CHAPTER VI

Suriname on its knees

The most important challenge for Suriname in the next decade is to achieve economic independence. We in Suriname must be able to take decisions on our own. We must be able to reap the benefits of our own resources and the products of our own efforts according to our own priorities. Only then will we be able to provide solutions to the problems which our people meet daily. (Bouterse cited in Uwechue 1986.)

As outlined in the previous three chapters, the events of December 1982 plunged Suriname into severe socio-economic difficulties. These were caused, on the one hand, by the termination of Dutch aid and, on the other hand, by the failure to establish close relations with regional powers or with Third World nations as a collective to compensate, at least partly, for this financial shortfall. Consequently, to secure the regime’s survival, Bouterse realized that he had no choice but to improve Suriname’s relations with the Netherlands, so as to be able to negotiate the terms for reinstating Dutch aid. In this, Paramaribo was forced to acknowledge The Hague’s primary stipulation for reopening the flow of financial assistance: the reintroduction of democracy. Yet the military’s gradual shift towards democratic rule clashed with the Dutch demand that aid be provided only after the officers’ complete withdrawal from politics.

Within the regime this setback led to frustration. During the transition period of 1984–1987 The Hague was repeatedly attacked for its uncompromising position. Caught in this crossfire were the more moderate former politicians who would regain some influence as a result of the Republic’s gradual redemocratization. Yet they were forced into the position of onlookers as their foreign policy strategy of initiating dialogue with the Netherlands was foiled by continued bilateral tension. At the end of the day, the severity of Suriname’s socio-economic situation would force the military to hand over rule to an elected cabinet, which was then free to initiate direct negotiations with The Hague.
The Revolution’s failure

At the end of 1983 the Republic was confronted with such socio-economic hardship that the domestic situation became volatile. In a bid to alleviate the people’s growing dissatisfaction, Bouterse realized the need for a populist political organization to prevent the revolutionary process from collapsing altogether. To this end, on 24 November 1983 – the eve of the eighth anniversary of the transfer of sovereignty – the organization of a political mass movement was given a new impetus with the establishment of the Vijfentwintig Februari Beweging (VFB, February Twenty-Five Movement) (Trouw, 25-11-1983:7).

To a large extent the formation of the VFB came about as a direct result of external pressure confronting Suriname throughout 1983, as became evident in the speech delivered by Bouterse at the inauguration of the movement. Whilst addressing a crowd of between 15,000 to 25,000 people, gathered on Paramaribo’s Onafhankelijkheidsplein (Independence square), the Lieutenant Colonel warned his listeners of possible new invasion plans being hatched by the regime’s opponents, specifically the Liberation Council, which, he claimed, operated with the backing of The Hague and Washington. As an example of the seriousness of this threat, he pointed at the spate of recent arson attacks throughout the Paramaribo district.

In an attempt to put an end to these assaults, Bouterse asked the crowd to trust the authorities and reject the notion, brought forward by external powers, that the military were governing in a cold-blooded manner.

I hope that the people will understand that while so many problems remain to be solved we do not intend to take into account the jokers who want to put the clock back. It has nothing to do with the person of Bouterse, but we, who carry the responsibility for this country, must avoid capitulating without a struggle. We are no bloody-thirsty clique. On the contrary. But our responsibilities towards the people gives us the right to act where we must act. Once again, let us hope that the dark days of December will never be repeated in this country. (Trouw, 25-11-1983:7.)

Bouterse then directed his focus to the issue of aid. In a sharp attack he accused the Netherlands of adopting a hypocritical position towards Suriname by continuing its investments in the Republic’s economy while suspending the Aid Treaty.

In many companies in Suriname the Dutch government holds important shares. If then, according to the Netherlands, human rights in Suriname are being abused, why only suspend aid while the companies with Dutch government shares are allowed to stay here? (Trouw, 25-11-1983:7.)
These harsh words certainly did not come as a surprise. A few days earlier Bouterse had already noticeably hardened his position towards The Hague. Although demonstrating a willingness to negotiate, he had insisted that ‘this must take place in a respectable manner without preconditions. We are not visiting the Netherlands down on our knees’ (*Trouw*, 21-11-1983:5).

This caustic comment may have originated in the regime’s confidence in being able to find alternative financial resources. In his 24 November speech, Bouterse specifically referred to negotiations regarding a considerable international loan which was about to be concluded – a clear reference to the anticipated US$ 100 million IMF loan. Even if this would fail to materialize, Bouterse’s optimism about the country’s future remained unbroken: ‘If we are unsuccessful in gaining funds we will remain inventive. Up until now there has been no chaos. Suriname may be a poor country, but we are not that poor. Time will tell’ (*Trouw*, 25-11-1983:7). Indeed, by comparing Suriname’s GDP of US$ 2,267 in 1983 with Guyana’s GDP of US$ 1,024 or Jamaica’s GDP of 2,136 for the same year, the Republic was certainly not among the poorest nations in the region.¹

The most striking aspect of Bouterse’s speech was the strong indication that Paramaribo was unwilling to bow to any external pressure. At the inauguration of the VFB a resurgent feeling of confidence in being able to resolve Suriname’s problems was apparent. It was thought that the political situation would improve with the formation of the VFB and that the tide would change in the area of socio-economics with the anticipated IMF loan.

Bouterse’s optimistic assessment that no popular unrest would occur and that before long IMF negotiations would be successfully concluded, proved to be a gross misjudgement. Within a month of the VFB’s inauguration, the Republic was shaken by a series of strikes in the industrial sector, aimed at removing the harsh austerity measures which were implemented by Alibux, to meet the IMF criteria for the loan and at the undemocratic nature of the regime (Thorndike 1990:46; *De Ware Tijd*, 17-1-1984:1). Aware that a repeat of the events of December 1982 was unlikely to achieve the desired effect – it was feared that any further international isolation would be disastrous – Bouterse had no choice but to dismiss Alibux before growing public dissatisfaction could sweep away the entire regime (Chin and Buddingh’ 1987:63).

The significance of this dismissal was that it clearly illustrated the defeat of the Revolution or, in the words of Thorndike (1990:47), ‘an era had truly come to an end’. The Republic’s Marxist-oriented political course as defined by the PALU/RVP coalition was terminated. Even though popular unrest at the end of 1983 and at the beginning of 1984 would not lead to another massacre, its consequences provoked similar change as both Suriname’s

¹ United Nations 1984:94 (Guyana’s GDP), 110 (Jamaica’s GDP), 188 (Suriname’s GDP).
internal and external policies underwent another considerable shift. As Chin and Buddingh’ (1987:63) commented:

Total political isolation and the escalating economic crisis compelled Bouterse to seek support, or at least cooperation, from organizations with a broader social base. Bouterse turned to organized trade and industry and the trade union organizations, the same group that had offered him such bitter resistance in the fall of 1982. This act can safely be described as nothing less than having come, politically, full circle.

The new Udenhout cabinet would indeed include representatives of trade unions and the employers’ associations. Sworn in on 4 February 1984, the cabinet included five left-wing officers and politicians, and two seats each for the unionists and the industrialists (De Ware Tijd, 4-2-1984:1). With this, for the first time since the radicalization of the Revolution in March 1981 a cabinet was formed on a broader social and political base – a particularly important change as the ministries granted to unionists and industrialists were not without influence. Union representatives Dr Allan Li Fo Choe and Sigfried Gilds were appointed Minister of Education, Culture and People’s Mobilization, and Minister of Public Works, Social Affairs and Housing respectively (NRC Handelsblad, 4-2-1984:4). To encourage the unions’ rank and file and the employers’ associations to support the new administration, Bouterse allowed their representatives a casting vote on any future changes in the cabinet.

However, even more important was the announcement by President Misier that the government’s main task was to introduce democratic reforms. To ensure his political survival, Bouterse thus accepted some of the strikers’ demands in order to gain support for Udenhout. He also recognized that it was impossible to continue ignoring Dutch requests for redemocratization, especially if the regime was interested in establishing a dialogue with the Lubbers cabinet about financial assistance. That Bouterse had indeed given in to domestic and Dutch pressure became evident in Misier’s declaration at the inauguration of the Udenhout government: this was to be merely an interim cabinet until 31 December 1984, at which date the new Prime Minister would present a redemocratization programme (NRC Handelsblad, 4-2-1984:4).

With the intention of ‘overseeing’ these political reforms, Bouterse then decided to organize a think tank, which was formally established on 25 January 1984 (Bouterse 1990:228). This influential advisory committee included representatives of labour and of trade and industry (according to a similar formula as used to compose the cabinet) although it was still being dominated by members of the VFB and the army. Another important shift in the country’s power structure was revealed even more clearly as the Policy Centre was dissolved and PALU and RVP were excluded from government –
its members merely holding a few public offices and advisory positions (Meel 1990:88-9).

Since the power of left-wing officers and politicians was now primarily preserved in the VFB, Bouterse attempted to broaden the organization’s basis by mobilizing socio-political support through its chief ideologists Naarendorp and Wijdenbosch. At a rally at Zanderij Airport in May 1984 (De Ware Tijd, 14-5-1984:1) the objectives of the VFB – by then also known as Standvaste (Persistence), named after a local flower – were more clearly defined in quasi-Leninist terms.

The vanguard within the National Army has, during this phase of history, assumed the task of implementing a Revolution. This revolution is intended to change society, that is, to eliminate repression. To this end, the Revolution must involve itself with the working class. Not only because this class has ‘power’ and because it must produce for us, but also because it is the lifeblood of the Revolution. (Chin and Buddingh’ 1987:83.)

