CHAPTER I

The colonial race

I have drawn a coloured map of the various colonies which surround our Indian Archipelago, and when one sees those colours, one has to immediately admit that a draughtsman with his wits about him would easily be able to draft a striking picture of the risk we run. To the left, to the west, one descries the form of a snake, these are the English colonies, which lour threateningly from Singapore to Sumatra. On the other side is a gaping maw, the shape of Australia, which applies the Monroe Doctrine to New Guinea, in the vicinity like a hungry wolf Germany also lies in wait for us, and Japan, of which in former days nobody took any notice, turns out to have become a Big Power which can pose a real threat, while the greedy Yankee, who sticks at nothing, has already appeared in our near vicinity.1

It was a frightening world that the socialist H.H. van Kol unfolded in Dutch Parliament in November 1904. The message was clear: other powers were encroaching on the Netherlands Indies, and might not stop at its borders.

What was happening had started a number of decades earlier. Since the 1880s anxious Dutchmen had witnessed how mightier nations were carving up the world among themselves, and in doing so establishing themselves in regions which were uncomfortably close to the Netherlands Indies. The political and economic rivalries between the major European states had spread to parts of the world which up to that moment had been left untouched. At first this was mainly a competition between Great Britain, France, Germany, and Russia, though other states such as the United States and Italy then and before also figured in the scenarios constructed by Dutchmen about nations which wanted to establish settlements in the Dutch sphere of influence in Southeast Asia. By the end of the 1890s the two contemporary non-European Powers, the United States of America and Japan, had joined in.

Colonies, protectorates, and spheres of influence represented the status symbol of a modern self-assured nation. Colonial expansion was considered synonymous with the winning of overseas markets and economic growth. Even in Austria-Hungary people were caught up in the fever to occupy what

1 Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1904-05:207.
in the European vocabulary of those days was termed ‘empty’ land: regions inhabited by what were called uncivilized or semi-civilized peoples, governed by their own chiefs and rulers. There was not only the ‘scramble for Africa’, but also a ‘grab’ for the Pacific and East Asia, and to a certain extent also for parts of the moribund Ottoman Empire. In some instances European governments had taken the initiative, fearful of the intentions of their competitors on the international scene. In other cases the lead had been taken by enterprising adventurers, overseas settlers, or commercial firms, turning to the motherland to protect their newly acquired wealth and concessions or to block the advance of others.

The 1870s had already brought home to the Dutch how helpless the Netherlands was when other nations were intent on territorial expansion, whether this concerned the Netherlands Indies or Holland in Europe itself. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 had led to the first major scare in decades, in Holland and in the Netherlands Indies. An occupation of Holland might very well invite other powers to snatch at the Dutch colonial possessions, as had been the case in the days of Napoleon when British rule had replaced that of the Dutch. A few years later the ‘Borneo Affair’, the acquisition by British merchants of Sabah, sent an even clearer message to the Dutch that the Netherlands was in a very weak position if it were to become embroiled in a conflict over the boundaries of its colonial territory or sphere of influence with stronger adversaries.

Next came the occupation of the eastern part of New Guinea, the object of a mini colonial race between Germany and Great Britain. Initially the new German Empire had no colonial aspirations. The 1860s and 1870s had seen various German citizens who had pleaded for overseas possessions, including regions in the East Indies Archipelago which were not under Dutch control, but their protestations were ignored. Formosa and Indochina had been mentioned as were – in a series of article in the Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung in February 1867 – Timor and the Philippines. The Fiji Islands, Samoa and, what did upset the Dutch, Sumatra and New Guinea also did not escape the eye of the champions of a German colonial venture. Such dreams of overseas German settlements were not yet shared by the governments of Prussia and the German Empire. Invariably Prince Otto von Bismarck turned down the plethora of petitions from German businessmen and consuls abroad asking for a German annexation of spots in the Pacific and elsewhere. Had he acceded to such suggestions Germany would have become the master of parts of Fiji and Samoa, taken possession of Hokkaido in Japan, driven the defeated French out of Indochina, and acquired a foothold in China. Germany would also have established itself in Borneo, Sumatra, and the Philippines, and would have administered colonies in Africa and Latin America.²

² For the early German plans, see, for instance, Gründer 1999:54-63.
Within ten years Bismarck changed his mind. In February 1884 he gave orders for the first German protectorate in Southwest Africa to be proclaimed. At various points along the coast the German flag was hoisted with due ceremony and a proclamation declaring the region a protectorate was read out. These ceremonies marked the beginning of an active German *Kolonialpolitik*. In the Pacific one of the spots German attention turned to was New Guinea, of which the western half belonged to the territory of the Netherlands Indies. In August 1884 Bismarck wrote to the Neu-Guinea Compagnie that its exploits would be given the same support and protection from the Empire as those in Southwest Africa (Von Koschitzky 1887-88, II:212). Part of the north of the island was declared a *Schutzgebiet*, a word invented by Bismarck (Gründer 1999:69).

