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Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Age of Imperialism.  
Three case studies focusing on Dutch perceptions  
of the Anglo-Dutch relationship

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by

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The last decades of the nineteenth century saw an explosion in imperial activity among the European powers. The increase took place on two levels: those countries which already had empires or colonies, like Britain and the Netherlands, either consolidated or extended their authority, while previously non-colonial powers, such as Germany, Belgium and Italy, now joined the race for the remaining colonial spoils. As a result, the existing colonial powers began to guard their overseas territories even more jealously, and this inevitably caused friction between two of the world's most established colonial powers: Britain and the Netherlands. As the eminent Dutch colonial historian, H.L. Wesseling has pointed out:

The age of imperialism was an age of new possibilities, but also, and more importantly, of new dangers.<sup>1</sup>

Traditionally the Netherlands had looked to Britain for protection against the incursions of other European powers, both at home and in the colonies. Britain, in turn, had generally preferred the Netherlands as a colonial neighbour in South-East Asia to any of the other greater European



powers. Yet this comfortable situation began to change with the increasing colonial competition of the late nineteenth century. These circumstances highlighted the paradoxical nature of the Anglo-Dutch relationship: the two nations were simultaneously allies in a European context and rivals in an imperial context. Both elements have always been evident in Anglo-Dutch relations, with one or the other characterising Anglo-Dutch discourse according to external circumstances. Late nineteenth-century European colonialism again brought the rivalry in the relationship to the fore, and suspicion and mistrust characterised the Anglo-Dutch relationship to a greater extent than at any time since the Anglo-Dutch wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The historiographical debate on what has come to be known as the Age of Imperialism is a multi-faceted one focusing on definition, periodisation and the very nature of imperialism. Wesseling has observed that

After a century of use, the meaning of the word 'imperialism' seems to have become more confused than ever.<sup>2</sup>

And, more recently, Andrew Porter has pointed out that the study of imperialism

[...] involves historians in attempting to both

define and disentangle a wide range of social, political or economic processes, in order to understand their distinct function and perhaps their importance relative to each other.<sup>3</sup>

The general debate on imperialism has broadly centred on two questions: first, the degree to which the new imperialism was the product of predominantly economic forces and, second, whether or not it was a necessary attribute of the capitalist system. In 1902 Hobson identified the driving forces behind imperialism: patriotism, philanthropy and the spirit of adventure.<sup>4</sup> The financial climate in the mother country allowed these impulses to be translated into imperialist expansion. Hobson believed that imperialism could be eliminated by social reforms within the capitalist system. For Lenin, imperialism was the highest state of capitalism. However, although he owed much to Hobson's theories, Lenin believed that only the overthrow of the capitalist system, to be replaced by socialism, would put an end to imperialism.

Since the Eurocentric economic theories of Hobson and Marxist-Leninist imperial historians, the historiographical pendulum has moved in the opposite direction, namely towards non-Eurocentric peripheral theories and those seeking to explain imperialism in terms of some sort of collaboration between coloniser and the colonised. Thus, in 1953, Gallagher and Robinson published their theories in

their seminal article 'The Imperialism of Free Trade'.<sup>5</sup> Robinson's and Gallagher's theories held sway for many years, challenging the orthodox theory of British mid-Victorian anti-imperialism, replacing this with a hypothesis of fundamental continuity in British expansion. There were, however, salutary reminders that economic factors could not be totally dispensed with. Hobsbawm, for example, commented that

[...] politics and economics cannot be separated in a capitalist society, any more than religion and society in an Islamic one. The attempt to devise a purely non-economic explanation of the "new imperialism" is as unrealistic as the attempt to devise a purely non-economic explanation of working-class politics.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1980s, according to the imperial historian D.K. Fieldhouse, imperialist historiography began to lose some of its intellectual validity, mainly because some of the claims made for it by historians had been too great.<sup>7</sup> The historiographical swing from Eurocentric to peripheral theories meant that the imperialist historian of the 1980s faced a daunting task, which Fieldhouse describes thus:

The modern imperialist historian [...] has no territorial base or, for that matter, loyalties. He places himself in the interstices of his



subject, poised above the 'era of interaction' like some satellite placed in space, looking, Janus-like, in two or more ways at the same time. It is his duty, as an in-between man, to give equal weight to what happens in a colony and in its metropolis, and to be intellectually at home in both.<sup>8</sup>

Since the late 1980s a new explanation of British imperialism has been advanced and developed by P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins: the theory of 'gentlemanly capitalism', culminating in their most recent works, published in 1993.<sup>9</sup> Broadly speaking, a 'gentleman capitalist' was essentially one whose wealth derived from an occupation or source which allowed a leisured lifestyle compatible with the gentlemanly ideal, as pursued by the traditional landed élite. In the nineteenth century in particular, industrial capitalists used their 'new' wealth to emulate the 'gentlemanly' lifestyle associated with 'old' landed wealth, for example by acquiring country estates and sending their sons to public schools. The theory is further described in one major review as follows:

By shaping economic priorities, a distinctive gentlemanly culture made its impact on the stratification of society and the running of the state. The gentlemanly order is related to the financial and service sectors of the British

economy, and closely bound up, in turn, with economic and political decision making. These cultural and social components tied in with the economic and political realms led Cain and Hopkins to develop the theory of gentlemanly capitalism.<sup>10</sup>

Historians have tried to formulate theories of general imperialism from the unique British experience, but this has inherent risks, as Wesseling points out:

After all, Britain was the imperial power *par excellence*. But for that very reason Britain was not the most typical imperial power. Rather it was a-typical. Therefore theories about British imperialism cannot by simple extrapolation be transformed into general theories of imperialism.<sup>11</sup>

While much attention has been paid to European imperialism in general, and British imperialism in particular, discussions of Dutch expansion within the context of imperialism have - until comparatively recently - been sadly lacking. Nevertheless a Dutch debate has developed in recent years. While the debates on British and European imperialism in general have focused on the identification of causes, historians involved in the Dutch debate, which has evolved since the 1980s, have been

attempting to establish whether Dutch imperialism existed at all. Two of the main protagonists are Wesseling, quoted above, and M. Kuitenbrouwer, and the theoretical *status quo* is best expressed in the words of these two leading Dutch specialists. After a careful examination of Dutch colonial and foreign policy during the period in question, Kuitenbrouwer has concluded that 'the Dutch case rather closely fits the more recent, non-Marxist theories of imperialism'.<sup>12</sup> Kuitenbrouwer agrees that there were particular factors, previously identified by Raymond F. Betts, which motivated European expansion. These factors were 'pre-emption' and 'contiguity', and in Kuitenbrouwer's view these can also be applied to Dutch expansion. He sees contiguity in Dutch expansion in Indonesia, and pre-emption in the outbreak of the Achin war, which in itself 'reflected the rise of imperialism as an international phenomenon'.<sup>13</sup>

While agreeing that there is nothing in Kuitenbrouwer's periodisations that differs greatly from other nations, Wesseling disagrees that the concepts of 'pre-emption' and 'contiguity' help to explain Dutch expansion. Wesseling argues that 'pre-emption' (*Torschlusspanik*, or claiming territories in order to keep out other powers) is not typical of the Dutch. For Kuitenbrouwer 'pre-emption' is something else, namely the occupation by the Dutch of territories within their sphere of influence over which they had not previously established

their authority. As far as contiguity (expansion into adjoining territories) is concerned, Wesseling claims that this was characteristic of the Dutch during the period of imperialism, which makes the Dutch case different from - not similar to - other cases, where contiguity was more characteristic of the preceding period. According to Wesseling:

Dutch imperialism was not a matter of action but reaction. It was - and this seems to be unique - almost exclusively a function of international politics. In short, the only reason for Dutch imperialism was the imperialism of others.<sup>14</sup>

The theoretical gap between the views of Kuitenbrouwer and Wesseling has narrowed somewhat over the years. In 1994 Kuitenbrouwer stated that

The only remaining difference of opinion between Wesseling and myself is his denial of autonomous, specifically Dutch causes of imperialism, like nationalism and economic expansion - metropolitan factors which are emphasized in my analysis for the turn of the century. In his playing down of autonomous factors, however, Wesseling is in good company. While Dutch historians increasingly accept the term imperialism for the case of the



Netherlands, most of them emphasize peripheral causes and forms.<sup>15</sup>

In the course of the Dutch debate on imperialism, Dutch overseas expansion has naturally been compared and contrasted with that of other European colonial powers, and inevitably most often with Britain. Comparing Dutch and British imperialism, Wesseling observes that the two countries shared the most similar attitudes: 'defensive rather than offensive, reluctant and not enthusiastic'.<sup>16</sup> But, at the same time, the two nations were also growing apart:

Britain had become a superpower, the workshop of the world, an expanding society, invulnerable behind its naval defences. Holland was an extraordinary small nation at the expense of a united Germany. It was also an industrial latecomer, a country characterized by the spirit of *Jan Salie*, a nation of nincompoops.<sup>17</sup>

Kuitenbrouwer also sees similarities. In both countries, the configuration of interests established by Cain and Hopkins was 'embedded in a framework of free trade, the gold standard and a balanced budget'.<sup>18</sup> Yet he does not believe that Cain's and Hopkins' concept of gentlemanly capitalism can be fully applied to the Netherlands, since the Dutch aristocratic landed interest

was far less significant for the capitalist order than in Britain.<sup>19</sup> Neither, for Kuitenbrouwer, can the causes of imperialism be prioritised in the same way:

[...] one has to conclude that British imperialism was caused in the first place by metropolitan factors like gentlemanly capitalism and only in the second place by strategic and peripheral factors. Dutch imperialism on the other hand seems to have been caused by strategic and peripheral factors in the first place and only in the second place by metropolitan economic factors.<sup>20</sup>

Yet Kuitenbrouwer is aware that future research may modify these conclusions:

[...] this configuration of causes can be changed, along the lines of Cain's and Hopkins' analysis. Even then, however, no monocausal explanation will suffice, neither of British nor of Dutch imperialism.<sup>21</sup>

This study will examine both Britain and the Netherlands, but will concentrate on the relationship between the two countries and, in particular, the perceptions of that relationship. We shall be asking what perceptions existed and whether there were discrepancies

between expectations and reality, particularly on the Dutch side. If such discrepancies existed, how did they arise and how did they influence Anglo-Dutch relations? We shall be taking three case studies of the Anglo-Dutch relationship in the colonial theatre during the age of imperialism. The first of these case studies is the Borneo dispute, in which the division of British and Dutch spheres of influence on that island was hotly contested. The second case study is the Nisero question: in 1874 the crew of the British steamer Nisero was kidnapped by the Raja of Tenom in Dutch colonial territory. In Britain and the Netherlands there was fierce debate as to who was responsible and how the crew should be rescued. The Nisero question engrossed not only the British and Dutch governments, but also public opinion in both countries. The third case study is the founding of the Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPM, Royal Packet Company) in 1888, to unify inter-island transport in the Dutch East Indies and keep it under Dutch control.

The study will also consider the significance of the case studies with regard to the imperialism debate. The Borneo dispute is clearly an exception to Wesseling's claim that *Torschlusspanik* (see above, p.5.) was not typical of Dutch imperialism; the threat to the Dutch from British expansion on North Borneo was not primarily an economic one since the Dutch had shown comparatively little interest in developing their territory on Borneo. On Borneo at least,



the Dutch made claims to the disputed territory because any physical intrusion by a foreign power on Borneo represented (for the Dutch) diminishing colonial prestige. As this study will show, this was also the reasoning behind the foundation of the KPM, the purpose of which was not primarily to protect shipping in the Dutch East Indies against the *economic* threat from foreign competition, but to safeguard Dutch *political* supremacy in those islands. This was, then clearly 'not a matter of action but reaction' (Wesseling, quoted above); not economic imperialism but a matter of pride and prestige. Wesseling's claim that contiguity (expansion into adjoining territories) was typical of Dutch imperialism at this time cannot really be addressed by this study, since the case studies are not all purely territorial disputes.

These three incidents have been chosen as the basis for this study for three main reasons. First, they are Anglo-Dutch incidents arising out of imperial rivalry: they are confrontations which might have led to more severe forms of conflict, and they constitute part of the imperial experience of two great colonial powers at the end of the nineteenth century. Second, they are incidents which, on closer examination, show Dutch expectations and perceptions regarding the relationship between Great Britain and the Netherlands to be wildly unrealistic. Third, these incidents represent 'low points' in Anglo-Dutch relations. During these incidents relations deteriorated considerably,

and an atmosphere of suspicion and resentment clouded diplomatic relations. The 'low points' in the relationship contrast markedly with the 'high points' when the alliance was at its strongest: for example, Britain oversaw the unification (1813-15) of the Netherlands and Belgium into the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. The union created a buffer state designed to prevent further French incursions within Europe, but also gave two small powers, the future Netherlands and Belgium, the status of a middle power - albeit temporarily. A further 'high point' was the conclusion of three treaties in the early 1870s whereby the Netherlands ceded the last of its Gold Coast possessions in Africa to Britain, while Britain consented to all past and future expansion of Dutch authority on Sumatra, and acquiesced in the emigration of workers from British India to Surinam.

For each case study, sources will be discussed which inform us about perceptions of the Anglo-Dutch relationship within three different contexts, namely: in diplomatic circles, in parliament, and in public opinion. The diplomatic correspondence concerning the Borneo dispute, the KPM, and the Nisero question has been published, and will be examined in detail to establish the nature of the perceptions held by those in the Dutch Foreign Office. In order to establish how the Anglo-Dutch relationship was perceived in the Dutch parliament, parliamentary debates on the case-study subjects will be examined. Finally, the

reports and discussions in Dutch newspapers and periodicals will be examined to assess how public opinion saw relations with Britain. The establishment of the KPM is somewhat different from the other case studies in that it is not a bilateral dispute, but a unilateral anti-British action on the part of the Dutch. Therefore, in order to assess whether this action was based on accurate estimation of the situation with regard to Britain, the British reaction to the establishment of the KPM will also be assessed.

The study will be arranged as follows: the following chapter sets the historical and historiographical context with an examination of Dutch foreign policy and received historical opinion on Anglo-Dutch relations over the centuries. Then will follow the central empirical studies on the Borneo, Nisero and KPM affairs, as case studies of the general themes, in chapters 3, 4 and 5. The sources outlined above will be examined in order to establish how the Anglo-Dutch relationship was seen by the Dutch at the time of the incidents, whether their perceptions were accurate in relation to the reality of the situation, to what extent these realistic or unrealistic perceptions influenced the mechanics of the relationship at that moment, and whether unrealistic suspicions and negative perceptions hindered the solution of a particular problem. The conclusion and summary (Chapter 6) will set out the answers to these questions in order to provide further insight into the Anglo-Dutch relationship during the last

decades of the nineteenth century.



## Notes to Chapter 1

1. H.L. Wesseling, 'British and Dutch Imperialism: A Comparison', *Itinerario*, 13 (1989, no.1), 61-76 (p.72).
2. Ibid., p.62.
3. Andrew Porter, *European Imperialism 1860-1914* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1994), p.1.
4. J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism - a study*, first published 1902, rev. 1905, 3rd rev. edn (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938).
5. J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 6 (1953), no.1, 1-15.
6. E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* (London: Sphere, 1989), p.69.
7. David Fieldhouse, 'Can Humpty Dumpty be put together again? Imperial History in the 1980s', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12 (1984), no.2, 9-23 (p.12).
8. Ibid., pp.18-19.
9. P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914* (Harlow: Longman, 1993) and *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction 1914-1990* (Harlow: Longman, 1993). For an earlier version of the argument, see P.J. Cain & A.G. Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 39 (1986, no.4), 501-25.
10. Gerald Krozewski, 'Rethinking British Imperialism' (review article), *Journal of European Economic History*, 23 (1994, no.3), 619-630 (p.621).
11. Wesseling, 'British and Dutch Imperialism', p.64.
12. M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst van het moderne imperialisme. Kolonieën en buitenlandse politiek, 1870-1902* (Amsterdam: Dieren, 1985), p.234.
13. Ibid.
14. Wesseling, 'British and Dutch Imperialism', p. 69.
15. Kuitenbrouwer, 'Capitalism and Imperialism', *Itinerario*, 18 (1994, no.1), 105-116 (p.109).
16. Wesseling, 'British and Dutch Imperialism', p.72.

17. Ibid.
18. Kuitenbrouwer, 'Capitalism and Imperialism', p.112.
19. Ibid., p.113.
20. Ibid., p.114.
21. Ibid., p.114-15.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DUTCH FOREIGN POLICY AND ANGLO-DUTCH RELATIONS

#### Dutch foreign policy trends

The Netherlands is generally held to have entered the international arena in the year 1568, which saw the beginning of the 80 Years' War during which the Dutch fought to oust the Spanish. Peter Baehr, in his examination of Dutch foreign policy, sees it as the beginning of a golden age for Dutch foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> J. Voorhoeve also sees 1568 as the year in which the Dutch made their entry onto the international stage.<sup>2</sup> In 1579 the Union of Utrecht created the United Provinces of the Netherlands, also known as the Dutch Republic, which lasted until 1795 when it collapsed under French invasion and a Dutch democratic revolution.

Johan de Witt was Grand Pensionary of Holland from 1653 to 1672 and the aim of his policies was to allow the Republic's trade and commerce to continue unimpeded in an atmosphere of peace and equilibrium. According to De Witt,

The interest of the state demands that there be peace and quiet everywhere and that commerce can be conducted in an unrestricted way.<sup>3</sup>

And, as Israel points out, for De Witt the key to achieving

this was to improve relations with England and France.<sup>4</sup>

According to Baehr, Dutch foreign policy has ever since been based on De Witt's maxim.<sup>5</sup> The state was seen as a function or instrument of society, which meant that foreign policy should be in accordance with the general interest of the state in the world. This policy, however, brought the Republic into conflict with England where trading and commercial interests also had to be protected. The English resorted to protectionism, characterised by the Navigation Act of 1651. There were four Anglo-Dutch wars, the last of which (1780-84) greatly accelerated the decline of the Dutch Republic which had begun in the late seventeenth century. This war had a particularly disastrous effect on trade by putting an end to profitable exports of Cape wheat to the Netherlands, and to many other forms of colonial trade. The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War also paralysed the ailing Dutch fishing industry.<sup>6</sup>

In 1795 Napoleon invaded the Dutch Republic and after what A. Vandenbosch has referred to as 'approximately a century and a half of lusty participation in world politics',<sup>7</sup> the Dutch Republic withdrew from international politics and adopted a policy which he describes as 'small power neutralism'.<sup>8</sup> The reason for this policy was, according to Vandenbosch, 'not so much their refined sensibilities as their limited national resources in Europe'.<sup>9</sup> The Napoleonic period ended in 1813 and the Northern and Southern Netherlands were united as the United



Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815 as a buffer state to curb further French territorial pretensions. The United Kingdom lasted until the southern provinces revolted in 1830.

Dutch foreign policy during the nineteenth century will be discussed in more detail below. The conclusions of the general authorities on Dutch foreign affairs with regard to Dutch foreign policy trends since the mid-sixteenth century are as follows. Vandebosch concluded that during four centuries the Dutch had completed the cycle of power relations. While fighting for independence from the Spanish, the Dutch were fully participating in power politics. Then followed a period of withdrawal and neutralism. When the nation re-emerged, united with the Southern Netherlands after liberation from the French, the two countries enjoyed middle-power status for a short period. The failure of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands deepened the Dutch aversion to power politics and the policy of neutralism was followed even more intensely. In the twentieth century, the First World War caused the first major challenge to Dutch neutralist abstentionism, but this did not lead to a change in foreign policy. During the Second World War, however, that neutrality was violated by German invasion and occupation. In the post-war period, the Dutch became increasingly involved in European integration and NATO.<sup>10</sup>

Baehr recognises three trends in Dutch foreign policy over the centuries. The first period he refers to as the

Golden Age, which lasted from the beginning of the Eighty Years' War until 1713 (the year in which the War of the Spanish Succession ended). The second period lasted from 1713 until the end of the Second World War and is characterised by orientation towards neutralism. The third period, beginning after the Second World War, has been characterised by close western co-operation.

J. Voorhoeve distinguishes three foreign policy traditions: the maritime-commercial, the neutralist-abstentionist and the internationalist-idealist traditions.<sup>11</sup> According to Voorhoeve, the maritime-commercial tradition dates back to the fourteenth century when Dutch maritime domination was beginning. This tradition, based on Dutch naval and commercial supremacy, lasted until 1830. This was the beginning of the neutralist-abstentionist phase, within which Voorhoeve distinguishes five sub-phases. The third tradition, internationalist-idealism, began after the Second World War. This foreign policy tradition was internationalist in the sense that it began to focus on international integration, and idealist in the sense that the Dutch perceived a new world (moral) role for the Netherlands as a model nation in terms of international relations. The Dutch foreign policy traditions identified by these authors are thus broadly similar, although their chronology and labelling may not always correspond.

## **Dutch foreign policy during the nineteenth century**

The revolt of the southern provinces and subsequent dissolution in 1839 of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands heralded a new era in Dutch foreign policy. Having been essentially 'demoted' to the rank of small power once again, the Netherlands was forced to redefine its role in Europe, and the solution to this was to abstain from power politics. Strict non-alignment was central to this policy, and policy-makers concentrated instead on colonial affairs, domestic reform, and international trade and finance. Generally speaking, this policy was successful, despite occasional forays into international politics as in, for example, the Luxembourg Question (1867), which profoundly affected the position of the Netherlands in Europe.<sup>12</sup> It had now become apparent that France was no longer a potential threat to the security of the country; the threat came instead from Germany - now unified and in the throes of its own industrial revolution.

For the remainder of the nineteenth century, Dutch foreign policy reflected the Netherlands' status as a European small power with a vast colonial empire. As competition for the remaining potential colonies in Africa and Asia intensified, the Dutch were forced to take stock of their colonial status. Colonial policy came to the fore as Dutch authority in the Netherlands' overseas territories



was either consolidated or extended. The Dutch colonies had to be protected from the other great powers. While it could use force to 'pacify' Dutch territories in the Indies (for example in the Achin war, 1873-1904), the Netherlands could not afford such belligerence in Europe. The Danish war in 1864 led many to fear for the security of the small powers in Europe, and the Netherlands remained strictly neutral in an effort to avoid antagonising the great powers, in particular Germany. The realisation grew that, in the foreign policy of a small power such as the Netherlands, there was no longer a place for power-politics. This neutralist-pacifist tendency, which had developed since the late 1830s, manifested itself even more strongly at the very end of the nineteenth century, with the international Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907 held at The Hague. These were followed by the establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague, a direct result of the Peace Conferences. Many became convinced that the Dutch had a particular calling to become peacemakers and international arbiters. In the words of E.H. Kossmann:

A small power could win universal respect by strengthening its defences, by supporting the development of international law, and by being ready to act as a mediator in the interests of peace.<sup>13</sup>

In this way the Netherlands had found an alternative

means of preserving its international position, without having to rely on 'allies' who might later prove to be untrustworthy or fickle. The Dutch had always felt betrayed by the British government when it failed to act decisively to preserve the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in the 1830s.

### **Anglo-Dutch relations**

Having outlined the general trends in Dutch foreign policy from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, and in more detail in the nineteenth century, we shall now consider the Anglo-Dutch relationship, which has always been a consistent and important element in the foreign policies of both countries. As Neville Chamberlain reminded us,

The development in aeronautics has further impaired our insular security and given fresh force to the secular principle of British policy that the independence of the Low Countries is a British interest, that their frontiers are in fact our frontiers, their independence the condition of our independence, their safety inseparable from our own. It was to secure the independence of the Low Countries that we fought Spain in the sixteenth century, and that we

fought Germany in the twentieth.<sup>14</sup>

A close - if not always amicable - relationship between Britain and the Netherlands has always been inevitable, given their proximity and the strategic position of the Netherlands as a possible springboard for an invasion of Britain. As Charles Wilson put it:

The nightmare of our rulers for centuries has been the possession of the Dutch and Belgian coasts by an enemy. In 1940, in a matter of days, nightmare became grim reality and to the hazards of war at sea was added the bombardment of the cities of Britain from the airfields of the Low Countries.<sup>15</sup>

As Chamberlain pointed out, Britain first helped the Dutch Republic fight for its independence from Spain in the sixteenth century. The two countries were allied against the oppressor but despite the united struggle Anglo-Dutch relations were undermined by two factors: Dutch resentment of Elizabeth I's reluctance to become directly involved, and finance (the Dutch were slow in repaying a large loan from Elizabeth). Furthermore, the Dutch were unwilling to take on the financial responsibility of the Southern Netherlands which was equally indebted but now under Spanish rule.

After a long period of alliance against the Spanish



there followed, after the Treaty of Münster (which ended the Eighty Years' War in 1648), an era characterised by Anglo-Dutch commercial rivalry and wars. The English became jealous of the Republic's worldwide naval and commercial supremacy and under the influence of writings by Thomas Mun and others, who propounded the balance-of-trade theory, became convinced that the English economic system was subservient to that of the Dutch. The First Anglo-Dutch War broke out in 1652 (four years after the Treaty of Münster) and lasted until 1654. The war followed a period of tension after the 1651 Navigation Act which sought to exclude the Dutch from English sea trade by, for example, prohibiting Dutch shippers from acting as middlemen in English trade. Further tension had been caused by English attempts to unite the Dutch against the House of Orange and the Stuarts. Earlier generations of historians have, broadly speaking, attributed this war either to economic causes (Charles Wilson)<sup>16</sup> or to political ones (Pieter Geyl).<sup>17</sup> The Second Anglo-Dutch War was fought between 1665 and 1667, when it was ended by the Treaty of Breda. It was different from the first war, as Simon Groenveld points out:

While it was true that the Dutch fleet, though greatly strengthened, was not impregnable, the Dutch maritime potential worldwide still proved stronger than the English. At the Treaty of Breda in 1667, the English were even forced to make a number of economic concessions.<sup>18</sup>

For Wilson the year in which this Second Anglo-Dutch War ended was the beginning of a new phase in Anglo-Dutch relations. Yet, on the whole, there is a strong case for believing that 1667 marks a real turning-point in Anglo-Dutch relations. At this time the English began to realise that the second war had done more harm than good. Nevertheless a Third Anglo-Dutch War was fought between 1672 and 1674. Charles II, having joined with Sweden and the Northern Netherlands against France in the Triple Alliance of January 1688, then proceeded to sign a treaty with France in 1670: the Treaty of Dover. The provisions of this secret treaty granted Charles a subsidy, and obliged him to declare himself a Catholic and restore the Catholic Church in England. The treaty also obliged him to declare war upon the Northern Netherlands, which he duly did in 1672. A further fundamental change occurred at this time, according to Wilson, namely that by the end of the third Anglo-Dutch war, English hostilities towards the Dutch diminished while those towards France grew.<sup>19</sup>

The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War followed almost a century later and lasted from 1780 to 1784. It was fought within the context of the American War of Independence. Britain was angry at clandestine trading agreements between the Dutch and the American rebels, and at a proposed alliance between the two parties. According to K.H.D. Haley,

The moral that the British drew from the war of

1780-84 was that they must ally with a party in the Dutch Republic to restore the alliance.<sup>20</sup>

Today, several decades after Wilson, historians of the Anglo-Dutch wars are even more reluctant to attribute the wars to a single cause, whether it be economic or political. In the words of Groenveld:

This brief summary [of historiographical interpretations] makes it clear enough that labelling the Anglo-Dutch wars as trade wars is at the very least open to discussion. The same applies if the wars are described as purely political conflicts. Can these wars in fact be explained on the basis of a single cause? <sup>21</sup>

Groenveld concludes that

This analysis of the causes leading up to the First Anglo-Dutch War shows with sharp clarity that this conflict cannot simply be labelled a trade war, nor yet a political conflict. [...] The First Anglo-Dutch War was a multi-faceted conflict, which does not lend itself to a monolithic explanation. In fact this applies equally to the two subsequent wars as well; further research will be needed, however, in order to ascertain whether it is correct to



describe the second war primarily as a trade war and the third as a mainly political conflict.<sup>22</sup>

Anglo-Dutch relations had been damaged by the last Anglo-Dutch war, but the situation had improved again sufficiently by 1788 for both governments to enter into a triple alliance with Prussia. When French troops invaded the Dutch Republic in 1795, British troops arrived to defend William V and the stadholder's system of government. The Dutch stadholder William V fled to England with his family and subsequently handed over Dutch colonies to the British for 'safe-keeping'. This is indicative of the closeness of the dynastic relationship at that time, and is in sharp contrast to the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the Dutch government did everything in its power to protect its colonial possessions from Britain and the other European colonial powers. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain was seen as a threat both in a European context and a colonial one. Queen Wilhelmina herself stated that

The Netherlands must protect itself against England, France and Germany; in defence of our colonies we must reckon with England, the United States of North America, and perhaps later with Germany.<sup>23</sup>

However, in 1795, the intense colonial jealousies of the



age of imperialism did not exist, and Britain could be trusted to help prevent the French from occupying her strategic colonies. Further proof of the closeness between the Netherlands and Britain at this time is the fact that Britain oversaw the union of the Northern and Southern Netherlands in 1815. Anglo-Dutch relations rapidly soured when Britain failed to prevent the dissolution of that union. Van Sas's analysis of the Anglo-Dutch 'special relationship' in the early decades of the nineteenth century is divided into five chronological stages, each corresponding to a different phase in the relationship. The periods are as follows:

1813 to 1815 - the 'patron-client' stage

1815 to 1818 - the 'adjusting to peace' stage

1818 to 1823 - the 'emancipation of the Netherlands'

1824 to 1830 - 'great power-in-spe'

1830 to 1831 - 'England's European responsibility'.<sup>24</sup>

The remainder of the nineteenth century is marked by a succession of 'ups and downs' in Anglo-Dutch relations. In 1819 (still during the period of the so-called special relationship), Sir Stamford Raffles, the British East Indian Administrator, bought Singapore from the Sultan of Johore, who was not (according to the Dutch) in a position to sell it, having recognised the overlordship of Batavia over all the islands of the Riau archipelago. This crushed Dutch hopes of making Batavia once again the centre of a

trading empire as had appeared possible when Java came back into Dutch hands in 1816. A new Treaty of London (17 March 1824) was concluded in order to establish the British and Dutch spheres of influence. Under the terms of the treaty Britain ceded Bangkulu (Benkoelen) and claims on Billiton in return for Malacca and the recognition by the Dutch of Singapore as a British possession. In signing the treaty the Netherlands was, according to C. Fasseur, 'accepting the inevitable'.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Britain undertook not to set up any factories/trading posts to the south of Singapore, while the Netherlands undertook to respect the independence of Achin, at the northern tip of Sumatra. The Dutch now felt less impelled to 'flag-flying' in the so-called Outer Possessions ('Buitengewesten')<sup>26</sup> and must therefore have thought that the new Treaty of London had solved territorial problems. This perception was mistaken and the terms of the treaty were to be heavily debated between the Netherlands and Britain in later years, when it appeared that the two parties interpreted certain stipulations differently. One important example of this was the Borneo dispute. The treaty was therefore not as definitive as it had appeared in 1824.

In the 1840s further colonial difficulties arose when Sir James Brooke was installed as raja of Sarawak, a title which he accepted, along with control of a large area of Sarawak (on Borneo) in return for quelling the rebellion of the Dayak and Malays against the Sultan's governor. The Dutch feared further British expansion. These fears

appeared justified when, in 1846, the British government accepted the Sultan of Brunei's offer to cede Labuan, and appointed Brooke its governor. The Dutch protested that the cession violated the terms of the 1824 Treaty. Their protests achieved nothing, but encouraged the Dutch to consolidate their interests on southern Borneo. The Dutch protested again later in the century - this time with greater success - when concessions on North Borneo were granted to the so-called British North Borneo Company. As we shall see below, although they were (ultimately) not completely successful in excluding the British influence on North Borneo, those in the Dutch Foreign Office and government succeeded (more through persistence and determination than anything else) in ruffling the feathers of the British government and Foreign Office, whose members were at least forced to listen to the Dutch government.

The 1840s and 1850s were therefore bad decades for Anglo-Dutch relations, from both a colonial and a domestic point of view. On the European front, the Dutch were bitter towards the British for the dissolution of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Dutch and Belgians remained on a war footing until 1839 when, as Kossmann puts it:

[...] the Belgian Government finally accepted William I's decision of March 1838 to abandon his *status quo* policies. For this decision meant that the King was ready to agree to Belgium's independent existence [...] <sup>27</sup>



On the colonial front, too, the Dutch were, as we have seen, dissatisfied with British activity, particularly that of James Brooke on Borneo and Labuan. Later in the century, at the beginning of the 1870s, better relations were signalled by three Anglo-Dutch treaties (see Introduction, page 11), but this period of comparative peace was to be interrupted by the Borneo dispute and the Nisero question. The true low-points in the Anglo-Dutch relationship occurred, then, when there were disputes on two fronts, namely the European and the colonial.

The twentieth century began with strong anti-British feeling on the part of the Dutch, intensified by the Boer War (1899-1902). For the Dutch, the British attack on the Boers might just as well have been an attack on the Netherlands itself, so strong were the ties of kinship they felt with the Boers. In Kossmann's words:

With the decision of the Boers, regarded as members of the Dutch race, not to submit to Britain, the Dutch began to develop a nationalistic fervour powerless in fact but potentially dynamic.<sup>28</sup>

When the Boer War ended, Dutch anti-British sentiments did not subside. Although the formation of the Union of South Africa did improve matters to a certain extent, feelings were running so high that the Netherlands would not join the Allies - among them Britain - when the First World War



broke out.<sup>29</sup> Relations - and commercial relations in particular - improved again in the *interbellum* and a number of Anglo-Dutch companies were formed, among them Unilever in 1929.

The Second World War constituted a high-point in Anglo-Dutch relations, when Queen Wilhelmina, the rest of the royal family and the government were exiled in London. Pro-British feeling in the Netherlands greatly increased when the country was liberated by the Allies.

Thus it can be seen that Anglo-Dutch relations over the centuries have followed a roller-coaster course of high and low points. Previous generations of historians such as Pieter Geyl, Gustaaf Renier, Alice Carter, and Charles Wilson have traditionally viewed the Anglo-Dutch relationship against a backdrop of alliance, mutual respect and common interests interspersed with periods of rivalry. More recent studies of the relationship have, however, emphasised the element of dependence inherent in the relationship. Van Sas's study has shown how the Northern and Southern Netherlands were united and thereby promoted to the rank of middle power, under the aegis of Britain. Another recent study of Anglo-Dutch relations, a collection of essays edited by G.J.A. Raven and N.A.M. Rodger, also draws our attention to the underlying dependence which bound the Netherlands to Britain.<sup>30</sup> In one of the essays, J.A. de Moor describes the colonial relationship between

Britain and the Netherlands at the end of the nineteenth century as 'very unpleasant', the reason being that from mid-century the Netherlands was '[...] chained to John Bull for military and political support, and simultaneously afraid that England might seize large portions of Borneo and Sumatra'.<sup>31</sup> De Moor explains the nature of the relationship as follows:

From the beginning the defence of the Archipelago was regarded as an impossibility and the Dutch tacitly relied upon British support. Therefore, to a large extent, they were at the mercy of Britain - a circumstance which gave this relationship its ambiguous and unpleasant character.<sup>32</sup>

De Moor does not believe that the Anglo-Dutch relationship during the period in question could be described as a partnership or alliance; it was a relationship based on dependency. He concludes:

To describe this relationship as a form of partnership seems incorrect. From their former position of Lords of the Eastern Seas the Dutch were reduced to the status of a dependent 'ally of a kind'. The tacit support of Britain was made the cornerstone of Dutch colonial policy. When the age of imperialism with its manifold

tensions began, the Dutch faced the future of the Netherlands Indies with confidence. With the help of Britain, which was so overtly imperialistic in other parts of the globe, the Netherlands Indies might be safely steered through the vicissitudes of the modern world.<sup>33</sup>

Rodger, too, appears to deny that the countries were allied by common interests. In his discussion of the Anglo-Dutch naval alliance which functioned from the late 1680s, he states that:

It [the alliance] never reconciled the divergent interests of the two countries, and in the end it did not survive the great discrepancy which developed in their power and their policies [...].<sup>34</sup>

This is in considerable contradiction to the findings of an earlier generation of historians, such as Blok, who concluded that,

The reigning houses have, like the nations themselves, maintained a friendship devoid of political consequences and strong enough to outlive temporary storms.<sup>35</sup>

Since the Second World War it has certainly been true



that the two nations have 'maintained a friendship'. Yet the circumstances of that friendship are very different in the late twentieth century from those in previous centuries. The second half of the twentieth century has been characterised by European integration and the Netherlands, still a small power, is now protected by European alliances and no longer obliged, as it has been in previous centuries, to seek out an ally from among the great powers struggling for mastery.

### **The Anglo-Dutch diplomatic situation 1870-1914**

The 1870s were important for the Dutch in South-East Asia. The Culture System<sup>36</sup> in Java had come under heavy criticism in the late 1860s and the Dutch government's response to this was a so-called Liberal Policy under which compulsory sugar cultivation was abolished and the entry of new private capital allowed. While the grip of the Dutch state on Java's economy was being loosened, the opposite was happening in Achin (Atjeh; on the northern tip of Sumatra). The Achin war began in 1873. Piracy was rife in the seas around Achin and the Dutch had failed to persuade the Sultan of Achin to solve the problem. The declaration of war on Achin by the Dutch was in effect a violation of the 1824 Treaty of London which had stipulated that no action should be taken in this area. The Achin war, which lasted until 1908, cost many lives and was a considerable drain on



the Dutch economy. The British, meanwhile, were fighting the Boer War. The Dutch condemned the British for their involvement with the Boers, while the British condemned the Dutch for their activities in Achin. Both apparently overlooked their own activities. Nevertheless, the three Anglo-Dutch treaties mentioned above were concluded in the early 1870s against this background of colonial war. Economically, too, circumstances were favourable to both countries in the 1870s. The removal of trade barriers, which had begun in 1860 with the Anglo-French Cobden Treaty, continued into the 1870s with the adoption of the gold standard. The Netherlands adopted the gold standard in 1875. The benefits of free-trade were, however, not to be enjoyed for long. As De Vries puts it:

This optimum situation, in which goods and money circulated freely within and across national frontiers, lasted only from 1860 to 1880. Then, the economic idyll was shattered by *protectionism* and *imperialism*, the former aimed at reserving the home market, the latter at subjugating overseas possessions to the economic interest of the mother country.<sup>37</sup>

This was very unfortunate for the Netherlands, a country which industrialised late in comparison to other European powers:

There is a curious irony in the fact that in the period 1860-1880 the country was insufficiently equipped in industrial terms to obtain full benefit from the optimum world situation, and that after 1880, when its industrial importance was on the increase, it ran into barriers of protectionism and imperialism.<sup>38</sup>

There is, then, a possible general parallel to be drawn between the economic cycle and the trend in the Anglo-Dutch relationship. When the three treaties were concluded in the 1870s, the world economic situation was generally good. As the economic situation worsened from the end of the 1870s onwards, so Anglo-Dutch relations worsened and encountered low-points such as the Nisero question and the Borneo dispute which were both a consequence of the protectionism and imperialism described by De Vries.

Towards the end of the century the position of the Netherlands in the world had, according to some, not improved. In the words of Kossmann:

The international position of the Netherlands could hardly be said to be improving at all. For the defence of its colonial empire the Netherlands depended entirely on British support.<sup>39</sup>

The status of the Netherlands as a small power

restricted its ability to act in international situations, for example in the Boxer crisis of 1900 when, as Kossmann pointed out, the desire for neutrality precluded any Dutch action, despite alignment with the imperialist policy of the great powers.<sup>40</sup>

In the late 1880s, apart from the Borneo dispute, the Netherlands was also involved in colonial issues with other nations, for example, with France over Suriname, and with America over tobacco from Sumatra. There were difficulties with Turkey and China over the long-standing issue of the status of their subjects in the Netherlands Indies. There were also several multilateral diplomatic issues to be dealt with at this time. There were problems in Japan with the multilateral trade treaty and it became apparent, when the treaty powers met there to negotiate, that Japan no longer wished to implement the concession which would have enabled it to revert to a later introduction of the trade convention, and continued to still claim the right to raise tariffs without having fully opened the country to foreign traders.<sup>41</sup> This issue was important to the Netherlands, with colonies in the east.

In November 1889 a conference was held in Brussels to discuss the problem of the trade in weapons and slaves. Discussions at this conference also centred upon the question of import duties on strong liquor in Africa. Eventually a sliding scale was agreed upon, which could be periodically reviewed. This had strong implications for the Dutch, who protested heavily: the Act of Berlin (1885) had



forbidden import duties and, moreover, 75% of the Congo trade was carried out by the Dutch. The General Act, which was the result of the conference, was signed by sixteen of the seventeen participants - but the Netherlands refused to sign.

The Sugar Convention was held in London in August 1888. The aim of the discussions was to abolish export and production tariffs (or their equivalents) on sugar. Matters were complicated by the Belgian government which would not make sufficient concessions, and by the British government which wanted to exclude from the discussions the sugar produced in her own colonies. The Dutch government wished to abolish surtaxes but this was rejected by the British government, which instead proposed equal treatment of sugar beet and cane. It thus appeared that both could be taxed more highly than sugar from the British colonies. The British proposal was, then, based on self-interest. But this is not surprising since, for the European powers, free-trade interests and colonial interests continually clashed during this imperialistic age, and colonial interests often prevailed. Earlier that same year, the Dutch government had voted to establish a steam-packet monopoly in Indonesia, the Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (see Chapter 5 of this study), and it could not therefore claim that British self-interest was unique.

During the 1880s the Netherlands also participated in a number of conferences, namely the Anti-Slavery Conference, the Maritime Law Conference in Brussels, the



Budapest Telegraph Conference (1896) and the first Peace Conference (1899). Thus, although the Netherlands was a small power, Dutch diplomats worked hard to make their voice heard at these international gatherings.