It can be argued that with the formation of the Udenhout cabinet, Bouterse cleverly managed to ease public dissatisfaction and win ‘a certain amount of breathing space’ (Chin and Buddingh’ 1987:64). At the same time he continued to control the nation’s development through the VFB. Bouterse, in fact, became the Chairman of the movement while two other high-ranking officers, Boer enveen (later to be convicted of drug trafficking, see Chapter V) and Paul Bhagwands, were elected as Secretary and Treasurer respectively. As a result, the military maintained a predominant position in the party’s central decision-making body that communicated directly with the organization’s branches representing the grass-root members.²

Yet even though the VFB became an influential pillar in the government, it failed to attract strong popular support. In this context Brana-Shute (1986:95) argued that ‘no definition of revolutionary socialism was given other than that social services would be expanded and trade links with socialist countries established’, as a result of which ‘the movement was unenthusiastically received by the public’. The VFB managed to enrol no more than around 3000 party members, of whom only a few hundred actively participated. Following the strikes in the autumn of 1983 and the collapse of the Alibux cabinet early in 1984, Bouterse’s power base had thus noticeably weakened.

² Composed of members of the community, youth organizations, farmer and labour associations, see Chin and Buddingh’ 1987:83-5.
The emerging dialogue with the Netherlands

As stated, the new political situation following the Revolution’s failure also resulted in a considerable foreign policy shift towards the Netherlands. A new initiative was undertaken to improve relations with The Hague, which had deteriorated to an all-time low in the previous year. Bouterse realized that he needed access to the remaining Nf 1.4 billion in aid promised in the treaty, all the more since IMF negotiations had proved futile. However, apart from the economic importance, he was aware of pressing political reasons for seeking a dialogue with The Hague. In January 1984 Bouterse had had to accede to the condition of Moederbond’s Chairman Fred van Russel that in exchange for the union supporting Udenhout, a serious attempt would be made at restoring relations with the Netherlands (NRC Handelsblad, 30-1-1984:4).

Additional pressure to initiate a dialogue with The Hague came shortly after Udenhout’s inauguration with Minister Schoo publicly expressing her view that some of the funds earmarked for Suriname should be used to help other developing nations (de Volkskrant, 10-2-1984:3). The situation grew even more tense when, a few days later, the Lubbers cabinet questioned Bouterse’s promise to introduce democratic reforms, declaring that he must first withdraw from politics before the aid flow could begin again. As Schoo stated, ‘the government doubts whether Bouterse is really willing to introduce democratic structures in Suriname’ (NRC Handelsblad, 15-2-1984:3). The Dutch government, in its turn, had come under pressure at home to stand firm against Bouterse following the Liberation Council’s public call to send in marines to restore democratic rule (Trouw, 3-2-1983:21).

The Hague’s harsh reaction to Udenhout’s inauguration and its reluctance to accept the promise of a redemocratization programme came as a great disappointment to Bouterse. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, he decided to personally try and repair links with the Netherlands. In contrast to the aggressive speech delivered to the VFB in November, this time he declared that ‘we remain prepared to initiate a dialogue with the Netherlands on the condition that the Netherlands recognizes and respects our status as a sovereign and independent nation’ (De Ware Tijd, 27-2-1984:10). To underline his quest for a dialogue, Bouterse emphasized that the regime was currently initiating wide-ranging reforms. Consequently, The Hague’s rejection of what he called the ‘new phase’ was perceived as unjust.

While Bouterse indicated his willingness to engage in discussions with The Hague, C-47’s President Derby also announced his intention to talk with Dutch officials about aid and redemocratization. Yet this double-track strategy did not achieve the desired objective. Even before Derby’s departure to Amsterdam, Dutch politician Weisglas (VVD) succinctly expressed the Dutch coalition’s position with regard to contacts with the regime: ‘They all
know the conditions set by the Dutch government’ (NRC Handelsblad, 5-3-1984:3) – implying that Bouterse must step down before any meaningful bilateral discussions were undertaken. In a similar manner the international spokesperson of the Dutch union movement, Johan van Rens, declared that neither the FNV nor the Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond (CNV, Confederation of Christian Trade Unions) would be willing to lobby on behalf of the Surinamese unions for the reinstatement of aid. Confronted with such an unwelcoming environment, Derby decided to cancel his visit.

Suriname’s attempts at improving relations were further frustrated when in March 1984 another invasion plan by mercenaries operating from French Guiana was revealed. The French authorities, who had uncovered the operation, arrested sixteen exiled Surinamese guerrillas (almost all of whom carried Dutch passports) and deported them to the Netherlands Antilles (De Ware Tijd, 26-3-1984:1). Led by a high-ranking member of the Liberation Council, these exiled guerrillas declared that they had been trained by American mercenaries who claimed to have fought the Sandinistas3 in Nicaragua (de Volkskrant, 3-4-1984:1).

Neither the connection with the Council nor the involvement of American mercenaries angered Bouterse more than the announcement by the Dutch Justice Department that the sixteen men were allowed to return to the Netherlands without being prosecuted (De Ware Tijd, 28-3-1984:1). The Council’s Secretary, Sewrajsingh, was merely summoned to the Ministry, where he was told that ‘the Council must strictly abide by the Dutch legal order’ (NRC Handelsblad, 30-3-1984:3). Bouterse remained silent but his anger became apparent when – probably with the regime’s blessing – a crowd of 2,500 demonstrators gathered in front of the Dutch and French embassies, eventually occupying the Dutch diplomatic mission, in protest against the apparent involvement of The Hague and Paris in this affair (De Ware Tijd, 18-4-1984:1).

As in the previous year, there was an emerging risk of further confrontations with the Netherlands. While Suriname accused the Netherlands of indirectly supporting the attempted invasion, The Hague soon found a counterargument with which to denounce Paramaribo, while investigating an assassination attempt on Humphrey Somohardjo, brother of the exiled Surinamese politician Paul Somohardjo, in March 1984 by the Dutch police and BVD. The authorities also investigated arson attacks on the houses and offices of other exiled Surinamese politicians, all of whom were active in the anti-Bouterse movement. It was alleged that these terrorist activities were linked to a secret group of Surinamese agents operating from the Republic’s embassy in The Hague (NRC Handelsblad, 23-3-1984:1). These accusations were taken

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3 Members of the Sandinista National Liberation Front, a socialist political party named after Augusto César Sandino, a hero of Nicaraguan resistance.
so seriously that a round-the-clock police protection was provided for the Council’s President, Chin A Sen.

Fortunately, despite the invasion attempt and terrorist incident this time the Surinamese and Dutch governments displayed less mutual antagonism. This somewhat less hostile atmosphere allowed the regime to continue its cautious attempts of thawing the relations. Bouterse’s decision in June 1984 to replace Ambassador Herrenberg with Heidweiler was another important landmark. Other than Herrenberg, who throughout 1983 had largely been responsible for escalating diplomatic tensions, Heidweiler had regularly emphasized the need for Suriname to maintain good links with the Netherlands. At his appointment, he commented that:

In Paramaribo I have been told that I should try to bring relations back to a reasonable level. In fulfilling my task I will be guided primarily by the interests of the Surinamese people. Even though The Hague is a very difficult post, I am aware that large sections of the Surinamese and Dutch people want the relationship to improve. This is also the wish of the Surinamese government. (NRC Handelsblad, 19-5-1984:3.)

Another diplomatic tool used by Bouterse to influence The Hague was to publish statistics ‘confirming’ that the majority of the Dutch public favoured providing Suriname with financial assistance. A representative survey among 1,000 Dutch citizens by NATCOM⁴ revealed that 57% of the respondents wished to give the former colony the funds promised in the Aid Treaty (NRC Handelsblad, 23-6-1984:3). Even though NATCOM did not publish the actual survey questions, which could have ruled out any accusations that the questionnaire had been ‘organized’ to ensure a positive response, this initiative illustrated Paramaribo’s determined attempt to influence The Hague’s position.

These initiatives indeed appeared to bear fruit. Two months after having instigated contacts between high-government officials of both countries, The Hague confirmed that its Director of European Affairs, Willem van Eekelen, had met with Minister Fong Poen at an international conference in April 1984. It was also acknowledged that Udenhout had personally approached Van den Broek at a UN forum in Washington in May, while The Hague admitted to having conducted additional talks at an ILO convention in Geneva, where Minister Gilds had requested a meeting with his Dutch counterpart De Koning (Het Parool, 5-7-1984:3).

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⁴ Ironically the abbreviation for Nationale Commissie ter Preventie van Buitenlandse Inmenging in Suriname (National Commission for the Prevention of Foreign Interference in Suriname).
In all three cases Suriname employed the same tactic of approaching Dutch politicians and officials in a neutral environment. Although these talks would not result in any definite aid agreement – they had not, however, been initiated with this in mind – they were nevertheless an important manoeuvre to gauge official Dutch attitudes. Whereas The Hague continued to demand, according to Foreign Affairs, that ‘on the Surinamese side concrete steps are taken in the fields of legal security and democratic relations’ (NRC Handelsblad, 4-7-1984:1), from a Surinamese perspective it was emphasized that, when looking at the composition and purpose of the Udenhout cabinet, these ‘concrete steps’ had already been implemented.

