The Dutch past harbours a treasure of impressive and glorious military occurrences. The most famous of these were achieved — and this congress with ‘Anglo-Dutch Partnership’ in its title is a good opportunity to recall this — in the seventeenth century naval wars against England. One might even consider the Four Days’ Battle in 1666 and the expedition to Chatham in 1667 as the highlights of Dutch glory at sea. But there has been much more. Very early in the fight against Philip II of Spain, a not unimportant naval battle was fought: the battle of the Zuiderzee in 1573. Later on in the Eighty Years’ War, the battle of Downs was of great importance. In these few examples, only the control of the seas close to the Netherlands was at stake. Early in the seventeenth century the Dutch fleet also appeared elsewhere in the world; in the Mediterranean for example, where Heemskerck fell at Gibraltar in 1607 and Michiel de Ruyter at Sicily in 1676, and in the Baltic, where the Dutch fleet restored order more than once. In the East and West Indies it was mainly armed merchantmen which were active, but here as well there was occasion for marked military action, especially in the West. And, of course, the capture of the Spanish Silverfleet in 1628 should not be forgotten in this context. No wonder that the names of quite a few Dutch admirals are very well known and still live on in nursery rhymes and folk-songs. Although, according to the stereotyped pictures of the Netherlands as a seafaring country, military glory was chiefly gained at sea; in fact military activities on land were at least as important. One could easily defend the statement that the Dutch Revolt resulted in a Dutch State partly, and perhaps even mainly, because it gradually changed into the famous Eighty Years’ War, which was largely waged on land. Obviously this war did not yield only successes (no more than did the naval battles). The first campaign of William of
Orange in 1568, for example, resulted in a complete failure, in spite of a small victory at Heiligerlee at the beginning of the campaign. But considering the Eighty Years’ War as a whole, there certainly were some remarkable achievements. Both Stadholder Maurice and his cousin William Louis grew into internationally prominent strategists and army reformers.

Next to various battles (the battle of Nieuwpoort in 1600 is, partly because of the nice round figure, indelibly printed on the minds of the Dutch), it was mainly sieges which were of importance. At first, only the defence of the cities against Spanish troops was at stake, and from time to time the townspeople played a remarkable role alongside the garrisons (as was the case in Haarlem in 1573 and in Leiden in 1574). But later on, offensive sieges became more important. At the end of the sixteenth century Maurice closed ‘The Fence of the Seven Provinces’, as it was called. His brother and successor, Frederick Henry, managed to enlarge the territory south of the Great Rivers: the conquest of ’s-Hertogenbosch, 1629, is undoubtedly his most famous feat of arms. As a direct result of this he received the nickname of ‘De Stedendwinger’, which roughly corresponds to the English ‘The Conqueror of Cities’.

Although the great successes were achieved in the seventeenth century, as one would expect from the strength of the Dutch Republic in that period, it would be wrong not to mention the two following periods. First, it is the early nineteenth century which draws one’s attention. In 1812, Dutch pontoneers played a heroic part in the retreat of Napoleon’s army at the Berezina in Russia. And later, in 1815, the actions of the Dutch troops under the command of the Prince of Orange at Quatre Bras, preceding the battle of Waterloo, were also of some importance. The Belgian Rebellion of 1830 also led to military activities, both in that year and in 1831, which drew much attention. The actions of Van Speyk and the Ten Days’ Campaign gave rise to much enthusiasm. Secondly, the armed forces were able to distinguish themselves to some extent in the five days’ battle against Germany in May 1940, which ended in disaster, and in the allied war against that country, in which the Royal Netherlands Navy and the Irenebrigade participated.

Colonial history gives us many more examples. Many, often successful, but at times also catastrophic, expeditions had to be undertaken in the nineteenth century to establish Dutch rule in the colonies. The Aceh wars especially cost a lot, but yielded much military honour as well. In the twentieth century, Japan gradually became the
major enemy in the Pacific. During the war against that country, which was waged in alliance, an important part was played by the then very young Dutch Air Force for the first time. From this period, the battle of the Java Sea, in which Karel Doorman played such a heroic part, is also very well known in the Netherlands. And after the Second World War, probably the most extensive Dutch military action of all time took place. After the Japanese occupation, Dutch activities in the Dutch East Indies, which were meant to restore order and authority, resulted in a war against the native nationalist movement. This conflict, mainly a guerilla war, with restrictions on the Dutch side of a policy which prevented uninhibited action, was lost mainly because it was a guerilla war. As soon as more traditional and ambitious military actions were undertaken, the Dutch armed forces were able to boast of great successes.