In the Netherlands feelings were ambivalent. There was no ambition to extend the administration over East New Guinea, but the prospect of a new neighbour, which would not be long in announcing itself now that the world had been alerted to the impotence of Holland to prevent a British intrusion in Borneo, bristled with anxieties. British politicians were also not pleased. Australians were adamant that the eastern, non-Dutch portion belonged to their sphere of influence. No other country should settle there. The British government tended to concur with this position, fearing that if it were not to, political complications with the Australian colonies would be the result. In London the British statesmen were not yet very used to having Germany as a new and, as it turned out, determined colonial rival. They had missed the hint that Germany was aspiring to a piece of the colonial cake.

Germany could not be stopped and an agreement over the division of East New Guinea was reached on 17 May 1885. Now, Emperor Wilhelm I could formally put the German territories in New Guinea and the New Britain Archipelago under protection of the Empire. Sovereignty over the region, which had already been christened Kaiser-Wilhelms-Land in March, was delegated to the Neu-Guinea Compagnie. On the same occasion the New Britain Archipelago was renamed the Bismarck Archipelago. At the end of November, New Ireland became Neu-Mecklenburg, New Britain Neu-Pommern and the Duke of York Islands the Neu-Lauenburg group. These names were chosen, the Dutch Ambassador in Berlin informed his government, because the most of the crew of the ships which sailed to these islands originated from these areas.

As a Dutch newspaper had written in 1880 it be ‘better to have colonial rivals as distant friends rather than as immediate neighbours’. There was no escaping the fact that in the closing years of the nineteenth century such new

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neighbours were already gracing the scene in Borneo and New Guinea. In both cases some Dutch people could still see the bright side. Great Britain taking control in North Borneo would preclude adventurers from other nations, who were said to pose a much greater danger to Dutch rule – and Germans were the chief suspects – being able to colonize parts of North Borneo. A similar argument was advanced with respect to New Guinea. There were some, and the Dutch Consul General in Melbourne was one of them, who argued that the German annexation had strengthened rather than weakened the Dutch position in West New Guinea. Neither Germany nor Great Britain would allow the other to take possession of the Dutch portion of the island.

Had Great Britain become the sole master of East New Guinea sooner or later serious problems might well have arisen to harass the Dutch. People who adduced these arguments thought that the German expansion in Africa and the Pacific had called a halt to what they considered the unbridled colonial appetite of Great Britain, to which the Netherlands Indies or part of it could possibly also fall victim. Such opinions were coupled with a certain malicious pleasure in seeing Germany outmanoeuvring Great Britain. This made it easier to accept the German colonial presence in the eastern portion of New Guinea. The appearance of Germany on the colonial stage had checked English ambitions also in the Netherlands Indies, and would, it was hoped, produce a new colonial balance in which Holland ‘tranquil and calm’ could still ‘have pride of place’.

The ideas among the wider public about the repercussions of the Anglo-German rivalry over the eastern portion of New Guinea resembled those entertained by the Dutch about the colony as a whole. These oscillated between fears that a mightier state, its pride wounded by developments elsewhere in the world, might look to territorial expansion in the Netherlands Indies to refurbish its image counterbalanced by the feeling that international rivalries formed a safeguard for the integrity of the Netherlands Indies.

International rivalry between the powers intensified at the close of the century. Berlin embarked on a new phase in German foreign policy in 1897: the Weltpolitik. Kaiser Wilhelm II enthusiastically took the lead in transforming the country from what had been essentially an inland continental power into a nation fired with the ambition to play a leading economic and political role on the international stage. The prestige of Germany and its emperor had to be enhanced. The German Empire should become a World Power and this should entail the acquisition of new overseas possessions. Among the regions upon which Wilhelm had set his eye were Portuguese Timor, the Sulu Archipelago,

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6 De Indische Gids 1882, I:28.
7 Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië 1889, II:129.
one or more of the larger Philippine Islands, the Caroline Islands, and Samoa (Gründer 1999:190). Spurred by aspirations engendered by this ‘world policy’, the acquisition of overseas possessions and the enlargement of the German Navy, modestly launched under Bismarck, were now given a fresh stimulus.

With new rivals arriving on the scene in the late nineteenth century, and suspicious of adventurers trying to carve out their own kingdom, guarding the Dutch position in the East Indies acquired a new urgency. In the previous decades the Netherlands had already slowly but surely added territories to its East Indies possessions, expanding the region over which it exercised only de jure control. In reacting to the changing situation at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Netherlands contended itself with consolidating its hold over the East Indian Archipelago, bringing under direct control regions it had left untouched up to then. Parts of Sumatra and Celebes, often still virtually unexplored regions which hardly any European had yet traversed, were added to the colonial territory. In some instances a considerable military force had to be mustered. In others, the threat of force sufficed. Other expeditions were sent to the smaller islands of the Archipelago to gain the submission of the local rulers who still occupied an independent position. Underlining its intention naval vessels were ordered to remote corners of the Archipelago to show the rest of the world the extent of Dutch rule.

