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Defending Redundant Territories

The conflict between the
Netherlands and Venezuela
between 1850 and 1910



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Abstract

In November 1908, the Dutch government sent a small but significant part of their naval fleet to the coast of Venezuela. Although it could be argued that Venezuelan provocations in the months before were enough reason for this military interference, this thesis argues that there multiple long-term and contextual factors that caused the Netherlands to engage in a military confrontation with Venezuela in 1908. The geopolitical, post-colonial and economical circumstances of the Caribbean in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century provide the framework for this argumentation. In this framework, the Monroe Doctrine, the exploitation of oil in Venezuela, the opening of the Panama Channel and the legacy of Spanish colonization in the Americas are of considerable importance.

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Introduction

In December, 2023, Venezuelan president Maduro commented the following on a neighbouring territory: “Our Guayana Esequiba has been de facto occupied by the British Empire and its heirs and they have destroyed the area.”¹ These words are a great representation of Venezuelan view on international relations in recent years. They indicate how the potential actions of Venezuela in South and Central America have been an increasing concern of Western states. Because, only two days before this speech, the Venezuelan government organised a long-awaited referendum to ask its population about their ideas on the potential annexation of the neighbouring territories of Guyana. A vast majority of the Venezuelan population voted in favour of Venezuela taking possession of these lands in the future. Guyana is a former colony of England. So in response, Great Britain sent a part of their naval fleet to the coasts of Guyana for precautionary reasons. Such looming conflicts have been occurring around Venezuela ever since its independence in 1830. Hereafter, Venezuela had gone through a century in which revolutions and conflicts with foreign states happened frequently. For some part, these conflicts can be seen in the light of the colonial past of Venezuela. South and Central America experienced a major wave of anti-colonial independence movements. All the while, this anti-colonial sentiment is also represented in the ideas of the US, which experiences its rise to hegemony in this century.

Gathering this, it can also be expected that the former Dutch colonial islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao have had similar issues with anti-colonial origins with Venezuelan. In that light, a reference can be made to a dispatching of three Dutch warships to the Venezuelan coasts in 1908. The official reading at that time was twofold. First, it needs highlighting that in May, 1908, Venezuela had put out a decree in which tight trade restrictions were put in place. This decree was especially alarming for traders from Curaçao, – the three islands were until 1986 named jointly as Curaçao – only 75 kilometres north of the Venezuelan mainland.² If this is seen in the light of this trade route being the main source of economic prosperity for the islanders, it is understandable that the Dutch government had insisted for months for Venezuela to retract this decree. The Dutch consul-

¹ Florantonia Singer, “Venezuela-Guyana dispute: Maduro mobilizes the army and announces annexation of Essequibo,” *El País*, December 6, 2023.

² Bas Kromhout, “Bijna-oorlog met Venezuela,” *Historisch Nieuwsblad*, March 10, 2017, accessed on February 20, 2024, <https://www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/bijna-oorlog-met-venezuela/>.

general in Caracas, Venezuela was naturally the major advocate for this retraction.³ However, when the Venezuelan government considered his arrest as retaliation for an interview he gave about this decree, the Dutch consul-general left the country in the summer of 1908.⁴ This provided the second official reading of the prelude to the action of a few months later. Because on November 26, 1908, the Dutch government ordered part of the Dutch fleet to start intercepting Venezuelan vessels. Only a month after this order, following weeks of growing unrest, a coup took place in Venezuela. So, when the Netherlands saw its wishes fulfilled and retracted its ships in January, 1909, Venezuela had a different president than it did before this military action.

The official story of this conflict in 1908 is rather appealing and therefore apparent in renowned literature.⁵⁶ However, a logical line of thought would say that these two instances of hostility cannot be the sole reason for a state to send several warships to the coasts of foreign country located on the other side of the world. And by understanding the background of the conflict of 1908, the conflicts that Venezuela is engaged in in the present day can be put into context. Furthermore, from a scientific point of view, the two incidents that officially would have caused the dispatching of Dutch warships in 1908, are rather short-term. Therefore, this argumentation is rather shortsighted. In order to complete the research on this conflict, this thesis aims to discuss the underlying factors for this military conflict in 1908. It does so by formulating an answer to the following research question: Why did the Dutch government launch a military operation against Venezuela in 1908?

As is explained in the following historiographical section, the existing literature has provided this thesis with four different perspectives through which it views the conflict of 1908. These four perspectives are represented in four factors that are seen as possible underlying causes for the events of 1908. The sub-questions that are derived from these factors form the basis for the four empirical chapters of this thesis. Preluding to these chapters, this thesis presents

³ Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs to Dutch Consul-General in Caracas. July 20, 1908, in "Staatsbegroting voor het dienstjaar 1909" (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1909), 66.

⁴ Dutch Consul-General in Caracas to Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, July 21, 1908, in "Staatsbegroting voor het dienstjaar 1909" (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1909), 67.

⁵ Petra Groen, ea., *Krijgsgeweld en kolonie: Opkomst en ondergang van Nederland als koloniale mogendheid, 1816-2010* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2021), 417.

⁶ Anselm van der Peet, *Belangen en prestige: Nederlandse gunboat diplomacy omstreeks 1900* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1999), 105.

its historiographical, theoretical and methodological overview in the following pages. Finally, this thesis gathers the insights of all chapters in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Historiography

The conflict between the Netherlands and Venezuela taking place in 1908 has been and will later be described as being in the tradition of the relationship between the two states. On this almost hundred years of relations, between 1810 and 1908, the literature provides countless insights in how to view these relations. All these perspectives have formed the basis for this thesis. More specifically, the four factors that form the main concerns in the several chapters to be discussed, originated from the literature being discussed in this part. Besides the literature that inspired the set up for this thesis, some literature has provided insight into the context of the subject. Therefore, this literature has been important to the research as well.

First of all, the introduction covered the traditional and short-reasons for the events that took place in Venezuelan waters in 1908. One research that has argued this is *Krijgsgeweld en Kolonien* by Petra Groen and several others. These authors have limited themselves to the Venezuelan decree of May, 1908 being the main reason for Dutch military interference in November that year. With this decree, simply stated, Venezuela prevented Antillean traders from trading in the western parts of Venezuela.⁷ Similarly, *Belangen en Prestige* by Anselm van der Peet, discusses the expelling of the Dutch consul-general in Caracas, Venezuela on July 20, 1908.⁸ This action was done under the Venezuelan assumption that consul-general De Reus had insulted the Venezuelan people in a Dutch newspaper. This had turned out to be a form of miscommunication due to a poor translation by the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In any way, these books have basically seen the military acts of November, 1908 as a direct consequence of Venezuelan action in that year.

On the other side of the spectrum of arguments, authors can be found that emphasize the ten decades before as factors in the events of 1908. These authors place those events in the context of Dutch-Venezuelan relations from the 1810s onwards. Meyer, in several works, described that the character of the relationship had caused conflicts at countless instances during the nineteenth century. For example, at several occasions, Meyer points to the

⁷ Petra Groen, ea., *Krijgsgeweld en kolonie: Opkomst en ondergang van Nederland als koloniale mogendheid, 1816-2010* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2021), 417.

⁸ Anselm van der Peet, *Belangen en prestige: Nederlandse gunboat diplomacy omstreeks 1900* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1999), 105.

purpose as a safe haven that Curacao had held for political refugees ever since the independence movements of Venezuela. Furthermore, the character of Antillean-Venezuelan trade being oriented towards illegal variants is explained as one of the characteristics that caused a relation of distrust between the Netherlands and Venezuela.⁹ In the same corner, with a different approach, Cornelis Goslinga can be found. His book *Curaçao and Guzmán Blanco* offers an argument that centres around the uninterested stance that the Dutch held for decades after regaining the islands from the British in 1816.¹⁰ In this light, Goslinga's analysis holds that this view changes in the late nineteenth century. According to his writings, the Netherlands suddenly see the value of the island due to announced opening of the Panama Channel around 1900.¹¹ Anita van Dissel and Petra Groen have added to this argument that the renewed view of the Netherlands to the Antillean islands also stemmed from the voice of its population. They argue that the Curacaoan elite was one of the most important obstacles in a potential sell of the islands to Venezuela or Germany in the 1870s.¹² So, the reasons are different, but these arguments have looked at the renewed view that the Netherlands had on the Dutch Antilles in the late nineteenth century. And this thesis takes these arguments and analyses to what extent these have influenced the Dutch stance towards the Venezuelan claim to the Dutch colonies.

From a totally different point of view, the literature also offers insight in what happened in Venezuela right after the dispatching of the Dutch warships in November, 1908. Because less than a month afterwards, Venezuela saw a coup that caused a change presidency. Van den Blink thoroughly describes this process. He argues that the Dutch relations with the new President Gomez after 1908 has been much better than with former President Castro. He concludes this in the first place due to the diplomatic ties being restored under Gomez, while they were broken during Castro's governance.¹³ Also during Gomez administration, the Royal Dutch Shell was granted the exploitation rights of Venezuelan oil in 1915.¹⁴ Van den Blink

⁹ W. Meyer, "De Economische betrekkingen tussen Curaçao en Venezuela sinds 1815 III," *Christoffel* vol. 1, no. 8 (1956): 361.

¹⁰ Cornelis Goslinga, *Curaçao and Guzmán Blanco: A Case Study of Small Power Politics in the Caribbean* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 85.

¹¹ Goslinga, *Curaçao and Guzmán Blanco*, 86.

¹² Anita van Dissel, Petra Groen, *In de West: De Nederlandse krijgsmacht in het Caribisch gebied* (Den Haag: Instituut voor Militaire Historie, 2010), 47.

¹³ M. van den Blink, *Olie op de golven: de betrekkingen tussen Nederland, Curaçao en Venezuela gedurende de eerste helft van de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1988), 19.

¹⁴ Blink, *Olie op de golven*, 48.

also claims that the regime-change in 1908 and the official revival of diplomatic relations in 1921 gave the Dutch some sway over the Caracas administration.¹⁵ Gathering these insights, this thesis aims to analyse to what extent there was an actual preference for Gomez as president in favour of Castro. This could in turn provide another motive for the military acts of 1908.

Not only does the literature provide research on the dislike of President Castro before November, 1908. The existing sources also discuss the claim that Venezuela laid to the Dutch Antilles. Jaap van Soest, for example, argued that from the 1860s onwards, the Venezuelan government had intended to strengthen its relationship with the Dutch Antilles. Venezuela did not officially communicate their intentions, but they can be described in the context of the potential integration of the islands in the Venezuelan archipelago.¹⁶ This intention offers context to the military intervention of 1908. In light of this argument, the Dutch action may have been caused by the intention of Venezuela to integrate the Antilles with Venezuela. Gordon Ireland analyses this case as well. He concluded that Venezuela was one of the key players in recovering territories in the Caribbean that were taken during the colonized period of Venezuela. He thereby also concludes that the Dutch Antilles are part of this group of territories.¹⁷ In this light, the following thesis will delve deeper into the claim that Venezuela laid onto Curacao. In this way, it can be assigned as an underling factor for the military acts of 1908.

From a totally different point of view, Hendrik Corporaal can be placed in this debate. Interestingly enough, his academic work came out in the same year as the formation of the League of Nations. Therefore, Corporaal devotes a large portion of his pages to the argument that the conflict in 1908 lacked an objective body of oversight and resolution. The newly-formed League of Nations brought hopes of an international body that could enforce their arbitrations. Furthermore, Corporaal concludes that there are three main interests in the relations between the Netherlands and Venezuela. These include the wish of Antillean traders to engage in legal and illegal trade with Venezuela; Venezuela's eager to get a grip on Curacao and the Dutch wish that the Antillean islands are not to engage militarily with

¹⁵ Blink, *Olie op de Golven*, 59.

¹⁶ Jaap van Soest, *De Betrekkingen tussen Curacao en Venezuela: een historische analyse* (Willemstad: 1980), 21.

¹⁷ Gordon Ireland, *Boundaries, possessions, and conflicts in South America* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1941), 382.