During the first years of the twentieth century, the long-standing Venezuelan question<sup>42</sup> became even more urgent and a provisional solution was finally reached in 1903. From the early 1890s until the outbreak of the First World War, the Netherlands continued to be active in international politics. A second Peace Conference was held in 1907 and in 1908-9 a Convention on Maritime Law was held in London. The aim of this convention was for the North Sea powers to obtain guarantees for their territories adjoining the North Sea. The participants at this convention were Germany, England, the Netherlands, France, Sweden and Denmark. During this period important negotiations also took place with Britain and France on the subject of arbitration treaties. Britain was to arbitrate in the case of the Nederlands Zuid Afrikaans Spoorwegmaatschappij (NZASM), and France in establishing a telegraphic connection between the Netherlands and the Netherlands-Indies. As far as trade was concerned, the Netherlands was still pushing for most-favoured-nation status, in particular with regard to America and France. Clearly it was a difficult period for a small power which was also a free-trade nation.

These overviews of the Dutch diplomatic situation in the world would not be complete without mention of the

*dramatis personae*. A key figure in Anglo-Dutch relations was C.M.E.G. Count van Bylandt, who was appointed envoy to the Dutch Embassy in London in 1871 and remained in that post until 1893. The British Foreign Office and Van Bylandt thus had the opportunity to become well acquainted with each other, although the relationship was at times fraught, and Van Bylandt's actions and motives were sometimes open to question, as one or two incidents in the case studies below will show. Vice-Admiral E.A.J. Harris was envoy to the Netherlands when Van Bylandt was appointed. During Van Bylandt's twenty-two year posting in London, which ended with his death in 1893, he served under seven Dutch cabinets and eight different Foreign Ministers (see Appendix 1). The longest-serving British envoy to the Netherlands was Sir Henry Howard, who held office from October 1896 until 1908. The question arises why Van Bylandt held office for so long. One possible answer is that, particularly after he had served as envoy for some years, successive governments valued his experience and knowledge, and were therefore reluctant to replace him (despite the fact that he occasionally blundered). This may have been reinforced by the feeling that in dealing with the British government it was best to remain consistent, which suggests that the Dutch viewed the British as fickle, and possibly untrustworthy. Who better, then, to keep the Dutch government informed than a long-serving envoy such as Van Bylandt, whose experience and British background (his mother was British and he had also served in the British

army) would have served him well in diplomatic dealings, giving him greater insight into the British mentality and enabling him to interpret - and hopefully predict - British actions and responses. These factors, rather than Van Bylandt's diplomatic skills (which at times left something to be desired) account for his long service. He was less than tactful and appears to have enjoyed deferring the blame (e.g. in the Nisero question), and examples of diplomatic one-upmanship were reported to his superiors with great relish. Van Bylandt was succeeded by 1893 by Mr. W. Baron van Goltstein van Oldenaller who remained in post until 1899. Van Goltstein dealt with the British envoys Sir Horace Rumbold (until 1896) and then Sir Henry Howard. Van Goltstein was succeeded in 1899 by K.W.P.(M).F.(X) Baron Gericke van Herwijnen, whose father had served as Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1871 and 1874 in the Thorbecke, De Vries/Geertsema, and Heemskerk cabinets. Van Herwijnen remained in post until 1913. Thus it can be seen that Van Bylandt was an exception when it came to length of service; he was the only constant factor amid all the changes.

The man with whom Van Bylandt had most dealings at the British Foreign Office was Sir Julian Pauncefote. Pauncefote joined the Foreign Office as Legal Assistant Under-Secretary, a post created in 1876 specifically to deal with matters of international law. Pauncefote also had to deal with political issues. He was appointed Permanent Under-Secretary of State in 1882. At the Foreign Office the



countries of the world were grouped into eight divisions, and each division was administered by one Senior Clerk. The Netherlands was in the fifth division with Spain, Portugal, and the South American States, and was clearly not considered as a 'Central Power' to be included in the first division. Pauncefote was appointed for his legal qualifications and had no experience as a Foreign Office Clerk, as was usually the case. R.B. Mowat points out that Pauncefote entered the Foreign Office with 'a fresh mind, with methodical habits, and with a great power of work.'<sup>43</sup> Also, Pauncefote was not an aristocrat; his appointment was a meritocratic one, and his attitude to work reflected this. In his dealings with Van Bylandt he was straightforward and business-like. It was clear that he did not suffer fools gladly, and sometimes appears to have included Van Bylandt in this category when the latter was too persistent (especially in the Borneo dispute). Pauncefote's apparent arrogance and brusqueness may simply mask a desire to be efficient and prove himself in a traditionally aristocratic institution, or could be due to the sheer volume and laborious working methods at the Foreign Office (the typewriter was not introduced until 1886 when Salisbury's second cabinet took office) which would have allowed him little opportunity for time-consuming pleasantries at a time when the Foreign Office was dealing with so many major international issues resulting from the imperial 'scramble' during the late nineteenth century. Also, Pauncefote's manner was almost



certainly due, in part, to the fact that he had little time for the smaller European powers, particularly when their envoys were as persistent as Van Bylandt. As Kennedy points out, the Foreign Secretaries themselves were always aristocrats (until Grey in 1905) with a classical education:

[...] all exhibited an essential pragmatism, a habit of understatement, and a feigned nonchalance which made their correspondence a delight to read. [...]. A cool, detached view of politics, a global perspective, a distaste for mere trade, for the *nouveaux riches* and for foreign governments which did not follow the gentlemanly code, all this occasionally gives the reader of diplomatic dispatches a sense that their authors were *in* but not of this world. <sup>44</sup>

When we come to consider the case studies in detail, it can be seen that it is precisely this which characterised English perceptions of the matters in question, and which the Dutch diplomats and politicians found so frustrating and, at times, difficult to comprehend.

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, then, the Anglo-Dutch relationship was severely tested as imperialism prevailed in Europe. The debate as to the nature and causes of imperialism is a long-standing one

which centres on such questions as whether it was driven by the export of surplus capital, or whether it was truly Eurocentric (see Chapter 1, pp.2-7). The imperial struggle forms the context of this study. The Borneo dispute was typical of the age; a territorial squabble inflamed by both countries' desire to keep out other European powers with imperial ambitions. The Nisero question added to Dutch troubles at a time when it was trying to consolidate its authority in Achin, and the KPM was created to prevent other foreign companies gaining a foothold in Indonesian inter-island shipping, and thus undermining Dutch authority there.

As we have seen, one of the main issues in the debate on Dutch imperialism/colonialism has been whether the Dutch pattern of overseas expansion corresponds with that of other European powers. In addition, attempts have been made to establish whether Dutch expansion could be truly defined as 'imperialism' in the sense in which this concept is understood with reference to the expansion of other European countries. As H.L. Wesseling, one of the prominent Dutch historians at the centre of this debate, pointed out in 1988,

The absence of the Dutch in the international debate on imperialism is striking [...]. Of course there are scores of studies on Dutch expansion and Dutch colonial policy but none of

the authors discusses this subject within the conceptual framework of imperialism.<sup>45</sup>

Since then, however, considerable contributions have been made to the historiography of Dutch imperialism/colonialism (see Bibliography).

The surveys of Dutch foreign policy and the Anglo-Dutch relationship have described the background of tension and friendship which characterised the two countries' dealings with each other. Against this background of tension and friendship, rivalry and alliance, the three case studies which follow will illuminate still further the following problems: the relationship between the British and the Dutch; the Dutch perception of that relationship; the discrepancy between the former and the latter, and the consequences of that discrepancy.



Notes to Chapter 2.

1. Peter R. Baehr, 'The Foreign Policy of the Netherlands; formulation and execution', in J.H. Leurdijk, ed., *The Foreign Policy of the Netherlands* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Sijthoff & Noordhoff, 1978), p.4.
2. J.J.C. Voorhoeve, *Peace, Profits and Principles. A Study of Dutch Foreign Policy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), p.23. For a further study of Dutch foreign policy see: C.B. Wels, *Aloofness and Neutrality. Studies on Dutch Foreign Relations and Policy-making Institutions* (Utrecht: HES Publishers, 1982).
3. Quoted in Leurdijk, *Foreign Policy*, p.4.
4. Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic and the Hispanic World 1606-1661* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp.407-8.
5. Baehr, 'Foreign Policy', p.5.
6. C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600-1800* (London: Pelican, 1988), pp.282, 310-11. See also: J.L. Price, *Culture and Society in the Dutch Republic during the Seventeenth Century* (London: Batsford, 1974), Ch.8.
7. A. Vandenbosch, *Dutch Foreign Policy since 1813. A Study in Small Power Politics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), p.305.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid. pp.305-6.
11. Voorhoeve, *Peace, Profits & Principles*.
12. King William (also Grand Duke of Luxembourg) acquired part of Belgian Limburg to compensate for Belgium's acquisition of Walloon Luxembourg. William ruled over Limburg as King of the Netherlands and it became Dutch territory. Thus arose the problem of Limburg's dual allegiance to both the Netherlands and the Germanic Federation, of which it was a part.
13. E.H. Kossmann, *The Low Countries, 1780-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p.422.
14. Quoted in J.C. Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy 1782-1865* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp.9-10.



15. Charles Wilson, *Holland and Britain* (London: Collins, 1946), p.127.
16. See Bibliography.
17. Pieter Geyl, *Oranje en Stuart 1641-1672* (Zeist/Arnhem/Antwerp: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1963), pp.13-80.
18. S. Groenveld, 'The Seventeenth-Century Anglo-Dutch Wars: Economic or Political Issues?', *The Low Countries. Arts and Society in the Low Countries. A Yearbook*. (Rekkem, Flanders: Stichting Ons Erfdeel) 1995-96, 172-90 (p.174).
19. Charles Wilson, *Profit and Power. A Study of England and the Dutch Wars* (London: Longman, 1957), p.156.
20. K.H.D. Haley, *The British and the Dutch. Political and Cultural Relations through the Ages* (London: George Philip, 1988), p.217.
21. Groenveld, 'The Seventeenth-Century Anglo-Dutch Wars', 172-90.
22. Ibid., p. 187.
23. C. Smit ed., *Bescheiden betreffende de buitenlandse politiek van Nederland 1899-1919* ('s-Gravenhage: Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatieën, 1957-68), Derde Periode, Tweede deel: 1903-7: no.412, pp.465-7, memorandum by Queen Wilhelmina dated 29 April 1905 and entitled 'Voor- en Nadelen van een bondgenootschap': 'Nederland heeft zich te wapenen tegen Engeland, Frankrijk en Duitschland; voor de verdediging onzer kolonieën hebben wij rekening te houden met Engeland, de Vereenigde Staten van Noord-Amerika en Japan, en misschien later met Duitschland.'
24. N.C.F. van Sas, *Onze natuurlijkste bondgenoot - Nederland, Engeland en Europa 1813-1831* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff/ Bouma's Boekhuis bv., 1985).
25. C. Fasseur, 'Nederland en Nederlands-Indië 1795-1914' in *Algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (Bussum: Unieboek, 1983), 11, 348-371 (p.353): 'Bij een nieuw traktaat van Londen [...] legde Nederland zich bij het onvermijdelijke neer.'
26. Ibid., p.353.
27. Kossmann, *Low Countries*, pp.174-75.

28. Ibid., p.425.
29. Haley, *The British and the Dutch*, pp.229-30.
30. G.J.A. Raven & N.A.M. Rodger, eds, *Navies and Armies. The Anglo-Dutch Relationship in War and Peace, 1688-1988* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990).
31. J.A. de Moor, 'A Very Unpleasant Relationship. Trade and Strategy in the Eastern Seas: Anglo-Dutch relations in the nineteenth century from a colonial perspective', in Raven & Rodger, eds, *Navies and Armies*, p.65.
32. Ibid., p.67.
33. Ibid.
34. N.A.M. Rodger, 'The British View of the functioning of the Anglo-Dutch Alliance 1688-1795', in Raven & Rodger, eds, *Navies and Armies*, p.27.
35. P.J. Blok, 'England and Holland at the Beginning of the Nineteenth century', *English Historical Review*, 29 (1914), 327-332 (p.332).
36. The Culture System (*Cultuurstelsel*) was introduced to Java by the Governor-General Johannes van den Bosch. Under the system the Javanese paid very little in direct taxes, but were required to put at the government's disposal one fifth of their soil and labour hours for the cultivation of indigo, coffee and sugar.
37. Johan de Vries, *The Netherlands Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1978), p.38.
38. Ibid.
39. Kossmann, *Low Countries*, p.423.
40. Ibid., p.424.
41. Japan was attempting to revise trade treaties concluded between 1855 and 1860 with fifteen powers: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, England, Italy, the Netherlands, Austro-Hungary, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland and the United States of North America.
42. The 'Venezuelan question' disturbed Dutch relations with Venezuela for many years. In the 1870s the Dutch colony of Curaçao became a refuge for exiles from Venezuela, leading to such problems as civil unrest and weapon smuggling. Diplomatic relations between the

two countries were severed more than once while the problems persisted.

43. R.B. Mowat, *The Life of Lord Pauncefote* (London: Constable, 1929), p.34.
44. Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy. Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980* (London: Fontana, 1985), p.60.
45. H.L. Wesseling, 'The giant that was a dwarf, or the strange history of Dutch imperialism', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 16 (1987-88), 58-70 (p.64-5).



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE BORNEO DISPUTE

#### **Introduction: The Dutch and English in Borneo**

Since the early sixteenth century, various European powers, chiefly the Netherlands, Britain, Spain and Portugal, had attempted to gain a foothold on the island of Borneo. The main attractions were the favourable location of the island and its fertility. In the histories of these nations until the nineteenth century, Borneo is recorded as a 'land of treachery, violence and sudden death'.<sup>1</sup> The British East India Company attempted to secure its own share of Borneo's trade from the early seventeenth century, and finally in 1764 the Sultan of Sulu ceded north-eastern Borneo and part of Palawan island to the Company.<sup>2</sup> Dutch settlement on Borneo began in the early seventeenth century and from the beginning of the nineteenth century there was intensified rivalry between Britain and the Netherlands on Borneo. The English and Dutch settlements co-existed until 1803, when Britain took possession of the Dutch colonies in order to prevent their falling to Napoleon. In 1814, a convention was concluded providing for the return of these colonies to the Netherlands. This appeared straightforward enough, since it stated that all colonies in the Eastern Seas which were in Dutch hands on 1 January 1803 would be returned to them. Negotiations progressed slowly however, and the small



settlement of Banjarmasin on Borneo proved to be an obstacle. In 1797 the Dutch had withdrawn from Banjarmasin, which left the fort of Tatas as the only Dutch possession on Borneo.<sup>3</sup> In 1809 Tatas was also abandoned as Marshall Daendels concentrated on defending Java. The Sultan of Banjarmasin consequently requested British protection. Alexander Hare was commissioned to establish a British settlement and became President of Banjarmasin after the Sultan of Banjarmasin ceded the forts (previously Dutch) of Tatas and Tabanio, the Dyak provinces of South Borneo and their districts on the south and east coasts. The treaty to this effect was signed on 1 October 1812.<sup>4</sup> When the time came for the return of the Dutch colonies under the convention of 1814, the Dutch position was unambiguous: Banjarmasin should be returned with the other colonies; it had belonged to the Dutch in 1803 and was now in British hands. It should therefore be restored to the Dutch. For the British the situation was less straightforward. First, Alexander Hare had announced his intention of retaining his 14,000 square miles of property, irrespective of whether Banjarmasin was restored to the Dutch. Second, the British government was still bound to the terms of the 1812 treaty which stipulated that Britain would not hand over Banjarmasin to any other European power. Third, the Sultan of Banjarmasin, having sought European protection for many years, now announced that he wished to rule his own country again.<sup>5</sup> This independent stance faded, however, and the Sultan later made generous concessions to the Dutch

Commissioners-General. The problem was finally solved and in 1817 Dutch sovereignty was proclaimed over Banjarmasin.

Anglo-Dutch commercial rivalry surfaced again after 1814. Those traders who had enjoyed prosperity and established themselves while the colonies were in English hands - in particular the merchants of Penang - were decidedly unenthusiastic about the return of the monopolistic trading of the Dutch. The situation became heated in the 1840s when the Englishman James Brooke settled on north-western Borneo, in Sarawak, which was recognised as a separate state by the United States in 1850 and by Britain in 1864. Brooke's involvement with Borneo began when he arrived there in 1839, ostensibly to explore and to carry out scientific research. His arrival coincided with the Sarawak civil war, in which the district was rising against the Sultan of Brunei. Brooke helped to suppress the rebellion and was offered the governorship of Sarawak by the Sultan of Brunei's uncle, Muda Hashim.<sup>6</sup> Dutch concern mounted as it became obvious that Brooke's aim was to establish permanent British influence in north-west Borneo. In November 1841 the Governor-General of the Netherlands Indies advised the Dutch Minister of Colonies Baud that he intended to establish a Dutch Government post in the Sultanate of Brunei. Baud, however, reasoned that the Netherlands Indies government possessed no sovereign rights in Brunei, and therefore had no right to exclude other powers from there. Also, Dutch settlements

on the south and west coasts were unimpressive and as such unlikely to tempt competition on Borneo from other powers.<sup>7</sup> The Dutch were nevertheless forced to examine their position on Borneo and in 1842 Baud ordered an archival investigation into the Netherlands' rights in the Far East. Baud's subsequent policy opposing British expansion on Borneo took the form of formal diplomatic protests between 1845 and 1848. In 1848, however, the policy was abandoned. In the revolutionary atmosphere of that year the Dutch government considered it wiser to preserve good relations with England; disputes over colonial issues were therefore avoided.<sup>8</sup>

This gives some indication of the Dutch perception of their relationship with the British, namely that of a second-rank power obliged to tread carefully in order to avoid disrupting their relationship with a neighbouring first-rank power on which they depended for some degree of protection from the pretensions of other first-rank powers.

#### **The debate re-surfaces: the Dent and Von Overbeck concessions.**

When Anglo-Dutch rivalry on Borneo reached another high-point in the 1870s, the European context was no longer one of revolution, but one of imperialism. Since Rajah Brooke had settled on Borneo, Europe was industrialising



rapidly and Britain's lead was narrowing. The late nineteenth century became synonymous with imperialism as the major European powers engaged in a scramble for territory. Characteristic of this was the partition of Africa and Britain's conquest of India.

Traditionally, this surge of colonial expansion has been attributed to the search for new markets and sources of raw materials for Europe's industries, although in recent decades the importance of non-Eurocentric, non-economic factors has been increasingly recognised by historians (see the discussion on imperialism in the Introduction). With regard to the debate among Dutch historians on the nature of Dutch overseas expansion, Kuitenbrouwer, author of the most recent comprehensive work on the Netherlands and modern imperialism, recognises that the explanations for modern imperialism which came to be accepted after 1900 were based on three main forces, namely: external and internal political forces (resulting from the dynamics of international relations, nationalism and social imperialism), and economic forces (i.e. commercial, industrial or financial). Kuitenbrouwer also points to the shift in imperialist historiography towards more 'local' explanations for imperialism, this shift following in the wake of post-war decolonisation and the resulting greater interest in third-world countries. He acknowledges the fact that an increasing number of historians have based their research on the Robinson



paradigm that imperialism was a product of interaction between European and non-European politics. This paradigm recognises the concept of the 'turbulent frontier', or the local power vacuum, as a cause of imperialism.<sup>9</sup>

Late nineteenth-century Dutch imperialism, then, cannot be explained solely in economic terms either. As we shall see, the preservation of the Netherlands' reputation as a colonial/imperial power was equally important. In the Borneo dispute the Dutch were concerned less with extending their own authority on Borneo than with protecting their existing colonial possessions from other European powers, in this case Britain. The ensuing debate among Dutch politicians and diplomats as to whether the Dutch actually had any rights to the disputed territory goes to prove that this was more a matter of prestige than economics. As was pointed out in the debates in the Dutch Second Chamber, the territory on Borneo which the Dutch so vociferously claimed (when the British threat was perceived) was territory which they had not even fully exploited. The Borneo dispute has much in common with other debates which arose between Britain and other colonial powers during this age of imperialism in which the smaller powers saw their possessions threatened by their more powerful European rivals, one notable example being Portugal in Africa. The late nineteenth-century imperial desperation among the larger European powers made them increasingly impatient towards the protests of smaller powers whose possessions

were thereby threatened. British impatience with the protests of the Dutch is one characteristic of the Borneo dispute.

The Dutch were understandably alarmed when they heard that Baron von Overbeck was to be granted concessions on Borneo. In January 1875 Von Overbeck purchased the concessions granted by the Sultan and Pangeran Temenggong of Brunei to Joseph Torrey, now the sole surviving member of the American Trading Company.<sup>10</sup> Von Overbeck was an Austrian subject and former Hong-Kong consul, and was 44 years of age when he acquired the concessions. The concessions involved all the territory between Kimanis Bay on the north-west coast, and the Sebuku river on the east coast (see Map 1).<sup>11</sup> Having satisfied himself that the concessions were valid, Von Overbeck entered into partnership with Alfred Dent, whose father had previously employed Von Overbeck as a local manager in his Hong Kong opium firm. Dent would provide most of the financial backing for the exploitation of the concessions.<sup>12</sup> A final agreement was made with the Sultan of Brunei in 1877. But there were problems with the concessions. The Sultan of Brunei had ceded territories to which he had no rights. The Sultan of Sulu claimed the entire north-west coast and, furthermore, his was the only authority recognised by the local natives. This was apparently only a minor obstacle for Von Overbeck. He visited the Sultan of Sulu and succeeded in obtaining from him a second cession which

secured those he had originally purchased. On 22 January 1878 the Sultan of Sulu ceded all the territory lying between the Pandasan and Sebuku rivers, and Von Overbeck became their 'supreme and independent ruler'.<sup>13</sup> However, in 1879 Von Overbeck withdrew from the enterprise when the Austrian government refused to support it. Alfred Dent and Company now owned over 30,000 square miles on Borneo, with 850 miles of coastline.<sup>14</sup>

Although at this stage there was very probably no direct threat to the Dutch from these concessions, they nevertheless saw in Dent the spirit of James Brooke returning to haunt them, and this caused much alarm. The debate among Dutch politicians and diplomats centred on the following main issues which will be discussed in detail below: the issue of rights on Borneo according to the treaty of 1824 (did this treaty establish or deny British or Dutch rights on Borneo? Should the Dutch extend their authority over the independent territories in the North?), and the issue of Britain's intentions on Borneo. Spain was also worried about British expansion on North Borneo, but Spanish protest was soon dispelled. The basis for Spain's claims to North Borneo was her defeat of Sulu in 1851 resulting in a treaty of capitulation in which Sulu admitted vassalage to Spain. Spain therefore claimed Sulu territories on North Borneo. The matter was finally settled in March 1885 with a treaty between England, Germany and Spain. England and Germany thereby recognised Spain's



sovereignty over Sulu, and Spain renounced all claim to North Borneo.<sup>15</sup>

The settlement of the Dent and Von Overbeck enterprise raised several issues among Dutch politicians and diplomats. The ensuing parliamentary and diplomatic debates were largely brought about by differing interpretations of the 1824 Treaty. Was the Von Overbeck enterprise purely commercial, or the foundation for a later British settlement? Also at stake were the pros and cons of Dutch expansion in the Archipelago, given the imperialist climate of the time. Finally, how should the Netherlands defend its rights, given its small-power status? It could be argued that these issues were symptomatic of the times; with the larger European powers competing more intensely for the world's remaining potential colonies, it was inevitable that smaller powers would be pushed aside.

The Anglo-Dutch dispute over Borneo was a long one, and was not resolved until 1891, when the border between British and Dutch territory was established, the disputed area having been made a British protectorate in 1888. During the course of the Borneo question there were nine changes of government in the Netherlands and six in Britain. In the Netherlands the Borneo question was dealt with by ten different Ministers of Foreign Affairs and eleven different Ministers of Colonies. In Britain the dispute was presided over by six different Foreign

Secretaries and seven different Colonial Secretaries.

The increased colonial ambitions of the European powers from the 1870s onwards forced the Netherlands to look carefully at its own possessions in the 'threatened' territories. Borneo was a prime example. Would it be better to have England as a neighbour than another, potentially less friendly power, or should the Netherlands struggle to keep the remainder of Borneo independent? It was clear at any rate that the Netherlands - small power or not - could not simply sit back and do nothing while its European neighbours fought over the remaining colonial spoils to be had in India, Africa and the Far East. The situation was, however, complicated by the Netherlands' relationship with Britain. This was very probably the reason for the conservative Minister of Colonies' (Baron W. van Goltstein van Oldenaller) reluctance, in the initial stages of the dispute, to publish documents or to commit the government to firm action. This suggests that, even at this relatively early stage of the Borneo debate, the Dutch government was cautious of Great Britain and reluctant to fully express its disapproval. J.J. Cremers (Member of the First Chamber from 1850 until 1882) clearly supported this course of action and on 12 November 1879 in the First Chamber he justified Van Goltstein's reluctance thus:

In exchanges of views between governments,  
expressions are sometimes used which are

mutually forgiven but which, when made public, can lead to mistaken conclusions. If the government has expressed itself very strongly, it is often in danger of harming the other party by publicising this. If its statements are weak, it will be attacked for this at home. Why would we provoke such a situation?<sup>16</sup>

The Dutch government had until now, Cremers pointed out, enjoyed the confidence of the King and Parliament, and could be relied upon to act wisely in the matter.

At the very least, then, the Netherlands' relationship with Britain caused the government to pause for reflection while deciding how - and more importantly whether - to prevent the settlement of Dent and Von Overbeck on Borneo. The extent to which relations with Britain influenced these reflections will be made more clear by examining political and diplomatic exchanges, and the reactions of the press in both countries.

The following section will discuss developments in the Borneo question from the point of view of Anglo-Dutch relations, from its re-emergence in the late 1870s to the year 1888, when the disputed territory was made a British Protectorate. The final section of the chapter will deal with the period 1888 to 1891/2, that is from the declaration of the British Protectorate to the Anglo-Dutch



border settlement in North Borneo.

### **The Borneo question and Anglo-Dutch relations, 1878-1888**

On 30 March 1878 the Dutch Department of Foreign Affairs received a letter from the Consul-General of Singapore, who reported that the Sultans of Sulu and Brunei had ceded a considerable part of Borneo to an English Company under Von Overbeck.<sup>17</sup> On 11 September 1878 the Dutch envoy in London, Count Charles M.E.G. Count van Bylandt, wrote to the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Van Heeckeren van Kell (a Liberal serving in the cabinet of J. Kappeyne van de Coppello, which had come to power on 3 November 1877), reporting a meeting with Lord Salisbury, the British Foreign Secretary.<sup>18</sup> During the conversation with Salisbury, Van Bylandt reminded him of the tendency of certain British subjects (citing, of course, the example of James Brooke) to raise the British flag when they settled in distant and uncivilised regions. The national flag represented sovereignty and could not be used by private persons or enterprises without causing difficulty, which both governments wished to avoid. Van Bylandt also reminded Salisbury of the 1824 Treaty and expressed the wish that Salisbury inform the Dutch government before taking a decision on the Dent and Von Overbeck concessions. Lord Salisbury, reported Van Bylandt, had listened very attentively and declared himself not unwilling to comply

with Van Bylandt's request to inform the Dutch government in advance of the conditions of the concessions. However, the time was not yet ripe to make a decision.

The 1824 Treaty referred to by the Dutch should have brought an end to Anglo-Dutch rivalry in the Indonesian archipelago, since it established - apparently beyond dispute - the dividing line between Dutch and British spheres of influence. When the 1824 Treaty was concluded, both parties were apparently in agreement as to its purpose and interpretation. Later in the century, however, this situation had changed. British and certain Dutch interpretations of the treaty differed. Indeed, the Dutch themselves could not agree upon its interpretation. The first question which arose when the Borneo dispute re-emerged in the 1870s was whether the whole or only part of Borneo belonged to the Dutch. Opinions were divided. Addressing the Second Chamber in October 1879, the Liberal Member for Zutphen, L.E. Lenting, claimed that the whole of Borneo belonged to the Netherlands, reminding the Chamber that Borneo was not mentioned in the 1824 Treaty because it had not been a disputed area at that time. Lenting reasoned that the Netherlands would not be in contravention of the Treaty if it were to extend its authority over the small independent kingdoms of the North and it could therefore be assumed that the whole of Borneo belonged to the Netherlands.<sup>19</sup>

The Dutch government then proceeded to issue persistent and unambiguous reminders that Britain would be contravening the 1824 Treaty if concessions were granted to Von Overbeck. Yet, in spite of this, envoy Van Bylandt had to tread carefully; his instructions in the early stages of the Borneo dispute were simply to try to make Britain reflect before lending her support to the Von Overbeck enterprise. This was another indication that the Dutch government was reluctant to express its full disapproval for fear of angering the British government. On 24 September 1879, the liberal Minister of Foreign Affairs, Van Heeckeren van Kell, wrote to Van Tets (Chargé d'Affaires in London), making his government's position clear:

Our attitude in this towards England must above all serve to prevent the government of that country - as far as is possible - from supporting the new company, and in particular from negotiations through which the new enterprise, at the Sultan of Brunei's loss of independence, would politically become British.<sup>20</sup>

His Majesty's delegation should repeatedly remind the British government of the purpose of the 1824 Treaty and of the possibility that the Netherlands' rights were not being considered in the granting of the concession. The British government, on the other hand, denied from the beginning



that Von Overbeck's was a British settlement. Sir Julian Pauncefote, (permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in London) had reassured Van Bylandt that there was no question of a British settlement either then or in the future.<sup>21</sup>

It became increasingly obvious that the British view of the 1824 Treaty differed from the Dutch view. In a report on the settlement of James Brooke and the Treaty of 1824, Jhr.Mr. R.A. Klerck pinpointed this difference in interpretation. The Dutch, he pointed out, emphasised the spirit of the treaty while the English emphasised its letter, and consequently:

All our explanations are thus reasonings by analogy, which must always be sought outside the written contract, while the English simply answer: It is written.<sup>22</sup>

Lord Salisbury himself wished to leave the treaty out of the discussions on the Von Overbeck concession. He thought it better not to become involved in a discussion of principles and to avoid reference to the said treaty.<sup>23</sup>

Not only the Dutch were anxious to know what was happening about the Von Overbeck concessions. Members of the British House of Commons were also curious. On 8 April 1878 Sir Charles Dilke (Member for Chelsea and a radical

liberal) asked the Secretary of State for Colonies (Sir Michael Hicks Beach) whether reports in the *London and China Telegraph* of 1 April 1878 on the subject were true. The reports had stated, first, that an English company had obtained cessions from the Sultans of Borneo and Sulu; second, that the Sulu cession was witnessed by the Governor of Labuan and the Consul General for Borneo and, third, that a Vice-Consul in her Majesty's Service had been appointed Resident in the ceded district. Hicks Beach answered that these reports were true, but that Her Majesty's Government had not yet decided 'whether the proceedings are such as can be properly sanctioned.'<sup>24</sup>

The following month Mr Ernest Noel (Member for Dumfries) asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sir Stafford Northcote) whether the government had now reached a decision, and was informed that this had been deferred until the promoters of the scheme had arrived in the country in the summer.<sup>25</sup> In December 1878 - well after the summer - yet another request was made for information, again by Sir Charles Dilke. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Robert Bourke) replied that a statement of the Company's views had been submitted to the Foreign Office only a few days before, and that the government had therefore not yet had enough time to reach a decision.<sup>26</sup> This was not merely an excuse: in March 1882 the Attorney General (Sir Henry James) confirmed that the submission had been late.<sup>27</sup>

Another explanation must then be found for the British government's apparent reluctance to reach a decision on the matter. The most plausible explanation can be found in the political circumstances of the time. A change of government was imminent and it has been suggested that Lord Salisbury, Foreign Secretary in the out-going Conservative government, thought it better to leave a decision to his successor.<sup>28</sup> However, Alfred Dent, a businessman with many dealings in South-East Asia (including the opium firm in China) wanted Salisbury to make the decision. Speaking in the House of Commons in March 1882, Mr L.L. Dillwyn (Member for Swansea) informed Members that:

[...] just before the late government went out of Office, Mr Dent, who not unnaturally thought he had a better chance of getting concessions from the Conservatives than from the Liberals, was particularly anxious to get the Charter sanctioned by the Government.<sup>29</sup>

As it transpired, Dent did succeed in having the Charter granted - in November 1881 under Gladstone's Liberal government. Salisbury had indeed left the decision to his successor. Kuitenbrouwer has pointed out that, in certain circumstances, Gladstone's government was given to continuing the expansive policy of his predecessor Disraeli; the British North Borneo Company's Charter appears to be one example of this.<sup>30</sup>



In June 1879 Mr W.E. Forster (Member for Bradford and one of the leading representatives of the advanced liberal party) asked the Under-Secretary of State for Colonies Bourke whether the government had incurred any responsibility in the Borneo case. According to Bourke, this was another question altogether. He could not answer, without notice, a question referring to the Foreign Secretary's opinion on whether the negotiations should be made public.<sup>31</sup> When he repeated his question a few days later, Forster was informed that the government would not assume any responsibility other than that 'which devolves on Her Majesty's Government of affording protection to British subjects in all parts of the world [...]'. Her Majesty's government, however, had not yet approved the cession.<sup>32</sup>

Diplomatic exchanges continued, with the English maintaining their stance and the Dutch continuing to remind them of the terms of the 1824 Treaty, asking that the Netherlands' rights on Borneo be taken into consideration. By 1881 no great progress had been made and the Dutch showed signs of impatience; Van Bylandt sent a strongly worded memorandum to Foreign Secretary Granville, who found the memorandum too severe and requested that Van Bylandt ask his government's permission to withdraw it.<sup>33</sup> Three factors had caused the Dutch government to lose its patience. First: in all the years that the Borneo question had been in the air, no written communication had ever been

received from the British government on the subject, despite repeated requests. Second: various dispatches from the Dutch government to the British government had remained unanswered. Third: the Dutch government had recently had occasion to peruse confidential papers belonging to Alfred Dent, and as a result became even more suspicious of Britain's intentions. C.T. van Lynden van Sandenburg (Prime Minister until 1883, and also Minister of Foreign Affairs until 1881) and his cabinet had to act quickly, before it was too late. This had prompted Van Bylandt's strongly worded memorandum, which had offended Granville, but which the British government could hardly refuse to answer. The conversation with Granville, however, persuaded Van Bylandt that he had acted in haste. Granville repeated his promise: he would inform the Dutch government of the draft charter for Dent & Co., before it was settled. Granville felt that his promise had not deserved such a heated response.

Van Bylandt was prepared to withdraw the memorandum, but on the condition that he replace it with another memorandum of the same date, to be submitted in place of the original. In this second memorandum, Van Bylandt would state that the incidental perusal of the Dent papers gave rise to the fear that the conditions of the charter requested by Dent & Co. contradicted the reassurances given to Van Bylandt by the British government, who claimed that the Dent and Von Overbeck enterprise was purely commercial. Further, that Van Bylandt had been instructed to draw

attention to this before it was too late, but that the Dutch government still hoped that its fears were unfounded. Van Bylandt wrote to Van Lynden that he believed Granville's request for the withdrawal of the offending memorandum was made to avoid future embarrassment. Sooner or later the Borneo documents would have to be published for Parliament. If the question had been solved satisfactorily, it would not be desirable for the British government to publicise the fact that it had received such a strong memorandum. If this was the case, there was something to be said for withdrawing it, thereby sparing the British government this embarrassment.<sup>34</sup> This belief echoed the sentiments expressed by Cremers in the First Chamber in 1879, when he spoke of the dangers of publishing exchanges of views between governments.

Granville's request for the withdrawal of the memorandum, and Van Bylandt's apparently unreserved willingness to comply with that request (albeit on the condition that a replacement be submitted), provide another clue to the nature of the Anglo-Dutch diplomatic relationship. Van Bylandt himself, it seems, was easily persuaded by Granville that he was in the wrong. In a letter to Van Lynden he even admitted the possibility that the memorandum had been presumptuous, saying that 'we are crying out before we have received a blow.'<sup>35</sup> This was not to be the first time that Van Bylandt reviewed his position, and suggests that he was either easily persuaded



or uncertain. Clearly, then, the British government retained the upper hand in the relationship. The Dutch government, having finally managed to protest in no uncertain terms against the British government's behaviour, quite soon found itself obliged to qualify its words - apparently for the sole purpose of sparing the British government future embarrassment.

Van Lynden did not agree with Van Bylandt's proposals for the substitute memorandum, since he could find no mention of the Dutch objections to the charter.<sup>36</sup> Van Bylandt's wording did not make this clear enough. Van Lynden was also thinking ahead; if the memorandum was unclear, it would lose much of its significance and later, when the documents were published, it could be remarked - and rightly so - that it was difficult to deal with unspecified objections. The Dutch government would also be criticised for not having set out its objections more clearly. Despite his reservations, Van Lynden did not wish to prevent Van Bylandt from submitting his substitute memorandum. He did, however, request that Van Bylandt broadly keep to the content of the original, while its tone could be modified by altering the phrasing. Van Lynden enclosed a draft which met these requirements. Van Bylandt submitted the new memorandum to Granville, who then reminded him again of the promise regarding the draft charter, adding that he had made the promise on the condition that this was done as an act of courtesy. The

promise was proof of the friendly relations between the two countries, but was in no way a recognition of the Dutch government's right to request this.<sup>37</sup> From this statement it is apparent that the Dutch and British differed yet again, this time in their interpretation of the Anglo-Dutch relationship. The British were prepared to inform the Dutch of the draft charter by way of courtesy. The Dutch, on the other hand, felt that this was their right. It could be argued that the Dutch overestimated their influence within the Anglo-Dutch relationship, and therefore demanded more than they were entitled to, from the British point of view. Furthermore, the case of the withdrawn memorandum shows who called the tune in the Anglo-Dutch relationship.

In November 1881, events took a turn for the worse, causing the Dutch government to feel even more disillusioned towards Granville. On 10 November Van Bylandt informed the Minister of Foreign Affairs W.F. Rochussen (who had succeeded Van Lynden in September 1881) that the text of the charter granted to the British North Borneo Company had appeared in the London Gazette the previous evening.<sup>38</sup> The English government had presented the Dutch government with a *fait accompli*. It had published the text of the charter without answering in writing the Dutch objections to that charter - as Granville had promised on more than one occasion. On 8 August 1881 the British government had sent a draft of the Charter to the Dutch government, asking it to submit any objections to this

within three days. As Sir John Eldon Gorst (Member for Chatham) pointed out in the House of Commons, 'that was rather hurrying the Netherlands government, considering that the Charter had been under the consideration of the Government for many years.' Nevertheless the Dutch were able to return - within the stated time - 'a most admirable despatch, which pointed out, beyond all controversy, the political character of the undertaking.' This prompted the comment by Gorst that in the Netherlands they were able to act 'with more despatch'.<sup>39</sup>

The British government failed to answer this despatch, although it had ample time to do so - from 11 August to 9/10 November. This had indeed caused some consternation in the Netherlands, since the despatch was not answered until after the publication of the Charter. 'That was', Gorst sarcastically pointed out, 'a very courteous mode of treating a Foreign Government.'<sup>40</sup> Why had the British government failed to answer this despatch? A possible explanation is that it had deliberately given the Netherlands government a deadline of only a few days, perhaps expecting that it would not be able to present its objections in such a short time. Having been taken somewhat by surprise when this was in fact possible, the British government may have deliberately postponed an answer until after the publication of the Charter, if indeed it intended to answer at all. According to Van Bylandt, the English government intended to simply leave the objections



unanswered, 'since it would not be easy to provide - officially and in writing - a sound refutation of those objections.'<sup>41</sup>

Van Bylandt deeply regretted the fact that his proposal for arbitration (made in October 1879) on the meaning and tenor of the 1824 Treaty had not been taken up. The British government, he believed, could not have rejected this proposal, having itself set the example in the Alabama question and the Delagoa Bay question with Portugal. Whatever the outcome of arbitration, the British government could not have gone further than it had now and the Netherlands would have had the chance to win over public opinion. Yet Van Bylandt recognised that the question remained whether a complete success for the Netherlands in the Borneo question would not have been damaging for relations with Great Britain, 'with whom we have to deal in so many other sensitive colonial issues.'<sup>42</sup> Thus, although feelings about the Borneo question ran high in the Netherlands, and the Dutch government persevered in making its protests heard, it nevertheless had to tread carefully in relations with Britain.

For Van Bylandt the Borneo question was Britain's reprisal for the diplomatic and political success achieved by the Dutch in 1871 with the Sumatra treaty and the cession of the coast of Guinea to England.<sup>43</sup> The possibility of a connection between these two issues was also raised in

the Dutch press, and in particular by the *Arnhemse Courant* which emphasised the flexible attitude of the Dutch government:

When the 'spirit of a treaty' remains outside the 'letter of a treaty', subsequent protests achieve little, particularly since it appears that our authorised agents have been so ultra-polite as to reciprocate England's compliance regarding Sumatra with the Netherlands' compliance regarding Borneo.<sup>44</sup>

This was, of course, also a reference to the fact that the Dutch interpretation of the 1824 Treaty differed from the British one.