All this was first and foremost a move to forestall an incursion by other nations. Regions had to be brought under Dutch rule before anybody else could settle there and claim them as theirs. The Dutch administration – in The Hague as well as in Batavia – had no aspirations to look for new territories or exclusive zones of influence elsewhere in Asia. Even in the East Indies Archipelago policy was cautious. An expansion of Dutch rule in the Archipelago was an option not all could agree on. Some, Van Kol was one of them, argued in favour of the opposite tack: a contraction of colonial possessions. The Netherlands should concentrate on Java and Sumatra. Less seriously it was suggested the Netherlands Indies be made the first prize in an international lottery.8 Upset by the difficulties the colonial army was experiencing in Aceh, the mood was far from bellicose. This seems to have been the prevailing feeling among the general public, though occasionally when military expeditions were being fitted out, the Netherlands went through its own spasms of jingoism. In Holland not many citizens seemed to be, and this greatly irritated their compatriots living in the Netherlands Indies, interested in what happened in the East or understood why military expeditions had to be mounted to conquer native states. The expansion of Dutch authority in

8 De Locomotief, 24-8-1900.
the Archipelago was considered to be ‘a burden or a motive for flaunting and showing off’ (Duitschers 1885:42).

Among the Dutch in the Netherlands Indies who were well aware of the costs, financially and otherwise, of armed expeditions to subdue still independent regions in the Archipelago, the mood was also defensive rather than offensive. It was encroachments by others, not an enlargement of the empire, that first sprung to mind. But this, too, was a matter of interpretation. As Borneo had shown, the outside world might have different ideas about how far the exclusive zone of Dutch influence extended. Anxiety arose when European nations – especially Germany and Great Britain but Russia, France and Italy were also hovering on the brink of their consciousness – or their citizens contemplated or actually founded new settlements in regions not under direct Dutch control, but which might be considered outlying parts of the Archipelago.

People were even not completely sure either about the regions where Dutch control was apparently entrenched. Were these safe from outside intrusion? The appetite shown for the acquisition of new territory and the international power game between the larger states in the closing decades of the nineteenth century formed a source of many a bleak speculation about the future of Holland and its colonies. The negotiations between the World Powers of the day and the real or rumoured deals they made to enhance their own position baffled and alarmed many an outsider. In the Netherlands this manifested itself from time to time in the fear that the Netherlands Indies might well be one of the pawns in the international game; the price paid by one government to assure the cooperation of the other.

In 1900 anxiety mounted when an article which received much attention in the Dutch, Netherlands Indies, and British press appeared in a German newspaper. The Times even suggested that its contents had been inspired by the German government. The article, written by E. von Hartmann, a German ‘philosopher’, was a plea for a silent annexation of Holland by Germany. It contained a double threat: in the Far East the Netherlands would be unable to defend its colonial possessions against an attack by a Foreign Power; in Europe, Germany could easily disrupt the Dutch economy by imposing high import duties and by transferring the transit Rhine-trade to the Ems. Von Hartmann suggested that the Netherlands should do what the South German states had done some thirty years earlier. It should sign a defensive and offensive pact with the German Empire and enter into a customs union with it. Were it to comply, the Netherlands could hold on to the Netherlands Indies. As an extra bonus the colony would profit from an influx of German capital and manpower.9 Von Hartmann was not the only one who contemplated such

9 De Locomotief, 22-3-1900, 7-4-1900; De Indische Gids 1900, I:352-3.
a strategy. Around the same time the Dutch Envoy in Berlin reported that such views were shared by the architect of the new German Navy, Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, and other senior German naval and army officers, and by leaders of the German business community (Kuitenbrouwer 1985:143).

An occupation of the Netherlands Indies continued to linger in the minds of those Germans, who aspired to a large colonial empire. The taking over of Portuguese colonies was what first came to mind but, as can be concluded from the words of the German Chancellor, Th. von Bethmann Hollweg in the early 1910s, a seizure of the Belgian Congo or the Netherlands Indies was not beyond the bounds of possibility (Berghahn 1993:132). Germany could well claim the Dutch colony as the price for a reconciliation with Great Britain, or, if France was in the picture, for a return of Alsace-Lorraine.

In the twentieth century, however, the greatest threat perceived by the Dutch did not come from a European Power. It came from Japan, which had made its entrance on the world stage as a major power after its war with China in 1894-1895. The victory of Japan established its reputation, inspiring fears and hopes in the rest of Asia. To Indonesians Japan was proof that an Asian nation could develop and become powerful. The Dutch, and they were not alone in this, began to express concern that Japan was ultimately set on acquiring the Netherlands Indies, or portions of it; an advance south for which Formosa, which Japan had gained from China, was an excellent stepping stone. The Philippines would follow; yet another step of Japan in its ineluctable march south en route to the Netherlands Indies, making for Borneo and Celebes. The speedy build-up of the Japanese fleet in the closing five years of the nineteenth century was observed with awe in the Netherlands Indies and in Holland. Japan’s ‘formidable Navy’ with its ‘fighting machines’, the ‘floating citadels’, which had a far greater battle capacity than any of the ships of the Dutch Navy, inspired simultaneous admiration and anxiety.0

