



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Conclusions and outlook: Small states on the global scene

van Dijk, R.; Kruizinga, S.; Kuitenbrouwer, V.; van der Maar, R.

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). Conclusions and outlook: Small states 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. 240-244). (Routledge Studies in Modern European History; Vol. 55). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315228440>

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.

Conclusions and outlook

Small states on the global scene

*Ruud van Dijk, Samuël Kruizinga,
Vincent Kuitenbrouwer and
Rimko van der Maar*

Towards a new synthesis of Dutch international relations

As editors, our aims in organizing a conference and publishing this volume on Dutch actors on the global scene were twofold: first, to contribute to a broadening of the historiography of Dutch foreign relations beyond traditional political and diplomatic history and, second, to bring case studies from the history of Dutch foreign relations conceived in this expansive way into the international history of the past two centuries. Regarding the former objective, we sought participants who in their own research emphasize the role played by non-state actors, their connection with and use of transnational networks, and the way state and non-state actors interacted in the international relations of the Netherlands during the past two centuries. With regard to the latter objective, we hoped to enrich the history of international relations since 1814 by introducing a wider readership to lesser-known case studies, based mostly on Dutch sources, which throw new light on current debates and issues in international relations history.

The chapters in this volume all succeed in advancing these goals. Many of them highlight the importance of Dutch non-state actors (both individuals and organizations) in representing the Netherlands on the global scene. Peter van Dam's and Giles Scott-Smith's chapters provide examples from the second half of the twentieth century, highlighting the connections between civic organizations and private individuals on the one hand and official state actors on the other. These connections, which were often wrought with tensions, helped shape Dutch attitudes towards the developing world and the communist bloc in that era. Pelle van Dijk and Anne-Isabelle Richard demonstrate the significance of non-state actors in the 1920s and 1930s as they show how the lines between them and officials were blurred in public diplomacy efforts to influence the international media and in the domestic debate about the idea of European unification. Joep Schenk's chapter on Rhine navigation diplomacy at the 1814–15 Congress of Vienna has highlighted how business communities significantly impacted both the proceedings themselves and their outcome.

Other contributions focus on how, under the influence of international developments, representatives of the Dutch state assumed new roles in the

formulation and conduct of Dutch foreign policy – contesting the traditional dominance of the *corps diplomatique* in this area. Jan Willem Brouwer's chapter focuses on the expanding role of the Dutch prime minister in diplomatic affairs in the context of the advent of 'summitry' in the 1970s. Similarly, Beatrice de Graaf and Wouter Klem show how in the *fin-de-siècle* period Dutch police officials, through their own transnational networks, managed to bypass the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in counter-terrorism policy initiatives.

Several contributions throw new light on themes long central to the historiography of Dutch foreign policy, such as empire and decolonization. Looking at the start of the era of imperial expansion in the early nineteenth century, Erik de Lange points out the agency of Dutch actors in establishing European dominance over the Mediterranean, a region that is often overlooked in the literature on Dutch colonial history. Introducing the concept of 'clientelism' to analyse the evolving relationship between the United States and the Netherlands, David Snyder highlights how, during the Indonesian war of decolonization, Dutch officials attempted to steer American might in a direction beneficial to them. And Boyd van Dijk notes in his chapter that Dutch contributions to, and identification with, the cause of international law during the tumultuous years following the Second World War had to contend with other forms of identification, specifically as victim of Nazi aggression, loyal NATO member, and colonial power. Susanna Erlandsson, too, focuses on these crucial years, which saw the Netherlands shift away from neutrality. She uses a comparative approach, not only to highlight similarities between the Dutch and the Swedish approaches to security, sovereignty and international cooperation, but also explain the divergent paths these two nations ultimately took.

Notably, the chapters gathered in this volume point away from oversimplifying Dutch international relations as those of an insignificant state in a big-power world, or from overstating the differences between state and non-state actors in giving shape to these relations. Instead, the work here demonstrates that we should rather focus on the interactions between and the entanglement of these two different types of actors, and levels of analysis, to provide a new perspective on the Netherlands' international relations. Moreover, by highlighting both the fluidity of actors' roles and identities, we hope that the chapters in this volume spark a range of new projects that explicitly and systematically pursue historical research into the international relations of the Netherlands, integrating transnational perspectives with traditional diplomatic and political history and directly connecting to work being done by colleagues working on other countries or doing transnational history in a broad sense. More themes would have to be included, especially economic and business history, but also, for example, the history of environmental or climate diplomacy. Eventually, the time may then arrive for someone to take a step back and write a new historical synthesis – not of Dutch foreign policy, but of the international relations of the Netherlands.

A new approach to small state studies

In addition to potentially providing a new start for the analysis of the history of Dutch international relations, we believe this volume provides an agenda-setting contribution to another field of international relations history, namely that related to 'small' countries.

A number of authors in this book have highlighted the contributions made by Dutch agents to the post-Napoleonic order in Europe and the wider world, most notably Erik de Lange, Joep Schenk, and Beatrice de Graaf and Wouter Klem. Their chapters suggest that, from the early nineteenth century onwards, contributions to the rule-based order that was created at Vienna extended beyond those by great power agents. Order was more than a balancing of (great) power (De Lange), it also included pragmatic approaches to safeguard shared economic interests (Schenk), or international cooperation against transnational anarchist networks (De Graaf/Klem).