This small selection from a vast number of Dutch military activities makes it clear that there is ample material for a strong military tradition, for a prominent place for the armed forces in Dutch society and for a nationalistic and also a triumphalist look at our own past. There are indeed many examples of such historiography. Next to the older and more specialised military historiography, one can also find such passages in the works of the most prominent historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I will restrict myself to two examples taken from the great work of P. J. Blok, which was first published in eight volumes around 1900: Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse volk (History of the Dutch People). Blok concludes his summarised opinion of Stadholder Maurice, which is certainly not positive in all respects, by saying that 'posterity' also honours him as 'the great warrior, the excellent mathematician, the brilliant creator of an army which became in his hands and in those of his brother, an excellent tool through which the liberty of the state of the Netherlands, primarily a creation of their father, was forever ensured'. About the end of the Four Days’ Battle, Blok wrote (I avoid the question of the correctness of his opinions from the modern point of view):

The main body of the Dutch armed forces was but for a moment in danger, for at the crucial moment De Ruyter hoisted the red flag as a sign for the general attack. The English lines broke in various places and presently the Dutch were chasing the enemy fleet. The entire English fleet would have been destroyed had not a thick fog prevented pursuit. Thus, this battle ended in victory and the states’ navy, though badly damaged, sailed into the Wielingen decked with flags and pennants, triumphantly towing six English ships, 300 prisoners, Ayscue and the body of his colleague Berkeley; evidence
of a victory which should have silenced all English assertions and shouts of joy about an English victory.3

Until a few decades ago, many Dutch children learned about their nation’s military activities in words like these through school-books and boys’ books.

However, such passages are not the most characteristic ones in Dutch historiography. There was, and still is, hardly any question of a strong military tradition deeply rooted in society, or of a prominent place for the armed forces therein. Where national complacency was at stake, attention was mainly concentrated on religious strife, commercial achievements, the arts and from time to time on science and burning political issues. Far from being militaristic, Dutch society has often been characterised as bourgeois. In 1941, A. J. C. Rüter mentioned the ‘spirit of liberty and tolerance, realism and being bourgeois’ as the most characteristic qualities of the Dutch nation.4 As a complement to this widely-held view C. M. Schulten stated: ‘The people of the Netherlands were never militaristic in the past. Nor was the majority even anti-militaristic on principle. The people of the Netherlands were for the greater part non-militaristic. They were a nation of civilians, who accepted they needed an army, but did not love it’.5 From this point of view, military heroism was of secondary importance.

In this chapter, the background of this attitude and its consequences for the relations between the armed forces and society, especially during the twentieth century, are the main issue. Why is it that, in spite of the fact that military events played such an important part in the birth and early prosperity of the Dutch state, the military element in Dutch society has always been of minor importance? The differences between the Netherlands and countries such as Britain, France and Germany in this respect are obvious. What were the consequences of this state of affairs for the armed forces, especially in relation to society as a whole? It will be clear that all these questions cannot be dealt with exhaustively in the available space. Besides, the problem has hardly ever been studied extensively. It is not possible to refer back to some series of penetrating monographs.6 Therefore my answers will be highly subjective and often not more than stray remarks about certain aspects of the issue. First, however, I should point out that there is some danger of exaggeration. Sometimes the terms being used are too strong. It is very often a matter of accent, of more or less, of degree, and not of a complete absence of interest or appreciation of the military aspects in
Dutch society. The necessity for a military force, for example, has never been seriously questioned, although some anxious observers have suggested otherwise. This was never the case even during those periods in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the heyday of antimilitaristic, pacifist and unilateral disarmament movements; nor did all these movements strive after the complete abolition of the armed forces. Those political parties who believed that there should be a military force have always been in the majority and have dominated the various cabinets. Therefore, those who wish to discuss the quality of the armed forces should not start by looking at the opposition, but at the dominating majority. In this context it is also interesting to note that the anti-armament movements scored their greatest successes in their fight against very specific and concrete aspects of the armed forces and defence policy: the Naval Act in the 1920s and nuclear armament in the 1970s and 1980s. However, even if they did manage to mobilise impressive masses of people for their aims (by means of demonstrations and petitions), it hardly changed the way in which the Dutch people cast their vote. Besides, movements like the ones just mentioned were often opposed by counter-organisations, though these had a smaller, or rather less manifest, following. Just think of organisations such as Ons leger (Our Army) and Onze vloot (the Navy League) and committees like the ones against unilateral disarmament and 'against undermining the defences of our country' in the 1920s and 1930s, and more recently the Interkerkelijk Comité voor Tweezijdige Ontwapening (Interdenominational Committee for Bilateral Disarmament), the antipode of the Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad (Interdenominational Peace Movement).