In the despatch of 22 November 1881, Van Bylandt also reported his most recent conversation with Granville, in which he referred to the Dutch objections to the Von Overbeck charter. He asked Granville whether he would be willing to provide a written response to the many written communications on the subject from the Dutch government, none of which had been answered. Granville appeared embarrassed and somewhat surprised that this was the case.<sup>45</sup> Two days later, on 24 November 1881, Van Bylandt reported to Minister of Foreign Affairs Rochussen that he had now received the awaited reply from Granville - dated 21 November (i.e. the day before the above conversation had

taken place).<sup>46</sup> The reply was not favourable. Granville informed Rochussen that his objections 'were duly considered by H.M's government who, however, have found themselves unable to concur with the Netherlands government in their appreciation of the meaning and objects of the charter, or in any of the apprehensions which they express on the subject.'<sup>47</sup> Such an answer was hardly surprising. Given that the British government had just granted the Charter, it could hardly now be seen to concur with Dutch objections to it. Rochussen's government would admit, continued Granville, that the Netherlands had - as far as international rights were concerned - no ground whatever for opposing the absolute annexation of North Borneo by Great Britain.

For Van Bylandt these words were proof that the dispute over the 1824 Treaty should have been subject to arbitration. This was the heart of the matter; if the Dutch government was not prepared to stand by its interpretation of the 1824 Treaty, then it was pointless to oppose from the beginning the charter which would sooner or later lead to British sovereignty on North Borneo. Furthermore, Granville's ready vindication of Britain's right of annexation was a bad omen.<sup>48</sup> But it was too late. The British government had granted the charter to the British North Borneo Company before the matter of the 1824 treaty had been resolved. Furthermore, both sides failed to appreciate the other's point of view. Granville, in his



reply, stated that:

H.M.'s government, therefore, are at a loss to understand the opposition of the Netherlands government to confirmation by charter, under proper guarantees, of this private undertaking [...] and which promises to open up an important field to commercial enterprise to the manifest advantage of the native populations and certainly not to the detriment of the neighbouring territories under Dutch rule.<sup>49</sup>

Granville assured Rochussen that the decision had been delayed as long as possible in order that the Dutch government could put forward its objections. This assurance is not entirely convincing. If the British government had indeed waited for the Dutch government's protests, why had it failed to answer those contained in the letter of 11 August 1881 - which had reached London by the stipulated deadline? Very probably because, as was suggested above, it could not answer those objections without admitting that they were to some extent justified. The decision to grant the concession could not be postponed any longer, given the important private interests involved and the length of time already devoted to consideration of the charter.

Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, Dutch rights on Borneo were being debated. Not everyone believed that the

Netherlands had a valid claim to the disputed territory. The debate raged in parliament and in the press. In a series of six articles published between 5 and 17 January 1882, the liberal-conservative *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (NRC) examined the various aspects of the Borneo dispute and claimed to have shown that the Netherlands could not justly resist British settlement in an area of Borneo which was not under Dutch sovereignty. However, there was a positive side to this: it also meant that the Netherlands was not prevented from expanding its authority on Borneo:

The 1824 Treaty, in not excluding Britain from Borneo, equally does not prevent the Netherlands from extending its authority on Borneo.<sup>50</sup>

The *Arnhemse Courant*, a more liberal newspaper than the NRC, had even greater reservations about Dutch claims to the disputed area of North Borneo. The Netherlands, it claimed, could do nothing to prevent Britain's settlement on Borneo:

It is true that we, strictly speaking, literally have *no right* on North Borneo. In 1824 we were far too modest, and have been far too modest to now be able to exert any rights at all in North Borneo.<sup>51</sup>

The *Java-Bode* also believed that the Netherlands'

claims to the disputed territory were doubtful, and could at most be based on political and geographical factors (presumably meaning that there were already Dutch settlements on Borneo). However, these claims were stronger than those of Great Britain, which had no legal claims to the area whatsoever.<sup>52</sup> In parliament too, it was the liberals who argued that the Dutch had no claim to the part of North Borneo which was not under their sovereignty and was now being claimed by a British enterprise.

Des Amorie van der Hoeven, Member for Breda and a prominent member of the clerical party, found Lenting's interpretation of the 1824 Treaty dangerous.<sup>53</sup> The terms of the 1824 Treaty did not explicitly forbid further expansion. Yet it could not be concluded from this that the Dutch were now the rulers of all Borneo. Furthermore, a colleague (whom he did not name) had shown him a map of Dutch possessions in the Indies. Areas under Dutch sovereignty were coloured green on the map and when asked by his colleague to indicate the location of the Dent and Von Overbeck settlement, Van der Hoeven pointed to the northern region, coloured white. 'Well', pronounced his colleague: 'if it is not located in the green area, what in the world does it have to do with us?'.<sup>54</sup> Van der Hoeven shared this straightforward approach to the situation.

In the series of articles in January 1882, the liberal-conservative *NRC* also pointed out the illogical



nature of this argument:

Borneo was not mentioned in the [1824] negotiations. Borneo is not mentioned in the Treaty. Borneo was not to be mentioned before the English Parliament. In the Dutch Chambers, Borneo had to be tacitly passed over, and still they want us to believe that the Treaty settles the legal situation on Borneo!<sup>55</sup>

The conservative Minister of Colonies, Van Goltstein (serving in Anti-Revolutionary Van Lynden van Sandenburg's cabinet which had come to power in August 1879) was also unconvinced of Dutch rights on Borneo. He found Borsius's proof of those rights weak: they were based on the fact that the Dutch had settled 'here and there', the fact that Banjermasin - as distinct from Borneo - was returned by England, and the fact that the 1824 Treaty delineated Dutch and English spheres of influence. All this was not, according to the Minister, proof of Dutch sovereign authority in these regions. This was so well understood, continued Van Goltstein, that Dutch authority everywhere rested on contracts, treaties and agreements with the ruling powers of the islands and if it appeared that such a contract had been overlooked, the Indies government would rectify this.<sup>56</sup>

The Chamber was informed of all such contracts, each

of which contained an article recognizing the sovereignty of the Netherlands. For Van Goltstein, then, Dutch authority rested not on tradition or historical precedent but on legal recognition in a series of bilateral agreements. Successive governments, he claimed, had never interpreted the matter in the manner of Borsius and Lenting. The debate continued and it became obvious that interpretations of the 1824 Treaty differed not only between the Dutch and the British, but also among the Dutch themselves. In a memorandum of reply to the First Chamber, the Minister of Colonies Van Goltstein made clear the government's interpretation of the 1824 Treaty, stating in the first place that previous governments had never believed that Dutch authority in the Indies extended beyond those areas secured by occupation, conquest or contracts with native rulers. This was definitely not the basis of the 1824 Treaty. The present government shared the view of previous governments - that the treaty's point of departure was to avoid communal possession in the Indonesian archipelago. The Dutch government had therefore referred to the treaty to protest against the establishment of British authority in that area of Borneo not under Dutch authority. The treaty did not, however, give the Netherlands the same rights with respect to the other powers. In this case the 'normal rules determining the limits of Powers' authority' were valid.<sup>57</sup>

Borsius nevertheless placed a different emphasis on

the treaty. It was intended, he claimed, to settle all existing difficulties. At the time the treaty was labelled a 'partition' in the First Chamber, and that had indeed been so. The Netherlands had ceded to Britain Malakka and Singapore; Britain ceded its only possession on Sumatra and renounced all claim to Billiton and all islands lying to the South of Singapore. The cessions, exchanges and mutual recognition of sovereignty were, Borsius believed, proof that Borneo came under Dutch sovereignty.<sup>58</sup>

As to the British interpretation of the treaty, the Minister of Colonies reassured the Dutch Chambers that this had not been shown to differ from the Dutch interpretation. Not all members were convinced. Speaking in the Second Chamber L.W.C. Keuchenius, the Anti-Revolutionary Member for Gorinchem, asked why, if this were so, the British government had not yet - after one year - withdrawn its support and protection from the Dent and Von Overbeck enterprise.<sup>59</sup> This debate was complicated by a further issue, namely the nature of the Dent and Von Overbeck enterprise. Was the undertaking purely commercial or did it have political overtones? In October 1879 Minister of Colonies Van Goltstein had reassured the Second Chamber that the Von Overbeck enterprise was purely commercial.<sup>60</sup> It had not yet become evident that the British government had taken the business into its protection. The 1824 Treaty was therefore irrelevant in a case involving the establishment of a trading enterprise belonging to an



Austrian subject in a part of Borneo which did not belong to the Netherlands. The areas in which Von Overbeck had acquired the disputed concessions were in two areas of Borneo - Sulu and Brunei - which were independent of the Netherlands.

The Dutch had never concluded treaties with the Sultans, who therefore did not recognise Dutch sovereignty. Speaking in the First Chamber in November 1879 Van Goltstein, replying to a speech by Borsius, challenged the latter's interpretation of the situation. Borsius spoke, he said, as if Von Overbeck would be ceding rights to the British government, but the fact of the matter was that the concessions would be made by the Sultan of Brunei to Von Overbeck. The question around which the whole debate centred was this: could the British permit such a cession under the terms of Article 10 of the 1847 Treaty? (In this treaty between Britain and the Sultan of Brunei, the latter undertook to admit no other settlements to his territory without the permission of the British government. The British government informed the Dutch of this treaty in 1849. The Dutch did not react, and it was thus assumed that there were no objections to it. This lack of reaction was now also criticised by those who wished to see Dutch rights more actively defended.) Cremers also supported the government, declaring that there was no evidence that the British government intended to acquire crown territory on Borneo, and so long as that situation did not change, she

was not contravening the treaties.<sup>61</sup>

Lenting and Borsius were less optimistic and trusting. Lenting claimed to have proof from the horse's mouth, as it were, of the political nature of Von Overbeck's enterprise. In the spring of 1877, there had been a meeting of English capitalists in London. The speeches and resolutions of the meeting had, according to Lenting, had distinctly political overtones. The chairman made a speech during which he explained that the British government was not taking governmental responsibility for the territory in question, but would recognise the settlement of British subjects there and ensure that their operations were not hindered. He went on to reveal that it was of the utmost political significance that England was in possession of North Borneo since the British merchant fleet operating between Hong Kong and Singapore would otherwise have no safe haven in times of war. Britain should be in possession of North Borneo before any other power gained a foothold. Lenting went on to inform the Second Chamber of the following resolution made at the meeting:

That the location of North Borneo, in the middle of the China Seas, between the great trading centres Hong Kong and Singapore, with exceptionally good ports and coal mines, is so favourable, that the timely possession of that territory is of indubitable significance for the

interests of England as a great sea power.<sup>62</sup>

Still Van Goltstein remained unconvinced of Britain's 'dishonourable' intentions. He dismissed Lenting's arguments, claiming that the words spoken during this meeting were no more proof of British intentions than were those spoken during a dinner held in honour of James Brooke, during which Brooke himself expressed the wish that his settlement Sarawak be taken over by the English government.<sup>63</sup>

Borsius, too, believed that Von Overbeck's settlement on Borneo was political. After the concessions had been granted, the British flag had been hoisted in the presence of the Governor of Laboean. The intention, as Borsius saw it, was to establish a British settlement, a post directly under British sovereignty. For Keuchenius the British government's involvement was also clear.<sup>64</sup> The government wished to co-operate in the measures taken by Von Overbeck to gain a foothold on Borneo. The British had, after all, sent the warship *HMS Kestrel* to North Borneo, ostensibly in search of pirates. *HMS Kestrel* destroyed a campong and then visited Von Overbeck's agent in Sandakang. A visit was then made to the Sultan of Sulu, who declared that he had no objections whatsoever to the Dent and Von Overbeck enterprise.

According to Kuitenbrouwer, the Dutch placed



considerable trust in Gladstone, the confessional circles trusting him more than the Liberals.<sup>65</sup> In the case of Borneo this could have been because he was seen to be continuing in Disraeli's expansionist footsteps, which could explain the liberal Lenting's mistrust of Britain's intentions on Borneo. Lenting was not, however, one of the majority of Dutch liberals who, according to Irwin, 'openly admitted that the Netherlands had forfeited all right to oppose British expansion in northern Borneo by accepting the British treaty with Brunei of 1847'.<sup>66</sup> As we have seen above, Lenting looked to the 1824 Treaty to confirm the Netherlands' rights on Borneo. It was not only the liberals who claimed that the Dutch had no rights on Borneo: the conservative Minister of Foreign Affairs, Van Goltstein, also believed this. However, Van Goltstein's trust in Britain appears somewhat naive and misplaced, in the face of the arguments presented by Lenting and Borsius.

The British North Borneo Company finally received its Royal Charter on 1 November 1881. Four months later the Charter was debated at length in the House of Commons. The debate is interesting since it shows that there were also British politicians who believed, first, that the British government had deceived the Dutch government, and, second, that the British North Borneo Company was indeed political - as certain Dutch politicians had been claiming all along.

Sir John Eldon Gorst (Member for Chatham), stated that

the arguments which had convinced the Dutch government would be unlikely to convince Members of the House. He continued:

I wish to point out to the House from this Charter several circumstances which seem to me to establish beyond all doubt that it is a Company of a political and not of a commercial character.<sup>67</sup>

The first proof of this, according to Gorst, was that the company must be, and always remain, British: '[...] every member of the Court of Directors is to be a British subject; and every representative of the Company in Borneo [...] are all to be British subjects.' Second: the fact that the appointment of officers and representatives of the company was to be approved by Her Majesty, and that of the company's principal officer in Borneo by the Secretary of State. Third: the company would use a distinctively British flag - also to be approved by the Secretary of State, and the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. As Gorst saw it, the company was a means whereby Britain could avoid competition from other nations on Borneo while evading direct responsibility. The company was nothing more than a front; 'a mere puppet, to whom she gives her orders, and through whom she acts in the Eastern Seas.' Gorst described the whole affair thus:

In point of fact, it is a sort of filibustering by proxy which the noble Lord the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs [Granville] thinks is so extremely cheap and safe.<sup>68</sup>

For Gorst, then, the Chartered Company was a form of colonialism on-the-cheap. This concept is recognised by historians of the nineteenth century. Swartz, for example, states that the Chartered Company was 'one means by which the government tried, at minimal cost, to accommodate the expansive drive of capitalist enterprise.'<sup>69</sup>

This was also remarked upon in the Dutch press. On 19 November 1881 the *NRC* had observed that, since Gladstone's cabinet had made known its disapproval of unlawful annexation, it was obliged for the moment to resort to disguised annexation 'à la Serawak', through a powerful company.<sup>70</sup> The *Java-Bode* commented that the British government could, without taking any trouble, enjoy all the advantages of this company, and admitted that it had acted logically in grasping this opportunity. After all, it remarked candidly, any government would have done so under the circumstances - even the Dutch government, had it not been so sleepy.<sup>71</sup> This comment hints at sentiments which the Dutch government largely concealed. It is likely that the Dutch government's indignation towards Britain was fuelled - at least to some extent - by colonial jealousy, and regret at not having taken those steps itself. The Dutch



government's protests almost exclusively concerned Britain's perceived mistakes and rarely, if ever, did it turn the spotlight on itself and admit that it had missed a valuable opportunity - or even admit behind closed doors that it was logical for Britain to seize this opportunity on North Borneo.

It would appear that there was some truth to Gorst's claims. Given the strong pressure of colonial competition from other European powers from the 1870s onwards, it is all the more likely that the British government would seek to maintain its influence overseas in ways which involved minimal cost and responsibility.

Another member who disapproved of the British government's behaviour in the Borneo question was Mr Peter Rylands (Member for Burnley). Although he disagreed with the Dutch protests, he did not think that the British government had behaved correctly. According to Rylands, the papers relating to the Borneo question 'represented the diplomatic conduct of Her Majesty's Government in a very unfavourable light.' The Dutch government was deeply offended by its behaviour. Moreover, regardless of whether or not the Charter was just, Her Majesty's government must have known that 'it would give the deepest umbrage to that government.' Rylands refuted, as Gorst had done, the claim that the Company was purely commercial. Through the charter the Company had now acquired the right to levy taxes,

enforce the law and establish a monopoly over a territory almost the size of France. 'Could this' asked Rylands, 'be represented as a purely commercial arrangement?'<sup>72</sup> It appeared that Great Britain had virtually annexed the territory. In the light of this criticism, Dutch protests seem increasingly justified. Indeed, the British government appears to have been protesting its innocence rather too vigorously.

Neither was the Dutch press convinced that the Dent and Von Overbeck enterprise was purely commercial. The *Arnhemse Courant* remarked that, through the Charter, the British North Borneo Company had acquired a semi-official character, simultaneously fulfilling the roles of mercantile company and political agent of the British government.<sup>73</sup> The liberal-conservative *NRC*, reacting to the granting of the Charter in November 1881, asked why a Royal Charter was necessary for incorporation when, surely, a parliamentary charter would have sufficed. Now that a Royal Charter had been granted:

With the Company's activities we will always have to remember, to consider John Bull, who is behind it and has its puppets totally in his power, making them dance to his tune.<sup>74</sup>

The Company would thus fulfil the role of '[...] agent; obedient servant of the English Government.'<sup>75</sup> These

were the very same views which Gorst was to express in the British House of Commons a few months later. The nascent British North Borneo Company was viewed by the *NRC* as a new East India Company, indeed this was the title of three articles by its London correspondent, published on 18, 19 and 21 November 1881. The *Java-Bode* shared this view:

Their enterprise is a trading company with sovereign rights, after the manner of the old English and Dutch East India Companies.<sup>76</sup>

It commented further that the Charter was in fact the continuation of an English plan, originating at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to keep open the routes from England and Bengal to China, and to ensure bases along those routes.<sup>77</sup>

Meanwhile, Dutch politicians had been debating the virtues of colonial expansion. In the Netherlands, as everywhere else, not everyone was convinced that more colonies were a universal panacea, and such debates were characteristic of the period. The anti-expansionists believed that additional acquisitions would prove too great a burden. Minister of Colonies Van Goltstein, addressing the First Chamber in November 1879, stressed that an expansion of Dutch authority should not be thought about lightly. It would bring extra responsibilities and obligations. The problems in Achin were, he claimed,



largely due to the international obligations placed on the Dutch to combat piracy in northern Sumatra.<sup>78</sup> Van der Hoeven also advocated a policy of 'authorization and self-restraint' ('machtiging en zelfbeperking').<sup>79</sup> He had not always held this view. One year previously he had addressed the Second Chamber thus:

The concept that very extensive colonial power would make a country great belongs to the concepts of the past; in no country will the policy of expanding colonial territory as far as possible any longer be thought a wise policy. But once a country has the fortune - or misfortune - to be a colonial power, it is often confronted with the necessity of such expansion.<sup>80</sup>

Lenting regretted this change of sides by Van der Hoeven, who was now of the opinion that the extension of Dutch power in the Indies was not desirable. Van der Hoeven also claimed that Lenting's politics (with which he had broadly been in agreement in 1878) 'would find much sympathy with Lord Beaconsfield.'<sup>81</sup>

Although he approved of the government's handling of the situation, Cremers believed that the Netherlands, as a neutral power, should extend its authority on Borneo.<sup>82</sup> Lenting, surprisingly, also shared Van Goltstein's

anti-expansionist stance. He declared himself to be against colonial expansion in the Archipelago - the Netherlands already had enough on its colonial plate. He even welcomed foreign industry in Dutch possessions where Dutch entrepreneurs had, for one reason or another, not become established. But this was not the issue. Intervening against a foreign settlement did not necessarily mean bringing the disputed area under direct Dutch authority.<sup>83</sup>

Clearly, then, at this stage of the Borneo question, incomprehension and mistrust were the order of the day in the Anglo-Dutch relationship. It was evident from the beginning that the Dutch did not place much trust in the British as far as Borneo was concerned. In a further report on Borneo (this time on the settlement of Von Overbeck) dated 30 September 1879, R.A. Klerck declared that 'even in Parliament the English government persists in its ambiguous attitude'.<sup>84</sup> In a later report on the history of James Brooke in Sarawak, Klerck spoke of the 'traditional treacherous politics of the English government'.<sup>85</sup> In November 1879 Van Bylandt wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Van Lynden, saying that he could not emphasise enough - as a result of his own practical experience - that the verbal negotiation of important issues with the British government 'leads to nothing and cannot be trusted at all.'<sup>86</sup> Van Lynden himself also distrusted the British government. In a despatch to Van Bylandt dated 10 March 1881 he mentioned 'the very unconfidential attitude of the

British government' ('zeer weinig vertrouwelijke houding van de Britsche regeering'), which encouraged the greatest caution ('groote omzichtigheid').<sup>87</sup>

Mistrust of the British government was also evident in the Dutch press. In the first of six articles examining the Borneo question, the *NRC* asked whether the official truth propagated by the British government was actually the real truth. It sounded a note of warning to the Dutch government:

If our Government is all too blindly soothed to sleep by the meaning of official statements, who knows how quickly the logic of the facts will rudely shake it awake.<sup>88</sup>

The *Java-Bode* criticised the British government more heavily, comparing British politics to those of the Vatican, commenting that they were flexible enough to adapt to all changes in the political world, while always remaining essentially the same.<sup>89</sup> A few days later the *Java-Bode* criticised the British press which, it concluded, viewed the Dent and Von Overbeck concessions as a British annexation while ignoring the sovereign rights of other powers. British politicians and the press, it remarked, apparently acted according to the principle: 'where we come, the rights of others cease.'<sup>90</sup>



Granville's long-awaited reply of November 1881 did not still Dutch protest. At the beginning of January 1882 he wrote to Van Bylandt acknowledging a despatch from the Dutch government, but regretting that the objections to the charter 'have not been entirely removed by the correspondence which has passed on the subject.' The Dutch government was persisting in the claim that the establishment of British dominion on Borneo would be a contravention of the 1824 Treaty. Granville continued to reassure Rochussen that Britain had no intention of acquiring North Borneo:

H.M.'s government have already explained to the government of the Netherlands that the grant of the charter does not in any way imply the assumption of sovereign rights in North Borneo, it is therefore unnecessary to pursue the discussion further.<sup>91</sup>

These words convey the impression that Granville was tired of reassuring a Dutch government, which was either unable or unwilling to take him at his word. Granville concluded by expressing his regret that the two countries were still at variance on the matter of the 1824 Treaty. He assured Rochussen that the British government 'been actuated by no unfriendly feeling towards your government, with which on the contrary, in regard to this and all other subjects, they desire and hope to maintain the most cordial

relations.'<sup>92</sup>

In Britain, however, there was mistrust of the British government's integrity among Members, some of whom criticised the government's behaviour towards the Dutch government. During the debate in the House of Commons of March 1882, on the granting of the Charter (discussed above), Gorst had criticised the British government's behaviour towards the Dutch government. 'As to the Government of the Netherlands' he pronounced, 'Her Majesty's Government have not, I believe, infringed any of their positive rights; but they have cheated and they have affronted them.'<sup>93</sup> He cited examples of this, the first of which was the British government's failure to answer the Dutch despatch of 8 August 1881. The second example was the British government's claim that it assumed no sovereign rights in Borneo. Gorst asked the House whether it would believe that no such thing was contemplated in the Charter and 'that the statement made to the Netherlands government was the grossest - I might almost say the most impudent - inaccuracy?' Although it had suited the Dutch government to accept such a statement, Gorst was in no doubt that it could see through it.

In the Netherlands, Minister of Foreign Affairs Rochussen was equally unconvinced by Granville's professions of friendship: 'the extraordinarily friendly conclusion to the note of 7 January does not remove these

two reservations.'<sup>94</sup> The first of Rochussen's reservations concerned Granville's remark about the 1824 Treaty, at which we have seen he had taken offence. Rochussen thought such a remark unfounded. His second reservation concerned the difference between past and current information from the British government regarding the cession of Laboean. The Dutch government had only now become aware that a district on mainland Borneo would thereby become a British possession. Rochussen instructed Van Bylandt to request information on this latter point and to convey his appreciation for the amicable spirit in which Granville's last communication was conceived. Granville, in turn, expressed the hope that the Borneo question could now be considered solved.<sup>95</sup> Van Bylandt was somewhat surprised by this, and also by the fact that Granville appeared to believe that there was no longer any difference of opinion on the 1824 Treaty.<sup>96</sup>

The British government seemed to attach less weight than the Dutch government to the whole Borneo question. For the Dutch government it was a central issue. The British were keen to get the whole matter out of the way, while the Dutch persisted in their demands for information and recognition of their rights. This situation could be interpreted in a number of ways. First, it is possible that the British government, realising that its position was not totally unassailable, wished to brush aside the Dutch government's objections with fine talk of friendship and



reassurances as to its intentions. Second, it is also possible that Granville and his government simply found the Dutch reaction exaggerated and were genuinely unable to understand their objections. The assurances given by the British government to the Dutch government regarding its intentions in Borneo appear sincere, and at first sight the Dutch government's reactions do indeed appear exaggerated. The initial tendency is to sympathise with the British government's attitude towards the persistent protests of the Dutch. However, the debate of 17 March 1882 in the British House of Commons (discussed above) provides evidence to the contrary and leads to the conclusion that the Dutch protests were - at least in part - justified. It cannot be denied that the British government published the Charter before it had answered the objections of the Dutch government contained in the despatch of 11 August 1881. Furthermore, there is no obvious explanation for this discourtesy other than - as Van Bylandt pointed out - the British government's inability to counter those objections. The failure of the British government to answer this despatch could therefore be seen as a tacit admission of guilt, yet again implying that the Dutch protests, albeit persistent, were not totally unfounded or exaggerated. A third possible explanation is the sheer volume of work at the Foreign Office in London, which increased phenomenally during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The *Dictionary of National Biography* records Granville's apparent inability to cope with the increase in the number

of despatches from 17,000 per year during his first period of office as Colonial Secretary (1868-1874), to 70,000 per year in his second period of office as Foreign Secretary (April 1880 to June 1885).

As to the second of Rochussen's reservations, concerning the Laboean cession, Granville wrote on 17 February 1882 that 'there is no treaty in existence, which has not been communicated to the Netherlands government, under which territory on the mainland of Borneo is ceded to Great Britain'.<sup>97</sup> This had simply been a misunderstanding. At the end of that same month, Van Bylandt wrote to Rochussen with a possible explanation for Granville's extreme friendliness in the memorandum of 17 February.<sup>98</sup> Remarks had been made to Goschen (the British ambassador in Germany) during his stay in Berlin some weeks before, regarding the extensive rights granted in the Borneo charter, and the fact that this had not been the intention of the 1876/77 treaty between Germany and Great Britain on the one hand, and Spain on the other. This treaty had provided for the protection of trade and shipping in the Spanish possessions of the Sulu archipelago. The Dutch defended these criticisms, denying that the British had any intention of obtaining sovereignty on mainland Borneo. This episode could have its advantages. Van Bylandt thought it possible to find out - in confidence - whether the Borneo question had indeed been discussed in this context. He thought it possible that Germany would be willing to

support the Netherlands government in its interpretation of the 1824 Treaty. It appeared later, however, that the rumour regarding this criticism by Germany was unfounded.<sup>99</sup>

As the Borneo negotiations continued, the Dutch government appeared to become even more sensitive. This gave rise to more misunderstanding between the two countries. During the House of Lords debate in March 1882, Granville had referred to the commerce of Spain and the Netherlands as 'far from being as liberal as our own'. This was immediately interpreted as a direct criticism of Dutch trade and colonial policy. Van Bylandt was instructed to express the hope that Granville would rectify this erroneous assertion in Parliament and 'de dissiper ainsi l'effet fâcheux d'une erreur à laquelle l'administration coloniale et la politique commerciale des Indes Néerlandaises n'ont pas donné lieu'.<sup>100</sup>

Again Granville was obliged to placate the Dutch government. He immediately reassured Van Bylandt that the words 'were not meant to convey the impression which they appear to have produced'. Granville had merely intended to convey the fact that in Spain and the Netherlands, free trade was not yet fully established, as it had been in Britain for some years. And he would, of course, make this clear to the House of Lords should the Dutch government so wish.<sup>101</sup>



This incidental episode - although not directly connected to the Borneo question - shows how sensitive the Dutch government had become, and how its sensitivity caused it to misinterpret as criticism the most straightforward statements concerning its policies. This was probably due - in part at least - to Dutch awareness of and sensitivity to the Netherlands' status as a second-rank power, an issue which arose in the various debates surrounding the Borneo issue. Borsius, for example, cited Messchert van Vollenhoven (Member of the Second Chamber until June 1877) who, during the debates on the 1872 treaties regarding Sumatra and the cession of the Guinea Coast, stressed the general principle that small nations, in dealing with larger powers, must compensate in energy and policy what they lacked in power and size. Borsius endorsed this, stating that 'he who wishes to be respected must respect himself.'<sup>102</sup> This was especially true of a small colonial power such as the Netherlands. For some, the status of the Netherlands as a small power justified the belief that she should act forcefully, while others believed that she should tread carefully. Borsius believed in acting forcefully. Speaking in the First Chamber in November 1880, he declared that it was the business of a powerful government - even that of a small state - forcefully to make itself heard by larger and more powerful nations when it had the right to do so. If the Dutch government had already acted with respect to Borneo, it should actively continue down that path. If it had not yet acted, it was

time to do so before it was too late. Minister of Foreign Affairs Van Lynden was more reserved. He adhered to the principle that a second-rank power should not go any further than the rights in question permitted, but should strongly defend those rights.<sup>103</sup>

F.F. de Casembroot (Conservative member for Delft) reminded the government that the whole world was aware that the Netherlands, being a small power, could not always act with force. However, he maintained, it would have been wiser to send a warship to expel the 'adventurer' Von Overbeck while circumstances permitted. Furthermore, the navy was too small and its budget too low for a colonial power such as the Netherlands. The Governor-General in the Indies (concluded De Casembroot) was consequently hard-pressed to keep a wary eye on all that might happen in the Archipelago.<sup>104</sup>

The Dutch press were also aware of the limitations imposed on the Netherlands by its second-rank status. The *Java-Bode* warned that British influence on Borneo would weigh upon Dutch authority and government '[...] with all that humiliating pressure and hindrance that a great neighbour can impose on a smaller power.'<sup>105</sup> It would be worthwhile to see, the *Java-Bode* continued a few days later, how the British government would have behaved if the disputed territory on Borneo was adjoined, and had been claimed by a large power such as Russia or Germany, instead

of two smaller powers such as Spain and the Netherlands.<sup>106</sup> Clearly, the *Java-Bode* was under no illusions about the nature of the Anglo-Dutch relationship and the subservience expected by Great Britain of a smaller power such as the Netherlands.

By May 1882, the emphasis in the Borneo question had begun to shift from the interpretation of the 1824 Treaty to the precise location of the border between the territory of the Netherlands and that of the British North Borneo Company. The Charter of the British North Borneo Company was now a *fait accompli* about which the Dutch government could do nothing, and it appears that it had now abandoned the struggle to get the British government to share its interpretation of the 1824 Treaty, deciding to settle for the next best thing, namely a clear and unambiguous delineation of territory. In the words of the NRC:

The Netherlands must have the unambiguous authority to be able to say to foreign intruders: this far but no further.<sup>107</sup>

But this was not as straightforward as it appeared. The problem was the northern boundary of Dutch territory, which was normally taken to be that of the Kingdom of Boeloengan, part of the once great kingdom of Berouw (see Map 2). Berouw had belonged to Banjarmasin.<sup>108</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Dutch concluded



contracts with Banjarmasin whereby Boeloengan came - in name at least - under Dutch authority. Another more northerly part of Berouw was occupied by the Sultan of Solok who, in 1763, had granted to the English an area in the North of Borneo, himself retaining the north-east coast. The border between Solok and Tidoeng (the most northerly part of Berouw) was unclear; was Tidoeng an independent territory situated between the possessions of the Sultan of Solok and the Dutch, or did Tidoeng belong to Boeloengan, and therefore to the Dutch? This situation was now complicated by the fact that the Sultan of Brunei also laid claim to the coastal area of Solok. His rights were dubious and when he ceded his territory to Von Overbeck the latter thought it prudent to seek the permission of the Sultan of Solok. Since the border between Solok and the Dutch territory was uncertain, the southern border of Dent and Von Overbeck's territory was also unsettled. Furthermore the British, it was claimed, were reluctant to indicate the southern boundary of their territory. The area was very fertile and this tempted the English to extend their boundary further to the south-west.<sup>109</sup>

There were consequently three different interpretations of the location of the Dutch northern boundary on the east coast of Borneo. Of these three, Batoe Tinagat was the most south-westerly and opinions were unanimous on the fact that this point at least belonged to the Netherlands.

The Indies Council (Raad van Indië) advised the Dutch government to bring this to the attention of the British government, adding that the watershed extending from Batoe Tinagat to the central mountains formed the border between Dutch possessions and those of Solok and Brunei.<sup>110</sup> The British took the frontier to be fixed at about 3°20 North latitude, as stated in the decree of 28 February 1846. But this was not the latitude of Batoe Tinagat. The Dutch claimed that the frontier now extended beyond 3°20 , since the incorporation of Boeloengan. The British government refuted this, on the grounds of the dates involved. Granville pointed out that the Dent and Von Overbeck concessions were dated 29 December 1877 and 22 January 1878. The date of the incorporation of Boeloengan, as fixed in a 'contrat de vassalité' was 2 June 1878 (communicated by the Dutch government on 17 January 1880). The concessions had therefore been granted before Boeloengan was incorporated, and the latter could not invalidate the former. Granville's conclusion was amiable but firm:

You will permit me to say, therefore, monsieur le ministre, that a careful friendly examination of your arguments has convinced H.M.'s government that they fail to support a claim for the recognition of a frontier beyond 3°20.<sup>111</sup>

Dutch hopes now rested on a discrepancy. In October 1882 Minister of Colonies De Brauw, an Anti-Revolutionary

who had succeeded the conservative Van Goltstein on 1 September 1882, wrote to his colleague in Foreign Affairs, Rochussen, stating that he was unable to provide an answer to Foreign Secretary Granville's letter (quoted above). He was awaiting the answers to two questions, the first regarding official proof from its archive that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had informed the English government of the decree, and the second regarding the location of the Sibuku river on recent English naval charts.<sup>112</sup> Herein lay the discrepancy: the location of the river on these charts was inaccurate, being placed further north than in reality. Since it could be assumed that Dent and Von Overbeck had referred to these charts, the difference of opinion with Britain was now solved. If Dent and Von Overbeck accepted that their territory was bounded by the Sibuku river, as located on the British charts, then Batoe Tinagat now definitely fell within Dutch territory since the Sibuku river was located too far to the north on the charts.

De Brauw soon received a reply to his first question regarding proof of communication of the 1846 decree. On 5 November 1882 Van Bylandt reported that, during a visit to Sir Julian Pauncefote (Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs), the latter had handed over documents which showed that it had been communicated not by the Dutch government, nor by the delegation, nor the Governor-General of the Indies, but by the British delegate at The Hague, Sir Edward Cromwell Disbrowe.<sup>113</sup> Van Bylandt was relieved:



'this clarifies the matter and makes it much simpler.'<sup>114</sup> If the Dutch government now stood by its rights, the British government would concede. Van Bylandt echoed the hope that the British North Borneo Company would wish the border of its territory to be fixed at the more northerly point. If, however, it insisted that the border were the Sibuku to the South of Batoe Tinagat, he hoped that the Dutch government would not give in, but would be steadfast. Once it was realised in London that the Dutch were tired of conceding, and were resolved to defend their rights, the matter would not, believed Van Bylandt, be taken any further. Finally, he remarked, the British North Borneo Company was in heavy financial difficulty and that the whole matter was in danger of becoming a fiasco: 'all the more reason not to concede.'<sup>115</sup> This may have been true at the time but, as will be seen below, comparisons were made between economic development in Dutch and British Borneo which put the Dutch in the shade. It would appear from these claims that the financial problems of the British North Borneo Company, alluded to by Van Bylandt, were short-lived.

The correspondence continued, with no further progress. In January 1883 the British envoy in The Hague, Stuart, wrote to Rochussen, informing him that in Granville's view further correspondence on the matter 'would not be likely to lead to any satisfactory agreement'.<sup>116</sup> The matter could best be resolved, Granville thought, if both governments jointly appointed

commissioners to investigate the matter *in loco*. Granville proposed that these commissioners be naval officers. The Dutch commissioner should be appointed by the commander-in-chief in the China Seas.

The Dutch were not pleased with this apparently reasonable proposal. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Colonies (Rochussen and De Brauw) sent a memorandum to the Dutch king, relating the history of the Borneo question thus far and requesting His Majesty's permission to reject Granville's proposal (for a further joint investigation).<sup>117</sup> This they did on the grounds that Batoe Tinagat had for many years been recognised as the northern boundary of the Netherlands' possessions on the east coast of Borneo. This had been established in a contract with the ruler of Boeloengan. Furthermore, this point lay to the north of the river which was, according to the Ministers and according to the map accompanying the documents on the Borneo dispute presented to the Dutch parliament, known as the Sibuku. The difference of opinion with England had very probably arisen from the fact that in the concessions made by the Sultans of Solok and Brunei, a second Sibuku river was named 'which is a totally different river from that which the Dutch government knows under that name.'<sup>118</sup> Royal permission to reject the proposal was duly granted.

The British government, however, apparently changed its mind and put forward a second proposal. By way of

settlement, the northern boundary of Dutch territory would be fixed at 4° North. This would mean that the British North Borneo Company's territory would extend south of the Sibuku river - further than stated in the concessions. The Dutch Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Colonies informed the king of this latest development and remarked that what the British considered a settlement was in fact nothing other than a cession of territory by the Dutch government to the said Company.<sup>119</sup>

The Ministers therefore requested the king's permission to state, in answering this second British proposal, that the government felt itself unable to co-operate. Rochussen lamented this development to Van Bylandt. The matter had, he wrote, 'taken an entirely undesirable turn.'<sup>120</sup> The British government had not shown His Majesty's government the friendly inclination to which it so often laid claim.

In a conversation with Van Bylandt, Pauncefote regretted the fact that the Dutch government saw something unfriendly in the two proposals.<sup>121</sup> The British government had no interest at all in the question and was prepared to accept an arbitral decision in the Netherlands' favour. Pauncefote saw no other solution than an investigation *in loco* and, if this was unsuccessful, arbitration. Van Bylandt refuted this, stating that arbitration was only feasible in differences between two governments. In this



case, however, the dispute was between the Dutch government and the Sultan of Sulu, who had made the concessions.

The cause of the present difficulty was, according to Van Bylandt, the fact that the British government had granted the charter too hastily. If the border dispute had been settled first, and the charter made dependent upon this, the British North Borneo Company would have been more accommodating, but now that the company was in possession of the charter 'it is making excessive claims at the expense of Dutch rights.'<sup>122</sup>

Van Bylandt was probably right about the fact that the charter had been granted too hastily. As we have seen, many months had elapsed before the British government reached a decision on whether or not to grant a charter (the change of government being a major factor in this delay). However, once the decision was taken, the British government was apparently determined that objections from the Dutch (and also from the Spanish and American governments) would not stand in the way of the charter. Ultimately, this is probably why it did not answer the despatch from the Dutch government dated 11 August 1881.

By January of the following year (1884) the situation still had not changed significantly. In a letter to Van Bylandt, Granville expressed his regret at the lack of progress:

It is moreover to be feared that, if matters are allowed to remain much longer in their present unsatisfactory condition, a state of feeling may be engendered which will hardly be consonant with the friendly relations now so happily existing between this country and the Netherlands and which H.M.'s government are so desirous of maintaining.<sup>123</sup>

Granville proposed, yet again, a joint mission to establish the true position of the Sibuku river. Van Bylandt now thought this proposal acceptable, since Dutch and British commissioners would work together to ascertain, and not to dispute.<sup>124</sup> Van Bylandt thought that this latest proposal would put an end to the claim repeatedly made by the North Borneo Company that the Dutch government had extended the borders of its territory after the concessions had been granted.

In reply Minister of Foreign Affairs Van der Does de Willebois (who had assumed office in April 1883) stated that if his government accepted the proposal it would be by way of courtesy ('acte de courtoisie'). Such an acceptance would in no way be considered a recognition of Britain's rights to co-operate in the verification of the boundary. Such rights were only enjoyed by a power whose territory bordered on Dutch territory, in this case the Sultan of Solok.<sup>125</sup> In this statement, in which De Willebois describes

that acceptance as an act of courtesy, we hear echoes of Granville's statement concerning the British government's willingness to inform the Dutch government of the draft charter of the British North Borneo Company. Granville had stated that he only did so as an act of courtesy, and that the gesture should in no way be considered as a recognition of the Netherlands' right to demand this. This could be seen as an attempt by the Dutch government to avenge this gesture by the English government. It could also be seen as a reflection of the Dutch perception of their place in the Anglo-Dutch relationship - namely that they felt their government was justified in making assertions as strong as those made by the English government, and wished to show that it could employ the same tactics. Such an attitude seems consistent with the principles of Messchert van Vollenhoven, as cited by Borsius in the Second Chamber, to the effect that small nations, in their dealings with larger powers, must compensate in energy and policy what they lack in power and size. It was, then, important for the Dutch government to be seen - at home as well as abroad - to be holding its own in relation to the larger powers. In his study of nineteenth-century Borneo, Irwin, however, denies that the Dutch government's action regarding the British North Borneo Company was energetic:

The Dutch had not acquiesced willingly in the foundation of the British North Borneo Company, yet it cannot be said that they fought a



full-scale diplomatic battle against it.<sup>126</sup>

Comparing Van Bylandt's protests with those of Van Dedel (the Dutch Ambassador in London) forty years earlier against James Brooke, Irwin comments that the former's were 'weak and hesitant'. He attributes this to the fact that the governing Liberal party had admitted that the Dutch had no right to oppose British expansion on Borneo, since they had accepted the British Treaty with Brunei of 1847. He argues that:

Van Bylandt's protests were probably intended more to pacify the Conservative Party in the States General than to impress the British Foreign Office.<sup>127</sup>

Irwin's claim that the Dutch did not wage a full-scale diplomatic battle against the British North Borneo Company seems harsh. The chronological span of the Borneo question is not consistent with half-hearted diplomacy or 'weak and hesitant' protests. If this had been the case, the Dutch government would surely have dropped the matter much sooner and been more easily satisfied with British explanations and reassurances. The Dutch government continued to make its feelings heard at the Foreign Office in London, refusing to let the matter drop. Yet it did now realise that it was useless to refer to the 1824 Treaty with Britain, and opted instead for a favourable border

settlement.