The main characteristic of these talks was that, despite their opposing views, both sides interacted in a calm and diplomatic manner. Under these more favourable conditions, in August 1984 Derby eventually decided to travel across the Atlantic for consultations with Dutch parties and unions (De Ware Tijd, 22-8-1984:1). However, he would fail to convince these parties that reforms were being introduced as his warning went unheeded that ‘if the principles of our thinking are not recognized, the workers will not give us permission to participate in a new government’ (NRC Handelsblad, 24-8-1984:3) – a clear reference that without Dutch aid to improve Suriname’s socio-economic status, Surinamese politics would certainly not improve. Meanwhile Dutch union leaders continued to emphasize that the regime had to introduce a comprehensive redemocratization programme before funds could be made available (Trouw, 21-8-1984:3).

Nonetheless Suriname continued to engage The Hague in informal talks. For instance, in a speech to the OAS in August 1984, Heidweiler predicted that his country’s strong historical and socio-cultural ties with the Netherlands would soon be followed by a durable political and economic friendship (NRC Handelsblad, 6-8-1984:3). One month later he presented a similar message to the Dutch Senate and the Tweede Kamer (House of Representatives). At the same time Udenhout suggested a meeting with his Dutch counterpart as he felt that bilateral relations had sufficiently stabilized (De Ware Tijd, 12-9-1984:1). Although Lubbers did not share this opinion, he agreed to a meeting between Udenhout and Van den Broek at the UN in New York, where the issue of economic aid was once more brought forward by the Surinamese Prime Minister (De Ware Tijd, 28-9-1984:1). The same theme was also raised a few days later by Udenhout, in his address to the UN General Assembly. While emphasizing that Suriname was currently implementing a redemocratization programme and that the main Dutch precondition for reinstating economic aid had thus been fulfilled, he argued that ‘Suriname has recently approached the Netherlands to discuss a normalization of relations and cherishes the hope that the dialogue, for which the basis has been laid, will lead to a new arrangement with regard to the Aid Treaty’ (De Ware Tijd, 6-10-1984:1).
Still, The Hague failed to respond on the grounds that a redemocratization programme had not even been initiated. This uncompromising position frustrated the Surinamese leadership so much that it began to lose patience. Following talks with Van den Broek in New York, Udenhout expressed his disappointment in an interview with the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*.

Responsibility for Suriname’s well-being, including the formation of democratic structures in our country, lies first and foremost with the Surinamese themselves. The Netherlands is no longer responsible for Suriname. We consider it oppressive and colonial that the Netherlands still claims that responsibility. [...] The Netherlands seems to have little insight into internal relations within Suriname nor is it capable of following the progress that has been made in every field. (*NRC Handelsblad*, 27-9-1984:3.)

A similar response was expressed by Bouterse in an interview with *Elseviers Magazine* in November.

The Netherlands must sit down at the table on the basis of equality. We have certain agreements with the Netherlands, we have certain agreements with international organizations, and the Netherlands must respect the agreements it has made with us, particularly within the framework of development cooperation, which has been suspended in a disputable fashion. (*Elseviers Weekblad*, 24-11-1984:33.)

Yet Bouterse was not willing to abandon Suriname’s foreign policy initiative altogether. In the same interview he reiterated his interest in continuing dialogue with The Hague for the sake of economic aid. To the question as to whether he still felt a positive bond with the Dutch, Bouterse’s surprising answer was: ‘As with all Surinamese. It is a consequence of colonialism, that we still have warm feelings for the Netherlands.’ In fact, Bouterse even admitted to be at least indirectly responsible for the December Murders, as he explained that ‘the events of December were based on the principle of saving one’s own life. We had to take action. It was either them or us. We acted first. That is the problem with a revolution: which revolution occurs without a fight?’ (*Elseviers Weekblad*, 24-11-1984:35). It was remarkable how Bouterse was willing to answer these controversial questions by Dutch journalists almost to the point of self-abasement. Even though it is unclear to what degree his answers reflected his ‘true’ position towards the Netherlands they did demonstrate that, despite his nationalist and socialist convictions, in order to receive economic aid, he was willing to say whatever he felt the Dutch public and politicians liked to hear.

This strategy, at last, seemed to soften The Hague’s position. Within the ruling coalition voices could be heard suggesting that redemocratization efforts be bolstered by providing some aid. The CDA, the main governing
party, supported Van den Broek’s ‘quiet diplomacy’ of including the possibility of transferring funds to Suriname once the redemocratization process had started, although its smaller coalition partner the VVD threatened to block these attempts as it insisted on Bouterse’s removal from power first (NRC Handelsblad, 28-9-1984:3). Udenhout’s hope that the CDA would pressure its junior partner into rethinking its position was shattered towards the end of 1984, when CDA Minister Schoo’s suggestion of visiting Paramaribo for a discussion on possible financial assistance was called ‘premature’ by the CDA leadership (de Volkskrant, 3-12-1984:1).

The Republic’s redemocratization, so insistently demanded by The Hague, came one step closer in December, when the think tank installed by Bouterse presented Udenhout with its report on the issue. The report stated the need for the formation of a National Assembly comprising 31 members (appointed by the country’s main political and socio-economic groups), 14 of whom were to come from the VFB/military, 11 from the union movement and 6 from the employers’ organizations. The parliament’s main task was to draft a new Constitution within a period of 27 months (De Ware Tijd, 6-12-1984:1).

In the following days Udenhout accepted these recommendations and, as agreed earlier in the year, dissolved his cabinet. On Bouterse’s request, on 1 January 1985 Udenhout’s second administration was inaugurated, including eight ministers who had served in the previous cabinet and with Udenhout retaining Foreign Affairs. Only Marcel Chehin of the Suriname Trade and Industry Association, the VSB, refused to participate in this redesigned cabinet in a protest against the apparently strengthened position of the Association of Surinamese Manufacturers, the ASFA (Het Parool, 2-1-1985:9). Still, despite the VSB’s withdrawal, the new cabinet would continue on a relatively broad base. Expanded to twelve members, it comprised five representatives from the VFB/military, four from the union movement and three from the ASFA (Meel 1990:89).

Considering the composition of both parliament and government, the redemocratization process finally appeared to have taken some concrete form. It was now hoped that it would merely be a question of time before Dutch aid reached Suriname. As Meel (1990:89) commented on recent developments in Paramaribo: ‘The Assembly and the cabinet can be characterized as extraordinary since the military did not command a majority in either of these bodies’, while pointing out that the military remained firmly in control of the country’s political affairs through the Supreme Council, a corporatist-styled body comprising eighteen delegates (mainly from the VFB/military although some representatives from the unions and the employers’ organizations were included) with the task of nominating ministers and formulating policy programmes. Despite the Supreme Council’s limited formal powers in ensuring that the government would follow the desired direction, its influence was significant.
It must be noted that Bouterse, as he had done at the beginning of 1984, once again cleverly managed to remain fully in control – this time through the VFB representation in parliament and the cabinet, as well as through the military’s dominant position in the Supreme Council. The officers’ hold on power was generally accepted by the other government partners, whose main criticism was restricted to complaints from some unionists who rejected the RVP’s influence within the Labor Ministry as well as to the withdrawal of the VSB from the government in protest of the apparent stronger position of the ASFA within the cabinet (Thorndike 1990:48-9).

Whereas these modest reforms were well received in Suriname, the Netherlands reacted quite differently. When on 7 December 1984 the Lubbers cabinet learned about the changes in Suriname, it critically analysed the redemocratization programme and on 18 December Foreign Affairs informed the public that the reforms were judged to be insufficient (NRC Handelsblad, 18-12-1984:1). Criticism centred on two issues in particular: neither free nor secret elections had been conducted to determine the parliament’s composition and the military’s influence had not diminished in any significant way. Consequently, Lubbers rejected the possibility of providing aid in the short term. Despite his conciliatory offer to continue the dialogue with Suriname and to discuss alternative reform possibilities, this rejection of the redemocratization programme came as a severe blow to Paramaribo, bringing Bouterse back to square one.

Going around in circles

While the year 1984 had seen some consensus arising on both sides of the Atlantic with regard to the need to discuss one another’s position, 1985 was characterized by a worsening of bilateral relations. Obviously, the main bone of contention remained The Hague’s uncompromising stand on the issue of aid. When Lubbers also rejected the Surinamese invitation to attend the Revolution’s fifth anniversary it became painfully obvious that transatlantic ties were still utterly unstable, despite the recent dialogue. Van den Broek, in a diplomatic letter to Heidweiler, outlined the Dutch position, arguing that ‘the present state of relations between the Netherlands and Suriname still does not make it expedient to accept the invitation’ (Het Parool, 12-2-1985:1). Instead, Ambassador Dirk Jan van Houten would represent Lubbers at some of the festivities organized by the regime on 25 February 1985 (de Volkskrant, 25-2-1985:6).

Not surprisingly, during these celebrations, Bouterse abandoned his strategy of seeking closer contacts with the Netherlands. In a speech made on 25 February he accused Dutch politicians and journalists of making use of
‘new lies and slander’ in order to create a negative image of the regime in the Netherlands and, through Radio Wereldomroep, also in Suriname (Het Parool, 26-2-1985:4). Bouterse went on to accuse Lubbers of allowing Dutch companies to invest in the Republic while refusing to allocate aid. Referring to a possible US$ 100 million loan from Libya, he angrily spat in The Hague’s face, stating in a rather undiplomatic tone: ‘To hell with your money. I will do it on my own’ (de Volkskrant, 25-2-1985:6). Equally acrimonious words could be heard in the new parliament, where a motion was carried demanding the reinstatement of financial assistance. Mijnals even went so far as to accuse the Netherlands of ‘misdeeds against our people and against the people of Indonesia.’ Interesting to note is that since Indonesia received Dutch aid despite human rights abuses, Paramaribo would also complain about The Hague’s double standards (De Ware Tijd, 26-2-1985:1; Oltmans 1984:17).