The complaints about the lack of popularity and prestige of a career in the armed forces have also been exaggerated at times. But wasn’t it a fact that people with an army career were often given the cold shoulder and sometimes even called murderers? And wasn’t it a fact that the armed forces were considered 'the dregs of society'? Was it possible to recruit enough talented people for training at one of the officers' training schools? It is my impression that things were not in such a bad way as was sometimes believed. Of course there have been fluctuations in the popularity of the armed forces, or of a career within that institution, and it is true that they lacked the prestige they had in Britain, France or Germany for example. But ever since the prestige of a military career began to be measured more seriously, which was after the Second World War, the results were certainly not shocking or alarming. So-called 'professional prestige stratifications', which were drafted in 1953
and 1982, showed that the commanding officer (i.e., Colonel) ended up somewhere near the parson and the secondary schoolteacher, and the non-commissioned officer close to the policeman and the self-employed farmer. Soldiers and sailors were not included in the scales. So even if the higher officers did not come anywhere near the professions such as professor, doctor, judge, notary or mayor of a big city, they did belong to the highest social strata. In surveys like these, however, it may be necessary to think relatively. An assessment of the average opinions of the entire population was undertaken. In certain circles, however, opinions could be very different. Among a section of the nobility and aristocracy, for instance, there was a clear tradition of ‘becoming an officer’. And the absence of the ordinary soldier and sailor from the scales calls attention to the fact that those ranks have almost disappeared as a profession. Once, in the nineteenth century and earlier, they did indeed belong to the lowest strata of society everywhere in Europe. So this was not a situation which was specifically Dutch. And the attitude towards compulsory military service should not be linked to the prestige of a military career: the ‘balen’ of conscripts (‘balen’ is a Dutch word which expresses how much most conscripts detested having to serve) and their aversion to entering the army are comparatively normal phenomena, which are not in any way alarming for the armed forces.

The navy was generally more attractive than the army or air force, which is in line with the maritime tradition, so important in the Netherlands, especially in relation to commerce and colonialism. On the other hand, the air force, with its atmosphere of advanced technology and adventure is nowadays more attractive to certain groups of the new generation. Another element of appeal and prestige for the armed forces as a whole may also be their special ties with the House of Orange. These ties, which were never absent even in the days of the Republic, were, as Amersfoort shows us, especially cherished during the nineteenth century, when the process of conscious nation-building was in full swing. This situation was still much the same in the twentieth century. It is well known how much Queen Wilhelmina felt these ties. It is therefore no coincidence that numerous public ceremonies attended by our armed forces are those at which members of the Royal Household are also present, such as inaugurations, the ceremonies connected with the opening of the States-General, the reception of heads of state, and so on.

That it would be incorrect to describe the attitude of the Dutch
people towards their armed forces in too negative terms can be illustrated by drawing attention to the final debate over the abolition in 1898 of the ‘remplacantenregeling’, a system which made it possible to pay someone else to complete your terms of national service for you.\textsuperscript{10} This debate should be seen against the background of a much wider debate on defence and the armed forces in general, which had been carried on since it became evident in 1866 and 1870 that under the existing system the security of the Netherlands was only very marginally guaranteed.\textsuperscript{11} Returning to Parliament in 1898, when the decision was made to abolish the above system of replacement, we may observe that none of the speakers took a negative view on defence or the armed forces in general, irrespective of whether they were for or against the system. The odd note from socialist quarters or some confessional apprehension about moral standards in the barracks did not shatter this general positive attitude. Almost all those present were interested only in how to strengthen Dutch defences and improve the armed forces. The supporters of abolition of the system, who finally decided the matter in their favour, had some very positive arguments at hand for their point of view: under the new system the social and intellectual elite would also be compelled to participate in the armed forces; it would be in the interest of social justice; and everybody would realise how valuable and important the tasks of the armed forces actually were. The then Minister of Home Affairs, H. Goeman Borgesius, put it like this: ‘Then, all ranks will be represented in the barracks; no soldier will be banished from respectable circles just because he is a soldier; serving will be considered an honour instead of a shame’.\textsuperscript{12}

For that matter, my warning against exaggeration does not affect the correctness of my initial statement: In the Netherlands, military traditions are relatively weak and the role of the armed forces and the military in Dutch public life is of secondary importance. It is not difficult to discover those aspects of Dutch history which have combined to create a situation like this. The Dutch Republic originated from a rebellion against a centralising monarchy. This was one of the reasons why this state, which was in many respects a strange phenomenon in Europe, did not have a strong centre in the form of a royal court in which both nobility and military took up important positions. The States-General in the Hague did not act as a powerful centralising authority either. In fact there were a great many larger and smaller centres of authority. The most important of these were, in changing mutual relations, the court of the stadholder, the States of Holland and
the mayors of Amsterdam. But they always had to reckon with the influence of the other provinces, cities and ranks. This division into numerous small entities was also obvious in the formal federal political structure of the Republic, to which was linked an equally divided financial structure. That was also the reason why both the army and the navy, whose higher ranks were often very much inclined towards the court of the stadholder, could not develop into powerful bases of authority or into important sources of centralised power. They were always dependent on their many masters for money.