De Willebois feared that the British government would reject Van Bylandt's proposal to ascertain rather than dispute the boundary. De Willebois and the Minister of Colonies believed, as their predecessors had, that the local investigation would be fruitless and that the Dutch government would be unable to co-operate in bringing the issue to arbitration.

Approximately one year later, in February 1885, Van Bylandt had written to De Willebois that he now thought it a favourable time to take up the matter again.<sup>128</sup> De Willebois disagreed, requesting that Van Bylandt 'play a waiting game' and await further developments.<sup>129</sup> This the Netherlands could safely do, particularly after the statement by Lord Fitzmaurice (Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs) in the House of Commons that Britain was not claiming sovereign rights on Borneo. In answer to this, Van Bylandt emphasised again that the Dutch government should strike while the iron was hot. Sooner or later rich resources such as coal or copper-ore would be discovered in the disputed border area. The British North Borneo Company would 'stretch out a greedy hand, and no doubt be supported by the British government'. However, given the present uncertainty surrounding this, and the difficulties then being experienced by the British government (Gladstone's Liberal government was about to be replaced by Lord

Salisbury's first cabinet, which came to power in June 1885), Van Bylandt believed that neither the British North Borneo Company nor the government would be in a position to make excessive demands. Under the circumstances, there was one way in which the problem could be solved, according to Van Bylandt: namely to fix the location of the disputed boundary by means of direct negotiation between the Indies government and the Company itself. If this were successful, the British government would be forced to respect the settlement.<sup>130</sup> It would appear that, after this memorandum, both sides let the matter rest. This was the advice given one year later in 1886 when Van Bylandt expressed concern about the colonial exhibition in London, where space had been allotted to 'British' North Borneo.<sup>131</sup>

In May 1887, however, matters again became heated when it was rumoured in the press that Sir Frederik Weld (Consul-General at Singapore) was being sent to Brunei, and that Britain was planning to establish a protectorate on North Borneo. Minister of Colonies Sprenger Van Eyk wrote to his colleague Van Karnebeek (the liberal Minister of Foreign Affairs who had replaced De Willebois on 1 November 1885) that Britain must be dissuaded from this course of action since it was against the spirit and purpose of the 1824 Treaty. Van Eyk realised, however, that the Dutch interpretation of the treaty could not be pressed with much force, since the conditions themselves gave the Dutch no right to contest British authority in a part of Borneo not



under Dutch sovereignty. It was nevertheless useful to broach the subject - so long as the region in question was not yet under British authority - so as not to give the impression of indifference.<sup>132</sup> Van Bylandt asked for further information at the Foreign Office, where Sir Julian Pauncefote explained that Sir Frederik Weld had been sent to Brunei to investigate the disputes between Rajah Brooke of Sarawak and the British North Borneo Company (who were, naturally, deadly enemies in commerce) and the Sultan of Brunei, who was caught in the middle. Weld's report had only just been received, and Pauncefote was the only person to have seen it. Van Bylandt trusted Pauncefote's information, but expressed reservations regarding the Colonial Office. Circumstances would sooner or later force Britain to establish a protectorate on North Borneo and Van Bylandt believed that the Colonial Office 'will do everything it can to bring this about, even against the wishes of the Foreign Office.'<sup>133</sup> It seems, then, that the British themselves were not in agreement as to the fate of North Borneo.

In December 1887, Van Bylandt reported that both Sir Frederik Weld and Rajah Brooke were in England, and that Weld's report on North Borneo was under consideration.<sup>134</sup> Van Bylandt also reported a conversation with Pauncefote. Public opinion in the Netherlands had, believed Van Bylandt, been stirred by the use of the word 'resident' in connection with Sir Frederik Weld and North Borneo. It was

possible that this word had a different meaning in England. Otherwise, the appointment of a resident on North Borneo was inconsistent with the conditions of the North Borneo Company's charter. First, there was no question of a British protectorate or British sovereignty over North Borneo. Second, the British enterprise was exclusively private and commercial and, third, the purpose of the charter was to keep the company within those limits. Sir Julian agreed with this, but failed to see that this prevented a British protectorate on North Borneo. This would be justified on the basis of old treaties between England and the Sultans of Brunei, who had undertaken not to cede any territory without the British government's permission. A British protectorate had then, in effect, already existed for a long time. Van Bylandt did not wish to pursue the matter, having heard this, but wondered whether the treaties mentioned by Pauncefote had been communicated to the Dutch government and if so, through which channels. Had no proof of such communication been found, Pauncefote's claims would have been invalidated. Unfortunately for Van Bylandt and the Dutch government, proof of this communication was indeed found. Yet again, it appeared, the Dutch were paying the price for not reacting to the British treaty with the Sultan of Brunei in 1847.

At the end of the 1880s, the situation did not look good for the Dutch. During the past ten years the Dutch government's persistent and determined protests against the

perceived threat of British expansion on Borneo (in the form of the British North Borneo Company) had fallen on stony ground in London. The British government, although appearing at first amicable - albeit bewildered - in the face of the Dutch protests, was at best unco-operative, delaying responses to and ignoring communications from the Dutch government. At worst it was hypocritical, officially professing a willingness to co-operate, while still tacitly pursuing its intended path. The Dutch government had failed to prevent the granting of the British North Borneo Company Charter in 1881. It could only be said that it helped to delay proceedings.

The Borneo question cast a shadow over Anglo-Dutch relations from 1878 until the declaration of the Protectorate in 1888 (Anglo-Dutch relations after the declaration of the Protectorate will be discussed in the following section of this chapter, beginning on p.147). The Dutch government, as we have seen above, did not trust the British government, and found its attitude ambiguous, deceitful and unco-operative. The criticisms voiced in the House of Commons lend credibility to the Dutch government's protests, which appear at first sight somewhat obsessive and not totally justified.

The Borneo question was no doubt influenced by a change in the British attitude towards colonial problems in the 1870s. This change resulted from the increased colonial



competition from other European powers. According to L.R. Wright, the period marked the beginning of a protection-annexation policy:

It was aimed at territories unoccupied by any other European power. The policy was stimulated by the expansion of German and French commercial interests. In Borneo the change of attitude was reflected in Colonial Office support for Sarawak's expansionist tendencies, and by an attempt at the Foreign Office to define its Borneo policy - a policy which hitherto had been vague.<sup>135</sup>

The British government's need to define its policy on Borneo at this time was an extra obstacle for the Dutch government, since the British government was consequently less sympathetic to criticisms of its activities in Borneo.

Borneo was important for the British in blocking the expansion of other large European powers which would have undermined her commercial supremacy in the Far East. For the Netherlands, however, the Borneo question was one of principle. As a second-rank power the Netherlands had to be seen to defend its rights. Since the separation from Belgium, the Netherlands had increasingly looked to its colonial possessions for proof of its standing in the world. This sentiment was also echoed in the Dutch press.

In November 1881, in the first of two articles on the British North Borneo Company, the *Arnhemse Courant* commented:

The only position still of any greatness, which we occupy in the ranks of nations, is that of a colonial power. As a colonial power we can still fulfil an important role; if we cease to be this, the Netherlands will fall back into the ranks of small states with walk-on parts.<sup>136</sup>

This tells us why the Borneo question was so important to the Netherlands. Its priority was not to secure any material advantages in the disputed territory, but to hang on to the last vestiges of former greatness, now to be found in its colonies. In November 1888, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hartsen wrote to the Governor-General in the Indies, Pijnacker van Hordijk:

However small our country may be, our government of the Indies gives us a position which has not been sufficiently asserted, particularly in our own eyes, because although we no longer belong to the ranks of the great powers, I do believe that we have often belittled ourselves, and consequently compromised our real rights. I believe that a country with limited material political powers can only ensure its existence

and future by upholding its rights.<sup>137</sup>

### **From the Protectorate to the border settlement, 1881-1891**

By mid-1888 it had become evident that the British protectorate in North Borneo was a *fait accompli*, just as the British North Borneo Company's Charter had been in 1881. From a communication from Hartsen, (the conservative Minister of Foreign Affairs in Anti-Revolutionary Mackay's cabinet, which had come to power in April 1888) to Van Bylandt, it would appear that Hartsen first learned of the protectorate from the Dutch Consul-General in Singapore. Hartsen informed Van Bylandt that since public opinion would be so sensitive to the issue of the protectorate, the Council of Ministers (*Ministerraad*) had been called together before a decision could be taken on the appropriate course of action. He advised Van Bylandt to proceed with the utmost caution and to make no official approach to the British government. It was not impossible that:

[...] we must finally concede and in that case the only alternative for us is to use this opportunity to obtain as compensation from England a favourable border settlement with recognition of our rights on Borneo [...].<sup>138</sup>



Dutch protests had apparently little or no influence on British decisions; despite claims to the contrary, Britain now exercised authority in North Borneo. This should not have been a surprise; from the beginning of the Borneo question, the political and literary journal the *Indische Gids* had been warning the Dutch government of the dangers inherent in the Von Overbeck concessions. The *Indische Gids* was broadly anti-British and it was heavily critical of the Dutch government. In 1885 it openly accused the Dutch government of 'ostrich politics' ('struisvogel-politiek'). The article concerned was a report of a lecture at London's Royal Colonial Institute on "British North Borneo". During this lecture, a member of the audience enquired about the possibility of territorial expansion. The question was answered by Admiral Mayne (a director of the British North Borneo Company), who stated that the southern boundary of the Company's territory was not yet fixed. Mayne was not sure that this would be for the best, since an official boundary would bind British hands at a time when they were best left free. 'It is strange' wrote a contributor to the *Indische Gids*, 'that these words have hitherto been totally ignored in the Netherlands. Another case of ostrich politics?' It warned: '[...] the dignity of the Netherlands is again in great danger.'<sup>139</sup>

The Dutch government was again made painfully aware of the Netherlands' comparative powerlessness as a nation of

the second rank. As we have seen, Hartsen believed that the Netherlands had often belittled itself and thus compromised its rights. With the British protectorate now established, the whole question was brought back to the point it had reached in 1882/83: the question of the 1824 Treaty. In the House of Commons Mr F.S. Stevenson (member for Suffolk, Eye) asked the Under-Secretary of State for Colonies (Sir James Ferguson) whether it was true that a protectorate was to be extended over North Borneo, Sarawak and Brunei. He also asked whether it was 'distinctly understood that the Treaty of 1824 does not apply to Borneo'. Ferguson replied that the protectorate was the subject of negotiations not yet completed. He added:

It is distinctly held by Her Majesty's Government that the Treaty of 1824 between Great Britain and the Netherlands has no application to Borneo.<sup>140</sup>

The official British view regarding the 1824 Treaty was, then, unchanged since 1881, while the Dutch were again considering Van Bylandt's proposed arbitration on the subject. It was Hartsen's personal opinion that the Dutch government should resign itself to the situation - if Britain was prepared to recognise the points Batoe Tinagat and the river Tawao as the boundary of Dutch territory. If not, then Hartsen thought it advisable to reconsider Van Bylandt's suggestion of arbitration on the 1824 Treaty as

well as the boundary settlement in relation to the treaty with the Sultan of Boeloengan.<sup>141</sup> Van Bylandt replied that he was in favour of arbitration regarding the boundary settlement, but that arbitration on the treaty seemed impossible.<sup>142</sup> He believed that an arbitration which might not turn out in the Netherlands' favour would be more damaging to its morale as a colonial power than the entire Borneo dispute was worth.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, when he first proposed arbitration, he had not read closely enough the second paragraph of Article 12 of the 1824 Treaty (the crucial article defining the Dutch and British spheres of influence). He had since re-read this and now feared that an arbitral decision could rule against the Netherlands.<sup>144</sup> This is a surprising admission of oversight by someone in a position such as Van Bylandt's. That he was capable of this blunder regarding such an important document suggests that he was not always as reliable or well-informed as a diplomat should be. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs under whom he served may also have noticed this, since on one or two occasions his suggestions were overruled.

The biggest obstacle to further negotiations was now the difference between the latitudes 3°20' and 4°20'. The Dutch claimed 4°20' as the boundary of their territory, while the British protested that this had never extended further than 3°. According to Lord Salisbury, the disputed area in fact belonged without doubt to the Sultan of Sulu.<sup>145</sup> The concessions to the North Borneo Company were



therefore perfectly legal. It was the Dutch government which had encroached on the territory of the Company by hoisting the Dutch flag. By now Van Bylandt could see that the matter could only be resolved through arbitration, given the steadfastness of the British government. He now believed that an arbitral decision could rule in the Netherlands' favour, especially in the light of the weak arguments used by Lord Salisbury in the memorandum. However, the question remained as to what sort of effect a decision in the Netherlands' favour would have on future relations with Britain as a colonial power. Van Bylandt did not venture to pronounce on this. Although he would not be happy to see the Dutch claim to Batoe Tinagat surrendered, it was possible that a friendly settlement involving some sort of concession would be preferable. But the Dutch claim must not be abandoned until arbitration was the only remaining solution.<sup>146</sup> In a further communication to Minister of Foreign Affairs Hartsen, written three days later on 21 February 1889, Van Bylandt clearly expressed his feelings towards the British government.<sup>147</sup> During the past ten years it had acted 'contrary to the most elementary principles of international law' ('in strijd met de meest elementaire beginselen van het volkenrecht [...]'), while the Dutch government had shown the greatest politeness and patience. The Dutch government had trusted in the loyalty and friendly assurances of the British government but was now bitterly disappointed. Under the circumstances, arbitration was the only solution. Other

governments should be made aware of Britain's disdain for the principles of international law. Finally, Van Bylandt noted, public opinion could have a great influence, as had been the case in the Nisero question. Presumably he was referring to the fact that the pressure of British public opinion was largely responsible for the British government's attitude towards the Dutch government in this issue, which is the subject of the following chapter.

Resentment towards Britain had clearly increased over the many years that the Borneo question haunted both governments. The British government failed to understand Dutch protests and claims. This was probably inevitable, since to do so could have been seen as an admission of guilt. The Dutch government was continually frustrated by Britain's apparent indifference and lack of response. Yet when the British government *did* respond, the Dutch government variously accused it of treachery, ambiguity and presumptuous behaviour. As we have seen above in the House of Commons debate of 17 March 1882, the Dutch government's perceptions were not totally exaggerated, but contained some element of truth. The British government was, at the very least, guilty of non-co-operation, one example being the failure to answer the despatch of 11 August 1881. It could also be argued that the British government was guilty of some degree of deception by claiming that the Von Overbeck enterprise was purely commercial when it was blatantly obvious that there were political advantages to

be enjoyed from supporting it. It would be unusual for a government to ignore such advantages during a period of intense colonial competition.

The next step was not the arbitration favoured by Van Bylandt, who was again overruled - possibly for the reason given above. What followed instead was a further proposal by the Dutch government for a joint commission to investigate the respective boundary claims by consulting the charts, maps and documents, and by the comparison of dates.<sup>148</sup> Salisbury rejected this proposal on the grounds that *all* the points of the border should be open to discussion. He evidently thought that the proposal did not allow for this.<sup>149</sup>

Hartsen consequently instructed Van Bylandt to make a further proposal, this time explaining that in the forthcoming discussions 'no point concerning the boundary settlement will be excluded', and that both governments would enjoy the same freedom in this respect.<sup>150</sup> Salisbury accepted this second proposal.<sup>151</sup>

A final solution to the Borneo question now appeared imminent. However, the first meetings of the Boundary Commission made little progress 'because both sides stood firmly by their respective rights.'<sup>152</sup> Sir Phillip Currie (permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) now proposed a compromise: the boundary in question should



start from the point 4°10' (instead of 3°20' or 4°20'). The islands of East and West Nanoekan would be left to the Netherlands, while Sebatik would become British (see Maps 1 and 2). The compromise also stipulated freedom of shipping for both countries on all rivers in the disputed area. The Boundary Commission met for the last time on 27 July 1889. At that meeting Van Bylandt summarised the issues involved in the Borneo question, leaving no doubt as to his interpretation of the matter. He stated that the Netherlands government had indeed received repeated reassurances as to the nature of the Dent and Von Overbeck enterprise and Britain's intentions, but

[...] all these reassuring and misleading declarations have been belied by subsequent facts. We have been all along kept in the dark and placed uninformed before accomplished facts.<sup>153</sup>

This complaint was justified, given the action of the British government during the ten years that the Borneo question had remained unresolved. To summarise, then, both the granting of the charter and the protectorate had been 'accomplished facts' which the Netherlands was powerless to change. Both actions had been preceded by constant reassurances from the British government that it was not seeking sovereign rights or political influence on Borneo. The granting of the British North Borneo Company charter

was initially delayed, for reasons discussed above. When it was finally granted, the news first reached the Dutch government via the press (its last protests having been deliberately ignored by the British government). Foreign Secretary Granville did not keep his promise personally to inform the Dutch government. Van Bylandt was accurate in observing that subsequent facts had belied the government's reassurances. This also applies to the declaration of the Protectorate, of which the Dutch government was equally ignorant until it was too late.

Why, then, had the British government made the territory a protectorate? According to Robinson and Gallagher, the protectorate was 'another device for evading the extension of rule', the first being the chartered company. This action by the British government was also the result of intense colonial competition. In the words of Robinson and Gallagher:

[...] faced with the prospect of foreign acquisitions of tropical territory hitherto opened to British merchants, the men in London resorted to one expedient after another to evade the need for formal expansion and still uphold British paramountcy in those regions.<sup>154</sup>

Meanwhile, Minister for Foreign Affairs Hartsen had been considering the British proposal for compromise. His

first impression was that the British government wanted to bring the matter to an end by dividing the disputed area into two halves, without further considering the rights of the native rulers. Furthermore, the matter of the inland boundary had been completely overlooked. He communicated these reservations to Minister of Colonies Keuchenius (also of the Anti-Revolutionary Party) who, after due consideration, concluded that the Dutch government would accept the tenor of the proposal subject to the co-operation of the Sultan of Boeloengan and the approval of the States General.<sup>155</sup> These, then, were the prior conditions for the Dutch government's acceptance.<sup>156</sup> Keuchenius wished the British government to consider the following as further conditions. First: that the settlement of the east-coast boundary be dependent upon the settlement of the entire east-west boundary. Second: Keuchenius agreed with Van Bylandt that Sebatik should remain Dutch. Third: the point chosen as the east-coast boundary should be a suitable starting-point for the inland boundary. Two months later, at the end of October 1889, Hartsen wrote to the Governor of the Netherlands Indies, Pijnacker van Hordijk, stressing the importance of resuming negotiations with the British government as soon as possible (since Hartsen's reply to the British proposal in August 1889, negotiations had been suspended).<sup>157</sup> According to Van Bylandt, the present British government was willing to conclude the matter; if a new government came to power there would be less chance of success. The Dutch government should



therefore act as soon as possible. Moreover, circumstances were more favourable now that Sir Julian Pauncefote had been appointed British ambassador to Washington. Pauncefote had been, according to Hartsen 'the great opponent in London of Dutch interests, also in the matter of Borneo.'<sup>158</sup> His influence had been so great that it was doubtful whether, had he remained in London, any progress would have been made.

Pauncefote's influence was indeed unmistakable. He was a long-standing friend of the Dent family and fully supported the Dent & Von Overbeck enterprise. According to one historian:

It is not too much to say that the labours of this civil servant secured North Borneo for the British in the face of years of delay and opposition from other government departments and politicians.<sup>159</sup>

In May 1890 Van Bylandt was visited by Admiral Mayne, a director of the North Borneo Company who had attended the meetings of the Boundary Commission in 1889. Mayne wished to discuss several points with Van Bylandt before submitting to the British government his company's response to the proposed compromise. He proposed that the inland boundary be fixed at a latitude of 4°10', and extend in a straight line to the mountain Goerapieck. It was in his

experience not practical to use a watershed as a boundary, since meandering rivers could complicate matters. Van Bylandt was much taken by Mayne's views, and saw in this a possible solution to the Borneo question. The matter of the island of Sebatik, however, proved more sensitive. Van Bylandt explained that since the Netherlands had already surrendered the coastal region between Batoe Tinagat and Broershoek (see Map 1), there was a danger that the States-General would reject the entire proposal if Sebatik also had to be surrendered. Mayne in turn explained the importance of Sebatik for his company. Given the damp and unhealthy climate of the north coast above Batoe Tinagat, the North Borneo Company had hoped to establish trading offices and coal stations on the Northern coast of Sebatik. Van Bylandt replied that Dutch sovereignty need not prevent this; he was sure that the Dutch government would be prepared to grant concessions on a piece of land on Sebatik, which could be used for this purpose, but which would remain under Dutch sovereignty.

Hartsen was less enthusiastic about Mayne's proposals.<sup>160</sup> In the first place, the matter of the boundary line was unclear. A boundary line extending from Broershoek to Goerapieck did not correspond to a latitude of 4°10', but ran in a south-westerly direction which was again unfavourable for the Netherlands. Furthermore, the exact location of the mountain Goerapieck - and even its existence - was doubtful. In the second place, a boundary continually

crossing the same river could be problematic. In the third place, the proposal went against the Malay concept of a watershed as boundary between inland states. Van Bylandt, in a despatch to Hartsen dated 12 June 1890, stressed again the necessity of a timely solution. He feared that the English would in the meantime become much more familiar with Borneo than the Dutch, and would discover rich resources. If this happened before a definitive boundary settlement were established, the British government would make excessive demands, and the Netherlands, given its status as a small power, would be unable to refute those demands:

Because in such a situation, without a definitive boundary settlement, the negotiations between a small and a great power are always 'a pot of clay against a pot of iron'.<sup>161</sup>

Moreover, if the Netherlands continued to press for the recognition of the watershed as a boundary, the North Borneo Company would possibly be less flexible regarding the island of Sebatik. The development of Dutch North Borneo was, after all, dependent upon a good relationship with 'the most powerful neighbour' ('den machtigsten buurman'), which was so desirable 'even if this must be achieved by a small territorial concession'.<sup>162</sup> It would appear from these words that, in the end, preserving good relations with Britain was at least as important for the



Dutch as their claims to North Borneo.

In the period immediately preceding the Borneo settlement, the *Indische Gids* became even more outspoken than hitherto in its mistrust of Britain, this time heavily critical of Britain's colonial greed and unwillingness to stand by the smaller powers. In 1890, by way of proof, it published a statistical comparison of Britain's overseas possessions in 1880 and 1890. The figures showed that in those ten years, the British government had annexed approximately 1,210,000 English square miles of territory, which was, the *Indische Gids* helpfully pointed out, nine times the surface area of Belgium. Yet still Britain's colonial hunger was not stilled. This could have unfortunate consequences: 'Immoderation will prove in time to be very damaging to the health.'<sup>163</sup> As regards Britain's unwillingness to stand by the smaller powers, the *Indische Gids* commented that Britain was trying to teach other powers - especially the smaller ones - two lessons: 'Solve your own problems' and 'Trust no-one, not even me!'. Britain was definitely not in the habit of drawing its sword to defend the weak against the strong. Therefore, if the Netherlands was counting on Britain's permanent protection, she would be disappointed, particularly since Britain thought so badly of Dutch colonial policy or - more likely - because the British envied the Dutch their colonial possessions.

Give Borneo to Britain today, and do not be surprised if tomorrow she tries to filch Celebes, Sumatra or Java.<sup>164</sup>

The Dutch government should do everything in its power not to become, once again, the victim of British 'connivings' ('kuiperijen') and 'gall' ('vrijmoedigheid').<sup>165</sup> The Dutch may well have believed that the British envied them their colonies, but this was surely mutual.

The stand taken by the Dutch government around 1890 is markedly different from that taken at the beginning of the dispute in the late 1870s and early 1880s, when the government resolved steadfastly to defend its rights. However, as negotiations became more and more protracted, the government appears to have become more conciliatory and was continually confronted with its own comparative lack of power as a nation of the second rank. The determined pronouncements made in the early stages faded with time. Later, more mention was made of the importance of friendly relations with Britain, and of not rocking the boat. Van Bylandt pointed out, by way of example, that Portugal's assertive behaviour had resulted in its obtaining diminishing rights in Africa.<sup>166</sup> Here, Van Bylandt is very probably referring to the results of the 1884-5 Berlin West-Africa Conference where, as J. Duffy has pointed out:

[...] Portugal lost half of what she had sought to keep, and had it not been for the skill of her diplomats, who played the animosities of France, England and Germany against each other, she would have lost more.<sup>167</sup>

Eventually, in March 1891, Lord Salisbury, who had succeeded Lord Iddlesleigh (Sir Stafford Northcote) as Foreign Secretary in January 1887, informed Van Bylandt that he was prepared to accept the latest Dutch proposals for the boundary. These proposals he understood to be, first:

That the boundary-line should start from 4o10 on the coast and should follow in a straight line in a West-North-West direction, between the rivers Simengaris and Soedang, as far as the point where the 117 East longitude crosses the parallel of 4o20 North latitude, the object being to include the whole of the river Simengaris within Dutch territory. [see Maps 1 and 2]

And, second:

That it should then proceed Westward along the parallel of 4o20 as far as the Crest of the Central Mountains, which forms the Eastern



watershed on that parallel, and thence in a South-Westerly direction along the summit of that range to Gura Peak (Goerapieck).<sup>168</sup>

Salisbury enclosed a draft agreement which gave rise to further correspondence and exchanges between the two governments. The agreement was finally concluded on 20 June 1891. By this time, the Dutch had accepted that it was pointless to persist in the opinion that the Treaty of 17 March 1824 precluded joint occupation on Borneo. This was confirmed by the President of the Council of State (Raad van State) in a memorandum to the dowager Queen Regent:

The Council of State shares the feeling of the government expressed in the explanatory statement that it would serve little purpose to persist in the opinion that the Treaty of 17 March 1824 excludes joint possession on that island.<sup>169</sup>

The establishment of a boundary, even if not totally to the liking of the Dutch government, was far preferable to a state of uncertainty.

The *Indische Gids* welcomed the final negotiations on the border settlement. However, it lamented that fact that the government had not heeded its many warnings. Also, the British North Borneo Company had, some years previously,

made a proposal to the Dutch government similar to the one now made by that very government. The *Indische Gids* regretted that the Dutch government had not then seen fit to take up that proposal. The government had seemed 'strangely and unfortunately enough, little given to solving the question, and the matter became drawn out.'<sup>170</sup>

In 1892, when the Borneo treaty formalised the boundary settlement, the *Indische Gids* commented that the fact remained that the Netherlands had - yet again - been forced to haul down its colours for Britain. It was true that the ceded territory was untamed, low-lying and swampy, and that what remained was enough, but these were merely consoling thoughts which did nothing to restore national pride.<sup>171</sup> The *Economist*, another quality Dutch journal, also had its doubts about the final settlement. It bemoaned, as the *Indische Gids* had, the Dutch government's slowness. If it had listened to the advice of Indies civil servants and concluded a treaty with the Sultan of Brunei, the Netherlands would now have become established on Borneo's Northern coast. Britain would then have accepted this situation and the recently settled question would never have arisen:

We cannot persist in excluding others from an area adjoining our boundary, where we have never exercised sovereign rights and in which we have never shown any interest.<sup>172</sup>

In the course of the exchanges between Great Britain and the Netherlands from 1878 to 1891, changes in attitude can be observed. These changes appear to have been mostly on the Dutch side, while the attitude of the British government remained fairly consistent.

At the beginning of the question the attitude of the Dutch government was comparatively steadfast, being determined to make the British government see that it was contravening the 1824 Treaty. Even at this stage, however, the Dutch government was not happy with the attitude of the British government which, as we have seen above, was seen to be pertinacious, ambiguous and at times even treacherous. The Dutch were continually frustrated by Britain's lack of response. Van Bylandt made these feelings known when he made his general remarks (in English) at the last meeting of the Borneo Boundary Commission on 27 July 1889:

I must confess that up to the present moment I have been unable to explain to myself the reluctance of the British government to provide a friendly power with fair information, on a subject in which political interests of some importance for my country were involved.<sup>173</sup>

By 1888, with little progress having been made and the prospect of a British protectorate on North Borneo, the



Dutch government realised that its attempts had been fruitless. On 13 August 1888 Van Bylandt had a conversation with Lord Salisbury 'from which it became apparent to me that the British government will never recognise our interpretation of the 1824 Treaty.'<sup>174</sup>

In 1888 the *Indische Gids* referred to an article in the *Bataviaasch Handelsblad*, which asked how the principle of occupation (i.e. that a country could only claim rights to a colony which it actively occupied) should be interpreted with regard to Dutch possessions. The *Indische Gids* again remarked on the indifference of the Dutch government: 'We have also asked this question, but the government seems unconcerned by it.'<sup>175</sup> In that same edition, the *Indische Gids* drew attention to a less well-known, but nevertheless significant development. This concerned economic development in British North Borneo and Dutch North Borneo. It was becoming apparent, according to the *Indische Gids*, that British Borneo was developing much faster economically than Dutch Borneo. Moreover, it was evident that increasing numbers of Dutch entrepreneurs were looking for opportunities in British Borneo. The *Indische Gids* was understandably alarmed by this: 'Why must Dutch industrialists and capitalists seek employment for their labour, knowledge and money in *British Borneo*?'<sup>176</sup> Later that year, the *Indische Gids* returned to this problem in an article entitled 'Development of *British Borneo* by the Dutch' ('Ontwikkeling van *Britsch-Borneo* door

Nederlanders'). The blame was laid squarely at the feet of the Dutch government and its colonial policy:

Does it not cast a most unhappy light on Dutch colonial policy, we ask yet again, that Dutchmen prefer to devote their capital and spirit of enterprise to the exploitation of British Borneo, and that Dutch Borneo as well as the other possessions remain untamed and unproductive? For political reasons too, this seems highly dubious.<sup>177</sup>

In 1890 the *Indische Gids* published yet more evidence of British North Borneo's economic success, taken from a report in *Petermann's Mitteilungen* by the German Dr. Posewitz. There followed more criticism of the Dutch government: were Dutch statesmen so lacking in zeal and patriotism that they did not take it upon themselves to obtain such results on Dutch Borneo? Dutch industrialists and capitalists were forsaking Dutch for British Borneo. This was how the Dutch government kindled the national spirit of enterprise!<sup>178</sup> This development was obviously an embarrassing one for the Dutch government, and it appears to have avoided the subject during parliamentary debates. It would certainly not have helped the anti-British position if it were known that the Dutch government was claiming (dubious) rights to a territory which, ironically, was apparently less attractive to Dutch entrepreneurs than

the British settlement which it wanted to exclude. The *Indische Gids* continued to stress the importance of developing Dutch Borneo and the Outer Possessions (*Buitenbezittingen*). It therefore considered the consolidation of existing Dutch possessions more important than expansion.

The *Indische Gids* was not only critical of the Dutch government's stance, but also mistrusted the British government, stating that it was out to deceive public opinion into believing that the Dutch government was guilty of encroachment by occupying a position north of the Siboeckoe river.<sup>179</sup> The *Indische Gids* agreed with member of parliament Brantsen van de Zijp that the greatest vigilance was now necessary, but did not express much faith in the Minister of Foreign Affairs. It would be a great surprise - and relief - to many if the Minister did not allow himself to be outwitted by Britain, and proved himself equal to the task in hand.<sup>180</sup>

## **Conclusion**

As the years passed, disappointment at Britain's conduct had increased among Dutch ministers and diplomats, although towards Britain itself the Dutch government showed a friendly spirit, only letting its impatience show on the few occasions discussed above. But, with time, the Dutch



government became more accommodating - apparently of necessity - and began to make concessions later in the dispute on points which it would not even discuss at the beginning (e.g. its interpretation of the 1824 Treaty, Batoe Tinagat as the northern boundary on the East coast, the possession of Sebatik). Throughout the dispute, as seen above, Britain continually refuted the protests made by the Dutch government, with constant reassurances that the Dent and Von Overbeck enterprise was purely commercial and that it was not seeking to acquire sovereign rights in North Borneo. On occasion British despatches showed signs of impatience and bewilderment. The British government seems to have thought that the Dutch government was over-reacting and prone to being over-sensitive. Admiral Mayne, whose proposal regarding the boundary line formed the basis of the final agreement, failed to understand why the Dutch government was so incensed:

I am still at a loss to understand how a great government owning such an enormous tract of land in Borneo as the Netherlands government does, can make any serious point of such a little island [Sebatik].<sup>181</sup>

It would appear, then, from the diplomacy of the Borneo question, that the Netherlands government was finally unable to hold its own against Great Britain. Van Bylandt had been perceptive in his observation that

negotiations between the two countries could be likened to a pot of clay against a pot of iron. Its initial steadfastness having been undermined by lack of progress and English unresponsiveness, the Dutch government was increasingly reminded of the restrictions imposed by its country's status as a second-rank power. Van Bylandt had remarked as early as 1879 that the representatives of large powers (to which England owed respect) received better treatment at the Foreign Office than those of the smaller powers:

[...] but for the representatives of smaller states, for whom Lord Salisbury himself is very rarely available, the verbal discussion of important issues with Foreign Office heads of department is the most inadequate that one could possibly contrive.<sup>182</sup>

Lord Salisbury's reactions confirmed this impression for Van Bylandt who, shortly after the above communication, reported a conversation with the former to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Van Lynden. In this conversation it had become clear to Van Bylandt that Salisbury was not prepared 'to recognise the equality of rights between great and small powers.'<sup>183</sup>

It could be argued that, had the Borneo question arisen earlier in the century, Great Britain would have

been more accommodating towards the Netherlands. However, in an age characterised by the race for colonies, it was far more important for the British government to ensure, first, that it was not out-paced by other would-be colonial powers - its neighbours in Europe - and, second, that existing trade routes and colonies were protected. Great Britain - a colonial power of the first rank - could not therefore afford to devote too much attention to the protests of a second-rank neighbour, thereby running the risk that its own colonial status would be undermined. This could explain the British government's impatience with the continual objections from the Dutch government. Britain's professions of friendship might, then, have been genuine enough, but the government could not allow its relationship with the Netherlands to take precedence over wider and more pressing colonial issues; hence the British 'stubbornness' ('vasthoudendheid').

It could also be argued that the Borneo debate between Britain and the Netherlands, arising as it did towards the end of the nineteenth century, was a sign of the times. With the great powers fighting amongst themselves for the remaining potential colonies, it was no surprise that the smaller powers were pushed aside in the rush. It could be argued that the Netherlands was pushed aside by Great Britain in the Borneo question, as the latter strove to maintain a position of paramountcy. This is evident in the way in which, as seen in this chapter, the British



government was relatively uninterested in, and unsympathetic towards, the protests of the Dutch government. As K.G. Tregonning pointed out in his study of North Borneo under the chartered British North Borneo Company,

Neither Salisbury nor his successor, Lord Granville, both of whom were well briefed by Pauncefote, was prepared to pay much attention to the Dutch claims, which they pressed most insistently, that a British settlement in Borneo would cause a profound disturbance, and that it was a violation of the 1824 Anglo-Dutch treaty.<sup>184</sup>

British Liberal governments during the last decades of the nineteenth century were faced with a dilemma: how to maintain Britain's commercial, industrial and colonial position (in the face of increasing competition from her European neighbours on all three fronts) without incurring extra expense and responsibility. Borneo was an example of how this was attempted. The resulting Anglo-Dutch dispute over the island shows what could happen when a second-rank power - aware of its limitations but nevertheless steadfastly adhering to the principle that it should speak up for itself - attempted to exert influence on such a policy.

The results of the Netherlands' attempts to defend its

rights on Borneo were mixed. Initially, the Dutch themselves could not even decide exactly what those rights were. It was the liberals who finally established that the Netherlands had no rights in the contested area. Having decided that it could not prevent British expansion in North Borneo, the Dutch government settled for the next best thing: a favourable boundary settlement between the Dutch and British territories. Even then, the Dutch were obliged to accept compromises which were initially unthinkable, while Britain herself made few, if any, concessions.

However noble its efforts to speak up for itself, the Dutch government was unable to exert as much influence on British decision-making on the matter as it would have liked. The evidence examined in this chapter strongly suggests that the Dutch perception of their role in the Anglo-Dutch relationship differed from that of Britain. Judging by its attitude in the Borneo dispute, the Dutch government overestimated its ability to influence the British government. The result was mounting suspicion, bitterness and disappointment. There was also a growing awareness that, however attractive the British assurances of fairness and friendship, the British government nevertheless called the tune in the relationship. This had become painfully obvious in the granting of the British Borneo Company's charter and the declaration of the British Protectorate.

Nevertheless, the Netherlands still needed the friendship of Britain as it had done for many decades: Britain had protected Dutch colonies from the French in the Napoleonic era, and had engineered the establishment of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1814, which gave the country - coupled with the southern Belgian provinces - the status of a first-rank power, albeit temporarily. This necessity for friendship with Britain confirms the Netherlands' position as a small power, which R.L. Rothstein defines as:

[...] a state which recognises that it cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes or developments to do so; the Small Power's belief in its ability to rely on its own means must also be recognised by the other states involved in international politics.<sup>185</sup>

Rothstein also makes another observation on the foreign policy of small powers which is largely consistent with the attitude of the Netherlands in the Borneo question:

In some cases, foreign policy not only concentrates exclusively on the short-run



factors, but also tends to consume the entire political process of a Small Power. The threat confronting it may seem so total and so imminent, that discussion of anything else appears irrelevant.<sup>186</sup>

In the Borneo dispute the need to remain on good terms with Britain was never overlooked by Dutch politicians and diplomats. However angry, fearful and suspicious the Dutch government may have been towards Britain, it remained cautious, even when expressing sympathy with other small powers experiencing similar colonial struggles with Britain. When Portugal was embroiled in the dispute over Africa, which culminated in Salisbury's famous ultimatum of January 1890 (stating that Portugal should withdraw her forces from the disputed territory), the Dutch press was favourable to Portugal. However, as E. Axelson points out:

The Minister of Foreign Affairs [G. van Tienhoven] expressed the sympathy of his cabinet for the predicament in which Portugal found herself, but made it clear that his Government would not act against Britain.

Although the Borneo question was obviously not the only issue occupying foreign-policy makers in the Dutch government, the British government's activity on Borneo was seen as a major threat to the Netherlands' status as a

colonial power, and this threat may have resulted - initially at least - in a panic which caused some Dutch politicians temporarily to overlook the fact that the Netherlands had no rights to the territory in question.

The Anglo-Dutch relationship survived the turbulence caused by the Borneo question but the Netherlands appears to have paid the price for its survival by making more concessions than Britain; indeed it could be argued that it had no choice. The stifled resentment over the Borneo question may have helped to contribute to the eruption of anti-British feeling during the Boer Wars at the very end of the century.

Notes to Chapter 3.

1. Graham Irwin, *Nineteenth Century Borneo. A Study in Diplomatic Rivalry* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1955), p.2.
2. *Ibid.*, p.10.
3. D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, 4th edn, (London: Macmillan, 1981), p.563.
4. Irwin, *Nineteenth Century Borneo*, p.16.
5. *Ibid.*, p.36-7.
6. L.R. Wright, *The Origins of British Borneo* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1970), p.11-12.
7. Irwin, *Nineteenth Century Borneo*, p.101.
8. *Ibid.*, p.160.
9. M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Opkomst van het moderne imperialisme*, pp.12-13.
10. Irwin, *Nineteenth Century Borneo*, p.199.
11. *Ibid.*
12. K.G. Tregonning, *Under Chartered Company Rule (North Borneo 1881-1946)* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1958), p.12. See also Irwin, *Nineteenth Century Borneo*, p.199.
13. Irwin, *Nineteenth Century Borneo*, p.201.
14. Hall, *History of South-East Asia*, p.609.
15. Wright, *Origins*, pp.20-24 and Tregonning, *Chartered Company Rule*, p.22.
16. *Handelingen der Staten-Generaal* [hereafter *H.S.G.*] ('s-Gravenhage: Algemene Landsdrukkerij) 1879-80 I. 9de Zitting, 12 Nov., p.52.
17. J. Woltring, ed., *Bescheiden betreffende de buitenlandse politiek van Nederland 1871-1898* ('s-Gravenhage: Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën, 1965) Tweede deel: 1874-1880, no.446b, pp.670-71.
18. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Tweede deel: 1874-1880, no.384, pp.582-83.
19. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 II, 19de Zitting, 21 Oct., p.200.
20. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Tweede deel: 1874-1880, no.387,



pp.585-86: 'Onze houding in deze tegenover Engeland moet bovenal daartoe strekken om de regeering zooveel mogelijk tegen te houden van het verleenen van steun aan de nieuwe Maatschappij, vooral ook van handelingen waardoor de nieuwe onderneming, bij het verlies van onafhankelijkheid van den Sultan van Broenai, in politieken zin eene Britsche zou worden.'

21. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Tweede deel: 1874-1880, no.446b, p.673.
22. Ibid., no.446c, p.694: 'Alle onze uitleggingen zijn dan ook analogische redeneringen, welke [...] altijd buiten het contract om moeten gezocht worden, terwijl van Engelse zijde eenvoudig geantwoord wordt: Er staat geschreven.' According to Woltring (ibid., p.668, footnote 1), the first reference (on 20 February 1880) to the author of this memorandum, Jhr.Mr. R.A. Klerck, is at the Department of Trade and Consular Affairs (*Handels- en consulaire Zaken*), where he served as assistant clerk (*adjunct-commies*). On 10 January 1883 he was a clerk (*commies*) in the Department of Political Affairs (*Politieke Zaken*). He is no longer mentioned in the State Almanac (*Staatsalmanak*) of 1887.
23. Ibid., 1874-1880, no.468, p.738.
24. *The Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time* [hereafter *Hansard*] (London: T.C. Hansard et al.), Third Series, Vol.239 (26 March 1878 - 15 May 1878), col.857.
25. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.240 (16 May 1878 - 20 June 1878), col.358.
26. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.243 (5 December 1878 - 28 February 1879), col.523.
27. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.267 (3 March - 24 March 1882), col.1175.
28. Wright, *Origins*, p.162.
29. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.267 (3 March - 24 March 1882), col.1174.
30. Kuitenbrouwer, *Opkomst*, p.82.
31. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.246 (9 May 1879 - 16 June 1879), cols. 1698-99.
32. Ibid., col.1911.
33. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, ('s-Gravenhage: Rijks-geschiedkundige Publicatiën, 1967) Derde deel:

- 1881-1885, no.42, pp.58-59.
34. Ibid., no.42, p.59.
  35. Ibid.: 'Nous crions avant d'être frappés.'
  36. Ibid., no.48, p.65.
  37. Ibid., no.51, p.69.
  38. Ibid., p.116, footnote 1.
  39. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.267 (3 March - 24 March 1882), col.1164.
  40. Ibid.
  41. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Derde deel: 1881-1885, no.81, p.117: '[...] aangezien een officiële en schriftelijke wederlegging daarvan op degelijke gronden niet gemakkelijk is.'
  42. Ibid., p.118: '[...] waarmede wij zoo vele andere tedere koloniale onderwerpen te behandelen hebben.'
  43. Ibid., p.117.
  44. 'De Britsche Noord-Borneosche Compagnie, II', *Arnhemse Courant*, 25 November 1881: 'Wanneer de "geest der traktaten" buiten de "letter der traktaten" blijft, baten de achternakomende protesten niet veel, vooral niet nadat het gebleken is dat onze gevolgmachtigden zoo ultrabeleefd zijn geweest Engeland's "toegeeflijkheid op het punt van Sumatra" te reciproceren door Nederland's toegeeflijkheid op het punt van Borneo.'
  45. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Derde deel: 1881-1885, no.81, p.117.
  46. Ibid., no.82, p.118.
  47. Ibid., no.82a, p.119.
  48. Ibid., no.82, p.118.
  49. Ibid., no.82a, p.120.
  50. 'Borneo. Slot', *NRC* (Tweede Blad), 17 January 1882: 'Het traktaat van 1824, Engeland niet uitsluitende van Borneo, heeft natuurlijk evenmin Nederland het recht benomen zich uit te breiden op Borneo.'
  51. 'De Britsche Noord-Borneosche Compagnie, II', *Arnhemse Courant*, 25 November 1881: 'Het is waar dat wij,

- strikt, woordelijk, letterlijk genomen, op Noord Borneo geen recht hebben. Wij zijn in 1824 veel te bescheiden, en al te bescheiden geweest, om thans eenig recht meer op Noord Borneo te doen gelden.'
52. 'Een Engelsche annexatie in onzen archipel, IV', *Java-Bode*, Bijvoegsel (Batavia: Bruining), 29 December 1881.
  53. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 II, 19de Zitting, 22 Oct., p.217.
  54. Ibid.
  55. 'Borneo, III', *NRC* (Tweede Blad), 7 January 1882: 'Over Borneo is in de onderhandelingen gezwezen. Borneo is in het traktaat niet genoemd. Borneo mocht voor het Engelsche Parlement niet worden aangerod. Borneo moest in de Nederlandsche Kamers stilzwijgend worden voorbijgegaan, en nog wil men ons wijs maken, dat het traktaat den rechtstoestand op Borneo regelt!'
  56. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 I, 7de Zitting, 10 Nov., p.32.
  57. Ibid.
  58. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 I, 9de Zitting, 12 Nov., pp.43-46.
  59. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 II, 46e Zitting, 20 Dec., p.690.
  60. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 II, 19de Zitting, 22 Oct., p.216.
  61. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 I, 9de Zitting, 12 Nov., p.52.
  62. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 II, 19de Zitting, 22 Oct., pp.200-201.
  63. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 II, 31e Zitting, 2 Dec., p.381.
  64. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 II, 30e Zitting, 1 Dec., p.375.
  65. Kuitenbrouwer, *Opkomst*, p.82.
  66. Irwin, *Nineteenth Century Borneo*, p.207.
  67. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.267 (3 March - 24 March 1882), col.1151.
  68. Ibid., col.1152.
  69. Marvin Swartz, *The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Era of Disraeli and Gladstone*, (London: Macmillan, 1985), p.149.
  70. 'Eene nieuwe Oostindische Compagnie: De Engelsche Borneo-maatschappij, II', *NRC* (Eerste Blad), 19 November 1881.



71. 'Een Engelsche annexatie in onzen archipel, II', *Java-Bode* (Bijvoegsel), 24 December 1881.
72. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.267 (3 March - 24 March 1882), cols.1211-1216.
73. 'De Britsche Noord-Borneosche Compagnie, I', *Arnhemse Courant*, 23 November 1881.
74. 'Eene nieuwe Oost-Indische Compagnie: De Engelsche Borneo-maatschappij, III', *NRC*, 21 November 1881: 'Steeds zal men bij het optreden der Compagnie moeten rekening houden met John Bull, die achter haat staat, haar poppetjes volkomen in zijn macht heeft en ze naar welgevallen kan laten dansen.'
75. *Ibid.*: '[...] agente; van gehoorzame dienaressen der Engelsche Regeering.'
76. 'Een Engelsche annexatie in onzen archipel', *Java-Bode* (Bijvoegsel), 23 December 1881: 'Hun onderneming is een handels-compagnie met soevereiniteits-rechten in den trant der vroegere Engelsche en Nederlandsche Compagnieën.'
77. 'Een Engelsche annexatie in onzen archipel, II', *Java-Bode* (Bijvoegsel), 24 December 1881.
78. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 I, 9de Zitting, 12 Nov., p.50.
79. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 II, 19de Zitting, 22 Oct., p.217.
80. *H.S.G.* 1878-9 II, 14de Zitting, 26 Nov., p.123: 'Het denkbeeld dat eene zeer uitgebreide koloniale magt een land groot zou maken, behoort tot de denkbeelden van het verledene; in geen enkel land zal men de politiek, om het koloniaal gebied zover mogelijk uit te breiden, meer als eene wijze politiek beschouwen. Maar als men eenmaal het geluk of het ongeluk heeft eene koloniale mogendheid te zijn, staat men dikwerf voor de noodzakelijkheid dier uitbreiding.'
81. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 II, 19de Zitting, 22 Oct., p.223: '[...] veel weerklank zouden vinden bij Lord Beaconsfield.'
82. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 I, 9de Zitting, 12 Nov., p.52.
83. *H.S.G.* 1879-1880 II, 18de Zitting, 21 Oct., pp.200-201.
84. *Woltring, Bescheiden*, Tweede deel: 1874-1880, no.446b, p.677: 'Zelfs in het Parlement volhardde het Engelsche gouvernement bij zijne dubbelzinnige houding.'
85. *Ibid.*, no.446c, p.687: '[...] de traditioneele

verraderlijke politiek van het Engelsche gouvernement [...].'

86. Ibid., no.467, p.737: '[...] tot niets leidt en geen vertrouwen hoegenaamd verdient.'
87. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Derde deel: 1881-1885, no.23, p.35.
88. 'Borneo, I', NRC (Tweede Blad), 5 January 1882: 'Als onze Regeering met al te blind vertrouwen op de betekenis van officieele verklaringen insluimert, wie weet hoe spoedig de logica der feiten haar dan op onzachte wijze wakker zal schudden.'
89. 'Een Engelsche annexatie in onzen archipel, II', *Java-Bode* (Bijvoegsel), 24 December 1881.
90. 'Een Engelsche annexatie in onzen archipel. Slot.', *Java-Bode* (Bijvoegsel), 4 January 1882: '[...] waar wij komen, houden de rechten van anderen op.'
91. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Derde deel: 1881-1885, no.101, p.158.
92. Ibid.
93. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.267 (3 March - 24 March 1882), col.1162.
94. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Derde deel: 1881-1885, no.112, p.185: 'Het zoo bijzonder vriendschappelijke slot der nota van 7 januarij mogt over die beide bezwaren niet heen doen stappen.'
95. Ibid., no.117, p.189.
96. Ibid., no.121, p.195.
97. Ibid., no.122, p.196.
98. Ibid., no.126, p.201.
99. Ibid., no.163, p.245.
100. Ibid., no.138, p.215-16.
101. Ibid., no.146, p.225.
102. H.S.G. 1879-1880 I, 9de Zitting, 12 Nov., p.43: '[...] wie geëerbiedigd wil worden toone zichzelf te eerbiedigen.'
103. H.S.G. 1879-1880 I, 18de Zitting, 20 Jan., p.122.
104. H.S.G. 1879-1880 II, 19de Zitting, 22 Oct., p.219.

105. 'Een Engelsche annexatie in onzen archipel', *Java-Bode* (Bijvoegsel), 23 December 1881: '[...] met al die vernederende zwaarte en hinderlijkheid, welke een groote nabuur aan een kleiner mogendheid bezorgen kan.'
106. 'Een Engelsche annexatie in onzen archipel, IV', *Java-Bode* (Bijvoegsel), 29 December 1881.
107. 'Eene nieuwe Oost-Indische Compagnie: De Engelsche Borneo-Maatschappij, III', *NRC*, 21 November 1881: 'Nederland moet dan een ondubbelzinnige bevoegdheid bezitten den vreemde indringers toe te roepen: tot hier, maar niet verder.'
108. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Derde deel: 1881-1885, no.177, p.260.
109. *Ibid.*, p.263.
110. *Ibid.*
111. *Ibid.*, no.185, p.271.
112. *Ibid.*, no.218, p.304.
113. *Ibid.*, no.222, pp.307-308.
114. *Ibid.*, no.242, p.339: '[...] dit klaart de zaak op en maakt dezelve veel eenvoudiger.'
115. *Ibid.*: '[...] reden te meer om niet toe te geven.'
116. *Ibid.*, no.268.
117. *Ibid.*, no.284, pp.393-96.
118. *Ibid.*, p.396: '[...] die eene geheel andere rivier moet zijn dan die, welke de Nederlandsche regeering onder dien naam kent.'
119. *Ibid.*, no.298, pp.413-14.
120. *Ibid.*, no.300, p.416: '[...] een alleszins ongewenschten keer genomen.'
121. *Ibid.*, no.301, p.418.
122. *Ibid.*, p.419: '[...] maakt zij buitensporige aanspraken ten koste der regten van Nederland.'
123. *Ibid.*, no.403, p.596.
124. *Ibid.*, no.409, pp.603-605.
125. *Ibid.*, no.416, pp.615-16.



126. Irwin, *Nineteenth Century Borneo*, p.207.
127. Ibid.
128. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Derde deel: 1881-1885, no.587, p.810, footnote 2.
129. Ibid., pp.810-11: '[...] eene afwachtende houding.'
130. Ibid., no.589, pp.813-14.
131. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, ('s-Gravenhage: Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën, 1968) Vierde deel: 1886-1890, no.25.
132. Ibid., no.131, pp.182-83.
133. Ibid., no.132, p.184: '[...] al het mogelijke zal doen om het daartoe te brengen, zelfs in weerwil van het Foreign Office.'
134. Ibid., no.174, pp.251-52.
135. Wright, *Origins*, p.203.
136. 'De Britsche Noord-Borneosche Compagnie, I', *Arnhemse Courant*, 23 November 1881: 'De eenige nog eenigszins groote positie, welke wij in de rij der staten innemen, is die eener koloniale mogendheid. Als koloniale mogendheid kunnen wij nog eene belangrijke rol vervullen; houden wij op deze te zijn, dan treedt Nederland terug in de rij der kleinen, figuranten-rollen vervullende staten.'
137. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Vierde deel: 1886-1890, no.266, p.390: 'Hoe klein ons land ook moge zijn, ons Indisch beheer geeft ons eene positie, die men niet genoeg heeft doen gelden, vooral in eigen op- vatting, want al mogen wij niet meer behoren tot mogendheden van grooten rang, zoo geloof ik toch, dat men dikwijls heeft toegegeven aan eigen kleinachting en daardoor getransigeerd over onze wezenlijke rechten; ik vermeen dat een land met beperkte materieele politieke krachten alleen zijn bestaan en toekomst kan verzekeren door handhaving van zijne rechten.'
138. Ibid., no.226, pp.336-37: '[...] wij ons tenslotte neer moeten leggen en ons in dat geval niets beters te doen zal overblijven dan van deze gelegenheid gebruik te maken om als compensatie van Engeland een voordelige regeling der grensquaestie met erkenning van onze rechten op Borneo te verkrijgen [...].'
139. 'De North Borneo Company denkt aan territoirvergrooting', *Indische Gids*, 7 (1885), II,

p.904: 'Het is bevreemdend dat die woorden tot nu toe in Nederland niet de minste aandacht gevonden hebben. Alweer struisvogelpolitiek? [...] De waardigheid van Nederland loopt weder groot gevaar.'

140. *Hansard, Fourth Series, Vol.329 (1888) col.1706.*
141. *Woltring, Bescheiden, Vierde deel: 1886-1890, no.274, pp.406-407.*
142. *Ibid., no.276, p.408.*
143. *Ibid., no.277, p.409.*
144. *Ibid., no.281, p.416.*
145. *Ibid., no.301, pp.452-53*
146. *Ibid., no.308, p.458.*
147. *Ibid., no.311, pp.464-65.*
148. *Ibid., no.318, p.481.*
149. *Ibid., no.330, pp.500-501.*
150. *Ibid., no.331, pp.501-502: '[...] geen punt rakende de grensregeling zal worden buiten gesloten.'*
151. *Ibid., no.336, p.507.*
152. *Ibid., no.342, p.520: '[...] omdat men van beiden zijden pal stond op de wederzijds beweerde rechten.'*
153. *Ibid., no.347a, p.529. General remarks made by Van Bylandt in English.*
154. *Gallagher and Robinson, Free Trade, p.12.*
155. *Woltring, Bescheiden, Vierde deel: 1886-1890, no.348, pp.530-31.*
156. *Ibid, no.352, pp.357-40.*
157. *Ibid., no.377, pp.572-73.*
158. *Ibid.: '[...] de groote tegenstander der Nederlandsche belangen in Londen, ook terzake van Borneo [...].'*
159. *Tregonning, Chartered Company Rule, p.21.*
160. *Woltring, Bescheiden, Vierde deel: 1886-1890, no.453, pp.658-88.*
161. *Ibid, no.455, p.692: 'Want in een zoodanigen toestand, zonder definitieve grensregeling, zijn de*



onderhandelingen tusschen eene kleine en eene groote mogendheid toch altijd: "pot de terre contre pot de fer".'

162. Ibid., pp.690-93: '[...] al moet zij ook verkregen worden ten koste van eene kleine territoriale concessie.'
163. 'Engelands overzeesche bezittingen in 1880 en in 1890', *Indische Gids*, 12 (1890), II, 1560-61 (p.1561): 'De onmatigheid zal echter ook hier te eeniger tijd blijken, voor de gezondheid zeer schadelijk te zijn.'
164. Ibid., p.1758: 'Geef den Engelschen vandaag Borneo en verwonder U niet dat zij U morgen Celebes, Sumatra of Java trachten te ontfutselen.'
165. 'Grensregeling op Borneo', *Indische Gids*, 12 (1890), II, 1987-88 (p.1988).
166. Woltring, *Bescheiden* ('s-Gravenhage: Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën, 1970) Vijfde deel: 1891-1894, no.27, pp.55-56.
167. James Duffy, *Portugal in Africa* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p.111.
168. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Vijfde deel: 1891-1894, no.100, pp.162-63.
169. Ibid.: 'De Raad van State deelt het gevoel der regeering in de memorie van toelichting ontwikkeld, dat het weinig nut zoude hebben de stelling te willen blijven volhouden dat het traktaat van 17 Maart 1824 gemengd bezit op dat eiland uitsluit.'
170. 'Grensregeling op Borneo', *Indische Gids*, 12 (1890), II, p.1987: '[...] vreemd en jammer genoeg! - aan de oplossing van de quaestie weinig gelegen, en de zaak werd slepende gehouden.'
171. *Indische Gids*, 12 (1892), II, pp.127-30.
172. *De Economist*, 1892, pp.818-20: 'Maar het gaat toch niet aan anderen bij voortduring te weren uit een op onze grenzen gelegen gebied, waar wij nimmer souvereiniteitsrechten uitoefenden, en waaraan wij ons nimmer lieten gelegen liggen.'
173. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Vierde deel: 1886-1890, no.347a, p.529.
174. Ibid., no.234, p.348: '[...] waaruit mij gebleken is, dat de Britsche regeering onze opvatting van het traktaat van 1824 nooit zal erkennen.'



175. 'Geen recht zonder feitelijk bezit', *Indische Gids*, (1888), I, p.64: 'Ook wij hebben die vraag reeds gedaan, maar de regeering schijnt onbezorgd.'
176. 'De Noord-Borneo-Compagnie', *Indische Gids*, 10 (1888), I, 65-67 (p.67): 'Waarom moeten Nederlandsche industriëelen en kapitalisten in Britsch-Borneo een emploi zoeken voor hun werkkraft, kennis en geld?'
177. 'Ontwikkeling van Britsch Borneo door Nederlanders' *Indische Gids*, 10 (1888), II, 1881-82 (p.1882): 'Werpt het geen allertreurigst licht op Nederlands koloniaal beleid, vragen wij alweer, dat Nederlanders hun kapitaal en hun ondernemingszucht bij voorkeur aan de ontginning van Britsch Borneo wijden, en Nederlandsch Borneo alsmede de andere Buiten-bezittingen woest en improductief blijven? Ook om politieke redenen schijnt dat hoogst bedenkelijk.'
178. 'Dr. Posewitz over Britsch Noord-Borneo', *Indische Gids*, 12 (1890), II, pp.1985-86.
179. 'De grens tusschen het gebied van Nederland en dat van de North-Borneo-Company', *Indische Gids*, 10 (1888), II, 1295-1298 (p.1298).
180. 'Nederlands rechten op Borneo', *Indische Gids*, 11 (1889), I, 62-65 (p.65).
181. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Vierde deel: 1886-1890, no.457c, p.698.
182. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Tweede deel: 1874-1880, no.467, p.737: '[...] maar voor vertegenwoordigers van kleinere Staten, voor wien Lord Salisbury zelf zeer zelden te spreken is, is mondelinge behandeling van gewichtige onderwerpen met de afdeulings-chefs van het Foreign Office de gebrekkigste, die men zich maar kan uitdenken.'
183. Ibid., no.468, p.739: '[...] gelijkheid van rechten te erkennen tusschen groote en kleine mogendheden.'
184. Tregonning, *Chartered Company Rule*, p.23.
185. Robert L. Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1968).
186. Ibid., pp.25-26.
187. Eric Axelson, *Portugal and the Scramble for Africa, 1875-1891* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1967), pp.223-4.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE NISERO QUESTION

#### Introduction

Historians of Indonesia (and of Sumatra in particular) will already be familiar with the Nisero incident which involved the kidnap of a crew - including some British seamen - after a shipwreck which took place in 1883 during the Achin War. The purpose of this chapter is therefore not to introduce new sources, but to consider existing sources from a perspective which has not been dealt with in great depth by historians who have written on the subject. In this chapter, the Nisero question will be considered within the context of Anglo-Dutch relations, and in particular the Dutch perception of that relationship.

The so-called 'Nisero question' dominated Anglo-Dutch relations for a short period in the early 1880s, placing extra stress on a relationship which was already under strain from the long-running Borneo dispute. This chapter will examine the consequences of the Nisero question for the Anglo-Dutch relationship. The claim made by Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, in his standard work on Dutch colonial policies in the later nineteenth century, that the Nisero question did not fundamentally alter the Dutch government's policy towards Britain will also be considered.<sup>1</sup> The Nisero

question is furthermore important from the point of view of public opinion (in this case British), and the extent to which the British government was influenced by this. In the Borneo dispute the situation was reversed: Dutch public opinion called for action against the British on Borneo, whereas in the Nisero question British public opinion called upon the British government to pressurise the apparently reluctant Dutch government into securing the release of the captured Nisero crew.

The fullest treatment of the Nisero incident is to be found in A. Reid's *Contest for North Sumatra*.<sup>2</sup> The most recent treatment is in the work by Kuitenbrouwer mentioned above.<sup>3</sup> Also of interest is an article by W.Ph. Coolhaas, which describes the reactions of a prominent intellectual, Professor P. Harting to the Nisero question.<sup>4</sup> Reid devoted an entire chapter to the Nisero question, which he considers from the perspective of the history of Sumatra, and more specifically 'the special problem created by the division of commercial and political power in North Sumatra in a period of imperial expansion'.<sup>5</sup>

The Nisero incident took place within the context of the Dutch government's attempts to bring under its control Achin, a Sultanate in North Sumatra, the various districts of which were ruled by a chief traditionally known as an *ulèëbalang*. Later rulers of Achin's coastal dependencies were referred to by the colloquial Malay term 'raja'. The



power of the Sultanate weakened with time, particularly during the nineteenth century with the rise of the coastal 'pepper rajas', so-called because they derived most of their income from the pepper trade.<sup>6</sup>

Under the terms of the Anglo-Dutch Sumatra Treaty of 1871, Great Britain undertook to 'desist from all objections against the extension of the Netherlands Dominion in any part of the island of Sumatra', thereby effectively giving the Dutch a free hand there, although the earlier Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 still placed certain responsibilities upon them. In 1873, two years after the Sumatra Treaty, the Dutch government declared war upon the rebellious Achinese, many of whom resented their would-be masters and repeatedly expressed a desire for British protection. From the mid-1870s, several Dutch posts, with military support, were established on Sumatra's north, east and west coasts.<sup>7</sup> Each post was governed by an Assistant Resident, who was responsible for strengthening Dutch influence in the dependencies of Achin. But the dependencies did not readily submit. Resentment grew and Dutch posts were frequently attacked. Dutch control thus appears to have been shaky, to say the least. What little control the Dutch had was exercised through punitive military attacks and the blockade of trading ports - a method which was applied at various times throughout the Achin War when other methods appeared to be failing.

The most important Dutch post, from the point of view of the Nisero question, was Meulaboh, on the north-west coast of Sumatra (see Map 4). Meulaboh was the closest post to the stranded ship Nisero and her captive crew. The relationship between Meulaboh's Assistant Resident, K.F.H. van Langen, and the Raja of Tenom, who had captured the Nisero crew, was a volatile one. It was characterised by harsh punitive measures provoked by suspicion and mistrust. Van Langen was suspicious and distrustful of the Raja, who in turn resented the presence of Van Langen. The Raja of Tenom had - outwardly at least - submitted to the Dutch in 1877 by signing the so-called Eighteen Articles.<sup>8</sup> Yet such declarations on the part of native rulers were not always sincere, and it was not unknown for a Raja, having pledged his loyalty to the Dutch, to pass on financial aid from the latter to the pro-Achinese war party.<sup>9</sup>

On the night of 8 November 1883 the Nisero, a British ship registered in Sunderland, was stranded on the coast of Tenom, on the west coast of Achin.<sup>10</sup> She had left Soerabaija (on the east coast of Java) on 27 October 1883 with a cargo of sugar, bound for the Suez Canal and then for Marseille. The Captain, W.S. Woodhouse, and his crew were captured by the Raja of Tenom and held to ransom. The majority of the crew were English, with two Dutch, two Germans, two Italians and two Norwegians.<sup>11</sup> The British government held the Dutch government responsible for the release of the prisoners; they had, after all, been captured in a

territory over which the Dutch government claimed sovereignty. Heated exchanges ensued when the Dutch government - in British eyes - did not act swiftly and efficiently enough, and the situation worsened as reports reached Europe of illness and death among the prisoners, caused either by disease or by lack of food. Some British politicians also accused the British government of acting too slowly, while others appealed for financial compensation for the captives' dependants.

In order to determine the extent to which the Nisero question influenced Anglo-Dutch relations, three main sources will be examined. Those sources are (as for the Borneo dispute): diplomatic exchanges, parliamentary debates, and the press. The Nisero question was essentially a humanitarian one: a straightforward question of life and death. However, other 'peripheral' issues clouded the question, in particular the connection with the Achin War. Issues arose which had also fuelled the Borneo dispute, such as the Treaties of 1824 and 1871, and the small-power status of the Netherlands. These 'peripheral' issues will be examined in this chapter on the grounds that they explain (but do not necessarily justify) the Dutch government's attitude in the question, which is the main subject of this study.

In the following chapter, the Nisero question will be divided into three chronological sections, which highlight



the main developments in a somewhat complicated course of events. The first section will deal with the 'initial' phase from the capture of the crew in November 1883 until W.E. Maxwell's visit to Tenom in February 1884, and his subsequent report. The second section will deal with Lord Granville's offer of mediation, made at the end of April 1884, and in particular his motives and Dutch reactions to the offer. The third section will deal with the final stage of the question, from the Anglo-Dutch agreement to take joint action against the Raja of Tenom, reached in July 1884, to the release of the captives in September 1884.

#### **From the capture of the crew to Maxwell's report**

When he heard that the Nisero crew had been captured, the Governor of Achin, Ph.F. Laging Tobias, instructed the local Assistant Resident to take all necessary measures to secure the prisoners' release. On 26 November the British Consul (Henry George Kennedy; the first British Consul for Sumatra, appointed in April 1882) arrived at Olehleh, as did the British warship H.M.S. *Pegasus* with its commander, Bickford. H.M.S. *Pegasus* had come to receive the captives on their release; Bickford would not intervene. Van Langen (Assistant Resident at Meulaboh) duly received a letter from the Raja of Tenom stating that he would free the prisoners if a certain Khoo Tiang Poh, a Chinese pepper trader from Penang, came to settle his debt in person.<sup>12</sup> The

solution at first appeared straightforward: if Tiang Poh's debt were settled, the prisoners would be released. Governor Tobias would pay this debt, and Tiang Poh would later reimburse the Governor. The Dutch government would then inform the Raja of Tenom that, if he released the prisoners, he would receive the same treatment from the Dutch government as the other Achin dependencies.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, Mr Edouard Roura (a French naval commander and friend of the Raja of Tenom) and Teuku Yit (former guardian of, and principal counsellor to the Raja) delivered the message that the Raja was now demanding US\$200,000 and a guarantee from the British Consul Kennedy that his ports would be re-opened. However, this 'message' was deemed untrustworthy and it was decided to wait for the Raja's written reply to the latest Dutch proposals, which arrived on 4 December 1883. In a letter to Kennedy, the Raja demanded \$300,000 compensation for damages caused by the punitive expedition sent to Bubun by the Dutch in December 1882. He also demanded the opening of his ports (with a guarantee from the King of England) and the exile of two of his enemies, whom he suspected of blaming him for attacks on Meulaboh. The Raja of Rigas, acting as an intermediary, conveyed a reply to these demands to the effect that the Dutch authorities would pay Tiang Poh's pepper debt and \$500 for each prisoner released. As to the re-opening of the ports, it was reiterated that the Raja would receive the same treatment as the other dependencies

of Achin.<sup>14</sup> This meant that the Raja's ports would indeed be opened, albeit subject to the shipping regulation (*scheepvaartregeling*) imposed by the Dutch in 1883 (and re-imposed in 1892). The regulation stipulated that foreign ships visiting Achin must be accompanied by Dutch officials. Moreover, coastal trade was severely limited by restrictions on vessel size.

On 10 December the Raja of Tenom's reply was brought by the Raja of Rigas. He was accompanied by Captain Woodhouse, the second engineer and the Nisero's Chinese cook. The second engineer was ill, and Woodhouse had been released on the condition that he return to captivity; if he failed to do so, his crew would be put to death.<sup>15</sup> Woodhouse now shed new light on the Raja's motives: it appeared that he was attempting to drive Britain and the Netherlands to war with each other (presumably because he preferred British to Dutch masters in Achin).<sup>16</sup> C.E. Van Kesteren, the chief editor of the *Indische Gids*, did not trust Woodhouse and could not understand why the Raja had released him:

What moved the Rajah to release the Captain, of all people? We simply cannot find an acceptable reason for this. Indeed, wherever this man turns up there is mystery.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, he considered the whole question mysterious,



not least the stranding of the Nisero in a location which, given its point of departure and destination, was miles off course:

It is a mystery how he became stranded [...] and no less a mystery how, having shown himself in any case to be incompetent, he was again given command of a ship, directly after his return to England - where they are usually unforgiving towards negligent captains.<sup>18</sup>

The *Indische Gids* was an influential colonial journal which first appeared in the Netherlands in 1879. Van Kesteren was a strong supporter of the colonial reform movement which had originated in Java.<sup>19</sup> He wrote three articles on the Achin War and the Nisero question which were, given the status of the *Indische Gids* influential and read with interest. J.K.W. Quarles van Ufford, who from 1863 to 1901 was the author of the colonial chronicle in the liberal *De Economist*, recorded that the articles were 'very much appreciated by different persuasions.' He described the second of Van Kesteren's articles as an 'excellent overview' ('uitstekend overzicht') of the Nisero question, and the author himself as 'talented' ('bekwame schrijver').<sup>20</sup>

It was not only in the *Indische Gids* that doubts were voiced about the stranding of the Nisero. The Dutch

Ambassador in London, Count Van Bylandt, asked Sir Julian Pauncefote (since 1882 Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) whether the Nisero's course on the night in question was being investigated, in particular Captain Woodhouse's decision to set a new course which brought him so close to the coast of Sumatra. There were no harbour facilities for large ships and the coast was, moreover, under Dutch blockade.<sup>21</sup> According to Coolhaas, Captain Woodhouse was also suspected of smuggling weapons for the anti-Dutch, pro-Achinese party based in the Straits Settlements.<sup>22</sup> Pauncefote's answer to Van Bylandt was predictable. The matter had been investigated and although the findings had not yet been published, the conclusion was known: Captain Woodhouse was not guilty of acting in bad faith, and the shipowners were above all suspicion of deliberate shipwreck.<sup>23</sup> Given his status as a diplomat, Van Bylandt's question was neither diplomatic nor constructive, and appears to have been nothing more than an attempt to deflect blame from the Netherlands onto Britain. If this was the case, his attempt was unsuccessful. Such a sensitive question - which could be seen as a veiled accusation - would be unlikely to elicit from Pauncefote an admission of Woodhouse's negligence. Even if Woodhouse had acted negligently, it is unlikely that Pauncefote would admit that the meanderings of a British ship were responsible for the current painful state of affairs. He would probably be even less willing to make such an admission to Van Bylandt who, in the light of the

protracted Borneo dispute, had probably become the bane of his life. Moreover, as we have seen in the Borneo dispute, Pauncefote was not altogether favourably disposed towards the Netherlands.

Van Bylandt's suspicions aroused the interest of the Salvage Association in London. On 13 June 1884 the Secretary of the Association wrote to Van Bylandt, requesting further information and informing him that the Association was representing the underwriters interested in the cargo.<sup>24</sup> Van Bylandt's reply of 18 June, written in English, stated that he was instructed to inform the Secretary that:

the wrecking of that ship has never been attributed by me to any "criminal design" [...] while my note of the 9th of that month [May] only expresses some doubt as to the "unavoidable" character of the wrecking, and the ground for this doubt is to be found in the own declarations of the captain of that vessel [...].<sup>25</sup>

According to Van Bylandt, Woodhouse's declarations left 'very little doubt as to the careless manner in which Captain Woodhouse navigated his ship [...]'. It was therefore not surprising, he concluded, that rumours abounded 'for which the Netherlands Government is not the



least responsible'.<sup>26</sup>

Back in the East Indies, the demands made by the Raja on Captain Woodhouse's release were rejected. New Dutch proposals comprised settlement of the pepper debt, treatment on an equal footing with the other Achin ports, permission to export existing pepper stocks, and a payment of Hfl 5,000 for food for the imprisoned crew. The Raja was again unco-operative and expressed the hope that Consul Kennedy could persuade the Dutch to pay \$300,000 compensation for the losses at Bubun.<sup>27</sup>

The Raja's answer to the latest Dutch ultimatum had still not been received by 20 December 1883. This prompted Commander Bickford to ask Governor of Achin Tobias's permission to go to Tenom. Bickford would go with H.M.S. *Pegasus* but unaccompanied by any Dutch ship, to negotiate in person with the Raja. Tobias was reluctant. First, he foresaw danger for Bickford and, second, he believed that the mission would reflect badly upon Dutch rule. If Bickford were successful, the British success would highlight the Dutch failure.<sup>28</sup> Here we see further evidence of the Dutch preoccupation with the colonial prestige of the Netherlands, the preservation of which, as we have seen above in the Borneo question, was uppermost in the Dutch official mind. During the late nineteenth century scramble for colonies it was vital that the Dutch were seen to be in control of their own colonial possessions. If Dutch

authority were seen to falter, another European power might seize the opportunity to exploit that weakness.

Eventually, in order to save the prisoners' lives, Tobias reluctantly agreed to let Bickford go to Tenom. He specified, however, that Bickford should sail on a merchant vessel flying a British flag.<sup>29</sup> If Bickford's mission was unsuccessful, a Dutch military expedition would be sent to Tenom.<sup>30</sup> Bickford cordially offered the services of H.M.S. *Pegasus* for the transport of troops and equipment on the expedition, but the offer was rejected. Van Kesteren, writing in the *Indische Gids*, could not understand why Bickford's offer of assistance had been rejected. Given that the Raja of Tenom wanted to cause antagonism between the British and the Dutch, would it not be more expedient to show him, by meting out a joint punishment, that he could not succeed? Van Kesteren feared that the rejection had offended Britain, citing as proof the fact that Bickford's following report was less amicable.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, a further complication had arisen. On 23 December, the warship *HMS Merlin* had arrived from Singapore, carrying a letter for Bickford from the Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Frederick Weld. Weld had written a letter to the Raja of Tenom, under the instructions of Colonial Secretary Lord Derby. He requested that Bickford hand this over in person.<sup>32</sup> Bickford then decided to appeal once more to the Governor of Achin to let H.M.S. *Pegasus* sail unaccompanied to Tenom. Bickford had, somewhat arrogantly,

let it be known that he intended to go to Tenom in any case. However, given the cordial relations between the British and Dutch authorities, he preferred to go *with* the Governor's agreement than without it.<sup>33</sup> Bickford's high-handedness could be explained by his eagerness to obey Weld's orders, particularly if those orders came indirectly from Lord Derby himself. Until this point he had not intervened directly, but had simply bided his time. However, orders such as those carried to him by H.M.S. *Merlin* could not be ignored. H.M.S. *Pegasus* duly set sail for Tenom, arriving on 26 December 1883.

In the *Indische Gids* Van Kesteren had sympathised with Bickford when his offer of help was rejected. He was less sympathetic towards Bickford in reporting this latest complication. How could the Governor of Achin, who from the first had seen the danger inherent in Bickford's co-operation, now agree that H.M.S. *Pegasus* should appear unaccompanied in Tenom? The whole transaction, Van Kesteren commented, had been a humiliation for the Netherlands.<sup>34</sup> This reaction is understandable. In this case the British government (represented by Weld and Derby) had made its influence felt. Van Kesteren criticised Tobias for allowing H.M.S. *Pegasus* to go to Tenom, but in reality he had had little choice. Since Bickford had stated that he would go anyway, the Governor's refusal to co-operate would only have angered the British government. It appears that he was prepared to suffer humiliation in order to avoid this.



Indeed, the merest flexing of diplomatic muscles by the British government appeared to awaken in the Dutch a strong desire for compromise and appeasement, however strongly they had hitherto fought their corner. This was also the case in the Borneo dispute: the Dutch government ultimately made concessions which it had considered unthinkable in the initial stages of the dispute. This suggests a relationship in which the Dutch government overestimated its role, possibly labouring under the illusion that it had as much influence as the British government on the course of the Anglo-Dutch relationship. The so-called 'humiliations' suffered by the Netherlands were the British government's way of reminding the Dutch government of its subordinate position.

Bickford's controversial visit to Tenom was fruitless. The military expedition was postponed due to the arrival in Olehleh of one Captain Christiansen, who had often traded in the ports of Achin, and was well known in Tenom. Tobias, in agreement with the British authorities, wished to send Christiansen to Tenom in a final attempt to communicate with the Raja. Christiansen was also unsuccessful, narrowly avoiding capture by the Raja of Tenom.<sup>35</sup> A Dutch military expedition consequently left for Tenom on 4 January 1884 and hostilities began three days later when the Raja ignored a further ultimatum.<sup>36</sup> On 16 January the troops returned to Olehleh without the Nisero prisoners.<sup>37</sup>

In many quarters, particularly in Britain, this unsuccessful military expedition was seen as a clumsy fiasco which had only served to make matters worse. The Raja of Tenom's residence had been destroyed, and several buildings taken. However, the net result was that the Raja had withdrawn into the interior of the island, taking with him his entourage and the prisoners.<sup>38</sup> Now they were even more inaccessible. Speaking in the British House of Commons in May 1884, Mr S. Storey (Member for Sunderland) recalled a description of the expedition by 'a person who was well able to give information on the subject'. According to Storey, this source (whom he did not name) had stated that the purpose of the expedition (according to the Dutch government's official report) had not been the rescue of the prisoners, but 'the chastisement of the district'. This led Storey to conclude that:

[...] it is not in the policy or the intention of the Dutch Government to do anything relating to these poor men except under strong pressure from the English government.<sup>39</sup>

It is possible that the military expedition of January 1884 was not designed to rescue the prisoners. If its purpose had been to return with the prisoners, it is difficult to explain the fact that the Raja's escape further inland had not been predicted and strategic measures not taken to prevent it. There are two

possibilities: first, that the expedition was incompetently planned, or, second, that the expedition was indeed intended as a mere show of strength to punish and/or frighten the Raja. Either way, it had been unsuccessful.

At the end of January 1884, the idea of sending a representative from the Straits Settlements to Tenom was discussed. The Dutch Governor-General of the Indies was consulted, and it was stated that the Dutch authorities did not object, provided the person in question would undertake the mission at his own risk. The Dutch would co-operate within limits to be set by the Governor of Achin.<sup>40</sup> On 26 January Van Bylandt telegraphed the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Van der Does de Willebois, that the Governor of the Straits Settlements (Sir Frederick Weld) had proposed sending a mediator to the Raja of Tenom.<sup>41</sup> On 11 February, Van Bylandt informed the Minister that Weld wished to entrust the mission to someone by the name of Maxwell, a member of the Colonial Council of Singapore.<sup>42</sup> Maxwell set sail from Penang for Achin on 16 February 1884. H.M.S. *Pegasus*, carrying Maxwell, arrived at Bubun three days later (see Map 4) and negotiations commenced, first with Teuku Yit (one of Tenom's leading private merchants who had great influence with the Raja) and later with the Raja himself.<sup>43</sup> The negotiations convinced Maxwell that there was only one possible solution: freedom of trade guaranteed by Britain. Governor Tobias, perhaps understandably, did not agree: freedom of trade would mean



the import of weapons for use against the Dutch, and the Bubun compensation could be used to the same ends. Maxwell, in turn, was probably frustrated at Tobias's intransigence. The dilatory attitude of the Dutch government could, then, be explained by its desire to solve two problems at once: the Nisero question and the Achin war. The Raja of Tenom was therefore not the only one bringing pressure to bear. It could be argued that the Dutch government, too, saw the Nisero incident as a means to an end, namely the submission of the rebellious Achinese. As Reid pointed out:

Reports from Batavia had suggested that a complete closure of the Atjehnese coast would be the most effective way to bring pressure on the 'war party', had it not been ruled out by the treaties with Britain. The growing crisis now presented an opportunity to make this closure acceptable to Britain as a means to the release of the crew.<sup>44</sup>

Thus it is likely that Maxwell was somewhat annoyed at the Governor of Achin's unwillingness to accept the only conditions which, Maxwell believed, would secure the prisoners' release.

J.P. Sprenger van Eyk (Minister of Colonies from February 1884) claimed that the British had found the Raja's demands equally unacceptable.<sup>45</sup> From where, then, do

we receive the impression that Maxwell was dissatisfied with the Dutch attitude? Again, we must turn to the *Indische Gids*, and we find that the feeling was clearly mutual (at least as far as Van Kesteren was concerned). 'Who is this Honourable Maxwell, anyway?' ('Trouwens, wie is die Honorable Maxwell zelf?'), he asked, wondering why Maxwell had undertaken the mission when he was not even acquainted with the Raja of Tenom, unlike Christiansen, who had been on good terms with him for many years. There must be an explanation. Van Kesteren even hinted at a certain amount of secrecy: 'A great deal has been published, but by no means everything' ('Er is veel gepubliceerd, maar alles nog op verre na niet'). He perceived Maxwell thus:

We do, however, know enough to venture to say that this man cannot have been the loyal representative of a friendly power; he is too biased and bitter towards the Netherlands.<sup>46</sup>

By way of proof, Van Kesteren quoted from Maxwell's report. One of the passages quoted shows how Maxwell perceived the Dutch. He commented, for example, that:

The national pride of the Dutch and their jealous guarding of their prestige in the East prevent them from accepting the concept of a British guarantee of their strict observance of these or any conditions.<sup>47</sup>

As in the Borneo dispute, Dutch colonial prestige again became an issue and to a large extent influenced the Dutch attitude towards the Nisero question. This thread is present in many Anglo-Dutch negotiations on colonial issues at this time. Great Britain, which had protected many of the Dutch colonies from Napoleon at the beginning of the nineteenth century, now became - in Dutch eyes - as great a threat to their colonial status as the other European powers.