In the perception of the Dutch, Japanese jingoism now assumed a similar tone as that of the British.11 When people in the Netherlands Indies spoke about a B.V., a Buitenlandsche Vijand (Alien Enemy) more often than not it began to denote Japan, and not a European Power. In the official correspondence between The Hague and Buitenzorg, Japan now also loomed as the potential enemy. Initially Japan was just a scribble in the margin of official records, whereas the text itself still referred to a European enemy. This, for instance, still queried with a question mark, was the case in 1903, when the reduction of the Indies Military Navy was discussed; that is the smaller flotilla ships with a low battle capacity permanently stationed in the East Indian

10 De Locomotief, 6-1-1900, 8-3-1900.
11 De Locomotief, 14-6-1898.
The unarmed idealist and the armed assailant. Onze Vloot propaganda. The Idealist: ‘We should see the Indies not as a commercial but as an idealistic possession’. The other: ‘Rightly so right. When he stays unsuff.’
waters and employed to impress native coastal states, and not the so-called auxiliary squadron, made up of better-armed, faster warships, which would be expected to grapple with a foreign enemy and, after a posting to the tropics for three years would return to Holland.\(^\text{12}\)

The stepping-stone scenario was soon to be rendered outdated by actual developments. It was not Japan that took possession of the Philippines but the United States. It did not take long before the American victory was perceived first and foremost as a blessing. With the Americans entrenched in the Philippines the chance that Japan would turn south and occupy these islands tended to fade into the background, though a Japanese fleet could still always sail around the Archipelago. Spain, hampered by its weak colonial army and Navy, had been replaced by a nation with a strong military force. The Japanese government would think twice before engaging such a formidable foe in war. One of those who voiced this opinion was the correspondent of the Semarang newspaper *De Locomotief* in Japan. At the end of 1899 he concluded that the Japanese expansion into the Pacific was as good as cancelled out by the occupation of the Philippines and Hawai‘i by Uncle Sam and that of Samoa and the Carolines by Germany. The Americans had raised a ‘natural barrier between Japanese chauvinism and the Netherlands Indies pie’.\(^\text{13}\) Later, when it had become plain that the United States planned to hold on to the former Spanish colonies, it initially became associated with all the wrongs of aggressive colonialism; and consequently was also seen as a potential threat to the Netherlands Indies. The United States had shown itself, the editor of *De Locomotief* now exclaimed, a true member of the Anglo-Saxon race, which because of its ‘blood- and land-thirsty’ nature was causing trouble in every corner of the world: ‘While in Africa this has spilled rivers of blood to bring British civilization in the form of cotton fabrics, gin, and beer to the banks of the time-honoured Nile, Washington does not gainsay its descent and origin’. What the United States had done was unprecedented in history. Great Britain, ‘even after its most fortunate war, has never been so voracious. Germany’s annexation of Alsace and Lorraine is a child’s plaything compared to it.’ It would be best to have the Pacific Ocean and not just the Mindoro Sea between the United States and the Netherlands Indies.\(^\text{14}\) Such voices remained an exception, though Roman Catholics sympathizing with Spain because of religious sentiments lashed out against the ‘sharks of big capitalism’ (Kuitenbrouwer 1985:147). People to the left of the political spectrum, no disciples of imperialism or the United States for that matter, were equally suspicious of American intentions, and would continue to be so. As far as Van Kol

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\(^{12}\) A.G. Ellis, Minister of Navy, to Idenburg, 25-9-1903, NA, Kol. Geheim, Vb. 7-12-1903 F19.

\(^{13}\) *De Locomotief*, 6-1-1900.

\(^{14}\) *De Locomotief*, 19-11-1898.
and other socialists were concerned the American danger remained a reality; the more so at those moments when politicians in the United States asserted themselves and warned the rest of the world that the United States fleet would react immediately wherever injustice was done to an American elsewhere in the world.\textsuperscript{15} The relief with which others had greeted the American annexation of the Philippines did not last long. Within little more than fifteen years when Washington indicated that it wanted to prepare the Philippines for independence, a Japanese occupation of the Philippines again returned to haunt the Dutch in the Netherlands Indies.

Two international conflicts around the turn of the century influenced Dutch perceptions about the weak position the Netherlands was in even more. One was the Boer War, the other the Russo-Japanese War. In the shaping of Dutch notions about what the strife between the powers of the day might mean for the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies, the significance of the Boer War cannot be underestimated. The fate of the Boer republics, the South African Republic (the Transvaal) and the Orange Free State, brought home to the Dutch, if this was not already been realized, that ‘come what may power takes precedence over right’.\textsuperscript{16} A small nation could not expect much benevolence from a mighty neighbour, whose politicians only had their own national interests at heart. Or, as a Member of Parliament phrased this, ‘when one speaks of right and justice, they point at bayonet, sabre, rifle, and cannon’.\textsuperscript{17} In the minds of many Dutch people the Boer War unmasked the raw imperialism of the British Empire. They were convinced that Great Britain had truly become a nation of jingoists, intent on expanding its colonial possessions and spheres of influence.