Venezuela.¹⁸ Thus, Corporaal argues that these three interests have shaped the relations, but also influenced the conflict that came to an ultimatum in 1908.

The last line of thought in this chapter, discusses the Western threats that the Netherlands and the Antilles were arguably subjected to. The Monroe Doctrine, a US policy that prohibits new colonisations in the Western Hemisphere from the mid-1800s, play a vital part in this matter. In this regard, Rob van Vuurde offers insight into the role that the US played in a blockade of Venezuelan ports in 1902. This was done by a joint-force consisting of Germany, England and Italy in order to force the Venezuelan government to pay back debts. However, Van Vuurde describes how these states eventually overextended their efforts and thereby caused a military intervention by the US. When the Dutch government engaged in a similar mission in 1908, Van Vuurde argues that intensive correspondence with the US government this time prevented a Monroe intervention.¹⁹ Another western threat that is considered in the literature, is Germany. David Olivier writes on Germany's wish to acquire territory in the Americas. Olivier also argues that this arduous search for lands, in combination with the growing might of the German fleet, made Germany into an incalculable player in the Caribbean region.²⁰ Therefore, this thesis delves deeper into the threat that Germany and the US potentially posed to the Dutch position in the Caribbean and in the conflict of 1908, respectively.

In conclusion of this historiographical chapter, the review of the literature has shown that besides the obvious events that triggered the Dutch military actions of 1908, multiple underlying factors can be distinguished. For this thesis, these include first of all the adversarial relationship between the Netherland and Venezuela in the nineteenth century. Also, a possible Dutch preference for a different Venezuelan government in 1908 is a factor that needs further analysis. Third, the threat that the Venezuelan claim to the Antilles posed to the Dutch position in the Americas needs consideration. Finally, the threat that Western states posed in the eyes of the Dutch is being considered in the final empirical chapter.

¹⁸ Karel Corporaal, *De Internationaalrechtelijke betrekkingen tusschen Nederlanden Venezuela, 1816 – 1920* (Leiden: IJdo, 1920), 370.

¹⁹ Rob van Vuurde, *Engeland, Nederland en de Monroeleer, 1895-1914: Europese belangenbehartiging in de Amerikaanse invloedssfeer* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1998), 45.

²⁰ David Olivier, *German Naval Strategy, 1856-1888: Forerunners to Tirpitz* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 154.

Answering the sub-questions that involve these factors respectively will provide a more argued view on the military actions of 1908 in Venezuela by the Dutch government.

Theoretical framework

A few theoretical concepts are to be discussed in the research of this thesis. A selection of the total number of concepts will be discussed and explained in this section. The first and foremost concept of the thesis is that of colonialism. This concept includes a situation in which one state has the sovereign rights over the choices of another state. There are many forms of colonialism, but the one that is important to this thesis, is the one that started to expand the Dutch, British and French empires in the seventeenth century. If one is to consider the various types of colonialism, the Dutch Antilles are easy to categorize as one of these. It is clear that islands such as these were initially intended to be a colony to be exploited for natural resources. However, the historical evidence proves that even since the 1850s members of Dutch parliament doubted the usefulness of the islands for these purposes. Nevertheless, the sources on German colonialism in the late nineteenth century indicate that islands like Curacao still had a considerable value. These harbours could provide literal safety, but also function as refuelling station for coal ships. Furthermore, the overseas territories like the Dutch Antilles provided the Dutch with the perfect venture point from which to engage in foreign relations and investments in South and Central America.

A second theoretical concept that is essential to the thesis, talks about the influence of the US in the western hemisphere in the nineteenth century. Originating in the 1820, the Monroe Doctrine basically covers the foreign policies of the United States that intend to prevent new forms of European colonialism in the Americas. Actually, any violation of this policy by European states would be regarded as an act of aggression aimed at the US. From the mid-1850s, this policy would be named after former President James Monroe. Its goal was to prevent security issues for the US by preventing physical spread and growth of the European power in the Americas. However, in this period the US did not always possess the military means to enforce their own policy. Nevertheless, the conflicts arising in the Caribbean between Venezuela and European powers did see an extensive form of US intervention. In 1902, when several European states threatened to invade Venezuelan territories, the US intervened in a military form.

Finally, the concept of 'gunboat diplomacy' needs explaining. The term originates from the period of aggressive colonialism by European states from the early 1800s. In this period of time, the European states were technologically and therefore militarily far better equipped

than their opponents. The method was used primarily as a last resort when negotiations via diplomatic ways did not present the European state with a satisfactory result. The military show of force was a way to enforce the position of these Western states on other continents.

Methodology

In order to research the several factors that are drawn from the literature review, a thorough multidisciplinary research needs to be constructed. This research uses of qualitative research method to accomplish this. In this case, the research also includes the implementation of case studies as being exemplary for certain views on international relations. The bulk of the sources used in this research will be written, as can be expected for this topic and period. This research is then oriented mostly towards the analysis of newspapers, governmental documents and speeches and letters by governmental official. In this part, an explanation will be given for the sources that are used and the way they are used. The most important limitation to be distinguished at this point, is the language being used by the Venezuelan government. The Spanish tongue provides considerable challenges for gathering sources from the Venezuelan perspective. Another possible challenge to the research is the limited accessibility of archives. This challenge is caused by the physical documents being in foreign countries, especially in the western hemisphere. Therefore, it is near to impossible to research these documents. In order to get around this problem, the thesis will rely on research that is done on these documents and use these secondary sources as a way to incorporate the primary sources being used for argumentation.

As indicated, newspapers form an important part of the list of primary sources that are used in this thesis. Among these newspapers, the articles from the New York Times Daily have provided insight in how the developments in the Caribbean were received in the US. This has therefore provided another view on the implementation of the Monroe Doctrine in the Americas. The New York Times Daily is used in this thesis, as it has archival input from the 1850s as well. For the Antillean perspective on issues arising between Curaçao, the Netherlands and Venezuela, this thesis uses the available articles of Antillean newspapers. These newspapers include *Amigoe di Curaçao* and *De Curaçaosche Courant*. The former is used because of its representative character. Especially, the catholic population and therefore the lower classes of Curaçao are represented well by this newspaper. The latter newspaper is used mostly because of its extensive availability.

Besides the newspaper archives, the thesis deals to a great extent with governmental documents and proceedings. This source of information has its limitations as it is also dependent on the periodical context of the hypothetical documentation. Concretely, this

means that governmental documents on Venezuela of the year 1848 have been hard to find. This is possibly caused by the rocky year that Europe went through. However, these documents usually provide insight in how especially the Dutch government perceived certain acts, people and threats. More specifically, the correspondence between Dutch government representatives with Dutch ministers gives this thesis context as to what information was shared in what way with the Dutch government. If one considers the actions of the Dutch government, their supply of information that preceded these are naturally of importance. In the same light, the public speeches that Venezuelan presidents have given, are considered. These are confirmed to be shared with the Dutch population and the Dutch government. Therefore, the words that the Venezuelan presidents presented in these, can form the basis for an explanation for the later actions of the Dutch government.

The Netherlands as Venezuela's nemesis from birth

In 1965, a US diplomate oriented towards Latin America claimed Venezuela developed towards a military and nationalist oriented state in the nineteenth century.²¹ This statement suggests a complication in the relations that Venezuela held with Europeans, and thus with the Dutch. So when the Dutch government ordered the dispatching of three warships to the coast of Venezuela in 1908, this could not have come as a total surprise to the involved parties at the time. Ever since the independent Venezuelan state was fully established in 1830, interactions between Venezuela, the Netherlands and its Antillean islands had not been without incidents. In fact, even the independence fighters of the former Spanish colony in South-America, had a troublesome relationship with the Dutch. Throughout the various revolutions that Venezuela saw in the decades after that, the role of Curacao has been important one. Therefore, the first empirical chapter of this thesis touches on the adversativity of the relations between the Netherlands and Venezuela. Analysing this relationship, an answer can be formed to the sub-question: To what extent can the character of Venezuelan-Dutch relations between 1810 and 1908 be described as adversarial? Answering this question provides context to the conflict in 1908. Specifically, it shows that the conflict of 1908 was not an incident with solely direct causes originating from that year. In order to answer this question, this chapter will analyse the relationship of the Netherlands and Venezuela through several period in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Each period offers different insights, but also includes aspects of the relationship that had been recurring. The first period covers the start of the relationship around the independence movements in Venezuela. This period also breeds feelings of distrust and anti-colonial sentiment. The second period talks about events happening around 1848 in which the role of Curaçao a safe haven for Venezuelan political exiles becomes evident. The phase hereafter sees the rise of nationalism in Venezuela under President Blanco in the 1870. Finally, this chapter discusses President Castro period of administration in which financial issues in Venezuela come to the forefront.

Decolonization and the dawning international relations

²¹ Julian Nava, "The Illustrious American: The Development of Nationalism in Venezuela under Antonio Guzmán Blanco," *Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 45, no. 4 (1965): 529.

In order to establish the long-term and rocky relationship between the Netherlands and Venezuela, this chapter first delves into the start of the relation. The dawning hereof can be traced back to March, 1816. In this month, the Dutch had officially regained the authority over the Antillean islands Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao from Great Britain. All the while, some 75 kilometres to the south, revolutionaries under the leadership of Simón Bolívar were fighting a war for independence from Spain. Since 1717, the Spanish had been in control of the territories of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, which encompassed current-day Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela. In order to gather support for their cause or to secure the neutrality of the surrounding powers, the nationalist revolutionaries send out envoys to the relevant and near island and states. However, in anticipation of the envoy reaching the shores of the Dutch colony of Curacao, Bolívar wrote the Governor of Curaçao, Albert Kikkert, on July 8, 1816 about the impending battles for independence. In this letter, Bolívar emphasised the perseverance of the revolutionaries. Furthermore, Bolívar claims that the trade relations between Colombia and Venezuela on the one hand and Curaçao on the other, have always been of paramount importance to the economy of the latter. And by doing so, a promise is being made about the continuation of preferential trade relations between the two territories as long as the authorities on Curaçao recognized the flag and the independence of the revolutionaries.²² This letter can be assigned as the starts of independent-to-be Venezuela's relationship with the Dutch and its Antilles. With this start, the mutual dependency and significance towards the relationship is being highlighted. However, a week after this letter, an envoy reached the shores of Curaçao in order to put action to the words in the letter by hand delivering the letter. The envoy reaching Curacao on July 14, 1816 was headed by the newly assigned minister and right hand of Bolívar, Luis Brión. Brión was born on Curaçao and was inclined to use his ancestral roots in the talks with the Antillean and Dutch authorities, as can be retrieved from a letter he wrote to Kikkert in 1817.²³ Meanwhile, the Netherlands, just like the rest of Western Europe had just gone through a period of wartime by the hands of Napoleon Bonaparte's France. In the aftermath hereof, peace discussion were bundled in peace resolutions. For some of the partners this resolution also consisted of the Holy Alliance. In this agreement, the participating European

²² Cornelis Van Dam, "Brieven van Simon Bolivar en van Louis Brion in het algemeen Rijksarchief te 's-Gravenhage," *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* vol. 44, no. 2 (1965): 111.

²³ Dam, "Brieven van Simon Bolivar," 115-116.

powers agreed amongst other things that revolutions were to be prevented. Anticipating that revolutions would cause societies of chaos, they could also be a realistic prelude to wars resurrecting on a geopolitical and military scale.²⁴ The monarchies of Prussia, Austria and Russia took initiative in this alliance. However, in the years after 1815, almost all European heads of state supported this pact. This eventually also included Willem I, the Dutch king at the time.