Meanwhile the British government found it necessary to remind the Dutch government of its responsibilities. On 15 March 1884, Pauncefote wrote to Van Bylandt to clear up an apparent misunderstanding which had arisen concerning a ransom demand from the Raja of Tenom. Maxwell had informed the Straits Governor (Weld) that he hoped for success if the Netherlands authorities would pay \$200,000 to the Raja. This was somehow misinterpreted by the Dutch, who were under the impression that this demand came from Maxwell himself. Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Van der Does de Willebois saw the Maxwell mission as an attempt by Britain to take matters into her own hands, and could not therefore comprehend how she could make such a demand. It was at this point that Pauncefote reminded the Dutch government of its responsibilities:

[...] I beg to point out that the attempt made by the Governor of the Straits Settlements to



communicate with the Rajah was made with the concurrence of your Government and that it cannot in any way relieve them of any responsibility which may attach to them in the matter.<sup>48</sup>

After the failure of the Maxwell mission, Governor Tobias and British Consul Kennedy considered the possibility of employing native rulers in Achin to secure the prisoners' release.<sup>49</sup> A telegram had been received from the Governor General of the Indies reporting that he had given permission for help to be granted to certain native rulers willing to show their strength against the Raja of Tenom, and that certain advantages had been promised if they succeeded in releasing the prisoners.<sup>50</sup>

### **The British offer of mediation**

By this time, the failure of the Dutch government to secure the release of the prisoners had caused considerable resentment in Britain. The hitherto unsuccessful negotiations did not inspire optimism. On 29 April 1884, British Foreign Secretary Lord Granville wrote to Count van Bylandt, offering British mediation.<sup>51</sup> Granville hoped that the Dutch government would accept the offer 'in the friendly spirit in which it is tendered', and that solutions could be found to satisfy all parties.<sup>52</sup>

Granville was to be disappointed. The Dutch government did not accept his offer in a friendly spirit. In fact, his offer again touched the raw nerve of Dutch colonial prestige. On 10 May 1884 Van Bylandt handed over to Granville De Willebois' reply to the offer of mediation. In his report of the ensuing conversation, Van Bylandt informed De Willebois:

I answered that the friendly intentions behind the proposal were not doubted for one moment, but that even before I had received my Government's answer, the proposal seemed totally unacceptable to me, to the greatest extent harmful to the prestige of our authority, not only on Sumatra, but throughout the whole of the Netherlands Indies.<sup>53</sup>

Tactful as ever, Van Bylandt did not hesitate to point out to Granville that the Raja would not have dared to make such outrageous and unacceptable demands if the British authorities had, from the very beginning, refrained from every intervention. Van Bylandt clearly felt that Britain's involvement had made matters more difficult for the Dutch government.<sup>54</sup> Whether or not his judgement was correct, it seems unwise for Van Bylandt to have stated this to Lord Granville at such a sensitive time. Again, Van Bylandt appears to be attempting to shift some of the responsibility for the Nisero question onto the British

government: he had first attempted to do so, as we have seen above, by suggesting that circumstances surrounding the stranding of the Nisero were suspicious. Van Bylandt ended his report of this meeting with Granville by informing De Willebois that:

Lord Granville could not suppress his disappointment that his proposal of mediation had not been accepted, and I must confess that our leave-taking was cool.<sup>55</sup>

Granville's disappointment was not unnatural, but Van Bylandt does not appear to have considered the possibility that his own less-than-tactful remarks may have been partly responsible for the coolness of their leave-taking.

De Willebois' reaction to the mediation offer appears to have been shared in many quarters. According to Van Kesteren in the *Indische Gids*, the Dutch government, in rejecting the offer, '[...] was drawing a sharper and more distinct line between goodwill and subservience'.<sup>56</sup> Clearly, then, Van Kesteren felt that the position of the Netherlands in the Anglo-Dutch relationship was not a favourable one. He added that the Dutch people were united in the rejection of British mediation. In a later article in the *Rotterdamsche Courant*, the author remarked that the mediation offer was not only in blatant contravention of the 1871 Treaty (according to which Achin was not a state



independent of the Netherlands), but was also not feasible, since there was no legal head of government in Achin. The offer was:

[...] nothing more and nothing less than folly, to which the British government was brought not by the concern for the fate of the Nisero crew, but by the [free-trade] argument of the pepper ports.<sup>57</sup>

These were strong words which accused Britain of being more concerned about its trading interests than about the prisoners. But the motivations of the British government are in a sense less relevant here than those of the Dutch government; the simple fact remained that the Dutch government had failed to rescue prisoners taken on territory over which it claimed sovereignty. The lives of those prisoners were more dependent upon Dutch actions than upon British actions. Therefore the motivation of the Dutch government could justifiably be called into question.

The author of the *Rotterdamsche Courant* article attempted to make the mediation offer appear even more unreasonable by emphasizing that it had been made by 'a civilised nation - one of the greatest powers' to the government of a nation 'which, in a moral sense, stands equal to that nation' ('dat in zedelijk opzicht met dat grote land gelijk staat').<sup>58</sup>

Strong voices were also heard on the subject of the mediation offer in the Dutch Second Chamber where, at the beginning of June 1884, Brantsen van de Zijp (the Anti-Revolutionary Member for Zutphen) proclaimed:

[...] as a Dutchman I protest - I protest with all the power that is in me against every intervention, from whatever side, in our domestic affairs, and it seems to me that a refusal was the *only possible* answer.<sup>59</sup>

Speaking on the same occasion, Des Amorie van der Hoeven (Member for Breda) also expressed his approval of the rejection of the British offer of mediation. He stated that any other response would have constituted '[...] a forfeiture of our honour and the dignity of our colonial rule and of our Dutch nationality.'<sup>60</sup> According to L.W.C. Keuchenius (Member for Gorkum), the stipulations in the Anglo-Dutch Treaties of 1824 and 1871 justified the rejection of any intervention by Britain, and also justified the attempts by the Dutch to carry out their responsibilities on Sumatra as laid down in those Treaties. But Keuchenius was less antagonistic towards Britain than his colleagues Brantsen and Des Amorie van der Hoeven. He would not have asked to speak, he claimed, if he had not feared that Brantsen's speech could be damaging to the relationship with Britain.<sup>61</sup> He had, in the history of the Achin War thus far, found no reason at all to doubt the

goodwill of Britain towards the Netherlands. Given the various British attempts to help the Dutch succeed in their struggle against the Achinese, Keuchenius, an outspoken critic of the Achin war, believed that the offer of mediation was nothing other than friendly and his remarks show that he was clearly anxious not to anger the British government.<sup>62</sup>

De Willebois justified his rejection of Granville's offer by explaining that if British mediation were accepted, Achin chiefs would resort to the same tactics in the future, thus endangering British subjects and those of other nations in Achinese waters. Moreover, the measures required to make the waters safe for shipping would hinder commerce. De Willebois and his government were convinced that, in order to achieve anything with the chiefs of Achin, it was necessary to assert superiority and authority. De Willebois stressed further that 'nothing would be so disadvantageous for the unfortunate prisoners than the activities carried out by a third power in order to deliver them'.<sup>63</sup> No doubt the Dutch government was sincere in these beliefs. In British eyes, however, this would not secure the release of the prisoners.

Meanwhile, resentment at the Dutch government's failure was growing rapidly in Britain. On 22 May 1884 in the British House of Commons, Samuel Storey (Radical) pointed out that the crew of the Nisero had been in



captivity for 232 days. He did not hesitate in placing the responsibility for their release with the Dutch government, who '[...] claimed sovereignty in those parts; and therefore they owed it to us to produce those men when we demanded their release'. Storey believed that the Dutch government was content to have an 'open sore' between themselves and the Rajah of Tenom, and for the imprisoned crew to remain a 'bone of contention'. It was, he emphasised, the duty of the British government to force the Dutch government into action. Other members supported him.<sup>64</sup> It is likely that Storey was motivated not by aggression towards the Netherlands, but by humanitarian feelings. Many of the relatives of the captured crew lived in his constituency (the Nisero was registered in Sunderland), so he would be more aware than most of the misery and hardship brought about by the men's capture. His impatience with the apparent indifference of the Dutch government - and also with the British Foreign Office - is more understandable when considered in this light.

William Redmond (Member for Wexford), speaking on the same occasion, believed that the British government was 'afraid, and altogether too mean, to stand up against a Power which could not be considered at all powerful'.<sup>65</sup> It is not clear from the context of this remark whether Redmond was referring to Tenom or to the Netherlands. However, if he was referring to the Netherlands, his remark is an insight into one particular British perception of the

status of the Netherlands.

The debate in the British House of Commons was followed on 9 June 1884 by the debate (mentioned above) in the Dutch Second Chamber, centred on Brantsen van de Zijp's interpellation, a matter which was naturally not ignored by the press. According to an article in the *Amsterdammer*, the British offer of mediation was 'an ominous sign' ('een veeg teken') and it was the government's duty immediately to prevent all further reference to it. Reporting on the interpellation, the author of an article in the *Amsterdammer* praised the government for not angering Britain, an indication either that he recognised British superiority, or that he simply felt intimidated by Britain:

During the Nisero interpellation, all sharp and hostile remarks towards the powerful Albion were withheld. That was sensible. It would have been by no means disadvantageous to the dignity of the Chamber, or to the impression which the debate must have made in England, if Mr Brantsen had concealed his doubt as to the actual *accidental* stranding of the ship; but there was in any case not a single word in the debate which could have caused offence on the other side of the Ocean.<sup>66</sup>

An article in the *Rotterdamsche Courant* of 15/16 June

1884 gives an interesting insight into another Dutch perception of Britain. The article refers to the belief, held by some (it does not specify by whom), that Britain's disappointment at events in Egypt and the Sudan, and the defeat suffered by her in Central Asia, '[...] where the Briton must increasingly move aside for the Russian', had exerted a negative influence on the British attitude in the Nisero question. This suggests that Britain was avenging its disappointment on the unfortunate Dutch. However, the author disagreed with this and did not believe that a 'misplaced national sentiment' would mislead the British government into 'unjust treatment' of a friendly power. He preferred to believe that the British government was acting 'in the best of faith' in the Nisero question, although it had unfortunately been 'swept along by spokesmen and advocates with a wounded self-interest', which had led it to act subjectively. The final paragraph of this article reveals how the *Rotterdamsche Courant* perceived the status of the Netherlands:

[...] the decision to be made [on the Nisero question] will answer the demands of national pride and those of our glorious past, which tolerate no violation of our independence.<sup>67</sup>

Here, again, the Dutch were seeking confirmation of their world status in the colonial prestige of the Netherlands. Those who found it difficult to come to terms



with the Netherlands' second-rank status in Europe would no doubt find comfort in the reference to a 'glorious past'.

Towards the end of June 1884 a further complication arose. On 25 June, De Willebois received a telegram from the Dutch Consul-General in Singapore, reporting that Commander Bickford and H.M.S. *Pegasus* had once again left for Tenom.<sup>68</sup> This was an affront to the Dutch government. Van Bylandt pointed out to Granville that since the west coast of Achin was under blockade, no ship was permitted to enter those waters without a special license. If the British government had requested this license, the Dutch government would no doubt have granted it, in the spirit of friendship which had hitherto characterised relations between the two governments.<sup>69</sup> Granville attempted to appease the bruised sensibilities of the Dutch government. In a letter to De Willebois he assured him that no discourtesy had been intended.<sup>70</sup> At a time of such tension and sensitivity, it would surely have been more sensible for the British government to heed the formalities and make a formal request for the license in question. The fact that this was not done suggests two things: first, that the British government took it for granted that the Dutch government would not be concerned and, second, that it did not support the blockade, and thus such a contravention was a demonstration of opposition. Either way, the British government did not respect Dutch authority in the matter, which is a further indication of how it perceived the

### **The Proposal of United Action**

Meanwhile, the Anglo-Dutch negotiations had entered a new phase. On 29 June Van Bylandt wrote to De Willebois reporting a meeting with Sir Julian Pauncefote. Pauncefote declared that the only solution was for the British and Dutch governments to act jointly to bring the Raja to order.<sup>71</sup> Six days later, on 5 July 1884, a conference took place at the Foreign Office in London. Present were Granville, Pauncefote, Van Bylandt, Pruys van der Hoeven (Civil Governor of Achin from April 1882 to March 1883) and Van der Wyck (Secretary-General for the Colonies since 1880).<sup>72</sup> Van der Wyck and Van der Hoeven would, it was hoped, lend weight to the Dutch government's arguments. The proposal for united action was made, with Granville again stressing the goodwill between the two countries. The Cabinet was anxious to act 'in concert with the country with which Great Britain had always entertained relations of such close friendship, and in the continuance of which both nations were so much interested'.

The thorny issue of Dutch national pride was again touched upon by Van Bylandt. Reporting the proceedings to De Willebois, he stated that he had raised the issue of the British government's attitude which caused it to challenge

the right of the Netherlands 'to adopt in our own possessions such measures as we think fit to preserve our rights and protect our interests'.<sup>73</sup>

Shortly before the conference on 5 July at the Foreign Office, Storey had raised the Nisero question in the British House of Commons.<sup>74</sup> The British government was again called upon to bring pressure to bear on the Dutch government. Storey criticised the British government for leaving matters in the hands of the Dutch government which, he stated, 'simply cared to keep open the dispute with the Raja, whom they had failed to conquer, and it was a matter of indifference to them, what became of the crew'. Yet he was not fundamentally anti-Dutch, simply critical of the Dutch attitude towards the Nisero question:

[...] it cannot be a thing to contemplate with a light heart that there should be any difficulty between us and a friendly Power like the Dutch. I should be the last to say one unnecessary word in this House or in the country to cause unpleasantness between us and the Dutch Government; but, after all, if circumstances have caused unpleasantness, the actions of the Dutch have assisted in this [...].<sup>75</sup>

Mr A. Brogden (Member for Wednesbury), remarking that 'too many cooks spoil the broth', echoed the Dutch view



that Great Britain should not have intervened. He asked the House how it would have reacted if the situation had been reversed. The Dutch government, left to its own devices, 'would have been obliged to take some steps that would have before now produced good results'.<sup>76</sup> The Liberal Sir George Balfour (Member for Kincardineshire), somewhat chauvinistically attributed the present difficulties to 'that monopolising spirit which pervaded the Dutch character',<sup>77</sup> but Gladstone himself defended the Dutch government, stating that it 'was certainly not in an attitude of indifference', but that great difficulties attended the adoption of its measures.<sup>78</sup>

On 16 July 1884 the Dutch government informed the British government that it accepted the proposal for united action.<sup>79</sup> But Granville had two reservations. The first concerned the unspecified sum of money to be paid to the Raja, and the second concerned the Dutch blockade of Achin ports, which the British government opposed.

A further complication concerned the wording of the instructions for the joint agreement to be sent to Consul Kennedy. The British government wished all details of the agreement to be included in these instructions, and wished to specify to the Raja that, if he complied with the ultimatum, freedom of trade would be established in his ports. The Dutch government disagreed. It argued that mention of the British government would be interpreted by

the Raja as a British guarantee of free trade and, in future differences with the Dutch government, he would turn to the British government for support. The Dutch government also disagreed with the concept 'freedom of trade', and wished to guarantee no more than a re-opening of the Raja's ports in line with the shipping regulations. A solution was finally agreed upon on 25 July 1884. The final text of the paragraph contained no reference to a joint agreement between the Dutch and British governments; neither did it promise to guarantee freedom of trade, but simply stated that the ports would be 're-opened to trade'. This was indeed a victory for Dutch diplomacy. It is likely, however, that the British concession was due less to Dutch cogency than to a British desire speedily to resolve the matter.

The correspondence on the wording of this paragraph had caused a delay of some five or six days, despite warnings from the British government that further delay could have serious consequences. The Dutch government was by all accounts very satisfied with the outcome, which was perceived by many as an important concession by the British government. This feeling was reinforced by the fact that the British government had made no further mention of mediation. In the *Indische Gids*, Van Kesteren commented that this development had brought the Nisero question into another phase.<sup>80</sup> An article in the *Rotterdamsche Courant* of 20/21 July also acknowledged this:

That they have, in London, dropped this demand or, if you will, offer to intervene themselves with the Rajah of Tenom - yes, even with the Achinese chiefs - or actually removed it from the discussions, totally changed the character of the diplomatic negotiations.<sup>81</sup>

The article ascribed this success to the firm attitude ('kloeke houding') of Van Bylandt towards the British government. This 'victory' over the British government reinforced Dutch pride: 'we may no longer be what we were in the international field, but the old Dutch resilience has clearly not yet perished.'<sup>82</sup> Given the circumstances of the Nisero question, the results of the negotiations were even more satisfying. In an article in the *Rotterdamsche Courant* it was remarked - rather insensitively considering the plight of the captives - that 'given the way in which matters have now been settled, we even have reason not to regret all too deeply that the Nisero difficulty arose.'<sup>83</sup> Dutch honour had remained intact, and the regard of the other Powers unshaken. These remarks lead to the unhappy conclusion that, at least as far as the *Rotterdamsche Courant* author was concerned, the preservation of Dutch prestige was at least as important as the lives of the captives. Considered in this light, British frustration with the Dutch government was understandable.

Similar self-congratulatory sentiments were expressed



in Dutch diplomatic circles. On 30 July Van der Hoeven (the Dutch ambassador in Berlin) wrote to De Willebois, reporting that he had emphasised to the German government (and, when necessary, to his colleagues) that it was the British, and not the Dutch government which had 'moved from its original standpoint and offered its co-operation', having first made an unacceptable proposal of mediation.<sup>84</sup> On the same day Van Bylandt wrote a somewhat sycophantic letter to De Willebois, emphasising his success:

Your Excellency will realise that it was no easy task for the ambassador of a second-rank power such as the Netherlands, to bring the government of a great power, such as England to take initiatives in flat contradiction to its attitude hitherto.<sup>85</sup>

Since the initiative for joint action had come from Britain, the honour of the Netherlands had been preserved. Van Bylandt was relieved. It was, he wrote, obvious that the Dutch government could not itself have asked for the British government's help: 'that would indeed have been damaging to our prestige, and an admission of powerlessness.'<sup>86</sup>

On 31 July in the Dutch Second Chamber, Des Amorie van der Hoeven (Member for Breda), also acknowledged the concessions made by Britain regarding the offer of

mediation and the wording of Article 2 of the Instructions for the joint mission. Again, as in the press and diplomatic circles, these were referred to in the context of Dutch prestige; both issues involved the national pride of the Netherlands and its sovereignty as a colonial power.<sup>87</sup>

But was this really such a great victory for the Dutch? The Dutch attributed their 'victory' to cogency yet, given the urgency of the circumstances, it is likely that the British government conceded these points in order to prevent further delay, which makes the victory appear somewhat hollow. Time, after all, was of the essence if the lives of the prisoners were to be saved. By contrast, the attitude of the British government in the Borneo question was markedly less conciliatory and more persistent. This suggests that in more urgent matters the British government was prepared to concede points to the Dutch government, and was not necessarily preoccupied with asserting its authority within the Anglo-Dutch relationship. This is supported by Reid's claim that Pauncefote wished to avoid a rupture with the Netherlands.<sup>88</sup> The Dutch, meanwhile, celebrated the British concession as a major victory. The self-congratulatory outpourings of certain diplomats, politicians and sections of the press suggest that Dutch priorities - in certain quarters - did not lie with the Nisero prisoners. They lay instead with the preservation of Dutch (colonial) prestige and the subjection of Achin.

These two preoccupations were certainly linked in the Dutch official mind, and are strongly indicative of feelings of inferiority, the main remedy for which was to remind the world (and Britain in particular) of the Netherlands' position as a colonial power.

However, feelings of national inferiority were not universal among the Dutch. Van Kesteren, writing in the *Indische Gids*, was sceptical about the Dutch victory. He claimed that the British proposals accepted by the Netherlands were, in fact, mostly Dutch proposals, made in December 1883 at Kota Radja (the capital of Achin and a Dutch stronghold), but rejected by the British, who 'saw the flexibility of the Dutch as pretentious'. The article ends with a negative perception of Britain. Van Kesteren wondered whether Britain, disappointed at the rejection of its mediation proposal, would try 'in a roundabout way to achieve the desired outcome for its glory and thirst for power.'<sup>89</sup> British foreign policy was not renowned for its loyalty and Van Kesteren feared that the intrigues of the Nisero question (which had been only partly revealed) would preserve this tradition. In a final note of warning, he emphasised that great caution should be exercised in organizing the Anglo-Dutch expedition, since even this could endanger the future and status of the Netherlands as a colonial power.<sup>90</sup>

Van Bylandt, too, exercised caution in his dealings



with Pauncefote, whom he did not trust. As we have seen in the Borneo question, the interests of the Netherlands were not among Pauncefote's priorities. Towards the end of his triumphant letter to De Willebois of 30 July 1884, Van Bylandt mentioned the fact that Pauncefote was now as much with the Netherlands against the Raja as he had been against the Netherlands in the beginning. However pleasing this development, Van Bylandt was not taken in:

This does not alter the fact that I do not trust him at all, and that every written proposal made by him must be carefully examined word for word.<sup>91</sup>

Pauncefote's change of attitude was seen by the Dutch diplomats as an attempt to vindicate himself. On 18 August 1884 Van Tets van Goudriaan (former head of the Minister of Foreign Affairs' cabinet) wrote to Van Bylandt reporting a meeting with H.B. Fenton, secretary to the British legation in The Hague. Fenton was deeply sorry to hear that Van Bylandt found Pauncefote to be unfavourably disposed towards the Netherlands in the Nisero question, the more so since, on speaking to Pauncefote himself, he found the contrary to be true. Pauncefote had adopted a position which only a Dutchman could: it was, reported Van Tets '[...] in a word, Sir Julian's only wish to help the Dutch government as much as possible in the unpleasant Nisero affair'.<sup>92</sup> Van Tets observed further that Fenton's message

had clearly been passed on with express purpose and was consistent with Pauncefote's recent politeness and obligingness.<sup>93</sup> Clearly the unsatisfactory relations between Van Bylandt and Pauncefote regarding the Borneo question also influenced their dealings in the Nisero question.

It was not only Pauncefote whose attitude had changed; on 31 July 1884, during an interpellation in the Dutch Second Chamber, the Dutch government was similarly accused. The liberal Rutgers van Rozenburg expressed his annoyance, not at the pressure exerted by the British government, but at the Dutch government's *volte-face*. The Dutch government was the guardian of Dutch prestige but, having initially carried out a well-motivated bogus defence, it had suddenly made an about-turn.<sup>94</sup> Van Rozenburg was referring to the fact that, having initially rejected British mediation, the Dutch government had now agreed to a joint mission. He saw this joint mission as 'a cession of our authority in our own household.'<sup>95</sup> De Willebois had justified this by explaining that the Dutch government had employed every possible method in order to free the prisoners. Then came Britain's unacceptable offer of mediation. The Dutch government was now in a difficult position. It had refused British mediation, yet still had not succeeded in freeing the captive Nisero crew. The obstacle to Dutch success was the Raja of Tenom, who believed that he could gain British support. Before the Dutch government could make headway, it first had to show the Raja that the British government

would not support his antics. The British proposal for joint action was considered in all seriousness and - unlike the mediation proposal - was found acceptable. Those who were against joint action overlooked the fact that the 1824 Anglo-Dutch Treaty included a mutual responsibility to combat piracy - jointly if necessary.<sup>96</sup>

The debate in the Dutch Second Chamber on 31 July 1884 reveals more than Dutch national sentiment; it also reveals Dutch perceptions of Great Britain. These perceptions were not all negative. The resentments and frustrations of the Nisero question cloaked a general realization that the British government was under considerable pressure from public opinion. De Willebois pointed out that the British government had no choice but to press for the release of the prisoners, since it was troubled almost every day in Parliament by very awkward interpellations.<sup>97</sup> According to Rutgers van Rozenburg it should be remembered that 'the British government was faced with a wild agitation of sympathy among the English people'.<sup>98</sup> Van Houten (Liberal member for Groningen) was also aware of the influence of public opinion:

[...] it is the same there as here: initially the most boisterous opinion paves the way. Even now the Nisero question is not yet under discussion to the extent that every Englishman has an opinion on the matter, and the most



inflammatory and - for us - disadvantageous opinions are heeded most there.<sup>99</sup>

Certain Dutch Members were concerned that the British perception of the Dutch was inaccurate. The chairman of the Indisch Genootschap and Member for Hoorn, Mr W. van Dedem, regretted that the Dutch government had done nothing to correct the current British perception that the Dutch were powerless to free the prisoners, and that it was the Raja's power which prevented this. Van Dedem disputed this: the problem was that the prisoners were being held in an area of dense tropical forest unfamiliar to the Dutch.<sup>100</sup> As a mitigating circumstance this is unconvincing, given that it was arguably the clumsy and unsuccessful Dutch military expedition of January 1884 which had driven the Raja to move the prisoners into the interior in the first place. The Dutch, it seems, had failed to foresee and prevent this predictable course of action. Again, Van Dedem's sensitivity reflects the Dutch sensitivity regarding the colonial prestige of the Netherlands and the fear that the Netherlands would be seen to be unable to keep its colonial house in order.

Further negative perceptions of Britain can be found in the *Indische Gids*. In the second of his three articles, Van Kesteren referred to the hostile attitudes of Lord Derby (Britain's Colonial Secretary) and Sir Frederick Weld (former Governor of the Straits Settlements). The letter

had adopted this stance as soon as the Nisero had become stranded and, assured of Lord Derby's support, persisted in this attitude. Weld's anti-Dutch attitude was not simply a result of the Dutch government's attitude in the Nisero question. He was strongly opposed to the way in which the Dutch were attempting to control Achin. He also resented the Dutch shipping regulation (*scheepvaartregeling*) in Achinese waters, which he believed was designed to attract trade to Olehleh and away from Penang, hitherto the centre of Straits trade.<sup>101</sup>

As evidence of Weld's attitude, Van Kesteren cited Weld's sending of H.M.S. *Pegasus* to Tenom, the content of his letters to Derby, and his letter to the Raja of Tenom. The letter to which Van Kesteren refers here is probably the letter of December 1883 from Weld to the Raja, of which Van Kesteren says in a footnote:

This also shows, in our opinion, that Sir Frederik Weld, familiar with Dutch authority with respect to the Raja, has not taken on a loyal attitude. The English reads: "And that my friend may be judged and stand or fall by his own acts before God and before the Queen".<sup>102</sup>

It could be seen that Weld 'was continuously out to humiliate the Netherlands, to make the Netherlands appear suspect, to make England's superiority felt in the

Netherlands', and that Weld would listen to any individual, no matter how untrustworthy, if they could blacken the name of the Netherlands.

Van Kesteren believed that during the six months preceding the joint action proposal, much had happened to give reason for concern. He criticised the 'spineless' ('zenuwloze') government of Jacob, Governor General of the Dutch East Indies, claiming that the latter's ingratiating attitude towards Britain far exceeded the bounds of international courtesy. History had taught that:

in order to enjoy a long-lasting friendship with the spirited English, one should never bring one's own spirit into doubt; this lesson has been ignored in the Indies, and the injurious intervention proposal is the punishment for this.<sup>104</sup>

Van Kesteren clearly believed that the British government would take advantage of any chinks in the armour of Dutch national pride in order to assert its superiority.

But there is no clear evidence that the British government took this attitude in the Nisero question. It was indeed guilty of pressurizing the Dutch government, but the failure of the Dutch government to release the prisoners justified this to some extent. It does not appear



to be the case that Britain exploited the circumstances in order to belittle or bully the Dutch government simply from a need to assert its superiority or, as had been claimed, to avenge its colonial disappointments in other parts of the world.

The united action agreed upon by the British and Dutch governments was ultimately successful. The *Annual Register* for 1884 reports:

[...] before the Anglo-Dutch ultimatum, threatening him with war if he did not give up his prisoners, reached him, the rajah of Tenom submitted to the will of the two nations, and on 11 September the Governor of Atchin conducted back to Kottaradja all the survivors of the crew of the Nisero.<sup>105</sup>

Pauncefote had hoped all along that the mere threat of joint action would bring the Rajah to submit, and his hopes had been fulfilled.<sup>106</sup>

In his third and final article on the Nisero question in the *Indische Gids*, Van Kesteren was no more sympathetic towards the British government. He cast suspicion on the owners of the Nisero, Messrs. Pinckney & Sons of Sunderland, referred again to Derby's injurious memorandum (in which Derby compared the hitherto unsuccessful Dutch

attempts to suppress the Achinese to British success in Malakka), and criticised the British government's treatment of the Dutch government.<sup>107</sup> He also made clear the position of the Netherlands as a small power:

Small powers should not be indifferent towards the public opinion of other countries. Small powers should seek support and protection against violence in that opinion, and will find it therein. In earlier times this was also understood in the Netherlands [...].<sup>108</sup>

Commenting more specifically on the status of the Netherlands with respect to Britain, Van Kesteren claimed that Dutch policy was dictated by the need to 'spare the sensibility of England'. Britain had always been one of the Netherlands' rivals in the Indonesian Archipelago and had always 'plotted and schemed' ('gestookt en geïntregeerd') against the Dutch, in the nineteenth century no less than in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Netherlands had nevertheless 'faint-heartedly submitted to many a humiliation because we wanted to spare English sensibilities.'<sup>109</sup> The door had thus been left open for many English connivings ('kuiperijen'). Van Kesteren concluded:

However valuable England's goodwill, the price appears to us to be too high, when the Netherlands must lower itself to such an extent

that one may justifiably quote Beaconsfield's  
jeering words and call our nation an  
extinguished people.<sup>110</sup>

This confirms the underlying irony of the Anglo-Dutch relationship, namely that the two nations were at the same time European allies and colonial rivals. Because the Netherlands' interests in Europe were largely supported by Britain, successive Dutch governments judged it wise not to anger their more powerful neighbour, whose protective wing could be useful against the political and territorial ambitions of its European neighbours.

A further anti-British article was published in the *Indische Gids*, written in July 1884 by Van Langen (Assistant Resident of Meulaboh). According to Van Langen, Britain was exploiting the Nisero question in order to force the introduction of free trade between the Straits Settlements and Achin. He claimed - as many of his contemporaries had - that British intervention had made matters worse and prolonged the whole affair. Originally, the Raja had required nothing more than the settlement of a pepper debt. But, hinted Van Langen, British intervention had given him other ideas.<sup>111</sup> Maxwell had stated that had it not been for the policy of the Netherlands, the freedom of the Nisero crew would not have been endangered. Quoting this passage from Maxwell's report, Van Langen commented that the incident would never have occurred, had it not



been for the questionable seamanship of that crew.<sup>112</sup> Here, Van Langen's tactics resemble those of Van Bylandt: Van Langen met reproachful remarks by Britain about Dutch conduct (probably containing an element of truth) with counter-accusations in an attempt to deflect blame and possibly to soothe a guilty conscience. In a judgement consistent with the Dutch resentment of foreign 'intervention', Van Langen condemned British actions as 'thoroughly ill-considered and a dangerous antecedent for their colonial realm'.<sup>113</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Some of the issues which arose during the Nisero question also surfaced during the Borneo dispute, in particular the status of the Netherlands, and Dutch attempts both simultaneously to come to terms with and preserve that status. In general, the mutual perceptions evident in the Borneo dispute also prevailed during the Nisero question, particularly the perception of Britain as a colonial rival. Mutual resentment was rife: the British government resented the Dutch government's failure to release the prisoners, and the apparent slowness with which it acted. The Dutch government, in turn, resented the pressure exerted upon it by the British government and, while acknowledging the influence of public opinion, continued to perceive the British government's actions as interference. Such meddling

was unacceptable because it gave the impression that the Dutch government was unable to keep its own affairs in order, which in turn was detrimental to its colonial prestige, the main source of Dutch national self-esteem. This had not gone unnoticed in Britain. Storey, commenting in the House of Commons on the mediation proposal, observed:

[...] the Dutch government did not consider so much the interests of our British subjects as its own interests in connection with the Rajah of Tenom. It absolutely declined the mediation of England. And why? Because the presence of the British as mediator might have a pre-judicial effect upon the prestige of the Dutch authorities.<sup>114</sup>

The Dutch also accused the British government of being motivated by less than humanitarian interests, namely by those of the Straits traders. The Dutch government was also accused of acting out of less than humanitarian interests. It was claimed in the House of Commons that the Dutch government was exploiting the situation in order to achieve - with Britain's help - the pacification of Achin, something which it had hitherto been unable to achieve alone. This claim appears harsh, but is somewhat justified in the light of the following comment by Van Kesteren in the *Indische Gids*:

If the shipwrecked crew had been put to death, it would of course have been distressing, but no-one could have blamed the Netherlands for this. The lives of our own soldiers are valuable too and a colonial power must above all have the respect of those native rulers who have recognised her authority.<sup>115</sup>

Procrastination, continued Van Kesteren, would endanger far more lives than those of the captives; the lives of hundreds of soldiers would be endangered, and the prestige of the colonial power would be damaged.<sup>116</sup> Such a remark confirms once again that preservation of the Netherlands' colonial prestige was a priority for the Dutch government. Van Kesteren's defensive remark (that the Netherlands would not have been to blame had the prisoners been put to death) seems somewhat short-sighted. As the British government had stated from the beginning of the Nisero question, the Dutch claimed sovereignty over the territory in which the men were captured, and should therefore accept responsibility. There is some justification in the remark made in the House of Commons on 3 July 1884 by Mr J. Slagg (Member for Manchester) that: 'they [the Dutch government] had assumed sovereignty over the country without discharging the responsibilities of that position'.<sup>117</sup>

It is true that the British government had pressurised



the Dutch government during the Nisero question. However, it could be argued that it was not abusing its position within the Anglo-Dutch relationship in doing so. The British government had simply observed the proceedings during the first few months, but when the Dutch government failed to secure the release of the prisoners, it had no choice but to press for action. The situation was made more difficult by the pressure of public opinion, itself provoked by reports of illness and lack of food among the prisoners. The failure of the Dutch military expedition in January 1884, followed by the refusal of the Dutch authorities to accept Maxwell's recommendations, further delayed the release of the prisoners and prompted Granville to make - in good faith - the proposal of mediation which met a further rejection from the Dutch on the grounds that it was injurious to their colonial prestige.

It is probable that the British government was motivated less by a desire to put the Dutch government in its place, than by sheer frustration at the apparent intransigence of the Dutch government. This intransigence was itself due - at least in part - to the Dutch preoccupation with the status of the Netherlands. Although not all the Dutch shared this preoccupation, it was nevertheless general enough to cause the Dutch government to act with less determination than it should have done to free the Nisero captives. The attitude of the British government in the Nisero question was certainly more

commendable than its attitude in the Borneo question. In the latter dispute, it was guilty of hypocritical behaviour (for example by claiming that the settlement in North Borneo was not political), and of confronting the Netherlands government with a *fait accompli* on more than one occasion. The attitude of the Dutch government, by comparison, was fundamentally the same in both the Borneo dispute and the Nisero question, and can be explained to a large extent by the need to protect the Netherlands' colonial status. The frequent references to 'colonial prestige, 'national pride' and the like support this.

Kuitenbrouwer concludes that the Nisero question did not fundamentally alter the Dutch government's policy towards Britain.<sup>118</sup> The sources examined for this study of the Nisero question appear to support rather than refute this conclusion, and even yield possible answers to the question which naturally arises from Kuitenbrouwer's conclusion: *why* did that policy remain fundamentally unchanged?

One possible explanation is that Dutch policy towards Britain remained essentially unchanged because the Dutch perception of the Anglo-Dutch relationship remained essentially unchanged. A second possible explanation is that the status of the Netherlands with respect to Britain had altered little, if at all. It could be argued that, had the status of the Netherlands improved or diminished in

some way, then the Dutch government would have needed to adapt its foreign policy accordingly.

Returning to the question of Dutch perceptions, these can be said to have evolved as follows. During the time of the Dutch Republic the relationship was characterised by colonial competition and naval alliance. According to E.S. van Eyck van Heslinga:

The Dutch Republic could do nothing more than tack carefully between the Scylla of naval alliance and the Charbydis of maritime competition.<sup>119</sup>

Van Sas characterised the relationship during the early nineteenth century as one of patron and client (see above, Chapter 2). According to Van Sas the 'special' quality of the relationship was lost after 1830, when the British government failed to support the Northern Netherlands in the Belgian Revolt.<sup>120</sup> De Moor, also writing on the nineteenth century (from a colonial perspective), concludes that:

To describe this relationship as a form of partnership seems incorrect. From their former position of Lords of the Eastern Seas the Dutch were reduced to the status of a dependent 'ally of a kind'.<sup>121</sup>



The Dutch naturally resented such dependency, and Dutch perceptions of Britain were inevitably coloured by that resentment. These perceptions explain, to a large extent, the attitude of the Dutch government in the Nisero question. When the British government took initiatives designed to bring the whole painful question to an end as soon as possible, it was widely condemned in the Netherlands for interfering and exerting undue pressure on the Dutch government. The British offer of mediation was immediately perceived as an affront to Dutch colonial - and therefore national - prestige. On a more individual level, diplomatic relations were dogged by an atmosphere of mistrust. Dutch ambassador Van Bylandt did not trust Pauncefote, who - initially at least - was unsympathetic towards the Dutch. Yet Van Bylandt was equally suspicious of Pauncefote when the latter became more sympathetic towards the Dutch in the Nisero question. It seems that, for Van Bylandt, the British could do no right.

The Nisero question did not lead to an irretrievable breakdown in that marriage of convenience known as the Anglo-Dutch relationship. However, it can be said that the mutual respect of the partners was diminished as a result. For the Dutch, the Nisero question reinforced long-held negative perceptions and emphasised the need for caution within the relationship. Despite such difficulties, the Dutch and British diplomats who managed the relationship were apparently motivated more by mutual interest than by

differences, and managed to prevent relations from foundering even at the most difficult of times.

## Notes to Chapter 4

1. Kuitenbrouwer, *Opkomst*, p.108.
2. Anthony Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra. Atjeh, the Netherlands and Britain 1858-1898*, (Malaya: University of Malaya Press/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), Chapter 7.
3. Kuitenbrouwer, *Opkomst*, pp.107-9.
4. W.P. Coolhaas, 'De Nisero-kwestie, professor Harting en Gladstone', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen van het Historische Genootschap*, 78 (1964), 271-325.
5. Reid, *Contest*, p.284.
6. *Ibid.*, pp.14-16.
7. *Ibid.*, p.189.
8. Paul van 't Veer, *De Atjeh oorlog* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1969), p.148.
9. Reid, *Contest*, p.113
10. Some uncertainty exists as to the exact date of the stranding of the Nisero. In contemporary parliamentary accounts, the Dutch Minister of Colonies gave the date as 10 November. Coolhaas claims that this is 'zeker onjuist', without explaining why. He describes the date of 8 November as 'vrijwel zeker' but, again, does not explain this. This second date is also given by Reid and Van 't Veer.
11. *H.S.G. 1883-84*, II, pp.1531-31.
12. See also Reid, *Contest*, pp.221-22.
13. *H.S.G. 1883-84*, II, p.1532.
14. *Ibid.*
15. According to Reid (*Contest*, p.223), Woodhouse 'had offered to allow the Rajah to kill the whole crew including his own nephew if he neglected his promise to return after negotiating with the Consul'.
16. *H.S.G. 1883-84*, II, p.1532.
17. C.E. van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie en de Gouverneur-Generaal Loudon. II' *Indische Gids*, 6 (1884), II, 237-287 (p.240): 'Wat bewoog den Radja om juist den hoofdpersoon, den Kapitein, los te laten? Met geen mogelijkheid kunnen wij daarvoor een



aannemelijke reden vinden. Overal trouwens waar men dien man ziet optreden, is een mysterie.'

18. Ibid.: 'Een mysterie is het, hoe hij op strand geraakte; een mysterie niet minder, hoe hij, die toch in elke geval getoond had "onbekwaam" geweest te zijn, dadelijk na zijn terugkomst in Engeland, waar men anders voor nalatige gezagvoerders al zeer weinig toegeeflijk is, weer als gezagvoerder op een schip kon worden gezet.'
19. Kuitenbrouwer, *Opkomst*, p.101.
20. *De Economist* (1885), part II, pp.741-2: '[...] in de dagbladen van verschillende richting zeer geprezen.'
21. H.S.G. Bijlagen 1883-84, [231.2], no.18: Van Bylandt to De Willebois, 17 March 1884.
22. Coolhaas, *Professor Harting*, p.271.
23. H.S.G. Bijlagen 1883-84, [231.2], no.18.
24. Ibid., [231.4], no.1: Crafer to Van Bylandt.
25. Ibid., [231.4], no.4: Van Bylandt to Crafer.
26. Ibid.
27. H.S.G. 1883-84, II, p.1532.
28. C.E. van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie en de Gouverneur-Generaal Loudon. II' *Indische Gids*, 6 (1884), II, 237-287 (pp.245-47). See also: H.S.G. 1883-84, II, p.1533.
29. Ibid., p.246.
30. H.S.G. 1883-84, II, p.1533.
31. Van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie. II', pp.246-47. See also: H.S.G. 1883-84, II, p.1533.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p.248.
34. Ibid.
35. H.S.G. 1883-84, II, p.1533.
36. Ibid. See also: Van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie. II', p.255.
37. Ibid.