Heidweiler was the only prominent Surinamese official still holding out for a diplomatic breakthrough. While addressing the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva in March 1985, he again emphasized that Suriname had started to reintroduce democracy. Since the findings of the Wako report had also been taken to heart Heidweiler argued that The Hague should rethink its position – in particular considering that other countries with a worse human rights record actually did receive Dutch assistance. In addition, Heidweiler warned that ‘the Netherlands has enough experience to know that economic sanctions in the first place hit the people and that sanctions actually have a hardening effect’ (Het Parool, 9-3-1985:3). Unfortunately, his comments were overshadowed by the death of three Surinamese musicians in an office of the Liberation Council in Rijswijk. They were, according to the Dutch police, mistakenly assassinated after having been confused with leading Council members by the same terror commando unit which had carried out earlier attacks in the Netherlands (de Volkskrant, 9-3-1985:3).

Lubbers was in no mood to compromise and following Bouterse’s decision to abandon further talks with Dutch officials, The Hague also hardened its stance. What followed were several weeks of a wait-and-see approach until, by the end of May 1985, Udenhout decided to force the issue by recalling Suriname’s two senior diplomats from The Hague. Although according to the official explanation both diplomats were to be consulted on the reorganization of the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister confirmed that the decision was in fact a protest against the Dutch uncompromising position (de Volkskrant, 28-5-1985:1).

As if Suriname’s unilateral action was not damaging enough in itself (particularly because Heidweiler was one of the two diplomats recalled), transatlantic ties experienced another setback as, a few days later, Schoo asked Paramaribo to unilaterally terminate the Aid Treaty. The Minister thus demanded Suriname to release the Netherlands from its commitments to pay...
the remaining aid (*Trouw*, 10-6-1985:1). The reason for this drastic ‘sugges-
tion’ was, according to Schoo’s implausible explanation, that only if this were
to happen would her Ministry be able to provide independent aid organi-
izations operating in Suriname with some of the frozen funds. Udenhout,
without hesitation, rejected this proposal. However, in the Dutch House of
Representatives Schoo’s proposal had not even won a majority as most par-
liamentarians had become so ‘paranoid’ that they even feared that funds for
independent aid organizations could end up in the regime’s treasury.

Following Udenhout’s decision to reduce the level of diplomatic
representation and Schoo’s suggestion to unilaterally terminate the Aid Treaty,
tensions reached a climax in the summer of 1985. Just how far the situation
had deteriorated within a short time became obvious in a speech made by
Bouterse to the VFB in July. Expressing his outrage at the present condition
of Dutch-Surinamese relations, Bouterse argued that ‘perhaps the time has
come to advise the Netherlands to downgrade its embassy in Suriname to the
level of chargé d’affaires, until the Netherlands is prepared to really maintain
friendly and non-hypocritical relations with Suriname’ (*Het Parool*, 15-7-
1985:3). The military strongman confirmed that Suriname would not maintain
an Ambassador in The Hague and asked the Dutch government to withdraw
Van Houten from Paramaribo. The Lubbers cabinet had no choice but to also
recall its Ambassador for ‘consultations’.

To fully understand this deterioration in Dutch-Surinamese relations,
it should be noted that within the Udenhout cabinet a crisis had emerged,
which actually had a negative effect on bilateral relations. In April the unions
had withdrawn their support for the government in protest against the refusal
of Minister of Labour Edmond Dankerlui to resign in connection with an
ongoing dispute about the RVP’s influence in his Department. Only at the
end of July did Udenhout manage to reorganize his cabinet by convincing
at least the Moederbond and the CLO (but not the C-47) of supporting the
government (*Het Parool*, 29-7–1985:7). One of the main changes in this new,
enlarged cabinet entailed Erik Tjon Kie Sim taking over from Udenhout as
Minister of Foreign Affairs. In the meantime, as most moderate politicians
attempted to resolve the government crisis, Bouterse was free to express his
anger and frustration with the Dutch.

A new twist in the worsening of transatlantic ties became patently visible
with threats being made against Dutch citizens and offices in Suriname by
unidentified gangs. At the request of First Secretary of the Dutch embassy,
Eric Klipp, the NL started to patrol the embassy, consulate and KLM offices
(*De Ware Tijd*, 30-8-1985:1). In fact, the threat to Dutch citizens did not only
come from unidentified gangs but also from the Surinamese authorities
themselves as demonstrated by the expulsion of Roman Catholic priest
Martin Noordermeer, who was ordered to leave due to his ‘anti-Surinamese’
activities, despite having lived in the Republic for over fifteen years (NRC Handelsblad, 30-8-1985:3). In other words, Bouterse began to rely on similar hostile tactics in his dealings with the Netherlands as he had done in mid-1983, by sharply attacking the Lubbers cabinet, downgrading diplomatic relations and expelling Dutch citizens.

Unfortunately, the Dutch media also remembered the old strategy of portraying Bouterse as a barbarous dictator. Het Parool published a caricature (Cartoon 6) of the Lieutenant Colonel requesting Dutch economic aid for having introduced the redemocratization process, despite continuing to oppress the people. A similar message, suggesting that Bouterse was planning to flood Paramaribo by destroying the Afobaka Dam near the capital in the event of an invasion or coup, was published a few days later in the same newspaper (Het Parool, 23-10-1985:7). Such images only contributed to fuelling anti-Bouterse – and most likely also anti-Surinamese sentiments – among the Dutch population. As such they put additional public pressure on the Lubbers cabinet to remain firm in its dealings with the former colony.

Cartoon 6. Progress towards democracy and aid (Het Parool, 19-10-1985:3)
Deadlocked relations

As relations with the Netherlands deteriorated, internally important progress towards Suriname’s redemocratization was achieved. This process, which Meel (1990:89) judged to be ‘a real watershed in Suriname’s history’, experienced a significant boost as on the tenth anniversary of Suriname’s independence the former coalition parties signed an agreement with the Udenhout cabinet on the further implementation of democratic structures. Secret talks between Lachmon (VHP) and Arron (NPS) on the one hand and the regime on the other were initiated at Bouterse’s request in May 1984, whereby the former political leaders had suggested that they come to a new power-sharing formula. This plan was, however, at first rejected by the officers since it would have reduced their influence. Nonetheless, despite this initial setback, secret talks continued and were later expanded to include Soemita of the KTPI (Chin and Buddingh’ 1987:65).

With the aim of concluding these talks before the tenth anniversary of independence, Bouterse had put himself under enormous pressure to reach an agreement with the civilian parties. But as Lachmon, Arron and Soemita insisted on the original plan of 1984, Bouterse’s room for manoeuvre diminished as he was forced to accept some major aspects of the initial redemocratization plan (Chin and Buddingh’ 1987:65-6). Eventually, on 25 November 1985, the Lieutenant Colonel publicly confirmed that an agreement had been signed between the VHP, NPS and KTPI about far-reaching political reforms (De Ware Tijd, 26-11-1985:1). The Udenhout cabinet would remain in office until April 1987. A new Constitution was to come into force following free and secret elections.

Furthermore, Lachmon, Arron and Soemita were invited to take part in the Supreme Council, where they monitored the agreement and also participated in political and administrative matters (Chin and Buddingh’ 1987:66). That the agreement had been the outcome of tough negotiations and many compromises was evident from the many unenthusiastic comments. While Arron stated that it was ‘the best result that could have been achieved under the present circumstances’ (de Volkskrant, 27-11-1985:6), Lachmon caustically commented: ‘Perfection does not exist anywhere […] I cannot really say that the entire document comes up to our expectations, but in a dialogue it is give and take’ (De Ware Tijd, 26-11-1985:1).

If Bouterse thought that this agreement, which was intended to invigorate the previously introduced redemocratization programme, would have a positive influence on The Hague’s position, he had again misjudged the situation. By the end of 1985 bilateral relations still remained tense and, the day following the agreement profound doubts were expressed in the House of Representatives. Knol (PvdA), for instance, argued: ‘I do not understand why
the old political leaders have signed that agreement. Bouterse is completely unreliable, which has repeatedly become clear in the past’ (*Het Parool*, 26-11-1985:3). Although Weisglas (VVD) was less critical, he also declared that the agreement constituted no reason to reinstate aid.

In contrast to these harsh tones in the House of Representatives, Dutch ministers acknowledged that the latest reforms represented some progress. A spokesperson for the Department of Foreign Affairs confirmed The Hague’s willingness to re-establish dialogue with Paramaribo and Lubbers invited the three leaders of the now legalized political parties to The Hague. This time it was Bouterse’s turn to reject the offer. After discussing the invitation with Lachmon, Arron and Soemita in the Supreme Council it was decided that as long as the military would not be accepted in the dialogue, no delegates would attend the planned talks (*De Ware Tijd*, 14-12-1985:1). Dutch-Surinamese relations thus remained deadlocked, despite the reforms.

Bouterse, in fact, felt comfortable enough to resume his sharp attacks on the Netherlands. In January 1986, in his New Year’s Address, he told the Lubbers cabinet to respect Suriname’s sovereignty and treat the nation as an equal entity within the international system. He commented that ‘a sincere friendship can only be based on the actual acceptance of Suriname’s sovereignty’ (*De Ware Tijd*, 2-1-1986:1). Bouterse went on to criticize The Hague for its double standards on economic aid: ‘One for the rest of the world and one for the former colony of Suriname, which continues to hinder the normalization of relations between both countries’ (*De Ware Tijd*, 2-1-1986:12). Finally, he snarled at the Netherlands while stressing the importance of the recent domestic reforms, describing them as ‘a real and durable democratic order which is no copy of the structures of former colonial masters, but which meets the ideals of the people’ (*De Ware Tijd*, 2-1-1986:12).