With this agreement in mind, the request of Brión on the recognition of the revolutionary flag could not be adhered to by the Dutch authorities. This decision was contradictory to the wish of the Antillean traders who had envisioned economic prospects in the trading relationship with the revolutionaries. Nevertheless, as a result of the Dutch decision, the revolutionaries endeavoured and supported quests of piracy against Antillean vessels.²⁵ In the years until 1821, the revolutionaries started to gain control over the territories of New Granada until it was renamed Gran Colombia in a successful strive for independence. In the meantime, the Dutch had sent out a warship in 1817 in order to protect Antillean vessels that had attempted to engage in trading with the remaining territories under Spanish rule.²⁶ So, the years between 1816 and 1821 have created the benchmark for Venezuelan-Dutch relations. Through the European anti-revolutionary agreements, the Dutch authorities were forced to bet on the Spanish horse that did not come out on top. By doing so, the relationship with the newly formed states, Venezuela most prominently, was damaged as soon as it commenced. This damage was, prophetically, also done by dispatching a warship to ensure trade with Spain, the colonial adversary of the later Venezuelan state.

Sanctuary during revolution

A decade after the events around the independence of Gran Colombia from Spain, this republic split up into several states in 1830. One of these states was the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. This republic represented the first modern state covering current-day Venezuela. In the next few decades this new republic and their Antillean neighbours on Curaçao did not succeed in regaining optimal diplomatic or economic ties. For the better part

²⁴ Derrick Murphy, "International relations, the Concert of Europe and the Holy Alliance, 1815-70," *Modern History Review* vol. 11, no. 2 (1999): 16.

²⁵ W. Meyer, "De Economische Betrekkingen Tussen Curaçao En Venezuela Sedert 1815," *Christoffel* vol. 1, no. 5 (1955): 233.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

of the next four decades the Conservative party was responsible for the Venezuelan part in this relationship. Although it cannot be stated that the relations have been without mutual concerns, the Dutch government relocated their consul-general from Bogota, Colombia to Caracas, Venezuela in 1840.²⁷ By doing so it adhered to the expectation that the Dutch relations with Venezuela were of far greater importance than those with Colombia. The importance of the relationship has been recognized from both sides when the relationship commenced. However, the events that commenced the dual relationship during the fight for independence, had left their marks on the relation. The year 1848, sees a first significant escalation of the distrustful underlying feelings. This year, the conservative candidate and product of the independence movement, José Tadeo Monagas, became the next President of Venezuela. And while his predecessors did not establish a tradition of parliamentary and democratic rule, his style of rule soon became clear as being exceptionally authoritarian.²⁸ Therefore, a civil war within Venezuela was unleashed after Monagas' election was confirmed. Opposed to the sitting dictatorial government of Monagas, former president Páez led a revolutionary group. The local population of Curaçao was in favour of the group of former President Páez. Most importantly, the Antilleans remembered the earlier administrations of Páez between 1830 and 1843. In this period, trade between Venezuela and the Dutch Antilles flourished as tranquillity ruled Venezuela alongside Páez. In this light, it would be logical that Curaçao once again acted as a sanctuary for politically challenged Venezuelans. In this instance, this meant that the family of former president Páez and some of his followers sought refuge on the Dutch Antilles.²⁹ This sheltering can be considered as a clear sign of the allegiances of the Antillean population on Curaçao.

Although the Antillean population took the side of the revolutionaries, the Dutch government had taken a different approach. Similarly to the situation in the 1810s, the revolutionary party in the dispute for Venezuela did not enjoy the official support of the Dutch Government and its representative on Curaçao. Therewith, the Dutch officially also adhered to the formal allegiance to the democratic process of Venezuela. As a result, the

²⁷ "2.05.338 Inventaris van het archief van het Nederlands Consulaat-Generaal en Gezantschap in Venezuela, 1840-1954," Nationaal Archief, accessed on March 20, 2024, <https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.05.338>.

²⁸ María Bencid, "24 de enero de 1848: el asalto al congreso o la consolidación de José Tadeo Monagas en el poder," *Montalbán: Revista de Humanidades y Educación*, no. 51 (2018): 359.

²⁹ "Nederland: Utrecht 14 Maart," *Utrechtsche provinciale en stads-courant*, March 15, 1848, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010779071:mpeg21:p003>.

warships of the Monagas administration were allowed into the harbours of the Curaçaoan harbours.³⁰ All the while, this had not been possible for supporters of the revolutionary side of the conflict. In fact, the Dutch compliance saw one of Páez' most trusted generals, Manuel Bruzual, being exiled. This was done because of suspicions of plotting a new attack against the sitting Monagas government.³¹ The several institutions involved confirm their views on the matter at several occasions. In January, 1849, the Curaçaoan Governor uses the local newspaper to affirm his wish for a stable and peaceful Venezuela right beneath a news article discussing the military victories of the Monagas forces of that week.³² Similarly, the Dutch Minister of Colonies assured Dutch parliament in September, 1849 that the Dutch representatives and population in the Caribbean had done nothing to cause a disturbance in Venezuelan-Dutch relations.³³ Collecting these, it can be concluded that from the Dutch perspective possible Venezuelan aggravations could not have been incentivized by Dutch actions in this case.

However, the fact that opposers of the Monagas administration were being sheltered on Curacao indicated a second narrative. At the same time, the Antillean traders from Curacao also engaged in the business of war materials. In this business, no distinction was being made between governmental or revolutionary customers. In fact, in order to avoid Venezuelan governmental interference in business, Venezuelan traders would sail with Dutch flags while being on the open sea. When approaching the Venezuelan coasts, the flag was switched to the one representing their homeland. In this light, it could not have come as a surprise that the Monagas government was agitated by the course of action by the Dutch and, in particular, the local Antillean population. As a way to retribute the alleged insults and sabotages from the Dutch and the Curaçaoans, the Venezuelan started a coordinated action to intercept Antillean trading vessels and imprison its sailors.³⁴ In the weeks after, the Venezuelan parliament excelled in speaking out in support for these actions. Interestingly

³⁰ W. Meyer, "De Economische Betrekkingen Tussen Curaçao En Venezuela sedert 1815," *Christoffel* vol. 1, no. 6 (1956): 279.

³¹ Cornelis Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1979), 127.

³² "Curaçao," *De Curaçaosche Courant*, January 6, 1849, <https://archive.org/details/KB-DIG-CURACAOSCHE-COURANT-1849-01-06/page/n1/mode/2up?q=venezuela>

³³ Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, "Wets-ontwerp betrekkelijk uitgaven voor het openbaar maken van het verhandelde bij de Staten-Generaal," September 21, 1849, 10.

³⁴ W. Meyer, "De Economische Betrekkingen Tussen Curaçao En Venezuela sedert 1815," *Christoffel* vol. 1, no. 6 (1956): 280.

enough, the Venezuelan anti-colonial sentiment against Dutch colonial rule in the Antilles, originating from the 1810s, can decidedly be gathered from the insulting speeches.³⁵

The contents of these speeches were insultingly enough and therefore reason enough for the Dutch Consul-General in Venezuela at the time, Van Lansberge, to take a leave of absence. In this endeavour he was supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³⁶ In response to this course of events, the Dutch government then dispatched a batch of six gunboats to the shores of Venezuela. In this particular instance, the threat of action that the presence of this fleet posed, was enough for the Venezuelan government to take back actions and words that had aggravated the consul-general.

Upon re-entering the country, the consul experienced the increased influence that he, as Dutch representative, had gained after the military threat.³⁷ In July, 1849 then, the revolutionaries of Paéz embarked on their final attack on the Venezuelan mainland. In this endeavour, the generals and some of the troops are said to have embarked from Curacao. After this last resort by Paéz failed, the Dutch government denied this allegation.³⁸ The Venezuelan press, however, saw these actions as another chapter in which the unwanted presence of Dutch colonial officers in the proximity of and stationed in Venezuela hindered the Venezuelan government from representing the interests of its people. The editorial office of the *Monitor Republicano*, usually known for its autonomy, claims the following on July 11, 1849: "So, we believe that it has come as far that the executive power of the Republic needs to suspend all community with this colony."³⁹⁴⁰ This article, and in fact all events that preceded it, confirm the road that the Dutch-Venezuelan relations were put on during the latter's independence movement. The distrust, provocations, anti-colonial sentiment, and military threats leaves the survival of the relationship surrendered to the communal

³⁵ "Curaçao," *De Curaçaosche Courant*, July 21, 1849,

<https://archive.org/details/KB-DIG-CURACAOSCHE-COURANT-1849-07-21/page/n1/mode/2up?q=rendon>

³⁶ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, "Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1849-1850 14 december 1849," December 14, 1849, 120.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁸ Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, "Wets-ontwerp betrekkelijk uitgaven voor het openbaar maken van het verhandelde bij de Staten-Generaal," September 21, 1849, 10.

³⁹ "Curaçao," *De Curaçaosche Courant*, July 21, 1849, <https://archive.org/details/KB-DIG-CURACAOSCHE-COURANT-1849-07-21/page/n1/mode/2up?q=rendon>

⁴⁰ "Mr. Foster to Mr. Evarts," Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Office of the Historian, August 15, 1879, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1879/d392>.

antipathy towards a potential war between the two states.⁴¹ This lack of trust then combines with the Dutch lack to subdue its colonial population to behave in the benefit of the relations with Venezuela.

In the years after 1849, the political landscape of Venezuela remained relatively stable. In this case, this meant that Monagas had succeeded in defeating all remaining challengers to his presidency. In doing so, Monagas did not enjoy the luxury of providing a diversity-rich cabinet. In order to stabilize the administration, Monagas had opted for a cabinet that almost exclusively consisted of relatives and known associates. A logical line of thought, would indicate that resistance against this increasingly dictatorial rule would eventually regain strength. This hypothesis was highly applicable to the Venezuelan situation between 1852 and 1857. In this fragment of time, the Dutch stance towards Venezuela had changed to a certain degree. Although the Dutch refused to assist in any disputes outside their colonial territories, the Dutch government did tighten their grip on the smuggling trade in 1853. By governmental decree, the Dutch prohibited the shipment of war equipment to territories involved in resistance movements.⁴² The Dutch authorities herewith attempted to reconcile with Venezuela by going against the primary interests of its Antillean population.

Nevertheless, the lack of trust Venezuela had in Dutch commitment to their resolutions – sentiment originating from 1848 – came to the front. More specifically, Venezuela refused to be as protective for Antillean interests. A manifestation hereof is visible when a wave of looting and molestation had afflicted Jewish and Antillean merchants in Venezuela. Although, these acts were carried out by mobs, it cannot be seen apart from the announced decision to not military interfere in such situations. After, the Dutch in response had sent three warships to the Venezuelan coast, the Caracas administration had given in to the Dutch consul-general Van Lansberge's demands again. The Dutch willingness to extent its diplomatic hand for the benefit of Dutch-Venezuelan relations did not result in anything positive. In this way, even the relatively stable political landscape between 1851 and 1859 had caused the Venezuelan-Dutch relations to be challenged.

⁴¹ "Curaçao," *De Curaçaosche Courant*, July 21, 1849, <https://archive.org/details/KB-DIG-CURACAOSCHE-COURANT-1849-07-21/page/n1/mode/2up?q=rendon>

⁴² W. Meyer, "De economische betrekkingen tussen Curaçao en Venezuela sedert 1815," *Christoffel* vol. 1, no. 6 (1956): 280.

Nationalist sentiment grows

The underlying distrust of the past decades had then ushered in a new period of Venezuelan-Dutch relations in the 1870s. These years see Venezuela under the leadership of President Antonio Guzmán Blanco. When Blanco ascended to the presidency in 1870, he had been in exile on Curaçao for two years. He had stayed on the Antillean island between 1868 and 1870 as a political refugee. All the while, the president of Venezuela at the time, José Ruperto Monagas, wrote the Dutch colonial office in January, 1870 about the alleged conspiracies taking place on Curaçao. The population of Curaçao had thus agreed to host a political opponent of a Monagas president on the island once again. From here, Blanco and three accomplices planned their future actions of seizing power in Caracas. In a formal response, the Dutch government did eventually issue the expulsion of Blanco. This enforced the wish of the Dutch government to prevent any conflict with Venezuela. All the while, this supported the Dutch argument that they would adhere to the democratic processes in Venezuela.⁴³ The Antillean people, however, once again did not agree with the standpoint of the Dutch government. *De Koloniale Raad*, an advisory body to the Gouverneur of Curacao, even viewed the issued expulsion as unlawfully.⁴⁴ In this example, the discrepancy between the course of action by the Dutch government and the wishes of the Antillean is demonstrated again.