For the twentieth century, likewise, several chapters suggest that international relations for small countries increased in complexity due to the broad and structural changes impacting great and small countries alike: decolonization, European and transatlantic integration, ideological conflict and globalization. But crucially they illuminate, from a small state perspective, specific aspects of these changes thanks to either methodological or conceptual innovation (Erlandsson and Snyder), the use of new sources (Boyd van Dijk), or emphasis on relatively new themes such as public (Pelle van Dijk) and citizen diplomacy (Scott-Smith) or NGO activism (Van Dam) through transnational networks.

All these perspectives are from the Netherlands, and as such they form contributions to the debate on Dutch international relations of the past two centuries. But they can also be seen as examples of the international relations of a small state. This raises the question of what the influence and experience may have been of this and other so-called small states in recent international history. If we accept, as our chapters here demonstrate, that Dutch influence was often significant beyond national borders and interests, how should we think about the overall place of small states in the world of the past two centuries? Can the Netherlands' small international stature shed light on the behaviours of Dutch state and non-state actors on the global scene? And what does the Dutch experience suggest about other small states, about small countries in general?

In our introduction, we highlighted that research into small states in international history has traditionally emphasized either their agency, or, interestingly, their *lack* of agency. Studies focusing on small states either focus on their ability to weigh in and, especially in times of international strife, tip the global balancing scale one way or another, or, by contrast, these states are seen as characterized by weakness: seeking to limit their exposure to global conflicts, small states, unable solely to rely on their own material and immaterial defence mechanisms, tend to seek refuge in international-legal

frameworks designed to limit and control conflict (such as neutrality) or regulate international conduct through institutions such as the League of Nations or the European Union. Doing so serves to minimize risks while increasing small states' ability to influence international agendas.

The case studies presented here confirm that the Netherlands did not neatly fit into either of these static models. It is true that Dutch state and non-state actors were active in international forums throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But they did so for a variety of reasons and with different levels of enthusiasm, engagement and impact. The Dutch were neutral, for parts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but this neutrality, too, changed and shifted, and it was abandoned in the 1940s. Finally, the Dutch sometimes felt that they managed to 'punch above their weight', but this had as much to do with the activities of different types of Dutch actors as it did with possibilities they recognized in the international sphere.

Comparative studies into concrete cases of small state foreign policy behaviour, like Susanna Erlandsson's contribution to this volume, highlight that even when two small states share important goals, they do not necessarily end up pursuing the same policies. Other research has also highlighted that in most cases small states do not act alike, and that, rather, their foreign policy strategies do not seem to differ that much from those of great powers.

This has led many researchers to conclude that 'small state' is simply not a useful category for research, since being small does not explain anything about the way a state operates on the global scene. Others have simply abandoned all attempts to lump small states together into one rigidly defined category, opting for an 'I know it when I see it' approach. Such researchers highlight that the primary utility of small state studies lies in correcting our understanding of (the history of) international relations, which is still largely the study of great power politics. On the one hand, with this volume on the activities by small state actors we adhere to this latter approach as we have sought to introduce a wide range of case studies from the Dutch perspective to an international audience. But, on the other hand, we believe that the essays in this volume have more to offer. Taken together, we believe, they suggest a way of reframing 'small state studies' as a viable field within the history of international relations.

First of all, our case studies highlight the complex interactions of Dutch state and non-state actors in shaping international relations. Currently, small state studies focus almost exclusively on state actors. It remains somewhat of an open question whether these different types of actors are beholden to the same sets of possibilities and restrictions. Does it matter whether a non-state actor, such as one engaged in transnational networks, is from a small state? Secondly, since our volume features case studies from the breadth of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it begs the question whether over that long stretch of time the *perception* of the size of the Netherlands both domestically and abroad did not change, and whether that did not have any consequences for the behaviour of its state and non-state nationals as they

engaged with the wider world? It seems like notions of the Netherlands' size (and thus its influence, power and overall importance) relative to the rest of the world shifted dramatically. Was the Netherlands the same 'size' for its negotiators at Vienna as it was for its government ministers during the Second World War? Did the prime minister at European Community summits think the Netherlands was small in the same way as legal experts negotiating the post-war judicial order did?

These questions suggest a new starting point for small state studies. Rather than thinking of 'small' as a rigid and static category, we suggest they are the result of both domestic and transnational discourses, which change over time, and in which both state and non-state actors participate. In our view, self-identifying as small is prescriptive: if a politically relevant audience considers a country to be small, this will have profound consequences for the bandwidth available for actions taken by or on behalf of that country. Therefore, the field of small states studies should, we feel, focus on analysing the connections between shifting ideas about a state's (relative) size, competing notions of national interest and mission, and the activities of state and non-state agents in international relations.

Therefore, we first need to analyse the individuals or groups articulating these competing views: who are the parties chiefly responsible for creating these narratives, where do they find their audiences and when are they successful? Secondly, different discourses on 'smallness' need to be compared and contrasted: how are they connected to specific notions of a country's history or destiny? Are they transnational, or is their influence limited to one polity? Finally, we should analyse the relationship between these discourses on small state identity and specific practices of 'smallness'. Can we connect shifts in international activity to changing notions of small state self-identity? And, if so, are these shifts recognized as part of a change in status in the international system? Seeking answers to these questions, we feel, is vital if we are to provide a new research agenda to study the role of small states on the global scene.