Whereas throughout 1985 Bouterse had formulated Suriname’s approach regarding the Netherlands, following the agreement with NPS, VHP and KTPI, the Udenhout cabinet attempted to take on a more active role. In February 1986 Fong Poen (acknowledging the progress made through dialogue with The Hague in 1984) sought to revive the earlier strategy and asked for a meeting with Van Eekelen at a conference in Mbabane, Swaziland (*Trouw*, 18-2-1986:1). Fong Poen’s initiative was given an additional impulse as Bouterse lifted the state of emergency – in force since August 1980 – on the sixth anniversary of the February coup (*De Ware Tijd*, 26-2-1986:1). This ushered in an attitude change in The Hague, where parliamentarians again debated the possibility of supporting the redemocratization process with financial assistance. The stance adopted by Schoo and Van den Broek in particular must have pleased Suriname. While Schoo announced the possibility of providing medicine and food, the latter confirmed that he had received no new reports about human rights abuses and was in favour of providing some restricted

A nerve-racking period began as Surinamese politicians anxiously awaited The Hague’s decision on aid. Their optimism intensified as Schoo announced she would be sending ministerial experts to Suriname to investigate recent political developments while the House of Representatives revealed its interest in sending a delegation with the aim of seeking contacts with members of the National Assembly. However, during the debate in the House of Representatives on 6 March 1986 it became painfully obvious that these latest initiatives found no support amongst the majority. Weisglas criticized Schoo and Van den Broek for weakening the Dutch position towards the aid issue, because Bouterse was still firmly being in control. The Dutch Foreign Minister impressively defended his policy as he argued that if the Netherlands wanted to influence the redemocratization process ‘we must have complete respect for the independence of Suriname’ (*Trouw*, 7-3-1986:4). His warning that it would make no sense to ‘wait until everything in Suriname has been organized’ indicated the cabinet’s interest in supporting recent developments in the Republic (*Trouw*, 7-3-1986:4).

In addition to the still vehement criticism within the House of Representatives, the official change in the Liberation Council’s stance towards the regime must have been received as discouraging news in Paramaribo. With the resignation of Chin A Sen as Chairman in March 1986, the Council’s new leader, Glenn Tjong Akiet, declared that he would not be a second ‘Gandhi’ in his dealings with Bouterse (*Trouw*, 19-3-1986:1). Even though Council members had been involved in previous invasion and coup plans, Tjong Akiet’s comment threatened to throw a spanner in the works of Udenhout’s attempts at stabilizing relations with The Hague.

It thus seemed merely a question of time before Dutch-Surinamese relations would plunge into a new round of difficulties. But when this finally did occur, it was not so much the result of criticisms expressed within the House of Representatives or of threats made by the Council, but mainly spurred on by events within Suriname itself. Following the embarrassing arrest of Boer enveen on drug-related charges in March 1986, the Dutch parliament demanded the suspension of discussions on medical aid to Suriname (*NRC Handelsblad*, 27-3-1986:5). Even the two Ministers previously tending to offer a helping hand, Schoo and Van den Broek, expressed their disappointment, particularly as it was speculated that other high-ranking officers were also involved in drug trafficking.

Once more, the regime felt betrayed as, despite the agreement with VHP, NPS and KTPI and the renewal of the dialogue with the Netherlands, The Hague had again rebuffed Paramaribo’s initiatives. Bouterse reverted to familiar tactics of antagonizing the Dutch as much as possible. When Foreign Minister Kie Sim resigned in February, Bouterse asked Herrenberg to replace
him (*Trouw*, 1-3-1986:1), thus ensuring that the confrontation with The Hague would be fierce. The situation worsened when another cabinet reshuffle took place. After Udenhout’s resignation in July 1986 a new government under VHP politician Radhakishun was formed. Maintaining the support of the VFB/military, union movements and the employers’ organizations, the new cabinet had a unique character with, for the first time since the February coup, direct government participation by VHP, NPS and KTPI (*De Ware Tijd*, 17-7-1986:1). And while most of these politicians were involved in intense negotiations about the composition of the cabinet, Bouterse used their preoccupation to act against the Netherlands.

His tactics once again included the arrest and expulsion of Dutch citizens. On 11 June 1986 two journalists, Pieter Storm and Gerard Wessel, were detained by the military on accusations of espionage (*De Ware Tijd*, 14-6-1986:1). International backlash was immediate as not only The Hague and the Dutch Association of Journalists, but also the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization of Journalists (in Prague) and the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (in New York) opposed to Bouterse’s latest ‘stunt’ (*Trouw*, 17-6-1986:7). As expected, by the end of June both journalists were expelled (*De Ware Tijd*, 26-6-1986:1). Bouterse then decided to further downgrade diplomatic links with the Netherlands by ordering Klipp to leave Paramaribo ‘on the grounds of unlawful interference in the internal affairs of Suriname’ (*NRC Handelsblad*, 9-7-1986:1). The Netherlands retaliated a day later by equally expelling the First Secretary of the Surinamese embassy, Marciano Jessurun, on the accusation of unlawfully carrying a weapon and of insulting Dutch parliamentarians, whom he had called ‘the dumbest in the world’ (*NRC Handelsblad*, 10-7-1986:3).

The civil war

Before continuing the analysis of Dutch-Surinamese relations, it is necessary to discuss Suriname’s ever-deteriorating socio-economic situation caused by the civil war. The origin of this internal conflict is to be found in mid-1986, when Bouterse’s former bodyguard and personal friend Brunswijk established the SLNA to overthrow the regime. Brunswijk, a former officer, decided to oppose Bouterse primarily due to a dispute with his superiors about rank and wages and was thus not based on political conviction. Withdrawing to East Suriname, he initially began to oppose the regime as a ‘lone guerrilla’ (Van der Beek 1987:25). This alerted the NL, which started to search for Brunswijk in his home region, in the process of which they began to harass the local Maroon population of which Brunswijk was a member (Lagerberg 1989:142).
The ‘hunted’ opponent eventually decided to seek asylum in the Netherlands. Realizing the political and military potential of the growing turmoil in East Suriname, opposition groups in the Netherlands convinced Brunswijk of establishing a guerrilla force to fight the NL. During a short stay in Amsterdam, Brunswijk was particularly influenced in his decision to form the SNLA by Haakmat and Michel van Rey, a former Minister of Defence under Bouterse (Van der Beek 1987:36).

With the exiled organizations promising to raise funds to buy weapons, Brunswijk returned to East Suriname and began to recruit a force, for which he mainly commissioned Maroons (Van der Beek 1987:100). This Jungle Commando was soon engaged in a series of spectacular assaults, including a raid on the military barracks in Albina and on an armed post guarding a bridge across the Commewijne River on the Paramaribo-Albina road, where, besides weapons, food, vehicles and ammunition (Brana-Shute 1987:7) the SNLA also captured the commander of the Echo Brigade, Van Randwijk (who would later join the guerrilla movement). In addition, Stoelmanseiland, located between French Guiana and Suriname in the Marowijne, was occupied and turned into the Jungle Commando’s main base. Making use of small boats, further raids were organized throughout eastern Suriname (see Map 3), a region of substantial socio-economic importance.

Meanwhile Brunswijk had gained enormous publicity by raiding a bank in Moengo on 8 August 1986 and distributing the money among his fellow Maroons; an action earning him the nickname of ‘Robin Hood’ (Van der Beek 1987:26). Yet he attracted even more public attention by calling on ‘all Surinamese, wherever in the world, to offer resistance to the corrupt and criminal military regime in order to gain a durable restoration of the democratic constitutional state’ (Trouw, 26-7-1986:5). Even though most of his political messages were directed at elevating his standing within the Surinamese community in the Netherlands and among Maroons living in the areas under his control, the occasional transmission of his speeches by Radio Wereldomroep was also used to communicate directly with Bouterse and to inform the Surinamese population of his operations.

By this time Brunswijk could count on some support from The Hague and Paris. Both governments had an interest in removing Bouterse from power. For the Netherlands, in Payne’s assessment (1984:106-7) of the situation prior to the civil war

the executions at the end of 1982 [had] finally persuaded the Hague to act and break off the supply of aid. In these circumstances, the Netherlands [could not] avoid continued involvement in the tense internal situation in Suriname, no matter how embarrassing it finds it, but generally it has no taste for geopolitical action in the Caribbean.
With this in mind, some assistance to the SNLA (such as allowing Brunswijk the use of Radio Wereldomroep) was perceived as a convenient way of intervening in Suriname’s domestic affairs without becoming directly involved. Referring to French involvement, Brana-Shute (1987:5-6) argued that

There is little doubt that Brunswijk also enjoyed the complicity of the French authorities who were growing increasingly irritated with Bouterse’s radical regime on their colonial border, and with his working relationship with Libyans with whom the French, for lack of a better term, were at war in Chad. On several occasions Brunswijk, with military in hot pursuit, crossed the Marowijne river [known in French as the Maroni] to safety in the border town of St. Laurent du Maroni. The Suriname army, generally poorly trained and riddled by internal factions, was not prepared to take on the French Foreign Legion. If this was a wink and nod by the French, by late 1986 the relationship had developed into a hearty handshake.