Despite these disparities, the Dutch government and its representatives did order the expulsion of Blanco and his entourage in April, 1870. Also because the preparations for a coup had violated the terms of agreement. However, in a series of fortunate events for Blanco, he managed to flee Curaçao in February already and to take power in Venezuela only weeks after the issue of expulsion. Once Blanco was installed as president in Caracas, he sought revenge against all those that had done him harm. Thus, Blanco wrote a letter in which severe critiques were aimed at the Netherlands, the colonial office and the Dutch representative in Venezuela, Rolandus.⁴⁵ Quickly hereafter, the Venezuelan president ordered the official diplomatic relations with the Netherlands to be cut off. Furthermore, less than two weeks after Blanco's instalment on April 27, 1870, a new law was installed that raised

⁴³ Ministerie van Kolonien, "Curacao", in "Koloniaal verslag van 1870", September 19, 1870, 3, https://repository.overheid.nl/frbr/sgd/18701871/0000418630/1/pdf/SGD_18701871_0000285.pdf.

⁴⁴ "Zitting van den Kolonialen Raad," *De Curaçaosche Courant*, February 5, 1870, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=KBDDD02:000213507:mpeg21:p001>.

⁴⁵ Karel Corporaal, *De internationaalrechtelijke betrekkingen tusschen Nederland en Venezuela, 1816-1920* (Leiden: IJdo, 1920), 206.

the incoming trade tariffs for almost all sectors when engaging in trade with Venezuela.⁴⁶ Most notably, these tariffs were unfortunate for Antillean traders. In the Dutch *Staatscourant* of June that year, the Dutch government claim that an arrest of Rolandus by the Venezuelan authorities in May of that year was imminent.⁴⁷ Before Venezuela could have attempt to do so, consul-general Rolandus had then already retrieved his passport and left the country. These warnings indicating the hostile position of the new administration towards the Netherlands, were enough for the Dutch government to openly show support for Rolandus' actions. Furthermore, the Dutch government claimed that other European powers had shown their endorsement for Rolandus' actions through various channels.⁴⁸

Besides Blanco's revengeful actions against the Dutch government and, particular, Rolandus, the target of retribution was aimed also on the Jesurun family. The highly influential Jewish Jesurun family owned an important company on Curacao. The Venezuelan liberal government of Falco, in office between 1863 and 1968, had loaned an extensive amount of money from this company in order to be able to afford government expenditure.⁴⁹ This should have tied the interests of the Venezuelan government and therefore also the Blanco administration to the Jesurun family. After Blanco took power, he considered the Jesurun's as loyal to the conservative military party in Venezuela. As a result, trading vessels of the company were seized on a large scale. Furthermore, the payments that the Venezuelan owed the Jesurun company were put on hold. Gathering these sings, the Dutch government sent a frigate of war to the shores of Curacao and Venezuela in order to secure the Dutch interests in the region. These interests were the safety of its subjects, representatives and commercial interests. In this light, the period just before and during the presidency of Blanco, can be seen as another chapter in which Venezuelan-Dutch relation were harmed. In this case, this was mainly caused by the troublesome role that Curaçao has held as a sanctuary for the banished from Venezuela.

All the while, Venezuela after 1870 saw its first long period of relatively peaceful politics. Blanco held office three times between 1870 and 1884. In the meantime, the other

⁴⁶ "Curaçao," *De Curaçaosche Courant*, May 21, 1870.

⁴⁷ "Binnenlandsche Berigten," *Nederlandsche staatscourant*, June 22, 1870.

⁴⁸ W. Meyer, "De Economische Betrekkingen Tussen Curaçao En Venezuela sedert 1815," *Christoffel* vol. 1, no. 6 (1956): 284.

⁴⁹ "Gemengde Berigten," *De Curaçaosche Courant*, June 2, 1866, <https://coleccion.aw/show/?KB-DIG-CURACAOSCHE-COURANT-1866-06-02>

presidents in this period were all put forward by Blanco himself or his liberal party. Due to this, Venezuela was able to develop into a more modern and powerful state in this period. One aspect hereof is the reorganization of the military institution. While the decades before Blanco had seen Venezuela left with an anarchial military structure, Blanco's administration was able to nationalize and formalize it.⁵⁰ In this way, revolutions headed by military leaders can be expected to be much less likely. On the other hand, this development also ensured the drastic increase in power of the military. This in turn was not beneficial to the development of democratic processes in Venezuela. On the other hand, the peaceful period did enable the government to engage in large developments of infrastructure such as railroads throughout the country.⁵¹ All progress in these areas left Venezuela in a stronger position against any possible challengers to the sovereignty of the Blanco administrations.

However, the advancements as mentions above did not necessarily benefit the relationship that the Venezuelan state held with the Dutch. Not only were the military and transportation sector rejuvenized. Also the education sector saw radical development. This development consisted for one part on the number of schools in the country. For example, between 1876 and 1885 the number of nationalized primary schools rose from 567 to 1312, while the first figure was already a national record in the country's history.⁵² But not only quantifiably the education sector saw the effects of nationalization. The federal character of these schools ensured that the provision of information could be nationalized. In this way, the liberal governments of Venezuela in this period were able to formally present children and their parents with textbooks that were full of patriotic sentiment. This was combined with a nation-wide controlled effort to resurrect statues of former revolutionary heroes.⁵³ This newfound appreciation for the founders of the Venezuelan independence also went hand in hand with nationalist sentiment that was anti-colonial by definition. From these indicators it can be gathered that the Blanco era saw Venezuela maturing as a state. However, this maturing also had its effect on the nationalist sentiment that grew in this period of time.

Lack of repayment

⁵⁰ Julian Nava, "The Illustrious American: The Development of Nationalism in Venezuela under Antonio Guzmán Blanco," *Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 45, no. 4 (1965): 529.

⁵¹ Nava, "The Illustrious American," 540.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 543.

After the rise of nationalism in the 1870s in Venezuela, the country held on to this state affairs with different presidents for the next few decades. In 1898, then, the peaceful political situation in Venezuela came to an end. In this year a new revolutionary movement was organized by General Cipriano Castro. His so-called called Restorative Liberal Revolution soon unleashed hard blows to the sitting administration that had been too chaotically organized to stand a chance against a movement consisting of multiple army generals. It then came as no surprise that in October, 1899, Cipriano Castro formally ascended to the Venezuelan presidency. Castro was a renowned military leader and had made it clear that he had very little sympathy for Western states.

The nationalist, anti-colonial and anti-western sentiments culminated in the Castro period. His administration, just like all the administrations that preceded it in Venezuela, had to deal with severe financial troubles. In order to combat these issues, Castro saw massive possible entrenchments in the paying back of foreign loans. These loans were putting immense pressure on Venezuela's state finances and were as a matter of fact seen by Castro as remnants of colonial times and power relations.⁵⁴ In response, however, a joint force of Italy, Germany and England set out for a blockade of Venezuelan ports. By doing so, they had hoped to secure Castro's commitment to paying back the Venezuelan debts that these states had owed. The exact context of this conflict will be discussed in the fourth empirical chapter of this thesis. However, what is important to note at this point, is the role of the Dutch government in this conflict. The Netherlands did not partake, but did offer the Curaçaoan harbour as a hideout for the European states. In this light, it can be argued that this fact resonates in Venezuelan's actions towards the Netherlands in the years after 1902.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the resolution did not give the Dutch much more than they would had wished. But the retaliation and distrust this sheltering of foreign ships had caused encompassed far more than the Dutch would have wished. Therewith, especially the aftermath of the events in 1902 formed an important prelude to the events of 1908. This can be therefore be

⁵⁴ William Sullivan, "The Harassed Exile: General Cipriano Castro, 1908-1924," *The Americas* vol. 33, no. 2 (1976): 284.

⁵⁵ M. van den Blink, *Olie op de golven: de betrekkingen tussen Nederland, Curaçao en Venezuela gedurende de eerste helft van de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1988), 18.

considered as the final step in which the role of Curacao as shelter has caused the relationship between the Netherlands and Venezuela to be hostile.

Conclusion

The relations between the Netherlands and Venezuela had seen a rocky history in the hundred years before 1908 saw three Dutch warships intercepting Venezuelan vessels. From its full independence in 1830, Venezuela had been excelling at replacing their governments and presidents every few years. As seen in this chapter, revolutions were not an unusual tool to accomplish such changes in administration. In this way, a sustainable relationship between Venezuela and the Netherlands had been near to impossible. First of all, because any positive developments in relations with a former president would usually be held against the Dutch government by the next president. Second, revolutions have a tendency for surrounding states to stay neutral or take a side. The inability to do this adequately by the Dutch, had caused involved parties in Venezuela to take a suspicious look at the relations with the government of the Netherlands. Another complicating aspect of the relations is the character of the trading relationship. The initial willingness to cooperate with Venezuela from a Dutch perspective can be clearly related to the commercial interests of Antillean traders. Trade with the Venezuelan mainland was the main contributor to local economics in the Dutch Antilles. On the other hand, the illegal streams of trade came with this dependency. All the while, the Dutch government lacked commitment to consequently preventing this from happening.

From another perspective, the disturbed relationship coming to a high in 1908, are in this chapter explained by the complicated role that Curacao played as 'safe haven' for exiled Venezuelans. The feeling of betrayal that followed the attempts to banish, extradite or the failure to do so by the Dutch authorities had more than once caused the Venezuelan authorities to come up with a form of retaliation. The examples of hosting Paéz and Blanco as guests on the islands showcased that this had caused a disturbed relationship with the sitting administrations. On the other hand, the formal allegiance that the Dutch government showed to the democratic processes in Venezuela urged them to cooperate with the political opponents of their guests. In most cases this meant a form of extradition or banishment. This in turn formed the basis for the relations with Presidents-to-be Paéz and Blanco. These role of safe haven is also shown to be combined with sentiments of nationalism and anti-

colonialism in Venezuela. If all these factors are considered, an adversarial relationship is easily established.

The obvious distrust is shown to have been communicated through various means. Most notably, Dutch distrust is communicated through the means of the *Staatscourant* and in the debates in Dutch Parliament. The Venezuelan adversary, on the other hand, oozed through the words as taken from speeches, letters and editorial commentaries in newspapers. And so, the events of 1908 were not the first page of the story between the Netherlands and Venezuela. The relationship had seen its share of adversities ever since the independence movements in Venezuela in the 1810s. Ever since this period, the relationship had not seen a significant period of time in which relations could have been described as friendly and without intrigues. The geographical, economic and political framework in which this relation found itself, created a context in which a willingness to reconcile was usually outweighed by the desire to act in the interest of one's own population or in the case of Venezuela, its political power struggles.

A change of presidency

The dispatching of the Dutch warships to Venezuelan waters in 1908, had for some part been caused by the actions of the Venezuelan government. The previous chapter has delved into the adversarial relationship between the Netherlands and Venezuela. Nevertheless, this chapter concentrates on the relationship that the Dutch government held with President Cipriano Castro between 1899 and 1908. In the previous chapter, this relationship has already been covered to some degree. There, it is concluded that the Castro administration held a particularly hostile view against European interference in the Americas. All the while, this translated into his administration being unwilling to pay back financial debts.

Furthermore, the Castro administration combined these acts with the usual acts of retaliation that the nineteenth century was packed with. And then the Dutch government dispatched three warships in November, 1908. As a direct consequence, existing unrest in Venezuela grew even further. A month later, in the midst of the Dutch military action, Venezuela saw a change of presidency. This succession took place when Castro was on a medical trip to Berlin. Less than a month after the Dutch had sent their fleet, vice-president Gomez organised a coup that saw his ascension to the presidency. In light of this possible coincidence, this chapter examines whether the military actions of the Dutch in 1908 were intended to have an ulterior motive in the form of a regime change. More specifically, because it may be hard to prove such accusations, the chapter will analyse to what extent the Dutch government had anything to gain from a potential regime change. It does so by forming an argued answer to the question: How did the Netherlands intend to benefit from the regime-change in Venezuela in 1908?