38. *H.S.G. Bijlagen 1883-84*, [231.2], no.8. See also Reid, *Contest*, p.225.
39. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.288 (12 May 1884 - 10 June 1884), col.1105.
40. *H.S.G. 1883-84*, II, p.1533. See also: Van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie. II', pp.59-60.
41. *H.S.G. Bijlagen 1883-84*, [231.2], no.10.
42. *Ibid.*, no.14
43. See further Reid, *Contest*, pp.226-33.
44. *Ibid.*, p.238.
45. *H.S.G. 1883-84*, II, p.1534.
46. Van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie. II', p.266: 'Genoeg weten wij echter reeds, om te durven zeggen dat die man niet de loyale vertegenwoordiger van een met Nederland bevriende mogendheid geweest kan zijn; daarvoor is hij veel te partijdig en veel te bitter tegen Nederland.'
47. *Ibid.*: 'De Nationale trots der Hollanders en hun naijverige zorg voor hun prestige in het Oosten beletten hen, het denkbeeld van een Engelse garantie voor hun stipte naleving van deze of gene voorwaarden aan te nemen.'
48. *H.S.G. Bijlagen 1883-84*, [231.2], Bijlage behorende bij no.18.
49. Reid, *Contest*, p.226.
50. *H.S.G. 1883-84*, II, p.1534.
51. See further Reid, *Contest*, pp.234-36.
52. *H.S.G. Bijlagen 1883-84* [231.2], no.21. See also Reid, *Contest*, p.234.
53. *Ibid.*, [231.2], no.23: 'Ik antwoorde dat de vriendschappelijke bedoelingen van het voorstel niet werden betwijfeld, maar dat reeds vóór ik het antwoord van Zijner Majesteits Regeering had ontvangen, het voorstel mij geheel onaannemelijk voorkwam, als in de hoogste mate schadelijk aan het prestige van ons gezag, niet alleen op Sumatra, maar ook in geheel Nederlandsch-Indië [...].'
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*: 'Lord Granville kon zijne teleurstelling niet



onderdrukken, dat het voorstel van bemiddeling niet was aangenomen, en ik moet bekennen, dat ons afscheid-nemen min of meer koel was.'

56. Van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie. II', p.269: 'De Nederlandsche Regeering echter, de grenzen tusschen welwillendheid en onderdanigheid scherper en juistertrekkende, wees het bemiddelingsvoorstel af.'
57. *Rotterdamsche Courant*, 15/16 June 1884: '[...] is alzoo het interventieaanbod van Engeland niets meer en niets minder dan een dwaasheid, waartoe het Britsch Bewind gebracht werd onder den indruk, niet van het lot der Nisero-bemanning, maar van het argument der peper-havens.'
58. Ibid.
59. *H.S.G.* 1883-84, II, p.1530: 'Maar, dit vooropstellende, protesteer ik als Neder-lander, protesteer ik met al de kracht die in mij is tegen elke inmenging, van welke zijde ook, in onze huishoudelijke aangelegenheden, en het komt mij voor, dat het afwijzend antwoord [...] het eenig mogelijke antwoord was [...].' See also Reid, *Contest*, p.238.
60. *H.S.G.* 1883-84, II, p.1535: '[...] een prijsgeven van onze eer en waardigheid van onze koloniale heerschappij en van ons Nederlandsch volksbestaan.'
61. Ibid.: '[...] een kwaden indruk zou kunnen te weeg brengen op de verhouding tusschen Nederland en Engeland.'
62. Ibid., p.1536.
63. *H.S.G. Bijlagen* 1883-84 [231.2], no.22: '[...] rien ne saurait nuire davantage aux intérêts des malheureux naufragés que l'activité déployée par une Puissance étrangère pour leur délivrance.' See also Reid, *Contest*, pp.234-35.
64. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.288 (12 May 1884 - 10 June 1884), col.1104. See also Reid, *Contest*, p.235.
65. Ibid., col.1113
66. *De Amsterdammer*, 15 June 1884, p.2: 'Bij de Nisero-interpellatie heeft men zich onthouden van alle scherpe en vijandige uitlatingen tegenover 't machtig Albion. Dat was verstandig. Het zou aan de waardigheid der Kamer en aan den indruk, dien de interpellatie in Engeland moet hebben gemaakt, zelfs geen nadeel gedaan, indien de heer Brantsen zijn twijfel had verzwegen aan 't werkelijk bij ongeluk stranden van 't schip; maar in elk geval was er in het debat geen



woord, dat aanstoot kon geven aan de overzijde van den Oceaan.'

67. 'Het Nisero-geschil' *Rotterdamsche Courant*, 15/16 June 1884: '[...] waar steeds meer de Brit moet wijken voor de Rus. [...] een misplaatste gewaarwording [...] onrechtvaardige bejegening [...] volkomen te goeder trouw [...] opgezweept door woordvoerders en pleitbezorgers van een gekwetst eigenbelang. [...] terwijl zeer zeker de beslissing, die vallen moet, zal beantwoorden aan den eisch van den nationaal zelfgevoel en aan dien van onze roemvolle historie, welke geene inbreuk op onze zelfstandigheid duldt.'
68. *H.S.G. Bijlagen 1883-84* [231.4], no.7. See also Reid, *Contest*, pp.240-41.
69. *Ibid.*, no.11.
70. *Ibid.*, no.19.
71. Reid, *Contest*, pp.240, 241. See also: Kuitenbrouwer, *Opkomst*, p.110.
72. *H.S.G. Bijlagen 1883-84* [231.4], no.24.
73. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Derde deel: 1881-85, no.470, p.680: 'Er was echter een punt, dat ik meende te moeten opklaren, omtrent het standpunt, waarop de Britsche regeering zich scheen te plaatsen, namelijk om ons met recht te betwisten om in onze eigen bezittingen zoodanige maatregelen toe te passen als wij zelf oordelen noodig te zijn voor de handhaving van onze rechten en de bescherming van onze belangen.'
74. Reid, *Contest*, pp.241-42.
75. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.289 (11 June 1884 - 3 July 1884), col.1900.
76. *Ibid.*, col.1902.
77. *Ibid.*, col.1903.
78. *Ibid.*, col.1914. (For notes 74-77 incl. see also Reid, *Contest*, p.241).
79. *H.S.G. Bijlagen 1883-84* [231.4], no.34.
80. Van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie. II', p.285.
81. 'Het Nisero-geschil en 't Atjeh-vraagstuk', *Rotterdamsche Courant*, 20/21 July 1884: 'Dat men te Londen dien eisch, of wil men, dat aanbod [...] liet vallen of feitelijk uit de onderhandelingen verwijderde, gaf aan het diplomatieke overleg een

geheel ander karakter dan het aanvankelijk droeg.'

82. Ibid.: '[...] ook al zijn wij op internationaal gebied niet meer wat wij geweest zijn, de oud-Nederlandsche veerkracht toch nog niet is vergaan.'
83. Ibid.: '[...] zooals de zaak nu geschikt werd, hebben we zelfs reden om het niet al te zeer te betreuren dat de Nisero-moeilijkheid ontstond.'
84. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Derde deel: 1881-85, no.489, p.697: '[...] dat het veelmeer de Engelsche regeering was, die, na eerst eene voor ons onaanneemlijke bemiddeling te hebben voorgeslagen, haar oorspronkelijk standpunt heeft verlaten en hare medewerking heeft aangeboden.'
85. Ibid., no.490, pp.697-98: 'UE zal wel kunnen beseffen dat het geen gemakkelijke taak was voor den gezant van eene mogendheid van den tweeden rang, zooals Nederland, om de regeering van eene groote mogendheid als Engeland er toe te brengen zelf het initiatief te nemen van voorstellen in lijnrechten strijd met de houding, die zij tot dusverre had aangenomen [...].'
86. Ibid.: '[...] dit zou inderdaad vernederend zijn geweest voor ons prestige en eene bekentenis van machteloosheid geweest zijn.'
87. *H.S.G.* 1884-84, II, p.1846: '[...] met beide was onze nationale eer en onze souvereiniteit als koloniale Mogendheid gemoeid.'
88. Reid, *Contest*, p.242.
89. Van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie. II', p.285: '[...] dat in de Nederlandsche meegaandheid voedsel voor aanmatiging vond [...]. [...] zal het niet trachten, langs een omweg toch tot een voor zijn glorie een heerschzucht gewenschte uitkomst te geraken?'
90. Ibid., p.286.
91. Woltring, *Bescheiden*, Derde deel: 1881-85, no.490, p.699: 'Hij schijnt nu even sterk op onze hand te zijn en tegen den radja van Tenom, als hij vroeger het tegenovergestelde was. Dit neemt niet weg, dat ik hem hoegenaamd niet vertrouw, en dat zeer scherp moet worden toegezien op ieder woord van schriftelijke voorstellen, door hem opgesteld.'
92. Ibid., no.496, p.705: 'Het was, in één woord, sir Julian Pauncefote's eenigste wensch de Nederlandsche regeering in de onaangename Nisero-zaak zoveel als maar doenlijk ter wille te zijn.'



93. Ibid.
94. H.S.G. 1883-84, II, p.1844: '[...] na eerst eene deftige wel gemotiveerde schijnverdediging gevoerd te hebben, eensklaps rechtsomkeert gemaakt heeft en aan den loop gegaan is.'
95. Ibid., p.1845: '[...] een afstand van ons gezag in onze eigen huishouding.'
96. Ibid., p.1843.
97. Ibid.: '[...] want schier elke dag werd zij in het Parlement door zeer lastige interpellaties bemoeilijkt.'
98. Ibid., p.1844: '[...] dat de Engelsche Regeering stond voor eene wilde agitatie van medelijden bij het Engelsche volk.'
99. Ibid., p.1847: '[...] maar het gaat daar als hier: de meest rumoerige opinie baant zich licht aanvankelijk een weg. Zelfs op dit ogenblik is de Nisero-zaak in Engeland nog niet zoodanig aan de orde, dat ieder Engelschman zich daarover een opinie vormt, en de opruiendste en voor ons nadeelige opinieën worden ginds het meest vernomen.'
100. Ibid., p.1850.
101. See further Reid, *Contest*, pp.197-98, 210, 227-28, 288.
102. Van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie. II', p.250, footnote (1): 'Ook dit toont o.i. niet dat Sir Frederik Weld, Nederlands gezag ten opzichte van den Radja kennende, een zeer loyale houding aangenomen heeft.'
103. Ibid., p.257: 'En men zal erkennen dat hij er steeds op uit was, Nederland te verkleinen, Nederland verdacht te maken, Nederland Engeland's overmacht te doen gevoelen, en dat geen individu van zóó slecht allooi kon zijn, of hij vond bij Sir Frederick Weld een open oor, wanneer er slechts een smet op Nederlands naam geworpen kon worden.'
104. Ibid., p.285: 'Van oudsheer heeft de gescheidenis geleerd, dat men, om zich in een duurzame vriendschap met het fiere Engelsche volk te kunnen verheugen, eigen fierheid nooit mag doen betwijfelen; die les heeft men in Indië veronachtzaamd, en het kwetsende interventievoorstel is de straf daarvoor geworden.'
105. *Annual Register* (London: Dodsley, 1884), p.323.
106. Reid, *Contest*, p.244.



107. C.E. van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie en de Gouverneur-Generaal Loudon. III', *Indische Gids*, 6 (1884), 422-453 (p.425).
108. Ibid., p.450: 'Kleine staten mogen voor de publieke opinie van andere landen niet onverschillig zijn. Kleine staten moeten in die opinie juist een steun en bescherming tegen het geweld, en zij kunnen die daarin vinden. Vroeger is dat in Nederland ook zoo begrepen [...].'
109. Ibid.: '[...] en flauwhartig hebben wij ons menige vernedering laten welgevallen, omdat wij "de gevoeligheid van Engeland" wilden ontzien.'
110. Ibid., p.453: 'Hoe groote prijs er ook op Engeland's welwillendheid worde gesteld, ze schijnt ons veel te duur gekocht, wanneer Nederland zich dermate vernedert, dat men terecht het honende woord van een Beaconsfield herhalen en onze natie een uitgedoofd volk noemen kan.'
111. Reid, however, disagrees with this (*Contest*, p.223).
112. Van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie. III', pp.465-66.
113. Ibid., p.467: '[...] wij veroordelen dan ook de Britsche bemoeiingen als geheel ondoordacht en als een gevaarlijk antecedent voor hun koloniaal rijk.'
114. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.289 (11 June - 3 July 1884), col.1899. See also Reid, *Contest*, p.241.
115. Van Kesteren, 'De Nisero-quaestie. III', p.452: 'En gesteld eens, dat de schipbreukelingen het lot om vermoord te worden getroffen had, 't zou natuurlijk bedroevend zijn geweest, maar niemand had Nederland daarvan grief kunnen maken. Ook het leven van eigen soldaten is kostbaar, en boven alles heeft een koloniale mogendheid zich door de inlandsche vorsten die haar oppergezag erkend hebben te doen eerbiedigen.'
116. Ibid., pp.452-53.
117. *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol.289 (11 June 1884 - 3 July 1884), col.1919. See also Reid, *Contest*, p.241.
118. Kuitenbrouwer, *Opkomst*, p.111.
119. E.S. van Eyck van Heslinga, 'A Competitive Ally. The Delicate Balance of Naval Alliance between Great Britain and the Dutch Republic, 1674-1795' in Raven & Rodger, *Navies and Armies*, p.10.
120. N.C.F. van Sas, *Onze natuurlijkste bondgenoot*, p.357.

121. J.A. de Moor, 'A Very Unpleasant Relationship. Trade and Strategy in the Eastern Seas: Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Nineteenth Century from a Colonial Perspective' in Raven & Rodger, *Navies and Armies*, p.67.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE FOUNDATION OF THE KONINKLIJKE PAKETVAART MAATSCHAPPIJ

#### Introduction

In 1891, the Dutch Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPM, Royal Packet Company) came into operation in the Dutch East Indies. The company's contract (to expire in 1905), stipulated that it would provide intra-Asian steam-packet transport on thirteen lines, which served 154 ports (see Map 4).<sup>1</sup> Historians of Indonesia are familiar with the subsequent economic success of this Dutch monopoly, which enjoyed considerable financial support from both the government and commerce. Until now, historians have dealt mainly with the economic aspects of the KPM. The most recent work on the subject, written by J. à Campo, also deals with the economics of steam-packet transport in the Netherlands Indies, placing the emphasis on the KPM's role in the integration of the colonial state.<sup>2</sup> Steam-packet transport in Indonesia was important socially as well as economically, and in this excellent study À Campo examines the interaction between steam-packet transport and state-formation from the perspective of the development of a social and technological system. This chapter will not therefore deal with the economic aspects of the KPM, but with the non-economic motives surrounding its creation. We intend to ascertain first, whether the



creation of the KPM affected Anglo-Dutch relations and, second, what this tells us about relations between the two countries at this time. The basic sources for this study are parliamentary, since these reveal most clearly the motives behind the Dutch government's decision to create such a monopoly in 1888. It has been generally acknowledged that one of the motives was fear of foreign encroachments during a period of European imperial expansion;<sup>3</sup> this study seeks to determine how the Anglo-Dutch relationship fits into this scenario.

Dutch historians recognise that the creation of the KPM in 1888 was a triumph of national interests. This must have been the case, since the contract with the KPM did not come cheap; it was heavily subsidised and although this raised doubts in the Second Chamber, these were voiced by a minority. Kuitenbrouwer sees the establishment of the KPM as 'the first, defensive shift towards Dutch imperialism',<sup>4</sup> and in an article preceding the publication of his book, Â Campo comments that, from 1888 onwards, the Dutch government had resigned itself to monopolistic tendencies. It had even consciously chosen a monopoly situation by opting for a private contract rather than a public tender, and for one contracting party instead of several. Furthermore:

It was a conscious choice based on the consideration of expected advantages and the

curtailment of dis- advantages.<sup>5</sup>

The Netherlands Indies government had first given financial support to private steamship companies in 1850. The Nederlands-Indische Stoombootmaatschappij received an advance and a temporary agreement was concluded with Mr Cores de Vries, who was subsequently granted a contract until 1865. The contract was for the operation of two lines from Batavia: the first via Benkoelen to Padang, and the second via Samarang to Makassar, Amboina, Ternate and Menato. In July 1863 the contract was put out to tender. The lowest bidder was H.O. Robinson from London, who was granted the contract from 1866 to 1875 and which he then transferred to the Nederlands-Indische Stoomvaartmaatschappij (NISM). Robinson won the contract again when it was put out to tender in 1874 for the period 1875 to 1890.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Bill of 1888**

As the end of Robinson's contract approached, the Dutch government had to decide what course to take after 1890. One thing was certain: it must retain control of steam-packet transport in the Indonesian Archipelago. An efficient transport network was crucial to the effective government of Indonesia. The Dutch government did not wish to be at the mercy of companies, foreign or Dutch, which

could restrict their services or levy unreasonable tariffs for the transport of government passengers and goods. The Dutch government was faced with three possibilities. First, it could renew its contract with the NISM. Second, it could put the contract out to tender or, third, conclude a private contract. Minister for Colonies Sprenger van Eyk initially opted for a public tender, but later he changed his mind as he became convinced that a public tender would not guarantee that Indonesian steam-packet transport would remain under Dutch control. Heavily subsidised foreign shipping companies could easily win the packet transport contract by public tender. Moreover, although the Netherlands possessed the technology and skill to operate such a network, Dutch companies would not be familiar with the extensive network of steam-packet lines built up by Robinson and his NISM, and would therefore be unable to compete against him in a public tender. Under public tender, the chances were very great that the contract be granted either to a foreign undertaking, or once again to the NISM, which would be able to submit the lowest bid. Given the predominance of Dutch national interests at the time, these factors persuaded Van Eyk that a private contract ('*onderhandsche overeenkomst*') between the newly-created company and the government would best answer the requirements.<sup>7</sup>

Sprenger van Eyk argued further. The Netherlands Indies was a kingdom of islands, the outermost of which



were only accessible by sea. A regulated steam-packet service was therefore essential to the administration of those possessions. The present arrangement was unsatisfactory since the Nederlands-Indische Stoomvaartmaatschappij was in fact an English company, although it had the appearance of a Dutch one. Its directors were English; shareholders' meetings were held in England, and even the Dutch director resident in the Netherlands was subject to the authority of his English colleagues. In addition, the Queen's Bench had pronounced that the company's ships were English. It was, stressed Van Eyk, of paramount importance that steam-packet transport should become a purely Dutch undertaking, not only in the interest of the Dutch government, but also in the interest of trade, both in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies.

The government favoured the bid of Messrs Jan Boissevain, Petrus Emilius Tegelberg and Willem Ruys. The debate on the need for a Dutch national steam-packet enterprise in Indonesia intensified during the 1880s, and Dutch shipping companies were approached and 'canvassed' as to their opinions on the subject. Jan Boissevain, a director of the Stoomvaart Maatschappij Nederland (SMN) believed, given the extent of the existing NISM network, that a merger between the SMN and the Rotterdamsche Lloyd (RL) was necessary to create the national enterprise which would replace the NISM. A merger between the two companies,

which were based in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, would also unite the two cities' shipping interests. But there were problems, not least the fact that the RL relied heavily on British capital. The directors of the RL, not wishing to be pushed out of the market, reluctantly agreed to go along with the merger plan. If they did not agree to the plan, the SMN might well win the contract for itself. But later the SMN also came to doubt the wisdom of the merger; it feared that it would lose out on the allocation of voyages ('vaarbeurten'), and that the formation of such a large company would provoke political resistance and also encourage competition to a greater extent than would otherwise be the case.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the directors of the companies drew up a bid and agreed that there would be co-operation between the three sister companies (SMN, RL and the KPM).

By now the NISM realised that the chances of a foreign company winning the contract were very slim indeed, and a rival bid was consequently submitted by Mr F. Bogaardt. On 12 January 1888 Bogaardt informed the government that he had set up a company, the Stoomvaartmaatschappij Holland (SMH), which would meet the government's requirements. He pointed out that the NISM was merely a co-shareholder and requested that the government either continue with the tender or give him the opportunity to negotiate for a private contract, in which case he could propose tariffs considerably lower than those of Messrs. Boissevain & Co.<sup>9</sup>

Sprenger van Eyk dismissed this bid, claiming that Bogaardt had not submitted concrete proposals, but had intended simply to prevent the acceptance of other proposals.<sup>10</sup> He also pointed out that keeping Indonesian packet transport as a Dutch national enterprise was the least of Bogaardt's priorities. If his proposals were accepted, the government would still in effect be dealing with the NISM, despite Bogaardt's assurances that the NISM would only be a co-shareholder in the SMH.<sup>11</sup> L.W.C. Keuchenius (Anti-Revolutionary member of the Second Chamber) was sharply critical of the government and defended Bogaardt's bid. His criticisms will be dealt with in more detail below. Although both Van Eyk and Keuchenius had been members of the Council of the Indies (Raad van Indië), they held opposing views on certain colonial matters. While Van Eyk, for example, supported the blockade of the entire Achin coast during the Achin war, Keuchenius took an anti-government stance on the matter.<sup>12</sup> Keuchenius also attacked conservative-liberal policy and the Dutch government's possession of the Indies.<sup>13</sup> It is, then, not so surprising that they held opposing views on the matter of Bogaardt's bid for the new contract.

The bill for the conclusion of an agreement with the KPM was first brought before the Dutch Second Chamber on 4 February 1888.<sup>14</sup> If the bill was successful, Messrs Boissevain, Tegelberg and Ruys would together form the KPM. Sprenger van Eyk explained why he favoured their bid:



An agreement with the three named bidders, whose good character removes all doubt as to their purpose, and who are already assured of the support of the foremost Dutch financial institutions and capitalists, would ensure that packet-boat transport in the Indies does indeed become a national matter.<sup>15</sup>

Dutch political circumstances were less than stable when the KPM bill was introduced. The Heemskerk cabinet's term of office was drawing to a close. Heemskerk (a conservative liberal) was replaced in April 1888 by the Anti-Revolutionary A.E. Mackay. Heemskerk's Ministers for Colonies and Foreign Affairs (Sprenger van Eyk and Van Karnebeek) had both been liberals. They were replaced by the Anti-Revolutionary, L.W.C. Keuchenius (Colonies) and the conservative, C. Hartzen (Foreign Affairs). In Europe, too, the political atmosphere was tense and there was intense colonial competition among the Powers. Anglo-Dutch relations were problematic: the long-standing Borneo dispute was still unresolved, and the memory of the traumatic Nisero question had not yet faded from the minds of British and Dutch politicians and diplomats.

The Dutch government, then, wanted to retain control of steam-packet transport in the Indies Archipelago by creating a purely Dutch company. How did it propose to ensure that the company remained Dutch? The bill contained

two main provisions designed to ensure this: the company directors should be Dutch; and the company should be based in the Netherlands or in the Netherlands Indies. If based in the Netherlands, its representatives in the Indies should be Dutch. A further clause, this time in the draft agreement, stipulated that the company's ships should be built in the Netherlands.

It is understandable that the Dutch government should take measures to protect its colonies against European intrusions, hence the desire to exclude as far as possible all foreign influence from the KPM. Yet the government was especially fearful of British influence. Traditionally in the Anglo-Dutch relationship, the Netherlands had looked to Britain to protect Dutch colonies from other powers with colonial ambitions. But now, in the late 1880s, Britain herself posed an unacceptable threat to Dutch colonial prestige. The Dutch government's perception of Britain had therefore become more negative. The perceived colonial threat from Britain was now so great that any British involvement in the KPM was unacceptable to the Dutch government. As Â Campo observes:

The English nationality of the shipping company [NISM] was certainly no obstacle to good service from a commercial point of view, but was not a good basis for economic, political, governmental and military co-operation.<sup>16</sup>

## **The reaction in Parliament**

Two weeks after the bill had been introduced in the Dutch Second Chamber, an interim report was published giving members' views on the bill.<sup>17</sup> It was customary for such a survey to be carried out in order to gauge the reception of a draft bill. Although this report does not refer to members by name, it is a reasonable indication of how they the KPM bill was received in the Second Chamber. There was criticism of the fact that the bill had not been put forward sooner, given that there was so much to be organised. Interested parties in Indonesia should have been given the opportunity to put their case. Although some members were decidedly against a hurried settlement by the departing cabinet, the majority would not resist this if the government had good reason for doing so. Virtually all members agreed that the steam-packet service should continue to be regulated on the present basis. Very few members favoured a government-managed undertaking; the present arrangement yielded certain advantages for the Dutch government which it could continue to enjoy after 1890. The majority of members shared Van Eyk's preference for a private contract, although there were some in favour of public tender if the conditions would ensure that the successful company was a Dutch undertaking.

There was also doubt concerning the ways in which the



government proposed to protect the KPM from foreign influence. It was pointed out that directors could be voted out of office by shareholders, and replaced by non-Dutch directors. The stipulation that all directors should be Dutch was generally considered inadequate; this should apply to all persons in managerial or supervisory positions. Furthermore, appointment of directors should be subject to government approval. Members were divided on the stipulation that the company's ships should be built in the Netherlands. Those against claimed that the exclusion of foreign competition in that industry would attract workers who could only be given short-term employment.

The strongest criticism came from L.W.C. Keuchenius (Anti-Revolutionary member for Amersfoort). In a memorandum dated 15 February 1888, he set out his objections to the proposed contract with Messrs Boissevain & Co. Keuchenius felt that the bill could have been introduced earlier; the government had ample opportunity during its term of office to put forward its proposals on the subject. Keuchenius defended the NISM, stating that it had served the government well for twenty-two years, and that the government had not even informed the company that its services would be unconditionally dispensed with after 1890. He strongly advised members to reject such hasty action by the government. As to the Dutch nationality of the company, Keuchenius found it strange that the condition regarding the building of ships in the Netherlands was not

mentioned in the bill, and only in part in the draft agreement. He pointed out that the NISM had also employed Dutch crews, except for the English engineers who had been recruited in the interest of general safety (here, Keuchenius probably means that there were no Dutch engineers of sufficient calibre). The government's fear of foreign shareholders was greatly misplaced in the light of twenty-two years of experience with the NISM. Keuchenius defended the bid made by Bogaardt & Co:

In the persons of Mr Bogaardt and his co-founders, the government would find no less a guarantee of earnestness and loyalty in the execution of the task, which these *Dutchmen* are also prepared - and will even lower *their requirements* - to take on in the Netherlands.<sup>18</sup>

The interests of the Indies and its inhabitants would not be served in any way if the Boissevain proposals were accepted and the Bogaardt proposals rejected. Keuchenius's argument was powerful and logical, yet it still failed to convince members of the Second Chamber for whom national interests - embodied in the status of the Netherlands as a colonial power - were paramount.

Minister for Colonies Sprenger van Eyk answered the criticisms of the bill in a memorandum of reply (*Memorie van Antwoord*) enclosed with a letter dated 20 February

1888. Van Eyk's reply was comprehensive and detailed; only those statements relating to the questions addressed in this chapter will be discussed here. On the question of guaranteeing that the company would remain Dutch, Van Eyk admitted that it was not possible to be completely certain that all shares would remain in Dutch hands, but stated that a very high degree of certainty was surely also desirable. Was it not better to have a company that was almost completely Dutch, than a company that was not Dutch at all?<sup>19</sup>

On the question of monopoly, Van Eyk reasoned as follows. If the transport market were divided among several companies, it was possible that, in the fight for survival, none would be able to afford the high expenditures necessary to meet the prescribed standards and requirements. Private passengers would then be offered an inferior service. In the case of insufficient competition it was possible that one company would forge ahead of the rest. Naturally the government would patronise this company, which would then be in a position to drive out the other competitors. Therefore, the absence of a monopolistic agreement - such as the proposed agreement between the government and the KPM - would not ensure the healthy competition which was advantageous for private passengers and trade - even on the better lines. In the case of the KPM, a monopoly would be advantageous, not detrimental, to private interests. An absence of healthy competition in the



Indonesian archipelago was not due to the existence of a monopoly, but to the fact that one particular client with a high demand for transport (i.e. the Dutch government) would favour the company which best served its interests.<sup>20</sup>

It is clear that the Dutch government wanted to shut out, as far as possible, all foreign influence which could hinder its colonial progress in the Indonesian Archipelago. As À Campo has observed: '[...] the aim of the undertaking was, in a word, to unfurl the national flag'.<sup>21</sup> The government's fear of losing control or having to depend on foreign undertakings was not new. As we have seen in the Borneo dispute and the Nisero question, the protection of Dutch colonies was uppermost in the minds of Dutch politicians and diplomats. The colonies gave the Netherlands the status of a first-rank colonial power, which compensated for its loss of status in Europe. The Dutch government was thus determined to preserve that colonial status and was alert to any potential threats.

### **The reaction in the media**

The liberal *Indische Gids* had already discussed the matter of packet transport in the Indonesian Archipelago in 1885. It drew readers' attention to an article by H.M. Chapelle, published in *De Economist* of July/August 1885. The author pointed out that the NISM discouraged all competition, and

he indicated what the government should do:

Let the government lift the embargo on the transport of goods by foreign ships between the ports of the Indies, and steam shipping companies will sprout like toadstools.<sup>22</sup>

La Chapelle also observed that the Indonesian Archipelago was in danger of becoming eclipsed:

The present situation has this further disadvantage, that the transit trade of our Archipelago is shifting more and more towards Singapore.<sup>23</sup>

This was a very real concern. Most British-dominated trade routes radiated from two points: Singapore, and Penang further north. Singapore was already an important British-dominated trade centre, and became even more important after the Suez canal was opened. The Straits of Malakka became the main passage for trade between Europe and the Far East, and Singapore benefited at the expense of Dutch Batavia. The port of Penang attracted much of Achin's trade, and later became the entrepôt for the KPM's Achin trade. According to Reid, as long as this situation persisted '[...] the British colony would remain a magnet drawing the Achinese away from submission to Batavia'.<sup>24</sup> But the situation did change as a result of Dutch efforts to

transform Sabang (a port on the island of Pulau We at the entrance to the Straits on the northern tip of Sumatra) from a supply station into a free port, and although not all Achinese traders switched allegiance from Penang to Sabang, its development rendered the Dutch more independent of Penang and its anti-Dutch traders.<sup>25</sup> The KPM was ultimately successful in driving British competition out of the Indonesian Archipelago. Â Campo describes how this was achieved with a strategy of tariff, line and transit policies, combined with horizontal integration (with other shipping companies) and vertical integration (increased control over secondary services and industries). Horizontal integration took place in the form of co-operation with English and German companies within the framework of the multi-national discussions at the Batavia Freight Conference and the Deli Freight Conference. Also, services outside the Archipelago (the so-called 'buitenlijnen') were shared with Japanese, British-Indian and Australian steamship companies.<sup>26</sup> In early 1888, when the Dutch government's intentions became known, an author writing in the *Indische Gids* made it clear that he favoured a Dutch company above a foreign company. But he did not agree that the colonies in question should foot the bill:

But to let the Indies pay for the satisfaction of the patriotic spirit is, we believe, unjust. Such protectionism is the most illiberal thing of all.<sup>27</sup>



Such patriotism could only be considered honourable if the successful company - chosen by public tender - was granted a subsidy by the *Dutch*, and not by the Indies treasury. Later that year, the author of an article on the introduction of the KPM bill cynically commented that many voters favoured some degree of protectionism, especially if the Indies paid.<sup>28</sup>

This was indeed the case, and protectionism won the day. Even Keuchenius, who had so sharply criticised the bill and the financial burden it placed upon the Indies government, was soon obliged to help implement that bill when he replaced Sprenger van Eyk as Minister for Colonies in April 1888.

The KPM debates were reported in detail by newspapers of all denominations. The Roman Catholic *De Maasbode* acknowledged the advantages of a national steam-packet company in the shape of the KPM, and recognised the protectionist nature of the proposals.<sup>29</sup> It did not explicitly object to these, but simply wondered why the Dutch Government did not apply the same principles to other national industries which were equally important - agriculture, for example. Protection for agriculture or industry in the Dutch provinces was a different matter, claimed *De Maasbode*. Whenever this was discussed, the objection was raised that the interests of a small number of producers could not be protected at the expense of the

vast majority, i.e. consumers. This, claimed the author of the article, was a double standard ('[...] meten met twee maten').<sup>30</sup> The conservative *Dagblad van Zuid Holland en 's Gravenhage* also supported the KPM proposals. Dutch industry and Indonesian trade would once more feel that the Dutch government was supporting them. The only matter for concern was whether the Second Chamber would approve the draft bill before the impending election, given that many members would feel drawn towards their constituencies and be absent from the Chamber. It concluded that this '[...] important, truly national proposal by the government deserves a positive and speedy reception'.<sup>31</sup>

The author of an article in the liberal *Arnhemse Courant* stated that, given the lack of time, the draft KPM bill could only be approved. It regretted the fact that this lack of time limited the possibilities for amendments. The author went on to claim that the KPM proposals were neither protection nor privilege, since trade legislation was not involved in any way. This is a strange reaction from a liberal newspaper, given that the tendency in the Netherlands at the time was not to deny the protectionist nature of the KPM, but to question whether or not this was acceptable. It was concluded, nevertheless, that '[...] the political interest of the State is worth a sacrifice from the treasury', in other words that the higher subsidies which the KPM would receive were justified.<sup>32</sup> Another liberal newspaper, the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, also supported

the KPM. An article in the 9 February edition of 1888 echoed the national preoccupation with the Dutch colonial empire:

In an area as extensive as the island sea in which our colonial authority has been established for almost three centuries [...] , a steam-packet service which is as complete as possible is just as necessary as a good railway network on the mainland.<sup>33</sup>

Monopoly was the best alternative, claimed the author of the article, since open competition for the contract would not generate sufficient competitors to guarantee the best possible situation for the government. Relations with the NISM had not been problematic until now, but who could say what would happen in the future?

With regard to the colonial situation, we are in a period of transition. Other European powers have come forward with tendencies towards colonial possessions: competition in that area is enormously increased, and many surprises may still await us.<sup>34</sup>

A third liberal newspaper, the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (NRC) revealed its support for the KPM in its unsympathetic attitude towards the bill's critic



Keuchenius. Keuchenius' speech in the Second Chamber on 23 February 1888, it was pointed out, lasted from eleven o'clock in the morning until almost half-past four in the afternoon, leaving little opportunity for other speakers. Keuchenius often digressed and was repetitive. The *NRC* also criticised Keuchenius for concentrating on the financial aspect of the bill. 'Is everything, for a colonial power like ourselves, to be brought down to money?' asked the author.<sup>35</sup> Keuchenius was described as 'an obstructionist *ad absurdum*' and, as an advocate of the NISM, he had 'provided the worst possible service'.<sup>36</sup>

The liberal *Het Vaderland* was equally critical of Keuchenius:

The policy of the Government may give cause for criticism, but an opposition which is so grossly exaggerated, and always assumes the worst, is more damaging to itself than to the matter it opposes.<sup>37</sup>

The position of this newspaper is less explicit. The author of the article recognised the potential difficulties of a foreign steam-packet company, but stated:

The fact cannot be concealed that Dutch interests are furthered above foreign interests, at the expense of the treasury.<sup>38</sup>

It may well be that the burden on the treasury was minimal, but only a public tender would establish the most economical means of serving the country. Furthermore, the author disagreed - in a truly liberal fashion - with the stipulation for building KPM ships in Dutch shipyards. Shipbuilders should reject this 'in the strong conviction that they are able and willing to compete in freedom with other countries'.<sup>39</sup> The author was not opposed to the draft bill, but merely wished to draw attention to its less favourable aspects.

The views expressed on the KPM bill in the Dutch press thus echoed those expressed in parliament. In the media too, then, there was a conviction that the national (and therefore colonial) interest would be best served by a Dutch company such as the KPM, albeit a monopoly. Some commentators, as we have seen, had brief crises of conscience but - as in parliament - protectionism won the day. Only one of Keuchenius' thirteen amendments, put forward during his lengthy speech on 23 February, was approved; the other twelve were rejected by very decisive votes. It is then, perhaps, hardly surprising that Keuchenius resigned himself to implementing the KPM proposals when the new cabinet came to power in April 1888. He surely felt that he had done all he could to oppose the bill, and given the overwhelming defeat of his proposed amendments, saw that he had no choice but to implement the bill. Moreover, as Kuiper has pointed out, the main reason

Keuchenius had accepted his portfolio was in order to prevent a Catholic becoming Minister for Colonies.<sup>40</sup>

The perceived colonial threat to the Netherlands during the last decades of the nineteenth century was not, then, confined only to those in government. It had penetrated the Dutch national consciousness to such an extent that the media largely accepted the protectionism inherent in the creation of a national monopoly such as the KPM. Although, from the 1860s onwards, the Dutch became ardent free-traders, and liberal principles triumphed, the late nineteenth-century imperialist threat could not be ignored and protectionist measures once again became attractive with regard to the colonies. In the words of Kossmann:

In the mother country itself the liberal conception of freedom had more positive significance; it meant the free development of all national resources and of all members of the community. But even in the Netherlands this principle was of limited effectiveness, and it was totally irrelevant in the colonies. In purely economic terms too free enterprise in its initial form soon proved unsatisfactory.<sup>41</sup>

### **The second KPM agreement**



In October 1898, ten and a half years after the introduction of the first KPM bill, a second bill was introduced proposing a ten-year extension of the government's contract with the KPM (i.e. until 31 December 1915), and a reduction in the subsidies on certain specified routes.<sup>42</sup>

The Minister for Colonies, J.T. Cremer (serving in N.G. Pierson's liberal cabinet which had come to power in July 1897), wanted to reduce the colonial budget, one method being to cut the subsidies granted to the KPM (amounting to Hfl 660,000 under the terms of the 1888 contract), thereby saving Hfl 250,000 each year from 1 January 1899. Since the KPM contract still had seven years to run, this represented a total saving of 1.75 million guilders.<sup>43</sup>

The report of a survey among members of the Second Chamber recorded the following misgivings. Above all, members found it difficult to judge whether it was in the country's interest to conclude a further agreement. The directors of the KPM had agreed to a reduction in subsidies of Hfl.200,000 per year for a period of seven years. The company was prepared to make this sacrifice if this would secure an extended contract while its existing one still had seven years to run. However, not all members were convinced that these terms were more favourable than those which would be obtained if the decision was postponed until

the KPM's current contract expired. Would this, they wondered, prevent unnecessarily high subsidies? Some members were against the extension of a contract which still had a number of years to run. Others suggested a sliding-scale subsidy, which varied with the revenue on individual routes. It was also pointed out that, if the contract were extended, tariffs for the transport of government goods and passengers could not be reduced before 1915. Those who believed that the proposed extension was premature did so on the grounds that even greater advantages would be possible if the volume of transport were to increase in subsequent years. If the government were bound by an extended contract, it would not be able to profit from these.<sup>44</sup>

Those members in favour of the bill had been convinced by Cremer's estimated budget savings, and doubted that more favourable terms could be obtained from the KPM by postponing the decision to extend the contract. The bill should be approved in the interests of this transport sector.<sup>45</sup> The bill was debated in the Second Chamber on 28 February 1899. Social democrat member H.H. van Kol and J.M. Pijnacker Hordijk, a liberal, spoke against it. Van Kol was anti-protectionist, while Pijnacker Hordijk criticised its premature introduction, and commented that tariffs, not subsidies, should be reduced. In May 1899, C. Pijnacker Hordijk (Governor-General of the Indies from 1888 to 1893 and brother of J.M. Pijnacker Hordijk) also argued against

the proposed extension in the First Chamber.<sup>46</sup>

Ten years after the first KPM bill, protectionism (as far as colonial transport was concerned) was still a dominant economic philosophy in the Netherlands. The bill was approved in the Second Chamber by 59 votes to 11, and in the First Chamber by 38 votes to 2. The victory had not even been marginal, suggesting that parliament at least was still fearful of foreign influence. Protectionism was the response to a perceived threat. In the Dutch case, the creation of the KPM was the response to the threat of foreign competition in the Netherlands Indies. The votes to extend the KPM contract indicate that, even in the late 1890s, the Dutch government still perceived a threat. Certainly the European powers were still competing for colonies and it is possible that the crises in Anglo-Dutch relations in the 1880s (the Nisero question and the Borneo dispute) were not yet forgotten. The Dutch government would, therefore, still be suspicious and wary of British ambitions and continue to protect its vulnerable and precious colonial status.

### **The British response**

The creation of the KPM and its continued existence were of paramount importance to the Dutch government. Given the government's preoccupation with the preservation of Dutch



colonial prestige, this is not surprising. The creation of a colonial monopoly such as the KPM is therefore consistent with the Dutch attitude in the Borneo dispute and the Nisero question. As we have seen, the colonial status of the Netherlands strongly influenced the Dutch government's attitude to these issues. During the Borneo dispute (which was still unresolved in the late 1880s), the Dutch government protested against the dictatorial attitude of the British government which, it claimed, continually presented it with *faits accomplis* and failed to recognise Dutch claims in Borneo. In the mid-1880s, the Dutch government complained that the colonial reputation of the Netherlands was being damaged by British intervention in the Nisero question, because that intervention suggested to the outside world that the Dutch government could not keep its own house in order.

The motives for the establishment of the KPM were more xenophobic than Anglophobic, attributable to a more general fear of foreign influence rather than a specific fear of British influence. Nevertheless it is important to examine the reaction of Britain to the creation of the KPM, since this should provide some insight into the British perception of the Anglo-Dutch relationship, and enable us to compare this with the Dutch perception.

It would be reasonable to expect that this move by the Dutch government to form the KPM would, at the very least,

have caused some unease among British politicians. But this was not the case. On examining contemporary sources, the overriding impression is of a singular *lack* of reaction; indeed the British reaction is conspicuous by its absence.

The creation of the KPM, and the subsequent renewal of its contract, did not create a stir in the British parliament; the Hansard volumes for the period in question contain no reference to the subject. The *Annual Register*, a respected nineteenth-century chronicle of events, made no mention at all of the KPM, despite the fact that it included a regular section on the Netherlands and Belgium. Neither was the matter discussed in prominent journals and reviews of the late nineteenth century such as *The Nineteenth Century*, *The Edinburgh Review* and *The Contemporary Review*. Apparently, there was no significant diplomatic discussion between the Dutch and British ministries on the subject of the KPM, since the volumes of foreign affairs documents (published in the Dutch series *Rijksgeschiedkundige Publicatieën*) contain no references to this.<sup>47</sup>

Neither was there much reaction among diplomats at the Foreign Office in London. On 6 April 1888 H.P. Fenton, Secretary of the British Legation at The Hague, forwarded to Foreign Secretary Lord Salisbury a translation of the 1888 KPM bill. This was forwarded by Salisbury to the Post Master General, but the bill did not provoke any lengthy

correspondence.