Whereas the influence of the nobility was comparatively small in the Republic (once again, there is some danger of exaggeration), the influence of the bourgeoisie was very strong. That is why, in politics, the financial and commercial interests of the urban bourgeoisie were predominant, leaving very little room for military-strategic interests or for arguments in favour of military honour and glory. It was certainly possible that commercial interests might lead to military action, but on the whole the wish for peace dominated, as peace was considered more favourable for trade than war. The tendency to pursue a policy of territorial expansion was therefore very small. J. C. Boogman made a well-known and illuminating distinction between a dominating maritime-commercial tradition in foreign policy on the one hand and a continental-expansive tradition on the other, which was of secondary importance most of the time.\textsuperscript{13} This general domination of the maritime-commercial tradition resulted in a certain aloofness towards territorial expansion in Europe. The urge for expansion was mainly aimed at widening commercial interests both within and outside Europe. If necessary, this could result in wrestling freedom of trade or in establishing trading posts in the colonies, but territorial expansion was seldom or never an aim in itself. Therefore the readiness to spend money on the armed forces without there being any question of direct and tangible results was not very great. As a result, the position of the armed forces remained of secondary importance.

In Europe, and especially during the seventeenth century, the Republic played a very prominent role, which was mainly based on its remarkable economic prosperity. But as the other European Powers made up their arrears, the Republic found it more and more difficult to bear the financial burden of this prominent place. And the (sometimes very extensive) military activities (direct or indirect through support to allies) were a part of that burden. These financial problems strengthened the tendency of the Dutch Republic to prefer peace and neutrality to
active participation in the political and military conflicts in Europe. In the eighteenth century it was impossible for the Republic to avoid becoming internationally involved altogether, but its heart was not in it. This had its effects on the armed forces. By the end of the eighteenth century, the problem of neglect of both the army and the navy had become urgent. During the nineteenth century, the conclusion that the Netherlands was only a small European state had become inevitable. After the turbulent periods of the Batavian Republic and the years of French rule, the Netherlands became a more centralised national monarchy. Its first king, William I, did try to turn this state into at least a medium-sized power, with a large colonial realm, but his efforts can only be seen as a temporary domination of the continental-expansive tradition. Inherent in this was a prominent place in society for the armed forces to which the king attached great value. The failure of his efforts resulted in a definite recognition of the Netherlands, by this time a parliamentary-constitutional monarchy, as a small state. From then on neutrality in international conflicts was considered essential for the protection of commercial interests and the colonies. Under the influence of legalistic traditions in international law, and ethical motives, which had become very important in this century, foreign policy was getting more and more pacifist. This meant in practice that the Netherlands completely refrained from military initiatives, especially outside the colonies. Naturally, the defence of the national frontiers still remained the responsibility of the armed forces. But it was also assumed, implicitly and often also explicitly, that in the long run the survival of the Netherlands as an independent state would only be safe if the country could count on support against an eventual aggressor. And since it was supposed to be in the interest of the whole of Europe that the Netherlands should remain an independent state (after all, it would be in the interest of each of the Great Powers not to allow the Netherlands to fall into the hands of their rivals) the state could be sure of that support; neutrality would be rewarded. In this perception, a lengthy independent defence of the Netherlands was, if not impossible, then impossibly expensive. Besides, ever since the middle of this century, the various Liberal and Liberal-Conservative cabinets had pursued a very economical financial policy, partly in reaction to the financial policy of William I. It is not surprising that military expenses were continuously under pressure in a state which was still dominated by the commercially-minded middle classes. It is understandable that the armed forces were not much inspired by the role they were allotted.
Against the background of the developments which I have sketched, the position of the armed forces in the Netherlands in the second half of the nineteenth century is quite logical. They were a relatively weak military force with not much prestige in society, in spite of quite a bit of military glory in the past. For the men it was the same as anywhere else in Europe, namely, that the armed forces were 'the dregs of society'. And for the élite too, not much credit could be gained by it. The Netherlands were even less inclined than previously to look to power or military show to prove their excellence. W. J. Hofdijk expressed it beautifully in his historical works Ons Voorgeslacht (Our Ancestors), which was published in six volumes between 1860 and 1880. He concluded his work by triumphantly recalling that once upon a time the Netherlands had a position of authority in Europe. That this was somewhat in the past was no reason for sadness. For, 'It is better to be the most moral rather than the most powerful nation in the world'.

This, I repeat, does not mean that the right to exist or the necessity for the armed forces was ever widely doubted. But why, how much and at what price has always been under discussion. It was mainly after the mediocre achievements of 1870, when both mobilisation and the defence of the national frontiers during the Franco-Prussian war were pictures of despair, that the debate on how the condition of the armed forces could be improved was begun. In the background, the rise of a new and strong Germany on the eastern frontier, and the developments in the colonies, were important factors. Pacifist, and sometimes even anti-militaristic movements exercised some influence, but were never a real threat to the armed forces, however clamorous they tended to be.