This chapter considers instances in which Dutch governmental agents and representatives have spoken about on their antipathy for President Castro and his actions. These instances can be gathered from letters and speeches by Dutch government agents. Furthermore, this antipathy needs a comparison with the successor of Castro, Juan Vicente Gomez. Therefore, the same sources will be examined in order to determine the wish of the Dutch government for a succession by Gomez in 1908. Finally, this chapter considers the relationship between Venezuela and the Netherlands after the change of regime in 1908. From Gomez' presidency, lasting from 1908 until 1935, an examination is done as to what extent the relationship

actually improved. This can for example be gathered from the development of the commercial and diplomatic relationship between the Netherlands and Venezuela.

Dutch view on Castro

When, in November, 1908, the Dutch ships were dispatched to Venezuela, the official reading of the cause of this was a Venezuelan decree from May 14, 1908. With this decree, the Antillean trade with West-Venezuela was basically made impossible. This reading also follows from a letter by the Dutch Minister of Foreign affairs, Van Swinderen, on November 13, 1908. In the weeks before, Dutch parliament members had agreed with a confidential request by the minister to confine talks about the situation with Venezuela. This would be done in order to prevent the Venezuelan government from receiving information that would hurt the Dutch position in the conflict.

Nevertheless, this particular letter also contains information on the personal relationship with President Castro. Because, this letter indicates that the Venezuelans and its government are not held responsible for the decree. In fact, it is specifically mentioned that the president was the one initiating these policies. The possible reason for this lays within the anti-colonial stance that Castro maintained. Another factor would be the Dutch actions undertaken during the 1902 blockade by European powers against Venezuela. The fact remains that the decree had not been retracted at the request of the Dutch government and is therefore also seen as part of a personal vendetta that President Castro held against his neighbouring colonizing state. This idea was only amplified by a letter by the same Minister of Foreign Affairs from September 3, 1908. In this letter, Van Swinderen explains that if the decree is not retracted before November 1, 1908, the consequences would “come solely at the expense of President Castro.” Similarly, in correspondence between the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs and his Venezuelan counterpart from November 25, 1908, the former claims that “on President Castro rests the full responsibility for the situation at hand”. However, he adds that the Dutch government is still willing to invest in a peaceful relation with the Venezuelan government. The only stipulation here is that this cannot happen if President Castro maintains his stance towards the decree of May, 1908. Thus, these letters provides insight in who exactly the Dutch government had felt to be responsible for the decree.

In the years before the military escalation of 1908, the disapproval of Castro by Dutch representatives is already clear through various instances of correspondence. In this light, correspondence that indicates the difficult relationship that Dutch representatives held with Castro, is sent by the Dutch consul in Caracas, De Reus and the Dutch governor in Willemstad, Jan Olphert de Jong van Beek en Donk. In May, 1908, just after the Venezuelan decree was put in place that prevented Antillean traders from engaging in their professional occupancy with their counterparts in the Western parts of Venezuela, these representatives wrote letters discussing the logic behind this action. In particular, the consul-general in these refers to the impulsive character of President Castro. This impulsiveness, according to the consul-general, was one of the key factors in the creation of this decree. Only weeks later, the same consul-general reports to the Governor of Curaçao that he has acquired evidence that President Castro has not required any outside council on the matter of the decree. In fact, he claims that President Castro did not intend to answer correspondence written by foreign representatives at that point. These pieces of correspondence indicate the troubling personal relation that Dutch representatives enjoyed with the President of Venezuela at the time.

Furthermore, around the events that immediately followed the decree of May, 1908, the role of Castro can also be examined from the Dutch point of view. As written before, July, 1908 saw the decision by Venezuelan authorities to return the Dutch consul-general's passport to him. In the period leading up to this, De Reus had already received several threatening letters from the Venezuelan government. In writings about one of these to the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, De Reus claims that the letter was directly coming from the hands of President Castro. This again showed the paramount importance that Castro's personal preferences played in Venezuela's foreign affairs. At least, this is how it was perceived by Dutch government officials. All the while, this also shows once again that the Dutch representatives also held Castro personally accountable for the issues that the Dutch had with Venezuela.

Expectations of more harmonious Gomez

In another light, the regime change that followed the military actions of 1908 by the Dutch government, is expected to have also inspired hope in the Dutch government. This hope would then be based on the expectation for a more cooperative successor to Castro. In this

light, an examination can be made about how the Dutch representatives viewed the successor to Castro, Juan Vicente Gomez. In this light, evidence from before the military acts of 1908 are especially of importance here. An important case study in this regard concerns the Venezuelan seizing of an Antillean vessel named Justicia in March, 1908. This was done under the suspicion of this vessel engaging in illegal trade in Venezuelan waters. When the crew members were brought before a Venezuelan judge, they were acquitted of the smuggling charges. This legal process had taken three full months to be completed. This is why a joint-commission consisting of Venezuelan and Antillean traders had suggested a financial compensation for the crew for unlawful imprisonment. The Venezuelan government refused this proposal. In fact, the owner of the vessel was ordered to pay for the retrieval of his possessions. In order to undo these actions, the consul-general recalls an incident from 1906. In this year, the owner of the Salvador vessel experienced similar problems with the Venezuelan authorities. At that time, the Venezuelan authorities responded leniently to the request of the Dutch consul-general to refund the owner of the vessel. This thus shows a different approach by the Venezuelan government.

In that light, it is important to note that in that particular period in 1906, Gomez had taken over the presidential tasks on a temporal basis. This was the case as Castro had taken a medical trip to Europe. All the while, vice-president Gomez had taken an informal approach to the dispute around the Salvador vessel and had thereby urged the Venezuelan Minister of Foreign Affairs to agree with a refunding to the owner of the vessel. However, this line of thought is hard to prove. In any way, this is how Consul-General De Reus recalls this process. Furthermore, now that Castro was in charge of the Venezuelan government again, his hopes for a positive outcome to the Justicia were far less high. In fact, De Reus adds: "Whether I will again succeed in this way with President Castro, I do not dare to predict." This comment and case study is thus a representation on how the Dutch government viewed the difference in approach between President Castro and the former acting-President Gomez. In this light, a change of regime in 1908 would provide the Dutch government with hope that any further relations with Venezuela would be far more harmonious.

Improved relations with Gomez

The expected increase in harmoniousness in the Dutch-Venezuelan relations with Gomez as president of the latter can be gathered from several aspects after the regime change in 1908.

Perhaps the most formal aspect is a protocol signed by both governments in April, 1909. This protocol contains several promises and rules for both states to bear in mind in the future mutual relations. The goal of this agreement was to prevent any further dispute like the one of 1908 from occurring in the future. In this protocol both parties also retrospectively agree on the source of the conflict of 1908. What that mutually agreed cause is, does not become clear from the document. What does become clear is that the broken ties are intended to be reinstated per the signing of this protocol. However, this intent did not translate into actual diplomatic ties. The formal diplomatic relations were only officially reestablished in 1920. What this protocol does make clear is that even a few months into Gomez' period of governance, his government agrees with a preferential trade agreement for the Dutch. In particular, the agreement contains an article that prescribes that the Dutch Antilles would in the future receive the at least the same terms of trade that European powers would receive when engaging with Venezuela. Another important aspect of this protocol is the Venezuelan intention to pack back debts that were owed to the Dutch government and its subjects on Curaçao. This does correspond with the consequent turnout of events. The Venezuelan government accomplished a few clean state with regard to Dutch debts being owed under the Castro administration by 1930. This protocol thus confirms that at least the trading and diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and the Gomez administration had been commencing on a positive note. Furthermore, the intentions of this protocol signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of both the Netherlands and Venezuela shows the mutual wish to cooperate in the future.

This cooperation between the Netherlands and Venezuela did not always take off very quickly as can be gathered from the evidence presented. However, if the entire period of Gomez' administration is considered several indicators show what the renewed relationship between Venezuela and the Netherlands resulted in. A first sign of this improved relationship, is the fact that the Venezuelan government basically contracted the Royal Dutch Shell to organize the Venezuelan oil industry in 1912. However, it can also be argued that this particular contracting was due to Shell's experiences in building infrastructure after its endeavours in Mexico in the decades before. Nevertheless, this contracting can also be seen in light of the renewed relationship between the Dutch and the Venezuelan government. Seeing as though Shell brought most of its business back to the branches in Rotterdam and

Amsterdam, the Dutch government was eager for this business to be conducted in this way. In the same light, the processing of the oil wells in Venezuela by Shell, needed a refinery in close proximity to the source. In order for this refinery to be effective, Shell and its investors were in need of a stable place with adequate harbour facilities. Therefore, it is no surprise that Shell saw Curaçao as the ideal base of operations for refining the oil from Venezuela. The advantages that Shell gained with the contracting of the oil industry in Venezuela cannot be seen apart from the improved relationship with the Dutch government. In fact, Dutch contemporaries concluded that the economic and commercial developments of Dutch subjects and companies in the Caribbean region could have only taken place if the relations with the Venezuelan government was to be returned to a peaceful state. Although, the commercial advantages were in the first place granted to Shell, the Dutch government and its subjects had much to gain from these economic developments.

Counter-argument on the Gomez harmony

However, the relationship with Venezuela in the period of the Gomez administration cannot be concluded to be completely positive. Evidence of this lays within the continuance of the Dutch military action, even after the coup of December 19, 1908. Furthermore, when speaking on the relations with foreign states, Dutch parliament in 1911 draws a rather negative conclusion. Namely, it was concluded that Venezuela held an exclusive position in this matter. In fact, liberal parliament member Meinard Tydeman speaks about foreign relations in general being on quite a friendly level with all foreign states. However, he adds: "Only the relations with Venezuela are not in a friendly stage." This indicates that even after several years passed, the relations have still not been on an adequately friendly level. Even with the change of regime, the relationship between the Netherlands and Venezuela did not remain unchallenged. A similar claim is made a few years later, in another parliamentary discussion in Dutch parliament in 1914. At this occasion, members of parliament still speak of a tense relationship with Venezuela. In fact, a member of parliament, Adrianus van Vuuren, is astonished by the words of the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs. The minister, prior to this meeting, had indicated that the relation with Venezuela had remained the same in the past few years. These words, according to Van Vuuren contained "an enormous resignation." From this instance, it thus can be gathered that although several signs had pointed out that the Gomez administration was much more favourable to the Dutch government than

Castro's, the relationship between the Dutch and Venezuelan government did not enjoy a major friendship after Castro was removed from office.

Conclusion

The findings of this chapter have indicated peculiar insights into the relationship that the Dutch government and its representatives held with the Venezuelan President Castro. In that light, it can certainly be concluded that the relations that the Dutch government held with Venezuela were much more positively inclined after Gomez had removed Castro from office. Before this regime change, the correspondence of Dutch agents had on multiple occasions insinuated that working with Castro was hard. And that his personal acts as president were hurting the Dutch-Venezuelan relations. Similarly, the signs of a Dutch preference for Gomez have been presented in this chapter. The major case study for this has considered the dispute around the vessel *Justicia*, indicating that working with Gomez was much easier for Dutch officials. Consequently, a few months after the regime change in December, 1908, the Dutch and Venezuelan Ministers of Foreign Affairs sign a protocol that laid out intentions for future cooperations. Not all intentions were followed with immediate action. The diplomatic ties are only officially repaired more than a decade later. But, the process of paying back of debts by Venezuela to the Dutch government is being commenced immediately. In the same light, the oil and refinery developments took a positive turn during the Gomez administration. This indicates that Gomez' administration acted in accordance with the preferential trade agreement as it was laid out in the protocol of 1909.

However, the Dutch relations with Venezuela throughout the 1910s are certainly unfriendly still. Dutch government officials are shown to have claimed this at multiple instance. For reasons such as these, this chapter cannot safely state that with the military acts of 1908, the Dutch government intended to cause a regime change in Venezuela. At least, the literature and primary sources in this chapter have not provided concrete evidence of that. However, the Dutch actions of 1908 did cause unrest in Venezuela. This unrest eventually urged Gomez to organise a coup. Thus, the Dutch actions did play a role in the coup December, 1908. All the while, this chapter has also shown that the Dutch government had much to gain from a new president in the person of Gomez. Nevertheless, concluding that this was the intention of the Dutch government in 1908, would be an unproven statement. Rather, this chapter concludes that the regime change was a welcome indirect consequence.

