independently. These results transcend the Dutch case study and shed new light on our understanding of small state security choices in general.

David Snyder examines the East Indies Crisis (typically dated 1945–1949) as an example of 'clientelism', which is developed here as a new strategy of postwar state power. Themes of interdependence, legalism and moralism dominate the literature on post-World War II Dutch foreign policy, leaving the realities of Dutch power under-addressed and under-theorized. While the postwar Netherlands may have been deprived of conventional forms of state power, it did seek to leverage American power in the pursuit of its interests, in this case the retention of its traditional Indonesian colony. American power offered itself as a new international force in these years, one which Dutch authorities eagerly sought to expropriate in their struggle with Indonesian nationalism. That the effort in this case failed by 1948 is less important than the fact that the broader clientelist strategy became a cornerstone not only of postwar Dutch foreign policy, but of many other states as well. The clientelist perspective credits Dutch foreign policy with much more agency and influence than is apparent in the current literature. Furthermore, it casts the postwar international system in a much more dynamic light than is typically captured in notions of hegemonic domination and resistance. In ensuing decades, the Netherlands drew on the power of the American imperium in the form of Marshall aid and NATO support. As this chapter shows, however, the Dutch were no mere passive recipients

of that power. Rather, clientelism allowed (and allows) small powers to mould and shape the international system in their own right.

Boyd van Dijk explores the history of the origins of the Dutch as guardians of 'Hague Law'. Based on a collection of multilingual archival materials, and focusing on three principal questions in particular (i.e. war crimes, the law of occupation, and colonial warfare), the article shows how the Dutch played a far more significant role in revising the post-1945 international legal order than is commonly assumed in the literature. Especially the now largely forgotten lawyer M.W. Mouton played a critical role in promoting a new war crimes' regime that would lie at the origins of the International Criminal Court's founding statute. However, while trying to revise the Hague and Geneva Conventions, these Dutch officials had to bring their internationally progressive effort to promote criminal law into harmony with their own obligations as a loyal NATO partner and a declining colonial power. Adding a new dimension to ongoing debates about the War of Independence in Indonesia, this article reveals how the Dutch rejected plans to apply the future Conventions to colonial wars. As a result of these clashing images, it became eventually impossible for them to uphold their role as the guardian of 'Hague Law'.

As Peter van Dam writes in his contribution, Dutch transnational relations have often been cast as a struggle between the figures of a self-interested merchant and a morally concerned clergyman. To appreciate the role of civic organizations in transnational relations, we have to move beyond this simple opposition of interests and ideals, he claims. His chapter demonstrates how attraction and repulsion between state and civic actors created a force field in which the lines between state and civic actors and between national and international policy became blurred. The Netherlands is an excellent point of departure for these studies because of the historically lively interactions between its state and civic actors. Case studies from the movement for fair trade since the 1960s exemplify three roles performed by civic organizations in shaping transnational relations. They functioned as forerunners, shaping public opinion on relevant issues and structuring the international arena through contacts with transnational organizations. Second, they constituted an alternative to government foreign policy and third, these organizations could serve as partners for government policy, providing input, legitimacy and alternative channels of communication.

Jan Willem Brouwer's chapter deals with the changes in international politics in the 1970s, particularly the rise of summitry. Traditionally, foreign policy was seen largely as the responsibility of the Foreign Minister. In the early 1970s this situation changed with the rise of multilateral summitry. Especially through the creation of the European Council in 1974 the prime minister became an important spokesman for the Netherlands. Brouwer analyses how Prime Minister Joop den Uyl and Foreign Minister Max van der Stoep managed to deal with the anomalous situation. Brouwer shows that the expansion of the Dutch prime minister's activities initially had more to

do with the international developments than with his personal ambitions. Nevertheless Den Uyl intended to act not only as prime minister, but also as party leader in the Socialist International and in bilateral relations. This caused widespread resentment among senior figures of the Foreign Ministry for whom the prime minister lacked competence in foreign affairs. Major collisions were avoided by Den Uyl's tactful behaviour and his good working relationship with Foreign Minister Van der Stoel.

Giles Scott-Smith examines the activities of Ernst H. van Eeghen, businessman and citizen diplomat *extraordinaire*. He looks closely at the Burght Foundation that Van Eeghen created to pursue his international mission of East–West reconciliation. By analysing his activities in detail, it becomes possible to examine the role and relevance of a non-state actor in the context of Dutch–Soviet and Dutch–Russian relations. In doing so, this chapter questions the state-centric approach of the orthodox diplomatic history that has so far covered this bilateral relationship. Scott-Smith shows that Van Eeghen considered himself perfectly justified in undertaking such an international role, and that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs went along with this. However, his relationship with Dutch diplomacy was not entirely smooth. Ministries are eager to make use of NGOs to achieve their goals, but are deeply suspicious of non-state actors that seek to go their own way regardless.

Acknowledgements

We, the editors, would like to thank the following individuals and institutions that have made it possible to host the symposium 'Recasting the History of Dutch Foreign Relations' at the University of Amsterdam in March 2016 where this volume originates. Liz Buettner, Marianne van Leeuwen, Niek van Sas and Roel van der Veen provided valuable comments on the papers which helped us to formulate the general themes in this volume. The funding for this project was provided by the Amsterdam School for Historical Studies and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the latter institution our special thanks goes out to Bert van der Zwan for his ongoing support.

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