The Boer War evoked strong commotions in the world. In the Netherlands anti-British public feelings ran even higher than in the rest of the non-British world.\textsuperscript{18} The British Ambassador in The Hague, Sir Henry Howard, was to complain in retrospect in November 1900 that the previous year had been ‘a trying time in regard to tact and temper’. He was looking forward to some ‘rest and quiet’. A few weeks in Paris, London, and Germany away from ‘this Boer atmosphere’ would do him good.\textsuperscript{19} In the Netherlands Indies the Dutch reacted in the same way as their compatriots in the motherland. All over Java and in cities and town in the outer provinces where Dutch civilians and sol-

\textsuperscript{15} Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1904-05:207.
\textsuperscript{16} Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1914-15:1728.
\textsuperscript{17} Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1904-05:990.
\textsuperscript{18} See Bossenbroek 1996 for a detailed analysis of the the relationship of the Netherlands with South Africa and reactions to the Boer War in the Netherlands.
\textsuperscript{19} Howard to Lansdowne, 6-11-1900, PRO FO 800 136.
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diers were stationed, fancy fairs, benefit concerts, and soiètes varièes were held
to raise money. Collections were organized at races and on many other occa-
sions; even on board the ships in the roadstead of Surabaya. In many places
lists on which people who wanted to donate money could put their names
circulated.

From time to time, the enthusiasm played tricks. Should there be anybody,
though this is almost inconceivable, De Locomotief wrote, who supports the
British jingo policy, then we suggest he not express his sympathies too loudly;
especially not when there are cavalrmyen around: ‘undoubtedly they will
make it clear to him in a somewhat hard-handed way, that in this case, though
respecting everybody’s personal conviction, their opinions differ from his’.
The streets did not become the scene of brawls between British jingoists and
the Dutch Boer-lovers. It was in the sociëtî, the private club house, the centre
of European amusement, where feelings occasionally ran high. In a number
of such clubs, of which the Dutch as well as British and other Europeans were
members, the playing – or the not-playing – of the Transvaal national anthem
occasioned an upsurge of emotion.

Impressed by the reports about the fearless Boers and their initial military
successes, young and old also started to impersonate the Boers. In tableaux
vivants and at fancy-dress balls, popular forms of entertainment in those days
among the European community, the Boer soldiers and their fortunes and
misfortunes were brought to life. Some really acted it out: riding ‘girded with
a cartridge-belt, rifle slung over the shoulder, on horseback hill up and hill
down’, they ‘played Boer’, dreaming for a moment that they themselves were
the brave warriors. Others, who were inspired by reports about the way the
Boers fought, prepared for a civilian defence of Java. They asked people who
were interested in participating in a volunteer corps to register and to mention
whether they owned a mount or not. Such initiatives were inspired by the fear
that after Great Britain had been kicked out of South Africa, it might turn on
the Netherlands Indies to compensate for the territories lost and recover the
self-respect and prestige blemished by the Boer successes. It was feared that an
additional reason Great Britain might have to act in such a way was the fierce
anti-British sentiment in Holland and the Netherlands Indies. London might
want to punish the Netherlands and the Dutch community in the Netherlands
Indies for their pro-Boer sympathies. Such a doom scenario was occasioned
not only by a bad consciousness. From time to time, such an act of revenge was
indeed hinted at in the Straits Settlements.

The Boer War made it clear a government could painstakingly guard

20 De Locomotief, 25-10-1899.
21 De Locomotief, 10-2-1900.
neutrality in its official policy, but that it was not equally easy to assure that public opinion did not take sides. In The Hague one overriding concern was not to defy the British. The Netherlands could not afford to irritate London too much. People were convinced that the British as it were were waiting for any act by the Dutch that could be construed as a breach of neutrality to have an excuse to invade Java. It was argued that they would do so without a qualm, offended as they were by anti-British demonstrations and the Anglophobe articles in the Dutch press in Holland and in the Netherlands Indies. Anxiety was all the greater as these were days in which there was much talk of an impending war in Europe and Asia. Some of the Dutch in the Netherlands Indies were convinced that such a war could break out at any moment. A Russo-Japanese confrontation was likely to involve other powers as well, turning it into a *Groote Oorlog*. One Dutch author prophesied in 1900 that this Great War, an ‘enormous struggle, which will stir the whole world’, was probably only weeks and certainly not more than a few months away (X 1900:293). Another doom scenario was that Britain and France would soon be at war with one another and that for strategic reasons each of the two would attempt to occupy the Netherlands Indies; a circumstance in which people were afraid an officially declared neutrality would count for nothing.