Looming claims and renewed interests

In November 2023, Venezuela expressed its continuing wish to integrate the neighbouring territories of Guyana into its borders. This was done after decades of Venezuelan warnings about this wish. The claim on the territories is being backed by the pre-colonial inheritance of the territories.⁵⁶ Similar claims have been made on the Antillean islands that have since 1634 been – short periods of foreign occupation aside – in the hands of the Netherlands and its representative organs. The concerned islands, Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao, have not been on top of the agenda for integration into the Venezuelan state in recent years, despite their close proximity to Venezuela. However, the threat of this becoming an issue in the future can be assessed from the situation in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. In this period, the state of Venezuela, that only took shape from 1830 onwards, had time to assess the territories that it could have the rights to annex. This search for new territories and the threat that this search poses to the owners of those territories may very well be a reason to the Dutch to defend these islands in the proximity of Venezuela in the early twentieth century. Especially the military actions of the Netherlands at the end of 1908 need consideration in light of the threat of the Venezuelan wish to integrate the Dutch Antilles into the Venezuelan state. Therefore, this chapter attempts to form a substantiated answer to the question: To what extent did Venezuela act on their political claim on the Caribbean Islands between 1850 and 1910? Answering this question in an argued manner also provides insight in how the Dutch government perceived the potential threat of Venezuela's interests to its colonial rule on Caribbean islands.

In order to grasp the question at hand in this chapter, a thorough investigation into the claim of Venezuela needs consideration. In order to do this, the pre-colonial and thus ancestral story of the Antilles is a first obligation in order to uncover this claim. Mostly, because this is where the Venezuelan stance towards the islands is drawn from. Second, the political stance of Venezuela against the Antilles is drawn from their anti-colonial prejudice. Therefore, this chapter also gathers evidence and information on how Venezuela viewed the future of the islands. This evidence is gathered from speeches, letters and documents issued by the Venezuelan government and its representatives. Now, this Venezuelan stance then needs a

⁵⁶ Tara John, "Venezuela expands military presence at Guyana border in 'perpetual prewar footing,' says report," *CNN*, May 14, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/05/14/americas/venezuela-essequibo-guyana-csis-intl-latam/index.html>.

combination with how this stance was perceived in the Netherlands, especially by its government and military representatives. Also, this is combined with how the Dutch viewed the political allegiance of Curacao in this era. In general the Dutch view towards the islands shifts from a negligent one to a watchful one. There a number of instances that are important here. Those are the dispute around the Aves islands in the 1850s, the 'almost sale of Curacao' in the 1870s and the overall signs that the Dutch are taking the islands more serious through the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. This chapter thus beholds the concepts of nationalism, colonialism and post-colonialism. By taking all this into account, this chapter will show how the Dutch government developed its view on Curacao and thereby how it perceived the threat of the Venezuelan stance towards the islands.

Pre-colonial legacy Venezuela-Antilles

As a start, the histories of the Antillean islands need a general consideration of its pre-colonial past. The islands Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao are part of the arc of islands considered the Lesser Antilles. As can be concluded from logical thought and the mere 75 kilometres between the coasts of Curacao and Venezuela, the ancestral link between Venezuelan and the most original inhabitants of the later Dutch Antilles is a major one. Research from 2020 analyses how migration movements of 1700 years ago from the South American mainland had gone through the Lesser Antilles through to the northern Greater Antilles in the ages after.⁵⁷ When the Antillean islands were first visited on record by Europeans, the population of the islands comprised for a large portion by the Caquitíos. These Caquitíos are described to have been fisherman that had taken the naval trip from the current-day Venezuelan territories around the Maracaibo lake to the Antillean islands.⁵⁸ The origins of the term 'Caquitío' may very well stem from a river in the south of Colombia. This Caquetá river had also been the provider of the name of the region that it flows through.⁵⁹ It can therefore be seen in the same light as the migration to the northern-laid territories of current-day Venezuela and the Dutch Antilles. Similarly, in the years after this migration had

⁵⁷ Daniel Fernandes et al., "A Genetic History of the Pre-Contact Caribbean," *Nature* vol. 590, no. 7844 (2021): 105.

⁵⁸ Louis Faron, "South American Indian" *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 16, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/South-American-Indian>.

⁵⁹ Gerard van Buurt, *Caquetío Indians on Curaçao during colonial times and Caquetío words in the Papiamentu Language* (Willemstad, Curacao: Fundashon pa Planifikashon di Idioma, 2015), 15.

taken place, the populations of the Antillean islands would often shuttle between the mainland of current-day Venezuela and the islands.⁶⁰ Due to this flexibility in habitats, this period is also when the intensive trading relationship between the islands and the Venezuelan mainland is being established. Therefore, based on ancestral history, the Venezuelan people in the nineteenth century can be expected to have felt a strong connection with the populations of the Antillean islands.

As a counter approach to the debate whether the pre-colonial inhabitants are of Venezuelan descent, one can argue that the state of Venezuela, as established throughout the nineteenth century, did not exist in any noteworthy form at the time of European arrival and colonization around 1500. Even more so, the islands did not have an organized authority that it had answered to for a significant amount of time before the arrival of Europeans. In fact, the current Venezuelan territories on the mainland did not have a centralized government or form of authority until the colonization by the Spanish.⁶¹ This was hardly unique for South American territories at the time. This was mostly caused by the geographical character of the lands. These varied to such an extent that any significant cultural connectivity was very unlikely. The geographical nature also amplified the physical and thus practical boundaries between different groups that would be able to form states ages later. Because of this lack of territorial binding, the inhabitants of current-day Venezuela had been moving from the more inward lands of South America to the northern coasts. In this way, a potential claim of intergenerational rights of the Antillean islands for the Venezuelan state in the late-nineteenth century could be counterargued based on the lack of formal authority in pre-colonial times.

Signs of Venezuelan claims to Caribbean islands

Ever since the independence movements in the 1810s, Venezuela and its preceding Gran Colombia had indicated their ideas for the colonial territories in the Caribbean Sea. Although the intentions were not always translated in concrete action against the colonial rule of Central American territories, evidence can be found in the several forms of communication. Jaap van Soest, for example, had argued that from the 1860s onwards the Venezuelan

⁶⁰ Gerard van Buurt, *Caquetío Indians on Curaçao during colonial times and Caquetío words in the Papiamentu Language* (Willemstad, Curacao: Fundashon pa Planifikashon di Idioma, 2015), 16.

⁶¹ Miguel Salas, *Venezuela : What Everyone Needs to Know?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 15-17.

government had intended to strengthen its relationship with the Dutch Antilles. Venezuela did not officially communicate their intentions, but they can in particular be described in the context of the potential integration of the islands into the Venezuelan archipelago.⁶² This intention offers context to the military intervention of 1908. In light of this argument, the Dutch action may very well have been caused by the intention of Venezuela to integrate the Antilles with Venezuela.

This conclusion can also be drawn when considering another line of thought. This line discusses the Venezuelan urge to recover territories that it lost to colonizing powers. In this light, it can be concluded that Venezuela was one of the main players in recovering lost territories in the Caribbean.⁶³ With this in mind, a conclusion that Venezuela saw the Dutch Antilles as some of these island that should have been part of Venezuela as well, is not farfetched. While the Venezuelan state was maturing throughout the nineteenth century, the option to work on reintegration of colonized islands started to become more feasible. Especially after the modernization of the Venezuelan military in the 1870s under the Blanco administration, this option seemed more attainable. Therefore, the threat that Venezuela had posed to the Dutch claim on the Antillean islands also stems from the capability of the Venezuelan state and its continuing wish to reintegrate colonized islands.

Besides the ancestral claims towards the Antillean islands, Venezuela can be expected to hold a more practically oriented view to its claims on the islands. Because, ever since the multiple civil wars that Venezuela had endured since the 1840s, Curacao most notably had acted as a neutral place for the Venezuelan banished to seek rescue. On the island, it was custom for the banished to start their preparations for new actions in order to seek out a change of regime in Venezuela. In previous chapters, this relationship is already being discussed in the context of the difficult relationship between the Netherlands and Venezuela. In that light, the activities being hosted on Curacao created a sphere of distrust between the governments of Venezuela and the Netherlands. From another point of view, the character of Curacao as being a safe haven for the banished, also can be expected to have an influence on the claims that Venezuela held to the islands just of their coasts. Reintegrating these islands

⁶² Jaap van Soest, *De Betrekkingen tussen Curacao en Venezuela: een historische analyse* (Willemstad: 1980), 21.

⁶³ Gordon Ireland, *Boundaries, possessions, and conflicts in South America* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1941), 382.

would minimize the threats that revolutionaries and illegal trade routes formed to the sitting Venezuelan government.

If one considers the wish of Venezuela to integrate the Antillean islands into the Venezuelan state, one needs to get a grasp on the evidence that representatives of the Venezuelan state have expressed on the issue. An important figure in this instance is the frequently considered president of Venezuela, Antonio Guzmán Blanco. In 1873, during his first term as president, Blanco conveyed some interesting messages on the ideas of the Venezuelan government about the Antillean islands. For starters, he proposed that the islands in the Caribbean, among which the Antillean islands, should be transformed into an independent republic.⁶⁴ The independency in this scenario would mean that the colonial status of the Caribbean islands would be forsaken. In this particular speech, however, the reason behind this is not one that is purely for the benefit of Venezuela. Most of all, because he adds: “That nation will have the maritime power of both American continents, and will serve as an armour for the politics and interests of a hundred Republics staggered from Canada to Cape Horn”.⁶⁵ This quote shows two particular ideas that Blanco means to convey about the future of the islands. First of all, the governments of the Americas are described to be in need of protection. This is particularly interesting considering the inclusion of the United States in this unity. Therefore, the explicit implication later in the speech is made that the conflict is with the European colonial powers. Their “omnipotence” in the Americas is based on the fact that they started their endeavours “at ages that lacked the civilization” that 1873 had showed in the Americas.⁶⁶ By claiming the matters mentioned above, the resistance against the colonial rule of the Antillean islands is being confirmed. This presents one of the particularities of the Venezuelan stance towards the colonially-ruled islands in the Caribbean.

Another example of Blanco’s and therefore Venezuelan thought on the islands, can be gathered a speech given in 1875. In this period, the Dutch parliament had started a discussion on the legitimacy of Dutch colonial rule on the Antillean islands. This discussion is analysed later in this chapter. For now, it is important to note that in this period rumours are spreading that indicate that Curacao is to be up for sale in the nearby future. In response to

⁶⁴ Juan Reyes, “The discreet charm of the Demagoguery: The speeches of the President Antonio Guzmán Blanco The seven years (1870-1877),” *Tiempo y Espacio*, no. 61 (2014): 310.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

these rumours, Blanco urged his constituency that Venezuela should not in the public sphere be unnecessarily in favour of such a resolution.⁶⁷ By doing so, the Venezuelan government would hold until this 'sale' to Venezuela would be the last remaining solution after the discussion. However, later in this speech, Blanco comments the following: "That day (of the sale) Curaçao will become our only port for imports, the great warehouse of merchandise and the centre of our navigation. After a quarter of a century Curaçao will become the richest and most beautiful city of the Caribbean."⁶⁸ In this fragment, Blanco thus openly fantasizes about the plans that would come with the integration of Curacao. This comment proves that at the very least Venezuela was not uninterested by the time of a potential auction of the islands. In fact, it can be gathered from this part that the Venezuelan government, and in this case Blanco, had abstract plans for the future of the island, if they were to become part of the Venezuelan country.