Failing to contain SNLA’s attacks on army installations or to protect the settlements outside the capital, the armed forces began to terrorize the local Maroon population. As a result, comparisons were drawn between the eighteenth-century Maroon’s Boni Wars against the Dutch and the Jungle Commando’s fight against Bouterse. The first sign of a more aggressive military campaign came as Bouterse proclaimed the state of emergency in East Suriname at the end of August 1986, thus providing the NL with wide-ranging powers. In the following months the army’s counter-attacks resulted in a steady stream of Maroons and Amerindians fleeing the fighting. They sought shelter in French Guiana, where local authorities had established several camps around St. Laurent and Aquaruni. Particularly the NL’s attacks on the Maroon villages of Sabana, Moiwana and Moengo-Tapoe, where at least twenty women and children were killed in late November and early December 1986, resulted in a rapid increase in the flow of refugees.5

Despite the military’s tactics aimed at breaking local support for the SNLA, which by now numbered between 300 and 600 guerrillas,6 Brunswijk continued to disrupt socio-economic life in eastern Suriname as well as in the central districts. In November 1986 the Jungle Commando destroyed two electricity lines supplying the capital with power, just thirty kilometres south of Paramaribo (De Ware Tijd, 20-11-1986:1). One day later the SNLA forced Suralco to close its mine in Moengo following heavy fighting in the region and the closing off of the main road linking the eastern districts with the capital by

5 Lagerberg 1989:145. In the village of Moiwana alone 39 people were killed by the NL on 29-11-1986. The military explained these killings on the grounds that it had assumed that the villagers were providing food and shelter for Brunswijk at that time.

6 Including three British mercenaries, see Brana-Shute 1987:26.
blowing up a vital bridge across the Cottica river (*De Ware Tijd*, 21-11-1986:1). The economic costs of these attacks were enormous. Aware that the army had thus far been unable to bring the conflict to an end, by late 1986 the regime decided to issue new currency notes, in the hope of preventing Brunswijk from buying more weapons with the money accumulated from bank robberies (*The Economist*, 15-11-1986:28).

These desperate actions were largely unsuccessful and the SNLA continued its campaign, with an English mercenary even announcing that control of the capital would be gained by Christmas 1986 (Lagerberg 1989:142). Nevertheless, the SNLA did suffer from the major weakness that it was generally perceived as a Maroon uprising (Lagerberg 1989:143). This provided Bouterse with some public support since other ethnic groups feared the SNLA’s rule. To counter this perception and to strengthen the Jungle Commando, in April 1987 Brunswijk met with representatives of various exiled organizations on Stoelmanseiland. During this meeting it was agreed to establish a National Resistance Council with Haakmat,7 Somohardjo (Pendawa Lima), Emile

7 Amsterdams Volksverzet, AVV, Amsterdam People’s Opposition Movement.
Wijntuin (PSV), Tjong Akiet (Liberation Council) and two delegates representing the Jungle Commando as members. Chin A Sen, unable to attend, was represented by Eddy Jozefszoon (*Het Parool*, 4-4-1987:3), who soon afterwards would become an influential advisor and spokesman for Brunswijk in the Netherlands.

The period shortly before and following the meeting on Stoelmanseiland was the highpoint of SNLA’s operations. In January 1987 Brunswijk once again severely disrupted Suriname’s economic sector by reducing the electricity supply to the Paramaribo region. As a direct result, Suralco was forced to lay off over 600 employees in the areas affected (*De Ware Tijd*, 31-1-1987:1, 2-2-1987:1). Other companies experienced similar difficulties in continuing their production. A bridge was blown up near Brokopondo which cut off access to the Poika region, where timber was sawn for Bruynzeel (*Het Parool*, 4-5-1987:1), whose processing facilities in Moengo had already closed down in October 1986, after the SNLA gained control of the town. In addition to the pressure placed on the regime through the suspension of Dutch aid, further financial losses were thus suffered as a result of the economic disruptions caused by the civil war.

Fortunately for Bouterse, by the second half of 1987 the SNLA’s success came to an end. Although the guerrillas continued their operations, including the capture of a SLM plane (Van der Beek 1987:96-7) and the shooting down of an army helicopter, it became clear that the various groups comprising the Nationale Verzetraad (National Resistance Council) were merely interested in using Brunswijk as a military tool to overthrow Bouterse (*Het Parool*, 11-7-1987:1). Brunswijk himself soon became aware of the dubious nature of the support which had been pledged to him, as he stated in a speech delivered to the National Resistance Council on Stoelmanseiland:

> Sometimes we ask ourselves here if the people in the Netherlands understand that we have a very serious task at hand which can, and has, cost human lives. Instead of helping us, we are attacked by these people and they abandon us. I find unity within the resistance very important. The Jungle Commando has done everything possible to achieve this. We have invited the people to come to Stoelmanseiland, after which the National Resistance Council for Suriname was formed. But once again the differences (which are often personal) appeared so great that before long the unity crumbled. (Van der Beek 1987:93.)

*Another diplomatic breakdown*

Unquestionably, the ongoing civil war had a devastating effect on the country’s fragile socio-economic situation. Furthermore, as Bouterse claimed, it also threatened to have an impact on the redemocratization process and the
problematic Dutch-Surinamese relations. On 27 August 1986 the Lieutenant Colonel clarified his viewpoint in a speech delivered to a crowd protesting outside the Dutch embassy against The Hague’s apparent support for the SNLA. Warning that Dutch attempts to undermine Suriname’s political stability would stall the redemocratization process (*De Ware Tijd*, 28-8-1986:1), Bouterse cited The Hague’s inactivity with regard to the media’s promotion of the Jungle Commando and its failure to prevent anti-Bouterse organizations from recruiting SNLA ‘terrorists’ as the main factors responsible for Suriname’s volatile domestic situation. To emphasize the seriousness with which Paramaribo judged these accusations, over 7,000 protesters then presented a petition to the Dutch embassy demanding the ‘immediate halt of all assistance to the terrorists and the calling back of the mercenaries’ (*Het Parool*, 28-8-1986:3).

On the other side of the Atlantic Dutch Foreign Minister Van den Broek rejected these accusations, emphasizing that the media enjoyed the constitutional right of press freedom and, although it was illegal to organize military activities for the SNLA in the Netherlands, sympathizers of Brunswijk could not be prevented from travelling to Latin America and joining the Jungle Commando (*Trouw*, 29-8-1986:5). Moreover, Van den Broek, assisted by the new Minister for Development Cooperation Piet Bukman pointed out that the Netherlands had just provided Paramaribo with medical aid amounting to Nf 1 million, to demonstrate that The Hague was not anti-Suriname (*NRC Handelsblad*, 1-9-1986:3).

This conciliatory tone had a positive effect on the new Radhakishun cabinet. Having settled into its new role, the administration now began to steadily expand its influence on the country’s foreign policy. Radhakishun in fact went on a ‘family visit’ to the Netherlands in September, during the course of which he accepted an invitation by Van den Broek for a meeting (*De Ware Tijd*, 16-9-1986:1). To what extent this so-called ‘family visit’ (in order not to provoke Bouterse) was prearranged by the two governments has been difficult to determine, but it certainly provided both sides with an excellent opportunity to exchange views on the civil war and on the redemocratization process. Around the same time the Surinamese Finance Minister met with Bukman at an IMF conference in Washington, where the latter promised further financial support ‘as soon as a positive step in the direction of a restoration of democracy has been taken’ (*Trouw*, 2-10-1986:1). With the renewed participation of NPS, VHP and KTPI in government it became clear that The Hague was eager to bring the latest row with Paramaribo to an end.

While in civilian political circles around Radhakishun there was a desire to restart dialogue with the Netherlands, Bouterse and his supporters continued their attacks on The Hague. At the NAM conference in Harare in September 1986, Herrenberg introduced a motion condemning Dutch interference in
Suriname’s domestic affairs (*Trouw*, 16-9-1986:3). A month later, it was Bouterse who repeated his earlier accusations against the Lubbers government in a speech delivered at the UN General Assembly, in which he referred to ‘terrorist groups, that are generally based in the Netherlands and currently provide support to a group of bandits who are terrorizing the eastern part of our country’. Bouterse asked the Dutch government ‘to take more action against these terrorist groups, particularly since they are largely recruited and financed in the territory of that country [the Netherlands]’ (*De Ware Tijd*, 4-10-1986:1). He also accused the Netherlands of, on the international level, ‘creating the impression that Suriname is a military dictatorship that arbitrarily exercises its power without taking into account the legal order or respecting elementary human rights’ (*De Ware Tijd*, 4-10-1986:2).

Across the Atlantic (and despite Bouterse’s and Herrenberg’s recent attacks) Lubbers, acting on Radhakishun’s gesture of goodwill, approved the initiative of Van den Broek and Bukman to provide an additional Nƒ 2.5 million in medicine and food to Suriname by the end of November (*Trouw*, 26-11-1986:1). The Hague, in fact, assured Paramaribo that this aid would primarily be distributed in war-torn areas under government control. Only aid provided by charity institutions, collecting their funds directly from the Dutch public, would be allowed to help those living in SNLA-held districts (*De Volkskrant*, 12-12-1986:5).

Suriname was not the only place where strong differences of opinion existed between the various strata of government regarding what policy to adopt. In the Netherlands the cabinet continued to be critically monitored by the House of Representatives. The Ministry of Development Cooperation’s decision to distribute aid in government-controlled areas was strongly rejected by many parliamentarians. Members of the governing coalition such as Harry Aarts (CDA) and Weisglas (VVD) forced Bukman to reconsider his position and, eventually, also to make funds available for assistance in territories held by Brunswijk (*NRC Handelsblad*, 9-12-1986:3). Even more worrying for Radhakishun were remarks made by opposition politicians such as Knol (PvdA), who called on Lubbers to abandon the dialogue with Paramaribo and to support the SNLA since ‘Ronnie Brunswijk’s fight in Suriname [can be] compared with that of the Netherlands during the Eighty Years’ War and during the Second World War’ (*Trouw*, 10-12-1986:4).