The first and second KPM contracts were treated with equal disinterest by *The Times*. There is only one brief reference to the KPM, on 5 March 1888. It reads:

The Monopoly of Steam navigation in the Indian Archipelago, which has been conferred upon a Dutch company, is stated to be injurious to the interests of Indian trade.<sup>48</sup>

This item is unhelpful and vague, since it does not tell us where or by whom the monopoly was stated to be injurious. Neither does it tell us how the Dutch monopoly would be injurious. It can only be assumed that, had the KPM been considered a very great threat to the interests of Indian trade, this would have occasioned much lengthier and more animated discussion in parliament, in the media, and among diplomats.

## **Conclusion**

The lack of British reaction to the creation of the KPM by the Dutch was surprising, given that Britain was a free-trade power closely involved with the Netherlands. What, then, is the reason for this lack of reaction, and what does it tell us about the Anglo-Dutch relationship at



this time?

There are two possible explanations for the British silence on the matter of the KPM. The first is that the British government's reaction was deliberately suppressed in order not to cause further complications in the relationship with the Dutch government. The second explanation is that the matter simply did not interest the British government to any great extent.

Let us consider the first possibility. At this time it is very likely that the British government would seek to avoid any further diplomatic disputes with the Dutch government, given that both governments were still embroiled in the Borneo dispute. Moreover, it is likely that the bitterness caused by the Nisero question had not yet subsided. The British government was concerned with other, more pressing colonial matters such as the scramble for Africa and the occupation of Egypt. The Foreign Office correspondence registers for 1888 show that Foreign Secretary Salisbury was also greatly preoccupied with the 'Sugar question' (and the International Sugar Conference in London planned for that year) and the liquor trade tax. If the British government were really trying to avoid further differences with the Dutch government, this at least suggests that it was not constantly preoccupied with putting the Netherlands in its place, as the Dutch government often claimed. The Dutch perception of the

British government was, therefore, sometimes too negative. Arguably the Dutch government felt itself put down more often than was actually the case. Such over-sensitivity has been noted in previous chapters.

The second possible explanation for the British lack of reaction, namely straightforward disinterest, implies that the KPM was not perceived as a threat to British interests in the Indian Archipelago, or that any threat was not large enough to cause any great concern. This could explain the vague item in *The Times*, which simply stated that the KPM monopoly was 'injurious' to the interests of Indian trade. Had the KPM posed a considerable threat to those interests, the wording of the item would surely have been stronger. The fact that the KPM was not perceived by the British government to be a great threat also implies a certain confidence in its own position in the area concerned. This is borne out by statements made in the Dutch parliament in 1899 when the bill for the extension of the KPM contract was introduced. In a report on a survey carried out among members of the First Chamber, members referred to the fact that not all the advantages predicted in 1888 had been obtained, and that Singapore remained the largest harbour for the Archipelago.<sup>49</sup> Dutch Minister for Colonies, Cremer, answering the issues arising from this survey, pointed to the favourable position of Singapore with relation to Europe and East Asia, and stated that this was why it was not possible for a company such as the KPM

to carry exclusively via Batavia.<sup>50</sup> It is very likely that the British government was confident in the supremacy of Singapore as a trading port, and did not believe that this could be seriously undermined by a company - albeit a monopoly - such as the KPM.

The second explanation has more to commend it than the first. If there had been a concerted effort to suppress the British government's reaction to the creation of the KPM for the sake of diplomatic relations, there would at the very least be some reference to this in parliamentary or diplomatic sources. The minimal reaction in parliament and in diplomatic circles makes this a less plausible explanation. Therefore the most likely reason for the lack of British reaction is disinterest.

But there is a third possible explanation for the lack of British reaction which must be considered. Reid points out that, as a result of the Dutch blockades of north Sumatra during the Achin war, the merchants of Penang and Singapore began to lose interest in Achin. In addition, the dramatic development of the Malay peninsula provided further opportunities for Straits merchants.<sup>51</sup> Before the KPM came into operation in 1891, then, these merchants from the English Straits were already moving to pastures new. Arguably, therefore, their interests would be less threatened by the KPM - hence the lack of reaction. The NISM itself was also able partly to withstand competition



from the KPM by transferring ships to other lines in south Asia and the Far East. It had begun doing so after the Achin war (1873-1904), when the demand for military transport fell and its returns decreased accordingly.

The Dutch government's decision to establish a steam-packet monopoly in the Indonesian Archipelago was not solely due to a fear of British intervention but rather to a more general fear of all foreign influence at a time of intense colonial competition. The creation of the KPM is an indication of two things. First, the fact that the British background of the NISM - after twenty-two years of loyal service, indispensable during the Achin war - suddenly became unacceptable is an indication of the pressure on the Dutch government to protect its colonies from the competing European powers. Second, it is an indication that the Dutch perception of Britain at this time was no more favourable than its perception of the other European powers. Clearly, where colonial rivalry was concerned, the Dutch government made no distinction between Britain and the other European powers. This negative perception could itself be the result - in part at least - of the heated exchanges with Britain during the late 1870s and 1880s over the Borneo dispute and the Nisero question. Increasing Dutch resentment towards British activity in South Africa may also be a factor.

The creation of the KPM by the Dutch government can therefore be seen as a defiant act of colonial

protectionism, which, although it must be placed within the context of late nineteenth-century European colonialism, nevertheless points to an increasingly negative perception of Britain, and Dutch dissatisfaction with the Anglo-Dutch relationship.

## Notes to Chapter 5

1. J. à Campo: 'Een Maritiem BB. De rol van de Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij in de integratie van de koloniale staat', in J. van Goor, ed., *Imperialisme in de marge. De afronding van Nederlands-Indië* (Utrecht: HES, 1986), p.131.
2. J.N.F.M. à Campo: *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij. Stoomvaart en staatsvorming in de Indonesische archipel 1888-1914* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 1992).
3. See, for example: H.W. Dick, *The Indonesian Interisland Shipping Industry. An Analysis of Competition and Regulation* (Singapore: Institute of South-East Asian Studies, 1987), Chapter 2; À Campo, *KPM*, pp.55-74; M. Kuitenbrouwer: 'Capitalism and Imperialism. Britain and the Netherlands', *Itinerario*, 18 (1994, no.1), 105-116 (111-112).
4. M. Kuitenbrouwer, 'Colonialism or Imperialism? Dutch overseas expansion, 1870-1914', *Britain and the Netherlands*, 10 (1992), ed. by Simon Groenveld and Michael Wintle, 107-119.
5. À Campo, *Een maritiem BB.*, p.127: 'Veeleer was er sprake van een bewuste keuze met afweging van verwachte voordelen en inperking van nadelen [...].'
6. H.S.G. Bijlagen 1887-88, Tweede Kamer: [85.3], p.2. See also À Campo, *KPM*, pp.123-26.
7. À Campo, *KPM* p.60, 64.
8. Ibid., p.69.
9. H.S.G. Bijlagen 1887-88, Tweede Kamer [85.3], p.6.
10. Ibid., [85.6], p.73.
11. Ibid., [85.3], p.6.
12. Anthony Reid: *The Contest for North Sumatra. Atjeh, the Netherlands and Britain 1858-1898* (Malaya and Oxford: University of Malaya/Oxford University Press, 1969), pp.244-45.
13. Kuitenbrouwer, *Opkomst*, p.91.
14. H.S.G. Bijlagen 1887-88, Tweede Kamer [85.1], [85.2].
15. Ibid., [85.3], p.3: 'Eene overeenkomst met de drie genoemde gegadigden, wier persoonlijkheid allen twijfel aan hunne bedoelingen uitsluit, en die zich dan ook reeds van den steun van voorname Nederlandsche



financieële instellingen en kapitalisten verzekerd hebben, geeft de zekerheid dat de pakketvaart in Indië eene inderdaad Nederlandsche onderneming wordt.'

16. *À Campo, KPM, p.59.*
17. *H.S.G. Bijlagen 1887-88, Tweede Kamer, [85.5].*
18. *H.S.G. Bijlagen 1887-88, Tweede Kamer, [85.5], p.72: 'In de personen van den heer Bogaardt en zijne mede-oprichters vindt de Regeering niet minderen waarborg voor ernst en trouw in de uitvoering der taak, die ook deze Nederlanders bereid zijn, evenwel met minder hoge eischen, in Nederland te aanvaarden.'*
19. *H.S.G. Bijlagen 1887-88, Tweede Kamer, [85.6], è4.*
20. *Ibid., section (§) 6*
21. *À Campo, KPM, p.33.*
22. *Indische Gids, 7 (1885), II, p.1130: 'Laat het Gouvernement het verbod voor vreemde schepen, om goederen tusschen de Indische havens onderling te vervoeren, opheffen, en stoomvaartreederijen zullen als paddestoelen uit den grond verrijzen.'*
23. *Indische Gids, 7 (1885), II, p.1131: 'De tegenwoordige toestand heeft overigens nog dit nadeel, dat de transito-handel van onzen Archipel zich hoe langer hoe meer naar Singapore verplaatst.'*
24. *Reid, Contest, p.269.*
25. *Ibid., p.270.*
26. *See À Campo, KPM, Chapter 2.*
27. *Indische Gids, 10 (1888), I, p.199: 'Maar voor de bevrediging van het nationaliteitsgevoel Indië te doen betalen is, gelooven wij, niet rechtvaardig [...]. Zulk een protectionisme is wel het meest illiberale van alles.'*
28. *Indische Gids, op.cit., p.349: 'Een groot gedeelte der kiezers wil wel eenig protectionisme, vooral wanneer Indië het gelag betaalt.'*
29. *De Maasbode, 11 February 1888, p.1.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Dagblad van Zuid Holland en 's Gravenhage, 9 February 1888, p.1: 'Het gewichtige, echt nationale voorstel der Regeering verdient eene goede en snelle*

ontvangst.'

32. *Arnhemse Courant*, 24 February 1888, p.1: '[...] het politiek belang van den Staat [...] is wel eene opoffering uit de schatkist waard.'
33. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 9 February 1888 (Avondblad), p.1: 'In een zoo uitgestrekt gebied als de eilandenzee, waar ons koloniaal bestuur gedurende bijna drie eeuwen is gevestigd en zich allengs heeft ontwikkeld, bestaat evenveel behoefte aan een zoo volledig mogelijke stoomvaartgemeenschap, als op het vasteland aan een goed spoorwegnet.'
34. *Ibid.*: 'Op koloniaal gebied verkeeren wij thans in een toestand van overgang. Er zijn andere Europeesche mogendheden opgetreden met neigingen naar koloniaal bezit: de mededinging op dat gebied is ontzaglijk toegenomen en veel verassingen wachten ons hier wellicht nog.'
35. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 24 February 1888 (Derde Blad), p.1: 'Lost zich dan voor eene koloniale mogendheid als de onze, alles op in eene geldsom?'
36. *Ibid.*: '[...] eene obstructionist tot in het ongerijmde [...]. [...] heeft haar [the NISM] misschien den slechtsten dienst bewezen, die mogelijk was.'
37. *Het Vaderland*, 24 February 1888 (Eerste Blad), p.1: 'Het beleid der Regeering in deze zaak moge tot kritiek aanleiding geven, maar een oppositie, die zoo schromelijk overdrijft en altijd bij voorkeur het kwade onderstelt, doet meer kwaad aan zichzelf dan aan de zaak die zij bestrijdt.'
38. *Het Vaderland*, 23 February 1888 (Eerste Blad), p.1: 'Het feit toch is niet te verbloemen, dat hier Nederlandsche belangen worden bevoorrecht boven buitenlandsche, ten koste der schatkist.'
39. *Ibid.*: '[...] sterk in de overtuiging dat zij in vrijheid kunnen en willen concurreeren met het buitenland.'
40. R. Kuiper, *Zelfbeeld en wereldbeeld. Antirevolutionairen en het buitenland 1848-1905* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1992), p.170.
41. Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, pp.398-9.
42. H.S.G. Bijlagen 1898-99, Tweede Kamer, [98.1], [98.2].
43. *Ibid.*, [98.3].

44. Ibid., [98.4] p.3.
45. Ibid.
46. H.S.G. Eerste & Tweede Kamer 1898-99, Eerste Kamer, pp.397-98. See also À Campo, KPM, p.126.
47. J. Woltring ed., *Bescheiden betreffende de buitenlandse politiek van Nederland 1848-1919. Tweede Periode 1871-1898*, ('s-Gravenhage 1962-1972). C. Smit ed., *Bescheiden betreffende de buitenlandse politiek van Nederland. Derde Periode 1899-1919*, ('s-Gravenhage 1957-1968).
48. *The Times*, 20 March 1888, p.5 (col.e).
49. H.S.G. Eerste & Tweede Kamer 1898-99, Eerste Kamer, p.361.
50. Ibid., p.379.
51. Reid, *Contest*, p.268.



## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

During the last decades of the nineteenth century European imperialism reached its climax as the European powers raced to acquire the last remaining territories. Rivalries between the powers were heightened and the Anglo-Dutch relationship also became increasingly fragile as a result. As circumstances forced both Britain and the Netherlands to re-assess and, where necessary, consolidate their colonial interests, sensitivities were heightened and heated colonial debates ensued. The case studies which have been examined here are examples of such debates.

The second half of the nineteenth century was particularly difficult for the Netherlands. Not only did it have to protect the Dutch colonies on all fronts, but it was also attempting to come to terms with its diminished status within Europe, following Belgian independence in 1830. The colonies gave the Netherlands a status which the country no longer enjoyed in Europe, and this colonial prestige therefore had to be preserved at all costs. This preoccupation greatly influenced Dutch attitudes in the disputes examined here, and is most evident in the Nisero incident.

The Borneo dispute was essentially a long drawn-out boundary dispute which lasted from 1876 until 1891. Dutch protests against British territorial expansion on North Borneo were initially based on alleged British contravention of the 1824 London Treaty which had, ironically, been designed to prevent such disputes. However, the Borneo question proved that the treaty was not watertight. Too much had been expected of the treaty, and certain stipulations now proved ambiguous, allowing for different interpretations by the British and Dutch governments. Although the 1824 Treaty itself falls outside the scope of this study, it would be interesting to examine the reasons for that ambiguity, and the extent to which the ambiguity was deliberate. The debate was essentially about the rights of the Dutch on Borneo and British intentions there. Neither government behaved impeccably. The Dutch argued amongst themselves as to whether they actually had any rights to the disputed territory at all, while in Britain the government was criticised for its treatment of the Dutch government. The British government was reluctant to consider Dutch protests concerning its activities in North Borneo. But the Dutch remained steadfast and the protests became more persistent. This suggests that the Dutch had considerable confidence in their position and that they were optimistic about their chances of success. However, the response of the British government, characterised by impatience, ambiguous behaviour, and lack of co-operation, leads us to conclude that this optimism on

the part of the Dutch was sadly misplaced and relatively ineffectual. In 1882, after years of debate surrounding the 1824 Treaty, the Dutch government finally realised that the British government would not agree to its interpretation, and decided to accept a favourable border settlement. The compromise eventually reached in 1891 left the Dutch government with the feeling that it had made all the concessions. Furthermore, during the dispute the British government had presented the Dutch government with *faits accomplis*: in 1881 it had granted a charter to the British North Borneo Company, and in 1888 it had declared the contested territory a British Protectorate. Worse still, the suspicions of the Dutch government were later shown to be justified: the Dent & Von Overbeck enterprise was indeed more than a commercial settlement.

The charter granted to the British North Borneo Company was, then, an attempt by the British government informally to extend its influence. Perhaps the British government had not envisaged that the Dutch (and Spanish) opposition would be so strong. Thus, although the Dutch government could not ultimately prevent this British expansion on Borneo, it did exert sufficient pressure to oblige the British government to declare the disputed territory a British protectorate. If Dutch protests had been less forceful, this would probably not have been necessary. Presumably the British government had reasoned that the informal protection of a charter would suffice at



a time when it was preoccupied with colonial competition in more immediately important territories in Africa and India. The protests on Borneo, however, forced the British government to pay more attention to Borneo than it had initially thought necessary.

In the Nisero incident the British government protested to the Dutch government about its failure to free the prisoners captured on Dutch colonial territory in Tenom. The failure of various missions to negotiate the prisoners' release led to British Foreign Secretary Granville's offer of mediation, which was met in the Netherlands with the utmost indignation and disapproval, showing how sensitive the Dutch government had become. The offer of mediation provoked heated debates in the British and Dutch parliaments. The Nisero question shows how an essentially straightforward issue (i.e. the rescue of the Nisero captives) was greatly complicated by considerations of national interest and pride, themselves emphasised by the intense colonial competition of the time which threatened the status of the Netherlands as a colonial power. The release of the captives would have been more straightforward if the Dutch government had not been under pressure to control Achin in order to secure trade routes and exclude competition from other European powers.

The third case study, the foundation of the KPM, was not a bilateral dispute, but a unilateral action by the

Dutch government. By creating a company which was essentially Dutch, the government aimed to exclude foreign influence from South-East Asian shipping networks. The significant factor here is that the foundation of the KPM was also designed to exclude British influence. The Netherlands had a closer relationship with Britain than with any other European power, yet in the eyes of the Dutch the territorial threat from Britain in the colonies was as great as that from other colonial powers. The Dutch government probably overestimated the threat of British competition in the Indonesian archipelago. Had this not been the case, the foundation of the KPM would have caused a much greater stir in Britain. Had the trade routes concerned been as valuable to the British as the Dutch suspected, the foundation of the KPM would have brought a great deal of protest from trading interests in the area, and the matter would have been more widely discussed in the press and parliament. The foundation of the KPM was also symbolic of the age of imperialism: a deliberate exclusion of foreign competition in the Dutch East Indies, a source of Dutch colonial prestige and national pride which had to be protected.

All three case studies show similarities: the Dutch tendency to overestimate their influence (and thus their status) within the relationship; the tendency of the Dutch government to allow the preservation of its colonial status to influence certain foreign policy decisions, and the

difficulties caused by ambiguities in the 1824 Treaty. This treaty was still in force to a certain extent, and had only been partly superseded by the 1871 Sumatra Treaty, in which Britain effectively gave the Dutch a free hand on Sumatra. Dutch misconceptions inevitably influenced the course of events in the cases examined here. The Borneo dispute was a painful reminder of the Netherlands' true (i.e. subordinate) position within the Anglo-Dutch relationship. The Dutch protests did not halt British activity on Borneo; at most they could be said to have made things difficult for the British and prolonged the dispute. In the Nisero question the Dutch government's preoccupation with colonial status became an obstacle which prolonged the prisoners' ordeal. Ironically, the Dutch government's procrastination brought about the situation it most wanted to avoid (i.e. British intervention leading to joint action). The importance of Dutch colonial prestige clouded the government's judgement and this fuelled British resentment and impatience still further. The escalating frustration and resentment in the Nisero question could very probably have been avoided if the Dutch government had acted with more expediency and objectivity.

As Kennedy has pointed out, when explaining one country's policy towards another, one of the features to be examined is the perceptions of the governing classes about their nation's place in the world.<sup>1</sup> This study has shown that, at least with relation to Britain, the Dutch government



overestimated its position. In general it could be said that the most obvious consequence of the Dutch government's overestimation of its influence within the Anglo-Dutch relationship was a tendency to be more assertive and to protest more vociferously than it would otherwise have done, particularly with regard to Borneo. Clearly the Dutch government, although aware of the importance of good relations with Britain, was at the same time confident the relationship was based on mutual respect. Without such confidence, Dutch reactions to any perceived misdemeanours on the part of the British government would arguably have been more modest. At times those reactions appear to have been somewhat exaggerated and over-sensitive, but in some cases they were clearly justified.

How, then, does this empirical study contribute to the historiography of the Anglo-Dutch relationship? Most studies of Anglo-Dutch relations have emphasised aspects of rivalry inherent in the relationship. Earlier generations of writers, such as Carter and Wilson,<sup>2</sup> concentrated on the Anglo-Dutch Wars and other aspects of economic and commercial rivalry up to the nineteenth century. Van Sas's work constituted a break from this tradition, emphasising as it did the 'special relationship' between Britain and the Netherlands, which was based on mutual strategic and political needs.<sup>3</sup> For once, economic interests were secondary. Van Sas also modified the traditional concept of rivalry into a 'patron-client' relationship.<sup>4</sup> As Van Sas's

contemporaries began to examine the nature of Dutch expansion in an attempt to define it as either imperialistic or colonial, and then, inevitably, to make comparisons or contrasts with the other European powers, they (notably Kuitenbrouwer and Wesseling) began to look more closely at Anglo-Dutch relations in more detail within the context of foreign and colonial policies.<sup>5</sup> The empirical findings of this study show that Van Sas's 'special relationship' did not endure much beyond the period he examined, and support Kuitenbrouwer's claim that the Anglo-Dutch relationship moved into a period of transition during the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Relations at this time were far from 'special'. This study has provided additional insights into the mechanics of the relationship between the Dutch and British governments, thus adding further substance to Kuitenbrouwer's findings as to the nature of the relationship. There is no doubt that the relationship survived the diplomatic turbulence of the age of imperialism, but the subsequent relationship could no longer be described as 'special' in the sense in which Van Sas referred to it. This study has highlighted preconceptions which governed interpersonal relations between ministers and diplomats, as well as certain personal shortcomings among the protagonists.

However, caution must be exercised in emphasising the negative aspects of the relationship between Britain and

the Netherlands. We must not overlook the fact that the foundations of the Anglo-Dutch relationship remained largely intact, although the superstructure did sustain some damage. In reviewing the work of Raven and Rodger on Anglo-Dutch relations through the ages,<sup>7</sup> H.M. Scott observes:

If this collection has a fault it is that many contributors seem more aware of the undoubted tensions and misunderstandings that existed than of the religious, dynastic, political and colonial interests that sustained the alliance. Had the Anglo-Dutch partnership been as fragile as is occasionally suggested, surely it would have been less enduring?<sup>8</sup>

This view, although dealing with a single work, could equally well be applied to the whole body of historiography of Anglo-Dutch relations. In this light it is interesting to contrast Scott's review with Jonathan Israel's review of the same work:

What comes across most strikingly is the sustained, uncompromising efficiency, not to say arrogance, of British power over many centuries as reflected in the continuous strategic domination - at any rate after 1692 when British power outstripped that of the Dutch - of a small



but important neighbouring power with major maritime, colonial and commercial interests. The Anglo-Dutch relationship emerges as having been, right down to the 1950s, one of the pillars of the British imperial system.<sup>9</sup>

The difference in emphasis between Scott's and Israel's views illustrate a particular methodological problem in the writing of history, namely the extent to which the process of selection employed by the historian 'colours' or influences the final product. In the words of Arthur Marwick:

[...] whether they are aware of it or not, historians will pick out, from the opening into the past offered them by the sources, what they find interesting, important or *significant*. Historians impose order, possibly pattern, define relationships and interactions; they decide what to put in and what to leave out; even if aiming at no more than a coherent narrative, they are still contributing form or shape to that narrative.<sup>10</sup>

And in the words of Julian Barnes:

You can define a net in two ways, depending on your point of view [...]. You can do the same

with a biography. The trawling net fills, then the biographer hauls it in, sorts, throws back, stores, fillets and sells. Yet consider what he doesn't catch: there is always much more of that.<sup>11</sup>

Here, for 'a biography' and 'biographer', read 'history' and 'historian', respectively. Biography is, after all, history: personal history.

The trawling net of Anglo-Dutch historians seems to contain predominantly negative catches; at least this is what is ultimately 'stored, filleted and sold'. Unfortunately, the results of this study are hardly more positive. Certainly Israel's 'continuous strategic domination [by Britain] of a small but important neighbouring power' is a more accurate explanation of Anglo-Dutch relations during the Borneo dispute than Scott's less forceful 'undoubted tensions and misunderstandings'. Seen in this light, Dutch attitudes concerning the Nisero question and the foundation of the KPM are best explained as the Netherlands' reaction to that continuous British attempt to dominate.

As John Mackenzie has observed:

[...] relations among the European powers, notably Britain and Germany, have been

repeatedly modified by the experience of empire, through creating jealousies, tensions and yearnings for mutual instruction and imitation.<sup>12</sup>

The Borneo dispute, the Nisero question and the foundation of the KPM are all part of the Anglo-Dutch experience of empire. These case studies show that, although Anglo-Dutch relations at the beginning of the century had been particularly close, they had indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, been modified by the experience of empire. Here it is necessary to emphasise the word 'modified'; the Anglo-Dutch relationship was not destroyed by the experience of empire.

The findings of this study point to possible areas for future research into Anglo-Dutch relations. The first area suggested is an examination of other bilateral issues arising during the same period, in order to establish to what extent these were influenced by the interpersonal relationships discussed here (for example the mutual antagonism between Van Bylandt and Pauncefote evident in the Borneo dispute).

A second possible area is a comparative study of other bilateral relations between large and small European powers, in order to establish whether the Anglo-Dutch relationship was typical of the late nineteenth century, and whether colonial competition influenced those



relationships in the same way. As we have seen in Chapter 3, there is a possible parallel with Anglo-Portuguese relations. Van Bylandt recognised the need for caution in dealing with the British government, given that the result of Portugal's assertive position regarding her territorial claims in Africa led to a decrease, rather than in an increase, in her rights there. A condescending entry in the *Annual Register* for 1877, under the heading 'Holland' is also indicative of the British attitude towards the Netherlands and other small European powers:

Of the minor countries of Europe very little can be said, for, in the presence of the more exciting topics of the Russo-Turkish war and the constitutional struggle in France, they seem to have been relegated to insignificance, and they furnish no continuous political history, or not any of sufficient importance to interest foreign readers. Hence only a few notes can be attempted.<sup>13</sup>

A third area concerns historical methodology, and can be expressed in the words of A.N. Wilson:

[...] for then the criterion of selection sets the focus and the picture becomes like one of those strange productions of artistic photographers where everything in the foreground

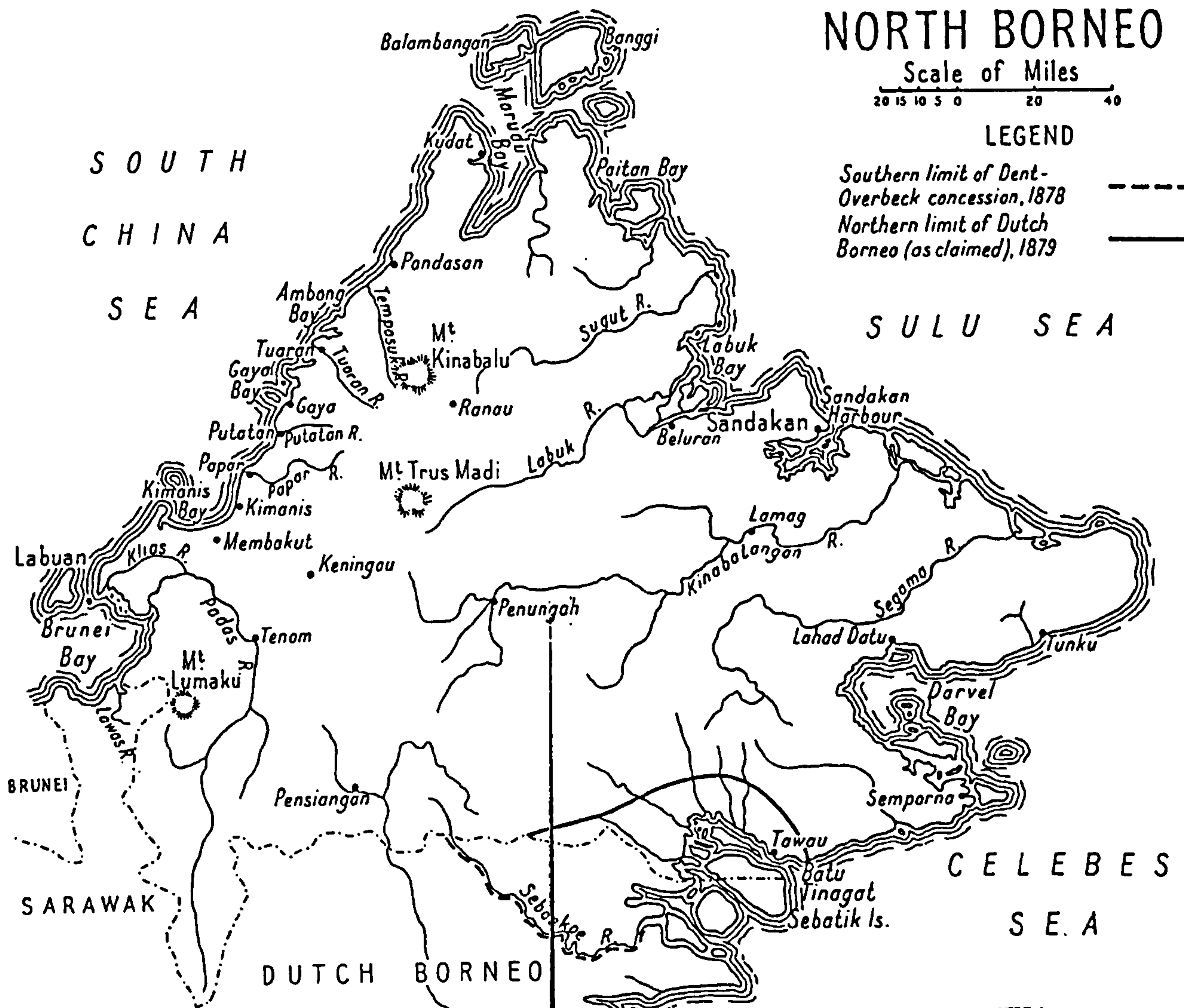
is out of focus and all attention is fixed on small details in the middle distance.<sup>14</sup>

Without wishing to suggest that the negative aspects of the Anglo-Dutch relationship discussed in this study (and its predecessors) are 'small details in the middle distance', a useful contribution to Anglo-Dutch historiography could be made by directing the focus of future research towards the sustaining factors within the Anglo-Dutch relationship, namely, in the words of Scott: '[...] the religious, dynastic, political and colonial interests that sustained the alliance.'<sup>15</sup> If these had not existed, the case studies discussed here would have had a destructive rather than a modifying influence during the period in question. Anglo-Dutch historiography by and large confirms that the Anglo-Dutch relationship survived its various low-points. It would be useful to identify precisely which factors were instrumental in that survival.

Notes to chapter 6.

1. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism* (London: Allen Unwin, 1980), p.3.
2. See, for example: C.H. Wilson, *Profit and Power and Anglo-Dutch Commerce and Finance in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940); Alice C. Carter, *The Dutch Republic in the Seven Years War* (London: Macmillan, 1975) and *Neutrality and Commitment: The Evolution of Dutch Foreign Policy 1667-1795* (London: Edward Arnold, 1975).
3. N.C.F. van Sas, *Onze natuurlijkste bondgenoot*.
4. *Ibid.*, chapter 1.
5. See bibliography for works by Kuitenbrouwer and Wesseling.
6. M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Opkomst*, pp.38-9.
7. Raven and Rodger, *Navies and Armies*.
8. H.M. Scott, review of Raven & Rodger (*Navies and Armies*), *International History Review*, 13 (1990), p.577.
9. Jonathan Israel, review of Raven & Rodger (*Navies and Armies*), *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 19 (1991, no.2), pp.269-70.
10. Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History*, 3rd edn (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1989), p.8.
11. Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), p.38.
12. John M. Mackenzie, 'European Imperialism: Comparative Approaches', *European History Quarterly*, 22 (July 1992, no.3), 415-429 (p.427).
13. *Annual Register 1877* (London: Dodsley, 1877), p.271.
14. A.N. Wilson, *Incline Our Hearts* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1988), p.179.
15. H.M. Scott, review as note 7, p.577.





MAP 1.

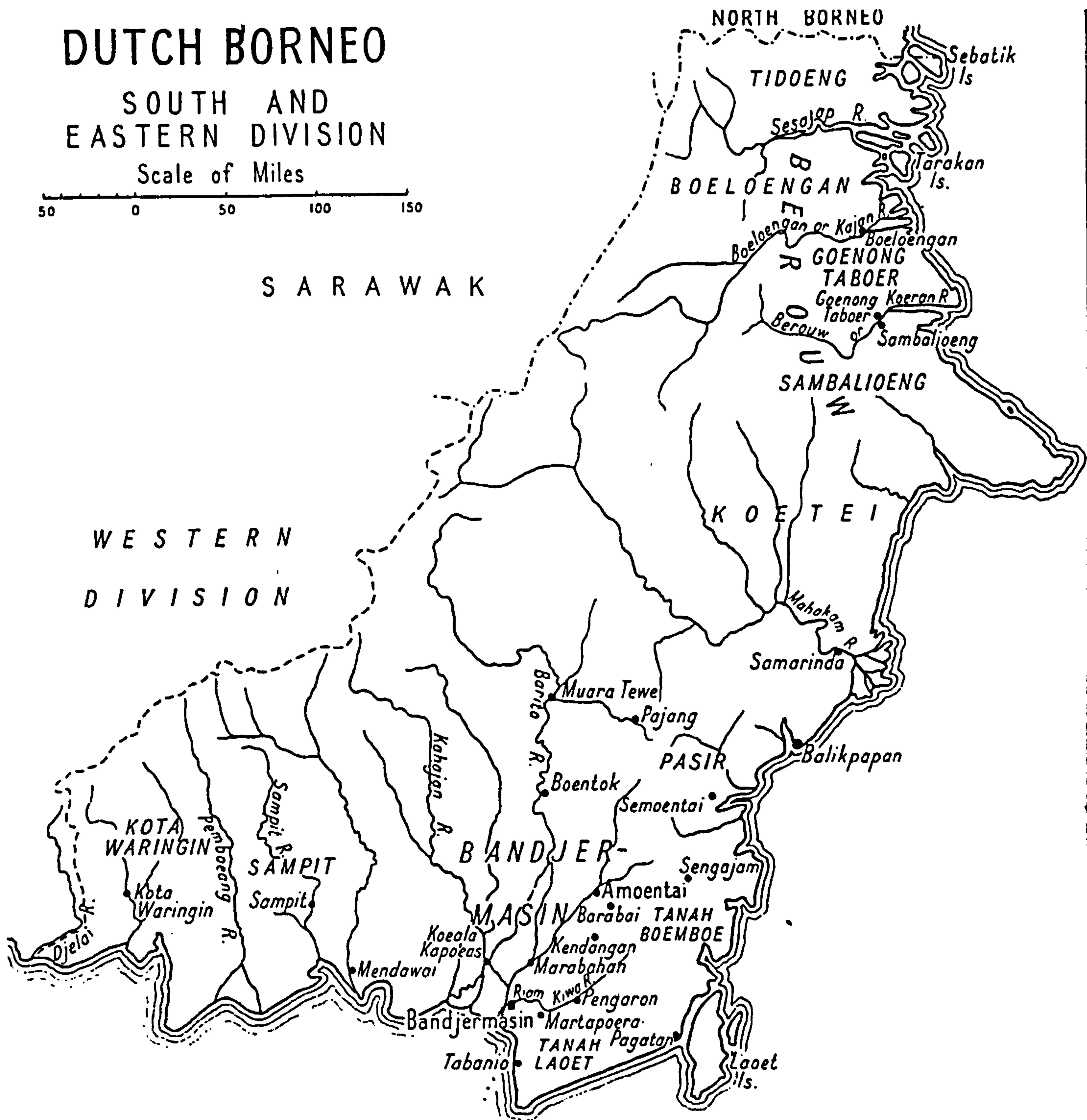
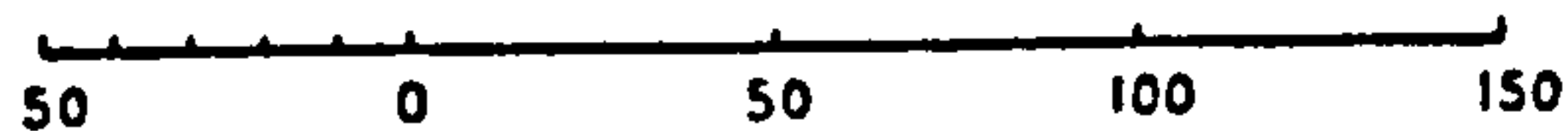
North Borneo

Source: Graham Irwin, *Nineteenth Century Borneo. A Study in Diplomatic Rivalry* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1995).

# DUTCH BORNEO

## SOUTH AND EASTERN DIVISION

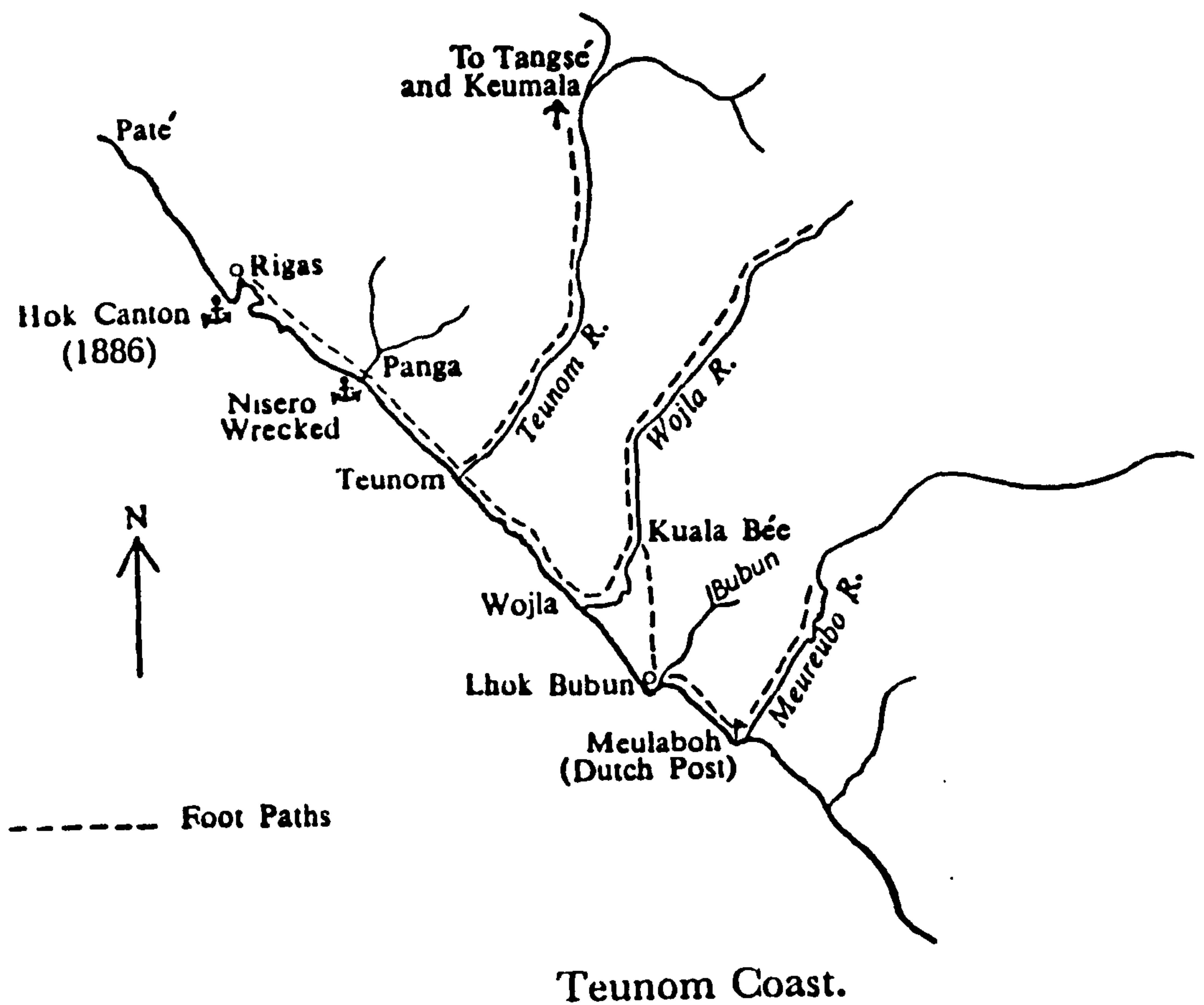
Scale of Miles



MAP 2.

Dutch Borneo - South and Eastern Division

Source: Irwin, Nineteenth Century Borneo.



MAP 3. Sumatra: the Teunom coast, showing the position of the shipwrecked Nisero.  
 Source: Anthony Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra. Atjeh, the Netherlands and Britain 1858-1898* (Malaya/Oxford: University of Malaya Press & Oxford University Press, 1969).





**Appendix 1: Foreign Secretaries 1870 - 1914**

<u>The Netherlands</u>		<u>Britain</u>
1870-71: J.J. van Mulken (L)		1868-70: Earl of Clarendon (L)
1871-72: J.H.L.A. Gericke van Herwijnen (L)		1870-74: Earl Granville (L)
1872-74: "	"	1874-78: Earl of Derby (C)
1874-77: P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois (L,RC)		1878-80: Lord Salisbury (C)
1877-79: W. van Heeckeren van Kell (L)		1880-85: Earl Granville (L)
1879-81: C.T. van Lynden van Sandenburg (AR)		1885-86: Lord Salisbury (C)
1881-83: W.F. Rochussen (CL)		1886-86: Earl of Rosebery (L)
1883-85: P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois (L,RC)		1886-87: Earl of Idlesleigh (C)
1885-88: A.P.C. van Karnebeek (L)		1887-92: Lord Salisbury (C)
1888-91: C. Hartzen (C)		1892-94: Earl of Rosebery (L)
1891-94: G. van Tienhoven (L)		1894-95: Earl of Kimberley (L)
1894-94: J.C. Jansen (L)		1895-1900: Lord Salisbury (C)
1894-97: J. Roëll (L)		1900-02: Lord Landsdowne (C)
1897- 1901: W.H. de Beaufort (L)		

C = Conservative      L = Liberal      AR = Antirevolutionary      RC = Roman Catholic



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