The Boer War was a foretaste of some of the problems the Dutch were to encounter in a far greater magnitude during World War I. The British had no hesitation at all in searching ships sailing under neutral flags which they suspected to carry cargo or reinforcements destined for the enemy. Mail, including that sent to and from the foreign consuls, was also not immune; it could be intercepted, opened, held up, and censored. There was also a great to-do about the nationalization of the Dutch-owned railway company in Transvaal and the dismissal and expulsion of its Dutch personnel, who made up about half of the total number of employees. The company had incurred the wrath of the British among other reasons by having a Boer field-gun serviced and repaired in its workshops (Pakenham 1994:258). The nationalization made a deep impression. In years to come it was frequently cited to demonstrate what the fate of Dutch commerce would be should another nation drive the Netherlands out of the Netherlands Indies. Some of those who were dismissed because of the nationalization found employ with the railways in the Netherlands Indies. There appointment contributed to what was perhaps the first industrial strike by Indo-Europeans in the Netherlands Indies. The Indo-European employees were piqued by the fact that the Transvaal immigrants were given the better jobs, blocking their own prospects of promotion. Relations between the two groups were not improved by the habit of the South Africans of calling the Indo-Europeans ‘brown Kaffirs’ (Bosma 1995:93).

The Boer War also provided unequivocal evidence that Great Britain was the undisputed master of telegraph communication. Around 1900 communication
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techniques had reached the stage at which a wireless system was just developing. The submarine telegraph lines spanning the world were mostly British-owned. Great Britain could deny others access to the telegraph cables, or at the very least control the nature of the messages sent. At the height of the Boer War, London reserved the cable between Aden and Zanzibar for official communications, interfering with commercial intercourse between Portuguese East Africa and Germany among other disruptions. Were the lines still open Great Britain could, as it did during the Boer War, demand that the telegrams were not to be sent in a language unintelligible to the British or in code. Control of the cable also meant control of the news about the war. Such experiences made people in Holland and the Netherlands Indies aware of how vulnerable the lines of communication between motherland and colony were. For private citizens and government officials alike it suddenly became a matter of great urgency to look for a telegraph connection that was not in British hands. This became a subject of a plethora of letters to the editor and articles in magazines and newspapers full of concern about the situation. So serious was the matter deemed, that suggestions were made for a public collection of money to finance an independent Dutch cable line. A ‘Committee for the Promotion of Telegraphic Communication between the Netherlands Indies and the Motherland via Lines Independent of England’ was also founded. Its secretary was J.J. le Roy, a lecturer at the Koninklijke Militaire Academie (KMA, Royal Military Academy). The government, the Dutch Minister of the Colonies well to the fore, turned to the Danes, the Germans, the French, and the Americans in order to give the Netherlands its lines independent of Great Britain.

As long as such a line did not exist, other precautions had to be taken to warn the Governor General in advance of the likelihood of war with Great Britain. At the end of 1900 a code was developed to be used even before a war had been declared, should important messages be no longer forwarded by wire from Singapore to the Netherlands Indies in a conflict with Great Britain. It was decided that telegrams alerting the colonial administration to an imminent war with Great Britain should be of such a nature that even when relations had deteriorated, they would still be allowed to be forwarded via the cable. The best way to accomplish this was to have the messages look as innocent as possible. ‘Mother seriously ill, Corry’ meant that strained relations with Great Britain were feared. From ‘Mother worse’, ‘Mother precarious’, and ‘Mother hopeless’ the messages reached their final stage in ‘Mother dead’. Of course, ‘Mother recovering’ was among the possibilities. The following year codes were added for Germany (Willy), France (Marianne), the United States (Anna), Japan (Clara), and Portugal (Mina). Initially the telegrams had to be

22 De Locomotief, 25-11-1899.
addressed to ‘Paulus – Buitenzorg’ or ‘Mrs Van de Vijver – Batavia’. As the recipients of the message were real persons (‘Mr so and so not’ meant that the address could no longer be used), the addresses had to be altered a number of times; the final occasion being in August 1914.\textsuperscript{23}

The authorities were successful in finding a partner for a non-British cable connection, though there had been some beads of sweat on brows when it leaked out in Java that The Hague was conducting negotiations with Berlin. Complication and ‘counter-intrigues’ were expected from the British side. It also took some effort to explain to ‘Prussian’ officials that ‘loose-tongued’ minor colonial civil servants (a complaint voiced more often by outsiders about the colonial administration) had been responsible for the leak.\textsuperscript{24} An agreement to establish the Deutsch-Niederländische Telegraphengesellschaft was reached between the German and Dutch governments in July 1901. The company had a German and a Dutch director. The Dutch government welcomed the contract with great relief. It showed its gratitude by decorating the chairman of the board of Directors of the German counterpart, the Norddeutsche-Seekabelwerke. It took three years before the German-Dutch Telegraph Company became a fact. On 8 January 1905, the cable-vessel, the Von Podbielski, bought by the Dutch government left Nordenham to sail to the Netherlands Indies to lay the first stretch of the cable connection between Manado in North Celebes and Yap, from whence an onward connection led to Shanghai and Guam.

The theatre of war drew closer to the Netherlands Indies on 8 February 1904, when a surprise Japanese torpedo attack on the Russian Pacific fleet at Port Arthur signalled the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War. The most daunting prospect of the conflict for the Dutch was that the Netherlands could well be implicated. Russian warships on their way from Europe to North Asia almost certainly would have to traverse the East Indies Archipelago, and no steam-propelled warship, however crammed the holds and decks were with coal, could sail the entire distance between Europe and North Asia without bunkering a number of times. Great Britain controlled its own network of coaling-stations stretching into the north of East Asia and was well provided for; France, with its Indochinese colony, maybe might, except when its ships were confronted with adverse weather conditions, be self sufficient in this respect; but Russia and Germany most definitely were not.