Aves Island dispute

Besides the words on how Venezuela views the allegiance of the Caribbean islands, it is also insightful to view the Venezuelan claim in the same way as can be done with other islands in the Caribbean. One of the most interesting situations in which this can be viewed is the dispute around the Aves islands in the 1850s. These islands – one is located 740 kilometres northeast of Willemstad, Curacao and one is located 60 kilometres west of the island of Bonaire – were until the start of the 1850s, held by the Netherlands. The islands, also known as the 'Bird Islands,' were not inhabited, but they were important for biological research due to its prevailing nature. During the decades before, the US had already expressed their interests in the islands at various occasions. All the while, Venezuela claimed the ancestral right to the islands. The question remains what the interests of the different parties were in these islands. Furthermore, the resolution and the actions of the involved parties make for an interesting insight that combines well with the situation of the Dutch Antilles in the first decade of the twentieth century due to its relatively comparable character.

The value of the islands in this period of time thus mostly concern the natural character of the islands. Specifically, the biological remains of the animals living on the islands was seen as highly valuable by scientific and commercial parties. The *guano*, the excrement of the sea

⁶⁷ Francisco Guinán, *Historia contemporánea de Venezuela*, (Caracas: Tip. empresa El Cojo, 1954), 210.

⁶⁸ Francisco Guinán, *Historia contemporánea de Venezuela*, (Caracas: Tip. empresa El Cojo, 1954), 210.

birds habiting the islands, was discovered and confirmed to encompass a great value in the form of fertilizer by US envoys in 1854. Upon the discovery and under the impression that it was Venezuelan territory, the travellers bid to the US government to write the Venezuelan authorities. From their point of view, this had to be done in order to receive permission to start the extractions on the islands.⁶⁹ All the while, this was being done under the impression that the authority over the islands laid with the Venezuelan government. When in fact, the Dutch were to last to have had showed these islands to be under its jurisdiction. So, the Venezuelan say over the island was theoretically confined to a minimum. However, hearing about this potential material wealth that was to be found on the islands, the Venezuelan authorities sent out some 25 armed men to start their own extractions of the *guano*. This mission was then also supported by the message that the islands were seen as property of the Venezuelan state.⁷⁰ In this light, the interest of the Venezuelan government in the islands can be seen as aimed at commercial and territorial interests.

Furthermore, the Venezuelan claim to the islands was only sparked upon hearing about the islands and their worth from the US travellers in 1854. The unknowingness of Venezuela about the islands, can be gathered from the situation that the 25 men found themselves into when camping on the island in December, 1854. They seem to have been unaware that the provision of sweet and thus drinking water was extremely limited on the islands. As a result, the threat of foreign invaders was not the biggest threat to the Venezuelan settlers. In fact, the thirst was the biggest reason for concern for these men. However, the Venezuelan claim on the islands is justified by a pre-colonial legacy. From this point of view, the Spanish colonizers were the first to discover the islands when entering the region from 1492 onwards. Consequently, when Spain gave up its right to the territories that encompassed, amongst others, current-day Venezuela, the islands became part of the newly-formed Venezuelan republic in 1830.⁷¹ Now this is the basis for the formal argument that Venezuela expressed.

From the perspective of the United States, the dispute on the Aves Island mostly revolved around the commercial interests of its nationals. These interests had later been reflected and

⁶⁹ "Het vogel eiland of Isla de Aves," *Utrechtsche provinciale en stads-courant* (Utrecht), July 30, 1856.

⁷⁰ "Het vogel eiland of Isla de Aves." *Utrechtsche provinciale en stads-courant* (Utrecht), July 30, 1856.

⁷¹ Guillermo Zuloaga, "The Isla de Aves Story," *Geographical Review* vol. 45, no. 2 (1955): 172.

incorporated into the so-called *Guano Islands Act* of 1856. In this piece of legislation, the US government backed its citizens and travellers in their endeavours to extract fertilizer from supposedly inhabited islands in the Caribbean. More specifically, the inhabitation meant that the islands would not be “within the lawful jurisdiction of any other government, and not occupied by the citizens of any other government.”⁷² In the case of the Aves Islands, the lawful jurisdiction of the islands was never formally determined or recognized. If a situation like this exact one is brought forward, US settlers are backed by their government when exploiting the lands. Even before this act, the United States government is said to have dispatched a warship to secure the safety and commercial interests of the diggers of guano on the ‘Bird Islands’.⁷³ This can also be gathered from advisory letters to the Secretary of State of May, 1855. In these letters, the actions of the Venezuelan government are deemed illegal and are said to have the potential to take hundreds of thousands dollars away from American merchants.⁷⁴ And so, the US perspective shows that commercial interest were of the biggest concern with regard to the Aves Islands.

On the other hand, The Dutch argument in a way contradicts the US standpoint. Because the argument that supports the Dutch claim to the Aves islands can be assigned to the informal claiming of the islands by Dutch survivors of a ship wreck in the early-seventeenth century. Although a formal claim was never enacted, the proximity to the Dutch island Sint-Eustatius made sure that the Aves islands were practically part of the Dutch archipelago. This practicality was being shown through the countless instances at which the local population of Sint-Eustatius visited the islands in order to gather the natural resources on the islands. In this light, the Dutch law was applied to the claim of the Dutch. The law in question here states that undisturbed use of a land for more than thirty years provides the user with property rights.⁷⁵ So, in response to the – in the eyes of the Dutch government – unjust claims by the Venezuelan government, three warships were sent to the Venezuelan coast to support the Dutch claim on the islands. Soon, these ships were withdrawn in order to make way for peaceful negotiations. However, this does show the means would be willing to

⁷² United States Congress, *Guano Islands Act*, August 18, 1856, Accessed May 8, 2024, 1080.

⁷³ “Latest Intelligence: by telegraph to the New-York Daily Times,” *New York Daily Times (1851-1857)*, February 2, 1855, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/latest-intelligence/docview/95881146/se-2>.

⁷⁴ “Bird Island –who owns it!: acquisition of derelict territory,” *New York Daily Times*, May 23, 1855, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/bird-island-who-owns/docview/95877732/se-2..>

⁷⁵ “Het vogel eiland of Isla de Aves.” *Utrechtsche provinciale en stads-courant* (Utrecht), July 30, 1856.

deploy and the lengths that the Dutch government had gone in order to secure their position in the Caribbean.

Now, the resolution of this conflict was brought forward by the objective judge that was determined to be Isabella II, the then Queen of Spain. Some ten years after the first squabbles, the claim of the United States had vanished. The US government never formally applied for the right over the islands. First of all, because this would go against their agenda represented by the Monroe Doctrine. Second, as there was no ancestral right for the US to claim the islands, any formal claim would not find a convincing basis. Also, the profitability of fertilizers of the islands was deemed reasonably limited.⁷⁶ Basically, this means that there were other places where exploitation would not involve geopolitical squabbles. The Queen decided in favour of the Venezuelan claim. Meaning that from that day, June 13, 1865, the Aves islands were under the formal authority of the Venezuelan government. From governmental proceedings from this period, it can be concluded that at this point the Dutch had already agreed with any resolution that would have been decided by the Spanish monarchy.⁷⁷ However, if a comparison is made between the Aves islands and Curacao, the difference mostly concerns the habitation. As can be gathered later in this chapter, the population of the Dutch Antilles was vital in the shift made by the Dutch government. The Aves islands did not have an active population that would portray an opinion on their allegiance. In this light, the difference lies with the Aves islands being considered Dutch territory, while the Antillean islands were eventually considered as part of the country by the Dutch government.

Dutch stance towards the colonies in the Caribbean

After the abolition of slavery and the increased interconnectivity between Europe and the Americas, the value of the Antillean colonies was put into question at several occurrences in the Netherlands. In the 1860s, several parliamentary proceedings in the Netherlands contained discussions on the wish to remove the Antillean islands from the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Particularly, it was claimed that keeping the islands in the kingdom would only

⁷⁶ Menno Langeveld, "Het Vergeten Belang van de ABC-Eilanden: Terug Naar Aves-Eiland," *Atlantisch Perspectief* vol. 22, no. 1 (1998): 21.

⁷⁷ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Memorien van Beantwoording van de Voorloopige Verslagen der Commissien van Rapporteurs*, November 5, 1865, 359, https://repository.overheid.nl/frbr/sgd/18631864/0000428814/1/pdf/SGD_18631864_0000330.pdf.

cost the Dutch government hundreds of thousands guilders every year.⁷⁸ Especially the Antillean people did not agree with the potential plans for excluding the islands from the Dutch spheres. As a quick response, local committees on the islands under the flag of the *Koloniale Raad* had started to draft a persuading letter to the Dutch government. In this letter, an extensive overview was presented that showed why the Dutch and the Antilleans had mutual interests in keeping the islands in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.⁷⁹ The Dutch government itself, at this point, did not intend to get rid of the colonies in the Caribbean. Most of all, as it deemed the wishes of the Antillean population as most valuable at this point.⁸⁰ Most notably, the Curacaoan elite was one of the few obstacles in this potential sale.⁸¹ These elites saw their affiliations with the Netherlands and their extensive trade with Venezuela, be it illegal, as the ideal situation for their interests. As a result, the Dutch government held on to its colonial territories in the Caribbean in the 1870s. This was then also highly influenced by the hostile approach that the Venezuelan government often had portrayed against the Dutch government. In that light, handing over the islands to Venezuela would not be desirable.

Dutch perception of Venezuelan claim on Antilles

The year 1876 forms an interesting case study for the interests of Venezuela and how the Dutch viewed their allegiances to the Antillean islands. On the one hand, the late 1870s had seen the Caribbean islands being overwhelmed by natural disasters. Hurricanes swept through the islands and had caused great harm to the population and material properties.⁸² Besides the obvious support that the islands received from their Dutch mother state, Venezuela also showed their willingness to offer aid to the neighbouring territories. Nevertheless, it can be expected that this was not merely done out of sympathy for the islands. Because, in the same period the number of discussions in Dutch parliament on the

⁷⁸ Cornelis Goslinga, *Curaçao and Guzmán Blanco: A Case Study of Small Power Politics in the Caribbean* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 85.

⁷⁹ Isaac Emmanuel, Suzanne Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1970), 411-412.

⁸⁰ Cornelis Goslinga, *Curaçao and Guzmán Blanco: A Case Study of Small Power Politics in the Caribbean* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 86.

⁸¹ Anita van Dissel, Petra Groen, *In de West: de Nederlandse krijgsmacht in het Caribisch gebied* (Den Haag: Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie, 2010), 47.

⁸² "West-Indische Koloniën," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 3, 1878, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010101945:mpeg21:p005>

legitimacy of the Dutch rule in the Caribbean rose again. In a debate on November 23, 1878, the highly influential and liberal member of Dutch parliament Herman Agatho des Amorie van der Hoeven urged the Dutch minister of foreign affairs to rethink the position of the Dutch Antilles. He agreed that handing over the islands to Venezuela could never be caused by demands from the Venezuelan government. However, if these relations would be restored and stabilized, the Dutch would have no reason, he argued, to keep possession of the islands. Furthermore, he adds: "According to the nature of things and due to its geographical position, Curaçao belongs to Venezuela rather than to the Netherlands."⁸³ In this light, it can be concluded that there was an influential group of people in Dutch parliament that was of the opinion that Venezuelan claims to the islands were justified. In fact, it was claimed in the proceedings on the same day of this speech that far more parliamentary member shared this opinion off the record.⁸⁴ Thus, the informal view of the Dutch parliament on the Antilles and Dutch rule there can be drawn from these proceedings.

Nevertheless, the Dutch government continued its rule on the Antillean islands. In order to explain this, several factors can be attributed. The most important factor in this regard is the wish of the Antillean population.⁸⁵ In the few decades after the regaining of the Antillean islands from the British in 1816, the emphasis had mostly been on the lack of profitability coming from the West-Indies. This, in turn, also concerns the aftermath of the abolition of slavery. Before that, the colonies in the Americas had been interesting investment for European powers if slaves could be put to labour. Throughout the nineteenth century, Curaçao in particular experiences a process of maturing. This can be exemplified by the professionalization of the *Koloniale Raad*. As this board's councils are taken seriously by the Dutch government and its representatives, the wishes of the local population could be conveyed more adequately. Another factor that played an important role in this renewed view on the islands by the Dutch government, also discussed more thoroughly in other chapters, is the large-scale oil discoveries in Venezuela. The strategical location of the Dutch

⁸³ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1878-1879 23 november 1878*, December 14, 1849, 95, https://repository.overheid.nl/frbr/sgd/18771878/0000406790/1/pdf/SGD_18771878_0000118.pdf.