Thus, after the low of 1870, the armed forces made a far more favourable impression during the First World War. It had cost much discussion and quite a bit of money since 1870, but as a result of all kinds of measures — the system of fortifications, the inundation line and army reforms — the neutrality of the Netherlands seemed to be guaranteed and supported from a military point of view. This was favourable to the armed forces, though there certainly was some backsliding now and then, particularly in the first decade after the First World War. This was a result of the aversion to war caused by the horrors of that conflict and of the retrenchment policy which was deemed necessary. On the whole, however, in the twentieth century the armed forces believe themselves to be firmly rooted in the Dutch state and an essential part of Dutch society as a necessity, without ever being considered as one of the most prominent, most characteristic or most
central of institutions. Especially after the Second World War, the position of the armed forces was strengthened by the decision to abandon the policy of remaining neutral at all costs and to adapt the defence of the Netherlands to the Atlantic Alliance. I will return to this question at the end of the chapter.

When we look more closely at the position of the armed forces in the Netherlands in the twentieth century — unfortunately the technical and tactical skills of the army have to be left aside — it is obvious that the discussion in parliament about defence and the armed forces deserves some attention. When we attempt an overall survey of these discussions for the twentieth century, then it is apparent that some debates are intermingled, primarily the debate about the necessity for national defence — and thus the national armament. This question was discussed hotly and sometimes very emotionally, especially after the First World War and well into the thirties. It attracted much attention, but without saying that it was unimportant or that it had no influence on the position of the armed forces. I think that the significance of this debate can easily be overestimated. As previously observed, even in the heyday of anti-military, pacifist or unilateral disarmament movements, one-third of the members of parliament at most held views of this sort.

This also means that a second debate, mostly started by military men inside or outside parliament, was partly based on a wrong principle. Time and again fear of interference with the right of the armed forces to exist is to be heard in the discussions. In 1910 the Minister of War said, 'Perhaps no other member of the government than the War Minister has to take so much trouble to win the people's confidence'. The spirit of the nation, as was often remarked, seemed to be abhorrent of defence. For instance, this should be apparent from the fact that when, in 1939, conscripts who had a job could be replaced by unemployed persons, who could earn more than their unemployment benefit, less than 10 per cent were willing to do so. And officers, who liked to see their job as a 'vocation' (for, weren't they willing to give their lives for their country?) did not detect much appreciation from society, with all the attendant dangers of demotivation and social isolation. However, anxious statements about this were usually not acted upon. Sometimes they evoked solemn declarations of appreciation. But except for the financial aspects, which I will discuss later, they were concerned with few concrete matters. I think the main concerns were expressions of dissatisfaction about the relatively insignificant position of the armed forces in Dutch society already described. The comparison with some
larger countries must have been painful. It is understandable that regular soldiers had some difficulty living with this, but it does not mean that all their complaints in this vein are always right. Generally they are at least somewhat exaggerated.

The essence of the parliamentary debate has always been the financial aspect. This was also the most concrete and urgent political problem which demanded a prompt answer. Many other more practical or technical issues were often connected with these financial problems, while the more essential and fundamental questions either remained open or were not discussed, because the answers were in fact given long before. These principal questions were certainly not discussed at length in parliament year after year. The defence debates in a more limited sense were not always the best framework in which those underlying questions could be considered. After the decisions about personal compulsory military service and some related questions, at the beginning of the twentieth century for instance, it was established that henceforth the Netherlands would have a military force comprising a permanent, not too large professional core and reserve troops of conscripts who could be readily mobilised and called into the army at about 20 years of age. The real strategic questions were by their nature inappropriate for public discussion in parliament. And foreign policy, highly relevant of course for defence and for the armed forces, was a separate field of discussion. Apart from that, foreign policy was very stable — until 1940 one of neutrality and after the Second World War one of participation in western alliances.

With the exception of the very special periods of mobilisation and war (when financial inhibitions almost fell away), in the financial debates the options were, roughly speaking, more important than the wishes of the armed forces or the international situation. It seems to me that in this the Netherlands does not differ from most other countries — certainly not from the smaller ones. One of the best illustrations of this consideration is still a statement of H. Colijn, issued in the twenties. Colijn was a former officer in the Dutch colonial army and a former Minister of War, and he was certainly favourably disposed towards the armed forces and defence.

Nevertheless, he thought that, ‘in these financial circumstances we must get used to the idea that defending our territory against foreign hostilities during a longer period will have to be taken out of our defence system’.18 There was a generally accepted need to be as economical as possible. This remained a subject of constant concern,
even in the second half of the 1930s, when, because of international tension, the defence expenditure was increased. One member of parliament for instance was even in these circumstances very insistent on a cut-back of expenditure, 'lest money will be spent otherwise than strictly necessary and the army needlessly be brought into discredit'.

An important problem for those who made a stand for higher defence expenditure has always been that, given the non-military tradition, defence may indeed be seen as a necessity, but, compared to other ends its popularity is not always great in the Netherlands. In its most demagogic form the argument is somewhat as follows: With the money that this single high-priced jet-fighter costs we could build a number of schools for handicapped children. In this way defence is always exposed to a continuous stream of urgent reasons to economise.