A novel argument for the active pursuit of a policy of colonial expansion presented itself. Foreign warships did not necessarily need a coaling-station

\textsuperscript{23} Van Heutsz to Fock, 9-2-1906, Fock to Van Heutsz, 26-3-1906, NA, Kol. Geheim, Vb. 26-3-1906 V7.

\textsuperscript{24} Dutch Envoy in Berlin to De Beaufort, 19-1-1901, NA, Kol. Geheim, Vb. 22-1-1901 V1.
in the Archipelago. A sheltered spot where coal could be transshipped from colliers and repairs could be made would do. It was also not out of the question that a Russian fleet, or for that matter a German one, would demand coal stockpiled in the harbours of the Netherlands Indies in excess of the amount allowed by international law. Under threat of force such a fleet might even try to ‘lease’ a coaling-station, copying the tactics the great powers had deployed in China, or alternatively occupy an island not yet brought under de facto Dutch control, not recognizing Dutch territorial rights, and the Dutch government was well aware of this ever since Berlin and London had disputed Spanish rule over the Sulu Archipelago in the early 1880s. Many of the islands which presented suitable conditions for bunkering were not well guarded by Dutch troops or ships, if indeed they already belonged to that part of the Archipelago where the Dutch exercised de facto control. In January 1905 when the Russian Baltic fleet was expected to arrive within a couple of weeks, the Governor General ordered frequent visits to islands west of Sumatra, where if resources stretched to it a military detachment should also be stationed. He feared that the Baltic fleet might anchor there using the pretext that the islands were not yet occupied by any European Power. The order was not so easily executed. As the Commander of the Navy pointed out, the island and bays in the region were many; not to speak of the other portions of the Archipelago through which the Baltic fleet, choosing a different route, could sail.

The Russo-Japanese War brought home a number of points: how difficult it was with a small fleet to guard the whole Archipelago against transgressions of neutrality; that foreign warships and other ships directed to Asia to provide them with coal and provisions could easily remain undetected (the Dutch fleet in the Netherlands Indies even completely missed the Russian Baltic fleet on its way from Europe to the Far East even when it sailed the Straits of Malacca); and how difficult it was to draft instructions to maintain neutrality which satisfied both sides in the war and covered all foreseen and unforeseen possibilities in allowing a belligerent fleet to bunker in territorial waters. Throughout the Russo-Japanese War, Batavia and The Hague spent a large amount of time in developing guidelines on how to prevent a Russian fleet fighting a naval battle with ‘Dutch coal’. They and the general public worried about implications of providing Russian warships with coal, or limiting the amount of fuel with which they could be supplied according to international law. A Russian squadron might try to seize extra coal by force. It also could not be excluded that Japanese warships would try to attack Russian warships bunkering in the Netherlands Indies. Finding the right solution was a fiendishly difficult task and absorbed great swathes of attention during the Russo-Japanese War, leading to an almost endless stream of official correspondence, mutual irritation, and, as the stakes were high, on occasion to intense rows between Batavia and The Hague and in The Hague between the ministries most directly involved:
those of Foreign Affairs, of the Colonies, and of the Navy. The matter was the more serious because the Russo-Japanese War made The Hague for the first time the subject of intense bullying by one of the belligerents in an armed conflict. The Japanese government was intent on preventing the bunkering of the Russian warships on their voyage round the Cape of Good Hope to Asia and made no secret of this. On 5 November, the Japanese Ambassador called on the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs and submitted a strongly worded caution. It said that the Japanese government was

convinced that if a neutral Power should permit the Baltic fleet, on its expedition, to enter into her territorial waters and to take in coal freely and without restriction at a spot where there is no danger of attack from the enemy […] such territorial waters of a neutral Power would in effect, be converted into a base of hostile operations for the belligerent fleet, and her neutrality is seriously violated.25

This was followed on 21 December 1904 by a note which stated the Japanese position in no uncertain terms. It was set out unequivocally that for a Russian fleet, proceeding to the Far East, it was

essential to the forward movement of the expedition and the development of its full fighting strength, that its scattered units should reunite at some point in the vicinity of [the] actual seat of war, in order to recoal, repair, and make final preparations and arrangements before advancing to meet the naval force of Japan.