This unfortunate demonstration of rebellion – and, it might be argued, the odious comparison – in the House of Representatives, favouring the SNLA as a military tool to oppose the officers’ influence in Paramaribo, led to further attacks by Bouterse on the Netherlands. In December the Lieutenant Colonel not only repeated his earlier accusation that The Hague assisted the SNLA ‘morally, financially and materially’ but he also claimed that due to Dutch interference the Netherlands were responsible for the devastation caused by
the civil war; the costs of which were estimated at Sf 94.6 million (De Ware Tijd, 13-12-1986:1).

As if these attacks were not enough, Bouterse also claimed that Lubbers had secretly offered him money to leave the country (De Ware Tijd, 13-12-1986:1) but he could not be bought off: ‘I have nowhere to go’ (Trouw, 13-12-1986:1). Indeed, according to the Brazilian journal Veja, a Dutch delegation had not only approached the Lieutenant Colonel in November 1986 in a bid to convince him to go into exile in exchange for a handsome pay-off, but representatives of Lubbers had also visited Brasilia. During talks with their Brazilian counterparts, the Dutch delegation had explored the possibility of gaining asylum for Bouterse, in case he accepted the money (de Volkskrant, 19-11-1986:3).

Even though Lubbers never admitted to having made such an offer, it was not the first claim made that the Netherlands had attempted to remove Bouterse through ‘financial persuasion’. In November 1985, for instance, an article had been published in The Washington Post stating that according to ‘highly placed Dutch officials’, The Hague was willing to increase its economic aid from almost US$ 600 million (or Nf 1.4 billion) to US$ 1 billion if Bouterse was to be ousted from power. One of the Dutch sources described this ‘initiative’ as ‘the highest price ever set on a head of state’ (The Washington Post, 25-11-1985:D16). Although it must be recognized that the objective was not to attract bounty hunters since the additional funds (provided the House of Representatives really would be willing to pay the extra money) would be reimbursed as part of the aid commitment, it certainly illustrated the Dutch desire to seek alternative methods of removing this thorn from its side.

In fact, an even more radical idea of dealing with the ‘Bouterse’ problem emerged, which involved sending in marines. Well aware of the logistical limitations faced by Dutch armed forces in the Western Hemisphere, in December 1986 The Hague approached the Reagan administration about the possibility of transporting to Suriname around 700 Dutch soldiers, currently stationed on Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles. With the support of the American navy, the Dutch marines aimed to topple the Bouterse regime. To discuss how this might be achieved, high-ranking offices from both countries met before Christmas (Reagan and Brinkley 2007:458). However, at the end of 1986 The Hague withdrew its proposal for military intervention in Suriname. Van den Broek stated that the meetings between Dutch and American officers had merely been a ‘precautionary measure’ (Antilliaans Dagblad, 9-6-2007:14).

Instead of leaving the Republic for money or even being taken prisoner by Dutch marines, Bouterse responded to these bribes and the threat of military invasion with another attack on The Hague, which was carried out by the Surinamese Foreign Minister in January 1987. In a letter handed over to Ambassador Van Houten, Herrenberg questioned The Hague’s attempt
to preserve diplomatic relations on an ambassadorial level, considering that ‘maintaining the level of the Dutch embassy in Paramaribo has not led to an improvement in the plight of Suriname’ \((De Ware Tijd, 2-1-1987:1)\). Herrenberg pointed out that Suriname had already withdrawn its Ambassador from The Hague in the summer of 1985, whereas the Netherlands (which shortly afterwards had recalled its own Ambassador) had unilaterally reinstated Van Houten following Radhakishun’s inauguration. The Dutch government reacted with surprise and irritation. Van den Broek emphasized his interest in maintaining diplomatic relations at an ambassadorial level as this was ‘in the interest of both countries, which share so many common ties’ \((Het Parool, 6-1-1987:3)\). Indicating his willingness to continue the dialogue with Radhakishun, he declared: ‘Should the Surinamese government think differently about this, then we can only interpret this as Suriname not giving the same priority to initiating a dialogue aimed at normalizing relations’ \((Het Parool, 6-1-1987:3)\).

As long as Radhakishun was unable to take control of the country’s foreign policy, the Dutch-Surinamese dialogue was doomed to be determined by radical officers and politicians, who so far had managed to retain their influential position. Then, on 10 January 1987, Herrenberg ordered Suriname’s chargé d’affaires in The Hague, Spier, to deliver a letter to the Dutch government, requesting the withdrawal of Van Houten by 25 January on the grounds of his interference in domestic politics. The Dutch Foreign Ministry responded accordingly and immediately declared that Spier must also leave the Netherlands by the same date \((Bad to worse 1987:15)\).

Following this tit-for-tat expulsion, both sides were absolutely adamant in their refusal, at least in the short term, to come to a compromise. Bouterse specifically ordered Herrenberg to follow ‘an aggressive policy in a positive sense’ towards the Netherlands ‘to clean up this relationship at the highest political level’ \((De Ware Tijd, 16-1-1987:1)\). Although Bouterse did not elaborate upon the phrase ‘in a positive sense’, his failure to consult the civilian politicians about his move to expel Van Houten indicated that he was likely to persist in following a hostile course, ignoring the government’s attempts at establishing a dialogue. In response, the Dutch hardened their position as well and dismissed the idea of replacing Van Houten. According to Van den Broek: ‘We must avoid the impression that the Netherlands could function as a diplomatic target for political arrows fired by radical elements in Suriname’ \((Het Parool, 23-1-1987:3)\).

Return to democracy

Following the expulsions of Van Houten and Spier, the last phase of the redemocratization process began as Radhakishun and other moderate politicians
resigned in protest of Bouterse’s continued attacks on The Hague. In fact, since the formation of the Radhakishun cabinet, a widening gap could be observed between the civilian and military wings of government. While the civilian politicians attempted to repair relations with the Netherlands, their ventures were continuously disrupted by Bouterse’s unrelenting attacks on The Hague and his foreign policy initiatives without consulting the Prime Minister. Bouterse’s increasingly nationalistic stand was not only based on his frustration that despite all redemocratization efforts, Lubbers persisted in his refusal to grant the so urgently needed financial assistance. As the ongoing civil war continued to erode the Republic’s internal stability, the Lieutenant Colonel also held The Hague primarily responsible for the NL’s failure to defeat the SNLA.

Their criticism of Bouterse’s foreign policy was the main reason prompting the moderate politicians to resign. As MacDonald (1988:120) has argued, Radhakishun described his Foreign Minister as a disruptive element in his administration and ‘publicly stated that Herrenberg, a close adviser to Bouterse, should resign, on the grounds that he was an unsuitable candidate to reopen talks with the Netherlands regarding restoration of relations and resumption of development aid’. Furthermore, in view of Herrenberg’s links to drug trafficking and his support of Bouterse’s decision to expel Van Houten without notifying the cabinet, Radhakishun and four other Ministers of the civilian parties had little option but to resign (De Ware Tijd, 13-2-1987:1).

With Radhakishun’s resignation on 11 February 1987, it appeared as if the military, through the VFB, had once again asserted its absolute domination of the Republic’s affairs. Bouterse even attempted to strengthen his position as he invited VFB member Wijdenbosch to lead the new cabinet (Thorndike 1990:50). However, the times when Bouterse could simply determine political developments in the country seemed to have passed. The resignation was followed by violent anti-Bouterse demonstrations in Paramaribo that lasted for several days (De Ware Tijd, 19-2-1987:1). This public backlash threatened to undermine the military’s position and Bouterse was forced to compromise and replace Herrenberg as Foreign Minister.

Although the controversial Herrenberg had to resign, he would continue to upset Dutch-Surinamese relations. Within a year following his resignation, Herrenberg (1988) wrote the book Suriname cocaïneverhaal in de Nederlandse pers; Een grote leugen in which he argued that the accusations of drug trafficking published in the Dutch media were part of a conspiracy plan directed against him ‘to severely damage the revolutionary process in our country’ (Herrenberg 1988:10). The former Foreign Minister also used his book to attack his political opponents in the Netherlands, including Aarts, Knol and Weisglas, as well as Haakmat, Chin A Sen and Sedney.

In the meantime Bouterse was confronted by a growing number of protesters. Eventually realizing that he had to appease the population by breathing...
fresh life into the redemocratization process and by easing diplomatic tensions with the Netherlands, in September 1987 he promised to organize a referendum about a new Constitution to be introduced the next month (Het Parool, 21-2-1987:3). Bouterse also ordered Heidweiler to meet with Van den Broek to discuss the status of relations. Both goals proved difficult to achieve. The demonstrations were stopped only through the massive deployment of military and police on the streets of Paramaribo (de Volkskrant, 21-2-1987:7). And in answer to the request for negotiations, Van den Broek told Heidweiler that The Hague simply did no trust Bouterse (NRC Handelsblad, 12-3-1987:2).

However, the Surinamese public and The Hague would finally cease their opposition with the introduction of a new Surinamese Constitution on 30 March, which primarily confirmed the regime’s continuation of the redemocratization process. According to Article 61 a National Assembly comprising 51 members was to be elected in ‘general, free and secret elections’. Articles 71 to 73 stated that this parliament was to serve as the primary legislative body. Its supreme position was reinforced as the Assembly, under Article 91, was to elect the President and the Vice-President, who, in contrast to the 1975 Constitution, enjoyed considerably greater powers, as outlined in Articles 99 to 109 (Fernandes Mendes 1989:315-8).