When we switch to the question: 'How much was actually spent on the armed forces?' (in a certain sense this reflects the attitude of society towards defence and the armed forces), we find ourselves faced with an extremely difficult question. One can neither indicate the exact level of the defence expenditure, nor the precise meaning of it. For example, the question whether it is much or not much can only be answered comparatively. For that purpose we also need exact figures of expenditure on other issues, and also of the expenditures of other countries. As far as I know these are not available over a long period of time, nor is there certainty about the actual level of military expenditure in the Netherlands. Once I made an attempt to give a more precise answer to this question for the 1920s and 1930s. I only partially succeeded in doing so, and not everyone supported my figures.

Therefore I will now restrict myself to a rather rough impression which is certainly not demonstrable. I think that, generally speaking, the Netherlands is rather economical with its defence expenditures, but, when we look at other governments and especially those of smaller countries, we certainly cannot say that there has been a notable financial negligence of defence.

This can be amplified for different periods. In the period from 1870 up to 1914, a lot of money was spent on defence in connection with its reorganisation; certainly when we consider it as part of the total government expenditure, which was then connected with fewer issues. Roughly speaking defence took 20 per cent of expenditure. During the First World War the expenditure of course increased. For four years there were a great many conscripts in the services and for other matters also it was necessary to spend large sums of money. During the 20
years after the First World War the pressure for economisation was
great, though the feeling with respect to defence changed strongly about
the middle of the thirties. Expressed as percentages of government
expenditure it fluctuates between well over 10 and just under 10, with
peaks in 1938 and 1939. Undoubtedly, the rise starting in the middle of
the thirties set in too late and was insufficient to bring the defence to
the standard required by some critics, bearing in mind the defeat of
May 1940. In my opinion however, the confrontation with the German
army and air forces would not have led to substantially better results,
even with very much higher expenditure at a considerably earlier date,
without a completely different situation prevailing in the rest of Europe.

Quickly leaving this sort of speculation, it is easy to appreciate that
from mobilisation in 1939 until the end of the forties, when the Dutch
troops left Indonesia, defence expenditure was extremely high — so
high in fact, that partly because of it the Netherlands nearly went
bankrupt a few times. As for the years afterwards, it seems safe to note
the following, mainly based on Siccamo's opinions. 22

- Defence expenditure, not adjusted for inflation, is increasing, but its part
  of the total government spending decreases.
- In real figures, that is to say corrected figures, the operating costs of both
  personnel and materiel are remarkably stable, while on the contrary
  investments (the purchase of new weapons) show a considerable
  fluctuation.

When we try to study expenditure comparatively then I incline to think
that the Dutch contribution to NATO has not been remarkably high,
but certainly not very low either. Particularly in fulfilling its obligations,
the Netherlands has rather a good name. Even in the latest austerity
policy of the government, the argument of NATO obligations plays an
important role, though it is not always the deciding factor.

This parliamentary and political interference with defence and the
armed forces, specifically expressed by the provision of money, is
perhaps the most important aspect of the relation between society and
the armed forces. But it is also interesting to consider whether there
was (and if so, in what way) a reflection in the armed forces of the
relations and social developments in society at large, and conversely if,
and in what way, the armed forces influence society, for instance in
politics. To consider the first issue, it is important to realise that the
armed forces are an exceptional element in Dutch society, just as in
other countries. They are a conglomerate of separate and even more
or less isolated organisations with their own specific features. They
have a very strict internal hierarchy and discipline and a professional
ethos in which preparedness to die for the nation is important; they
have regimentation and their own sub-culture with specific standards,
values and codes of conduct. Nevertheless, it is striking how much the
armed forces display characteristics typical of Dutch society in general
— possibly more so than in other countries, but unfortunately I cannot
speak with full knowledge about this. In many respects the hierarchy in
the armed forces is a reflection of social hierarchy, perhaps more
strictly institutionalised: officers belong to the upper class; the crew
were, for a long time 'the dregs of society'.

Furthermore, it is possible to observe the Dutch _verzuiling_
(pillarization), the denominational and ideological segmentation of Dutch
Society in the armed forces, in spite of the armed forces being a national
organisation. In the reception of soldiers after duty-hours, in spiritual
care and in social activities, one can see this pillarized structure,
especially in the twentieth century. The denominational groups
particularly were and are very active: quite a system of fleet and army
chaplains, numerous Roman Catholic and Protestant servicemen's
recreation centres, and so on. But there was also the social-democratic
branch: a number of unions for lower ranks were more or less openly
social-democratically orientated from the beginning of this century
onwards. And in 1939 social-democratic mobilisation clubs were intro-
duced alongside the Roman Catholic, the Protestant and the general ones.