Were the commander of the Baltic fleet to choose to use the territorial waters of the Netherlands Indies for these purposes, these would become ‘veritable bases of warlike operations against Japan’. It was warned that, in that case, the Japanese government was left with ‘no other course than to preserve to themselves the right to take, within the ports or waters so used, such measures of self-protection as the situation may demand’.26 All ended well. In June 1905 the Minister of Foreign Affairs, R. Melvil van Lynden, informed Queen Wilhelmina that the previous evening at a dinner with the Japanese Ambassador, one of the guests, Prince Arisugawa, had made a ‘lengthy communication’. Its purport was that the Japanese Emperor had instructed Prince Arisugawa to convey that he and his government had ‘particularly appreciated the manner in which the Government of Your Majesty had guarded the upholding of neutrality, and were very grateful for the effective regulations and firm measures taken with regard to this by Your Majesty’s Government’.27

Luckily for the Netherlands there were special conditions in the Netherlands

26 Mitsuhashi to Melvil van Lynden, 21-12-1904, NA, Kol. Geheim, Vb. 27-12-1904 X27.
Indies which mitigated the threat of a foreign occupation or attack. For strategic or economic reasons the great powers might well cast an envious eye on the Netherlands Indies; for the same reasons they might leave it alone, aware that their rivals would never allow them to occupy the whole or part of the Archipelago and could react to any such move by employing military force.

The most important of these special features was the international nature of the Netherlands Indies. In 1872, the last barriers to an open-door policy had disappeared. Preferential import and export duties were abolished. The Netherlands Indies opened up to German, Austro-Hungarian, French, British and other foreign capital invested mostly in the export industries, banking, railways, inter-insular cargo shipping, gas and electricity, and in the plantation industry (Burger 1975, II:85). The open-door policy removed one of the excuses Foreign Powers could have used to mobilize their military might against weaker nations. Enforcing or maintaining an open door had been the cornerstone of British-China policy and within a few years was the public reason given by the Germans in their ostensible support for Moroccan independence, opposing an expansion of French influence. A liberal trade policy, a Dutch Minister of the Colonies had stressed in 1870, was the best defence against a foreign assault.\textsuperscript{28}

The diverse origins of foreign investment were reflected in the composition of the European population in the Netherlands Indies. The Dutch formed the greater part, but people gathered there from all over Europe – most numerous among them the Germans, followed by Belgians, Britons, Swiss, and the French – remained clearly distinguishable. Their share was such that in official parlance the word Dutchman was ever hardly used, preference being given to the term European, which also, formally but not in actual social daily life, included the Indo-European population. Not only did foreign nationals come along with foreign money; for a long time the Dutch at home in Holland had not been very interested in a life in the East. Many employees on the plantations, missionaries, explorers and scholars originated from other European countries.

The same could be said about the colonial army. In 1900 still almost one-fifth of all Europeans serving in the army of the Netherlands Indies, some 3,000 soldiers, were foreigners. In 1904, at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, the number of foreign soldiers had dropped to 2,400, but proportionally their share had remained the same. At that time, fearing the consequences of the war for the Netherlands Indies, measures to facilitate the recruitment of foreigners for the colonial army were even deemed necessary.\textsuperscript{29} Only in the years thereafter did the colonial army become less dependent on non-Dutch

\textsuperscript{28} De Locomotief, 7-10-1870.

\textsuperscript{29} Idenburg to J.W. Bergansius, 7-3-1904, NA, Kol. Geheim, Vb. 7-3-1904 D6.
soldiers. In 1916 their number had dropped to less than 800, or about 10 per cent of the European soldiers; a majority of them – 625 – being of German origin.\(^{30}\)

Except for the common soldiers and the non-commissioned officers who were excluded from them, almost all of the European and American foreigners in the Indies had to live within the narrow confines of small European communities; its members depending on each other not only for business contacts but also for diversion and entertainment. This was an extra reason for caution in time of war, when intense feelings of nationalism which ineluctably accompanied the confrontations between the powers in the wider world were aroused. In view of the diverse composition of the European population, as early as 1870 not only were the usual proclamations with respect to neutrality issued in the Netherlands Indies. Explicitly referring to the many foreigners living in the Netherlands Indies the colonial administration made special appeals to the newspapers to maintain a strict neutrality in their reporting.

International competition came to the rescue of the Dutch. The Netherlands Indies was too rich a prize and the investments there of each of the main contestants in the European struggle for power, especially Germany and Great Britain (the French economic and financial interests were much less), too valuable for one of them to allow the other to invade and take possession of the Netherlands Indies. It was a comforting thought, cherished also by the Dutch government, that for economic and strategic reasons none of the powerful nations would allow a rival to gain control of the Netherlands Indies. As World War I drew closer, foreign economic investments by the countries of the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy) as well as of the Triple Entente (Great Britain, France and Russia) over the years had become of such importance, that the Dutch Minister of the Colonies, Th.B. Pleyte, hoped that should a European war break out this would safeguard the colony from an occupation by one of the belligerents. The stakes had become too high, and economic investments from contesting European Powers too great to let a rival power take control of the Netherlands Indies. An unequivocal open-door policy, Pleyte, stressed in Parliament as late as 1918, was one of the prerequisites which would allow the Netherlands to remain in the possession of its colony. It would, others argued, also be a reason to have the European Powers oppose a Japanese occupation of the Netherlands Indies (Teitler 1988:293).

\(^{30}\) Zwitzer and Heshusius 1977:12-3; Koloniaal verslag 1901 and 1905: Bijlage A Tabel 3.