A closer look at the Constitution reveals that the position of the officers was accommodated within its apparently democratic structure. A State Council was created, whose members were to represent political parties, various socio-economic interest groups and, significantly, the military. Its task was to supervise the President and government, as defined in Articles 113 to 115 (Fernandes Mendes 1989:319). Besides the armed forces’ influence in this State Council, the officers gained additional political weight as a National Security Council and a Military Authority were to be established according to Articles 128 to 130 and 177 to 178 (Fernandes Mendes 1989:320-4). In particular the last two articles broadly defined the military’s duties within Surinamese society: ‘to protect the highest rights and freedoms of the country and its people in serving the legal order, peace and security. […] Apart from this, the National Army works towards national development and pacification of the nation’ (Fernandes Mendes 1989:324). In other words, the military would continue to play a decisive role in the Republic’s political affairs. Rather than directly intervening, the officers could use legal means within their now constitutionally vested powers.

Bouterse maintained the momentum of political change when announcing, in March, that the first general elections since the February coup would be held on 25 November 1987 (De Ware Tijd, 2-4-1987:1). A few days later Wijdenbosch introduced his new cabinet. Although the VHP, NPS and KTPI continued to boycott the government (despite remaining in the Supreme Council), the cabinet won the broad support of the unions and employers’ organizations;
including that of the C-47, represented by Minister of Justice Gilds. Another reassuring appointment was that of Heidweiler as Foreign Minister (De Ware Tijd, 8-4-1987:1).

Despite the apparent shortcomings of the Constitution and the boycott by the VHP, NPS and KTPI, recent developments to bolster the redemocratization process and the positive findings of an ACP-EC delegation visiting Suriname in April 1987, strengthened the voices within the Lubbers cabinet in favour of the normalization of ties. The ACP-EC’s delegation’s final report strongly recommended that the Netherlands improve diplomatic relations and provide financial assistance. Although Van den Broek continued for the time being to reject the idea of providing economic aid, he announced his intention of resuming normal diplomatic relations and sending an Ambassador to Paramaribo (NRC Handelsblad, 6-5-1987:1). His Surinamese colleague reacted with relief, hoping that bilateral links would soon be on an even keel. Despite sustained criticism in the House of Representatives, the Dutch government did not stipulate any conditions on the reintroduction of ambassadors.

Yet it was a different story in Suriname, where Bouterse managed to surprise The Hague and his own Foreign Minister by stipulating conditions for the resumption of diplomatic relations and by simply rejecting the ‘Dutch candidate Van Houten as Ambassador’, stating that he would ‘not through the front door nor through the back door and neither down the drainpipe’ be allowed to re-enter Suriname (Het Parool, 25-5-1987:1). With this, the Lieutenant Colonel not only demonstrated, once again, his influential position, but also betrayed his chronic suspicion of the Netherlands, especially of Van Houten, whom he accused of having interfered in Suriname’s domestic affairs.

Bouterse thus created an extremely awkward situation despite being well aware that the public did not support his sustained attacks on The Hague. By June almost 10% of Suriname’s remaining population had requested visas for the Netherlands, primarily due to the Republic’s political and socio-economic difficulties (NRC Handelsblad, 10-6-1987:3). It was equally certain that the military was hesitating in supporting the redemocratization process, as became clear when Captain Olfer presented Bouterse with a petition signed by leading officers, expressing their discontent with VHP, NPS and KTPI. In fact, the officers saw themselves forced to ‘lodge a strong protest against the insults and threats voiced by the political leaders of VHP, KTPI and NPS’ (De Ware Tijd, 4-8-1987:1). The pressure on Bouterse was so great that the following day he, along with Graanoogst and Ernie Brunings, announced his withdrawal from the Supreme Council (De Ware Tijd, 5-8-1987:1). The fear that that the entire redemocratization process might come to a halt just weeks before the referendum and that elections would not materialize was founded as other VFB members did remain in the Supreme Council.

Nonetheless, shortly after resigning, Bouterse signed the Leonsberg Akk-
oord (Leonsberg Agreement) with the VHP, NPS and KTPI, in which the military confirmed its commitment to a return to democratic rule and the civilian politicians accepted a certain degree of intervention by the NL following the November elections (Thorndike 1990:52). In other words, Bouterse realized that his best option for continuing to shape Suriname’s affairs was through the influential position allocated to the military in the new Constitution; for this reason he pressed on with the redemocratization process. Moreover, Bouterse sought contact with NPS, VHP and KTPI to ease recent tensions between officers and civilian politicians while also attempting to communicate with Brunswijk, in order to facilitate a peaceful referendum in eastern Suriname (Het Parool, 24-8-1987:1). Under these more favourable conditions, on 30 September 1987 the referendum on the new Constitution was held, with over 60% of the electorate participating. Of these, 95% voted in favour of the Constitution, clearly a result of the civilian parties as well as the military having thrown their weight behind the ‘yes’ campaign (Meel 1990:91). With this overwhelming acceptance of the new Constitution, the return to democratic rule seemed to be only a question of time.

Yet the path was still not free of obstacles. The remaining eight weeks until the general elections were characterized by intense conflict between the various groups. The SNLA continued to be active and its position with respect to the elections was unclear, so it remained doubtful whether in eastern Suriname voting could even take place (Trouw, 2-10-1987:5). More importantly, the political confrontation between VHP, NPS and KTPI on the one hand and the VFB on the other, which had been reorganized and suggestively renamed Nationale Democratische Partij (NDP, National Democratic Party), escalated to a dangerous level. Yet the biggest threat to Bouterse’s future involvement in politics came from a political block called the Front voor Democratie en Ontwikkeling (FDO, Front for Democracy and Development) which became popularly known as the Front. This group, combining the VHP, NPS and KTPI, had been established in August 1987 to provide voters with an alternative to the Republic’s military domination. Although Thorndike (1990:51) regarded the block simply as a broad, pro-business oriented electoral alliance without a coherent political philosophy, its political power was enormous as it gained the support of many Surinamese. The Front’s first election rally in August was attended by over 60,000 people, about one-sixth of the entire population.

Rather than remaining passive the military became increasingly involved in the election campaign. After the transformation of the VFB into the NDP (led by Prime Minister Wijdenbosch), left-wing officers and politicians attempted to establish a modern mass-based and multi-ethnic political organization. 8

8 Unlike most other political parties, the NDP attempted to be multi-ethnic while including many people from other ethnic backgrounds, although it must be acknowledged that the Creols were still the dominate group within the party.
Bouterse was convinced of his ability to influence political affairs both through the constitutional rights granted to the military and through direct participation in the National Assembly. Aware of the lack of public support of the NDP, however, the party seemed to become heavily reliant on methods designed to disrupt the opposition’s campaign (for instance, by playing loud music at Front rallies), rather than on articulating their own political programme (Thorndike 1990:51-2). The NDP’s negative campaign was exacerbated by Bouterse himself as, just days before the elections, he accused the opposition of ‘treason’ and ‘collaborating with the terrorists of Brunswijk’ (Het Parool, 23-11-1987:3).

Finally, on 25 November, the Surinamese people regained the right to determine the composition of their government after more than seven years of authoritarian rule. Almost 90% of the electorate participated in the elections, which were declared free and fair by the international observers who had been invited, including five Dutch parliamentarians (De Ware Tijd, 27-11-1987:1). The results were a huge slap in the face for the military as the NDP won only 3 seats out of a total of 51, against the Front winning 40 seats while another 4 were obtained by Pendawa Lima, a political party representing Javanese interests. Even PALU managed to beat the NDP, capturing the remaining 4 seats. Hence, the NDP emerged as the Assembly’s smallest party. The 40 Front seats, in turn, were divided between the VHP (16), the NPS (14) and the KTPI (10) (Meel 1990:91).

These results were a clear signal that the Surinamese public strongly favoured a return to democracy and rejected the military’s interference in politics. Since the NDP generally associated itself with the Creoles (Thorndike 1990:53) – whereas the VHP, NPS and KTPI continued to rely heavily on the support of their respective ethnic communities – and since a more multi-ethnic based Surinaamse Partij van de Arbeid (SPA, Surinamese Labour Party) formed by Derby had failed to win any seats, the results were also an indisputable indication that Surinamese democracy was to continue from where it had been crushed in February 1980.

The period from late 1983 until the end of 1987 was characterized by enormous fluctuations in Dutch-Surinamese relations. The two major causes of these fluctuations were the Dutch decision to suspend aid (and the consequent deterioration of the Republic’s socio-economic situation) and the failure to find alternative financial sources enabling Paramaribo to fund its budget and various development projects.

Bouterse’s frustration about the Dutch rejection of his political reforms persistently strained the relationship, which continued in its cycle of verbal attacks, the expulsion of diplomats and the harassment of ordinary citizens. The efforts of moderate politicians – who increasingly regained influence in
Suriname’s foreign policy due to the accelerating redemocratization process – to involve The Hague in a series of dialogues were sabotaged by Bouterse. Nevertheless, in the end also he had to accept The Hague’s key condition that a return to civilian rule was the only option of gaining access to Dutch funds. When after the overwhelming acceptance of a new Constitution by all parties, free and fair general elections were held in which the military failed to make a significant impact, the new civilian government had finally become an acceptable negotiation partner to The Hague.