Developments in labour relations in the armed forces also reflect in
many respects developments in society in general, particularly when we
look at large organisations. About the end of the nineteenth century and
the beginning of the twentieth century associations for the protection of
the interest of professional servicemen were formed. Even if these were
not officially called trade-unions, they can be compared with them,
particularly the associations for the lower rank servicemen. Of course
this was met with opposition. Even more than in society in general it
could be argued that in the armed forces such a thing as a trade-union
was incompatible with the particular nature of the military profession.
It could arguably interfere with the exercise of the military function just
at the time when under extreme conditions it might be required to act.
In the early thirties a change set in, when in 1933 the mutiny on the
armoured vessel _De Zeven Provinciën_ seemed to prove the fundamental
flaw in the developments of previous decades. A series of measures
were taken. For example, associations of personnel were limited in their
scope (and some of them disappeared altogether); discipline was
intensified; recruitment was tightened, and so on. Yet in the long term this could not stop the development of a system for protecting the common interest of servicemen in the armed forces. More and more the forces came to be organised along the lines of a modern large-scale enterprise, with the up-to-date methods of personnel management that go along with it. This involves, for instance, a complicated consultative structure at many levels in which protection of interest by the trade-unions has become a common element. Bureaucracy in the armed forces is connected with this. The youngest shoot from the tree of protection of interest — the trade-union of conscripts — has, after a period of searching and exploration, and also after the inevitable conflicts, attended with publicity, more or less found its place. I think that these examples of the penetration of societal developments in the armed forces — and one could add, for instance, the introduction of women into the armed forces — can be seen as aspects of a wider process in which civilian elements became more and more prominent in the armed forces. In the opinion of an ever increasing number of groups and individuals, within as well as outside the services, the armed forces have a specific task. Consequently the organisation will have certain characteristics of its own; but it is more important that they are purposeful, in the same way as other purposeful organisations are.

Therefore the armed forces ought to meet the demands which are required from all sorts of similar organisations, especially government institutions. It can obviously be assumed that, the stronger the position of the armed forces in society, the stronger the emphasis on the particular nature of this organisation can be sustained. Therefore it is not surprising that the civilian approach to the armed forces, which develops in most countries, has been pushed somewhat farther in the Netherlands. At any rate, that is how I feel about it. In this process, in which the armed forces have become more 'civilian', a shift sets in from emphasis on the general military element, with its orientation on the nation, to emphasis on the professional element. Servicemen were and are becoming increasingly highly trained specialists in a technical and often very advanced company. Fulfilling such tasks competently and efficiently provides the serviceman with a highly specialised occupation, as well as giving him the opportunity of considerable job satisfaction.

The awareness of working by society's order, in the same way as other people fulfil different tasks, is not necessarily lost. On the contrary, it is the only justification and the only means of achieving social esteem. After all, it is servicemen who are prepared to take up this task of using
military force, which is by many considered disagreeable, though they
do so in the hope that it will never be necessary to deploy military
resources aggressively.

As the armed forces experience social influences in various ways, and
are themselves in a sense the result of numerous social and political
forces, so those same armed forces are a factor in the social and political
order. The question of how much influence they have can only be
answered very roughly and subjectively, like many other questions in
this chapter. Two remarks can be made with certainty. Policy has
clearly established the position of the armed forces, i.e., subordinate to
the political institution; and the Dutch armed forces have never seriously
disputed this position. Coups d'états or serious attempts were absolutely
out of the question. There were indeed short periods in or around the
two World Wars, during which the Dutch military were in supreme
command of the whole country, or parts of it, but then they were always
legally entitled to command, but they were ultimately responsible to the
political authorities. Het Militair Gezag (Military Authority) which played
an important role at the end of the Second World War is the most
important and well-known example. Though some people thought this
Military Authority was occasionally pushed too far, it is a very good
illustration of what I have just stated: it was officially instituted and
legalised by the government; it was meant to be temporary, and the
military never attempted to come into power for a lengthy period.

In fact the reverse happened now and again. Occasionally the
government used the armed forces for purposes other than safeguarding
the country against external attack. In a way that same Military
Authority is an example of such use. More basic examples are the use of
the armed forces in riots, kidnappings or hijackings. Whenever
assistance in the event of natural disasters was required, the use of the
military was undisputed, and this also applied to the deployment of
troops in cases of hijackings. In principle this was hardly disputed
either, though some people did have practical objections. More
difficulties were encountered when troops were brought into action
during social conflicts. This happened, or was at least seriously
considered, in the case of the second railway strike in 1903, the Jordaan
riot in 1934 and the suppressing of social unrest immediately after the
Second World War and in the sixties and seventies. Overall the
government acted very carefully. The action of servicemen was very
limited, being usually limited to support of the police forces by
contingents of military police or other troops. Anyway, committing
servicemen to dealing with social unrest implied and implies a certain risk, at least theoretically, for the same unrest might transfer its effect to the armed forces themselves. The government were apprehensive of this when there was a threat of a social and political revolution in the Netherlands in November 1918. Unrest inside an army camp had been one of the first signs! In the week during which the tension reached its highest point, the Naval Staff even started to disarm the fleet. The mutiny on the De Zeven Provinciën in 1933, previously mentioned, gave rise to doubts about the reliability of the armed forces as well. Yet, looking at the twentieth century as a whole, there is no reason to suppose that the armed forces have ever been a serious revolutionary threat. Nor could there be found a serious threat of a coup d'etat led by the right-wing officers. In short, the armed forces or groups from the armed forces were of little political importance. For a long time for instance, Ministers of War, Navy, or Defence came traditionally from military circles. But this was mainly done for practical reasons. They were supposed to be the experts. However, their actions were not always very successful. The majority of them had a poor command of political skills. When, about 1930, a change took place — from then onwards the majority of defence ministers have been civilians — they operated all in all more successfully. Now and again former servicemen became members of parliament, but their number was never large and they never formed a united front in promoting military interests. Two former servicemen rose to the office of Prime Minister: H. Colijn and P. J. S. de Jong. They were quite successful in their positions, but they certainly did not function as exponents of militarism. So, once again, the armed forces cannot be seen as an important factor in politics. This is not surprising given the historical place of the armed forces in society, which is the result of historical factors and the process of an increasing civilian approach.

Finally, a few words about the present. Historians are generally wise enough to keep their distance from the present, because they do not have a firm foothold there. But in this chapter I have already given so many impressions without that foothold that I dare to stretch my recklessness into the present. I think that modern attitudes towards defence and the armed forces are chiefly set by three factors, each connected to a historical development. In the first place the horrors of war received strong reinforcement during earlier decades. The horrors of the two World Wars play a part in it as proofs from reality, but to me, the potential horrors of a nuclear war seem more effective. These
sentiments join with older, sometimes slumbering traditions, which never had the upper hand, but which did exist: sentiments of anti-militarism, peace-mindedness and aversion to the military as a wasteful organisation. Recently these sentiments have led to well organised and very emotional protest-movements and demonstrations focused on concrete issues. But fundamental differences and changes of attitude in the population as a whole did not result from them. There was and is a prevailing non-military attitude.

A second important factor lies in the field of foreign policy. The choice of a national defence under the terms of the Atlantic Alliance, and more generally the choice of the miscellaneous western alliance was a very fundamental one. However confusing the problematical part of this co-operation, and the overrunning of democratic idealism by interests and power-politics may sometimes be, the Netherlands, i.e., the government, parliament and public opinion, has never tampered with this choice since it was firmly established by the Cold War. This choice was of invaluable positive interest for the armed forces. Not only was the necessity for the forces clearer than before, but also the element of uselessness of the Dutch armed forces in case of a real confrontation disappeared from the debates. The doubts which had sometimes been spread by this perspective were replaced by the conviction that defence expenditure contributed to the combined allied defence of what was solemnly called 'the freedom of the West'. Besides, the international contacts formed an inspiration for servicemen personally and for the armed forces as a whole. Especially in these new relations it was possible to achieve highly competent performances.

Thirdly, what I called the process of an increasing civilian approach in the armed forces is important, which is the result of the bureaucratisation of the military process and the fact that technology was becoming more and more important. On the other hand it was also connected with the way in which the relations between the armed forces and society developed. As servicemen were able to show more clearly that they from the Netherlands could contribute equally to an internationally necessary task, more appreciation could be displayed in society. Of course this has nothing to do with military heroism and its possible attraction, which was traditionally not very great in the Netherlands, but rather with appreciation for a professional highly qualified job.

In short, the conclusions are: In the Netherlands, war, and thus the armed forces, were and are, generally speaking, increasingly regarded as an evil. But in an imperfect world, in which so much evil exists, the
armed forces were and are more and more looked upon as a necessity, as a safeguard against an even greater evil. In my opinion, short-term fluctuations in the course of Dutch history in the twentieth century have not altered this. The characteristic position of the armed forces in twentieth century Dutch society is therefore quite obvious, though not very original — a necessary evil.

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NOTES

1. As a result of the very broad range of this chapter most of the facts mentioned are well known. Therefore the annotation is limited to quotations and to some more specialised publications.


6. For the thirtyes of this century there is a collection of essays edited by G. Teitler, *Tussen crisis en oorlog. Maatschappij en krijgsmacht in de jaren '30* (Dieren, 1984). Interesting research is nowadays carried out by the sectie Militaire Geschiedenis van de Landmachtstaf (Military History Section of the Army), the afdeling Maritieme Historie van de Marinestaf (Historical Department of the Navy) and the Stichting Maatschappij en Krijgsmacht. In the near future important books will be published.


8. The results of these research projects are summarised in *Maatschappelijke waardering voor het militaire beroep* (see note 5), pp. 15–17, 59–63.


11. According to W. Bevaart, who is working on a Ph.D. thesis about Dutch defence policy 1840-74, the turning point was in 1859 (crisis in Italy).


21. Information given by W. Klinkert (see note 15).


25. See notes 8 and 24.