⁸⁴ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1878-1879 23 november 1878*, December 14, 1849, 95, https://repository.overheid.nl/frbr/sgd/18771878/0000406790/1/pdf/SGD_18771878_0000118.pdf.

⁸⁵ Cornelis Goslinga, *Curaçao and Guzmán Blanco: A Case Study of Small Power Politics in the Caribbean* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 86.

Antilles gave the Dutch government an advantage in the processing and transportation of oil in the era. The same argument can be made for the opening of the Panama Channel. Although this channel was only officially opened in 1914, the late nineteenth century saw numerous attempts to do so already.⁸⁶ All these factors saw the Dutch shift their view on their rule of the Antillean islands to the degree that the Dutch government now had something to lose.

Conclusion

Gathering the insights of this chapter, an analysis can be made of the claim that Venezuela had held on the Dutch Caribbean islands. In general, this chapter has explained where this claim is based upon. It can be said that the Venezuelan claim stems from an pre-colonial or even ancestral legacy. In this light, the migration streams originating from the inlands of South America through Venezuela to the Antillean islands has been an important part of the ancestral claim. Also, the population inhabiting the islands when the Europeans arrives can be considered in the same regard. Their origins are shown to have stemmed from the mainland of South America. However, this chapter has also put forward a counterargument to this pre-colonial claim. Although the origins of the population contain considerable overlaps, the islands had never been under formal authority from the Venezuelan mainland before the Europeans arrived around 1500. Therefore, it can be argued that the claim of Venezuelan government would not be as effective as the ancestral aspect would indicate.

The pre-colonial claim is shown to have been put forward on some occasions by Venezuelan authorities. Examples hereof include several speeches made by President Blanco in the 1870s. In these speeches, Blanco basically laid out his plans for the future of the Antillean islands. In all of these plans, the role of the European powers, the Netherlands most notably, in ruling the islands of the Caribbean is decreased to a minimum. An example of this message has been shown in the case study of the dispute around the Aves islands in 1850s. These islands were under Dutch colonial rule, but they were taken by force by order of the Venezuelan authorities. The claims of the Dutch were eventually outweighed by the Venezuelan claims by an independent juror. This case study also showed that the Dutch were willing to send a very small portion of their naval fleet to the Venezuelan coast in order to

⁸⁶ David McCullough, *The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870–1914* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977), 125.

support their claim. However, considering the inhabitation and consequent voicelessness of a hypothetical population, the Dutch were not willing to risk it all in order to secure these lands. Another reason for this is the worth of these islands, which was minimal.

On the other hand, the Dutch view towards the islands by the name of Curacao has been shown to follow a different path of development. The nineteenth century saw an overload of Dutch discussions on the legitimacy and worth of Dutch colonial rule in the Caribbean. However, the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century saw a revival of the significance of the islands to the Dutch. The main reason for this change of view is the maturing of the islands in various ways. Combined with other circumstantial factors, this gave way to a feeling that the islands were part of the Dutch country. All the while, the Venezuelan authorities conveying their wish to incorporate the island under their jurisdiction, had the Dutch government take a more cautionary approach to the future of the islands. As to conclude, the Venezuelan authorities never made it a secret that they were of the opinion that Venezuelan rule on the Antillean islands would be more legitimate than Dutch colonial rule was. Venezuela also has not been afraid to act with this wish in mind. After regaining a renewed interests in the islands, however, the Dutch can be expected to have the political claim of Venezuela in mind when defending these territories. The military acts of 1908, can therefore also be seen in light of the renewed Dutch interest in the Antillean islands.

German expansionism and US Hegemony

By November, 1908, six years before the events that directly initiated the first World War, the tensions between European states were already noticeable. Renowned World War I expert Liddell Hart commented on these tensions: "Fifty years were spent in the process of making Europe explosive."⁸⁷ Part of this tension was the European expansionist desires. Most notably in this regard, the new-found desires of the German Empire are interesting. In this case, mainly due to the competitive nature of its foreign relations in the Americas. Also in this region of the world, Germany had sought new territories to answer its ambition. In this regard, it could be concluded that the military actions of 1908 by the Dutch government were a way of protecting their position in the Caribbean from German interests in the region. All the while, the US is also a growing military force at this point. In fact, President Theodore Roosevelt had claimed that he would go to war in order to prevent colonization from happening in South and Central America.⁸⁸ Considering this German expansionism and the rising US hegemony, it can be expected that the Dutch actions of 1908 were inspired by the geopolitical developments of that time. Therefore, in order to analyse the last underlying factor for the military intervention of the Dutch government in 1908, an analysis of how the Dutch perceived the threat of other Western states to their position in the Americas is essential. In order to do this, this chapter attempts to answer the question: How did Western states threaten the Dutch position in the Caribbean between 1850 and 1910?

Formulating a well-argued answer to this question, needs the consideration of several aspects to this geopolitical context. First of all, the background of German interference in the western hemisphere needs to be established. Adding to this, this chapter considers the manner in which Germany participated in the Americas. This shows what the interests of Germany in the considered region are. A second aspect that needs analysing is how the potential threat of Germany was perceived by the Dutch and Antilleans. This provides insight in how important this factor was in the context of the 1908 events. Third, a case study is provided that indicates how exactly Germany operated in this regard. This case study covers the blockade of Venezuelan ports in 1902 by several European states, among which

⁸⁷ "Why did World War I happen?" Council on Foreign Relations, *Contemporary History*, April 14, 2023, accessed on June 1, 2024, <https://education.cfr.org/learn/reading/why-did-world-war-i-happen>.

⁸⁸ Edmund Morris, "A Matter of Extreme Urgency": Theodore Roosevelt, Wilhelm II, and the Venezuela Crisis of 1902," *Naval War College Review* vol. 55, no 2 (2002): 81.

Germany. Finally, the role of the US in this entire matter is being considered. This role is highly important as the US hegemony was on the rise in this period. Combined with their intentions to prevent Europeans from gaining strength in the Americas, makes for an important aspect.

Bismarck's dream

In order to examine whether the Dutch had anything to fear from Germany regarding their position in the Americas, the German interest in the Caribbean region needs consideration. A couple of factors lay at the foundation of this expansionist world view. First of all, the nineteenth century sees the German-speaking states unifying. In this process, the Prussian state took the role of initiator.⁸⁹ This process continued until the relative completion of this unification in the 1870s. This unification in turn provided German states with much more international standing and authority than any of the single German states would be able to accomplish on their own.⁹⁰ So, the unification of German states in the nineteenth century empowered the foreign trading relations. On the other hand, the nationalist sentiment that came with this unification had unlocked Germany's mindset of prestige. This mindset concretely meant that at this point Germany's view towards the European colonies on foreign continents were filled with rational jealousy. Besides this, the Napoleonic wars of the early nineteenth century had left the German states, just like most of continental Europe in a tough economic situation. Therefore, the Hansa cities in the north of Prussia and later the consequent German empire initiated expeditions to other continents. These expeditions were mostly aimed at engaging in the world systems of trade and therewith at rejuvenising the German economy. All the while, the German states had enjoyed a remarkable catch up with other European states in terms of technological and industrial development. This, combined with the international standing, enabled German ships to now easily cross the oceans of the world. All these factors are among the most important ones as to why Germans started to engage in the trading systems of the Americas on a larger scale throughout the nineteenth century.

⁸⁹ Thomas Schoonover, *Germany in Central America: Competitive Imperialism, 1821-1929* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 11.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

By engaging in the systems in the Americas, Germany did so in very particular way. Under the leadership of *Reichskanselier* Otto von Bismarck, Germany had entered the dynamics of international maritime system in which from 1856 privateering by navies was supported by maritime law.⁹¹ Concretely, this meant that navies were enabled to wage attacks on trading vessels of foreign origins. By doing so, the commercial interests of rival powers could be diminished. This so called *guerre de course* typified Germany's presence between 1860 and 1890. On the other hand, the authorities of the naval fleet were until the late 1880s in the hands of military officers who did not have privateering as their main concern.⁹² Nevertheless, even these military officers had sustained the culture of commerce-raiding by the German navy. This dynamic is how Germany defined itself when entering the maritime trading and military systems in the Americas in the second part of the nineteenth century. This is especially typical for the Germany navy as it had, unlike other European powers, no historical presence in the Caribbean. Therefore, Germany had very little to do with historical allegiances like the Netherlands had with their colonies. The absence of formal responsibility in the Americas, it can be stated, enabled Germany to operate solely in the interests of the its own military and commercial interests.⁹³

Dutch view on German expansionist desires

Gathering the context and method of German presence in Central America, the question remains how from a Dutch perspective the possible threat of German presence was conceived. This needs assessing in order for this aspect to be worthy of being mentioned as a factor for the Dutch military acts of 1908. One of these instances is an extensive report and warning in a Curacaoan newspaper from October 7, 1876. In this particular article, an entire page is dedicated to an analysis on the threat that Germany is posing to the feelings of security and peaceful relations worldwide. In fact, the article speaks about the assumed fact that most major powers in global politics are in agreement that the status quo needed maintaining. The biggest exception in this regard is said to be Bismarck's Germany.⁹⁴ Furthermore, the future plans of the Germans are a matter of concern to the editors of *De Curaçaosche Courant*. The German stance towards international relations is said to be aimed

⁹¹ David Olivier, *German Naval Strategy, 1856-1888: Forerunners to Tirpitz*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 8.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁴ "Kalmte en Storm," *De Curaçaosche Courant*, October 7, 2010.

at continuing the German sphere of influence. This apparently raised the question what steps Germany would take next. Several neighbouring countries of Germany had already experienced its will to increase its influence. This then raises the question with the Antillean newspaper: "Who is next?"⁹⁵ This article is typical for this period in which tensions between European states high. It also provides insight in how from an Dutch-Antillean perspective the actions of Germany were perceived.

Blockade of 1902

An important occurrence indicating the matter of maritime acting by Germany in the Americas, is the blockade by European powers of Venezuelan ports in 1902. Because, this particular act happened in the same waters that surrounded the Dutch colonized islands in the Caribbean. As indicated in the previous empirical chapters, Venezuela in the period of Cipriano Castro's presidency had a tendency to be reluctant in paying back debts. These debts were in particular owed to the major European powers of that time. After these powers had enough of the broken promises, a combination of England, Italy and Germany sent out a fleet to blockade Venezuelan coasts on December 20, 1902.

The traditional explanation for the 1902 blockade thus refers to the lack of commitment to paying back debts by the Venezuelan government. However, drawing on this matter from the perspective of the US, another motive for at least Germany can be gathered. In the US, there was a growing consciousness about the German longing for territories. In this light, the correspondence that the German government held with the British needs consideration. In the prelude to the blockade, Germany admitted to the British that it would consider occupying Venezuelan harbour cities. This could for Britain and the US not be seen apart from the German wish for *Lebensraum*.⁹⁶ Especially in the US, growing concern existed about the plans of Germany in Venezuela. This concern was fuelled by the military developments of this period. By 1902, the biggest states in terms of military maritime power were Great Britain, France and Russia, in that order. However, the rising hegemony of the US saw it building its fleet in a very fast pace. There was only one Western state that could match the

⁹⁵ "Kalmte en Storm," *De Curaçaosche Courant*, October 7, 2010.

⁹⁶ Edmund Morris, "A Matter of Extreme Urgency": Theodore Roosevelt, Wilhelm II, and the Venezuela Crisis of 1902," *Naval War College Review* vol. 55, no 2 (2002): 76.

US' ambition in terms of the building of a naval fleet. This state was in fact Germany.⁹⁷ But, if the situation in the Atlantic Ocean is to be considered, the German ship-building figures even outnumbered those of the US. In this light, it can be concluded that the potential fire power of Germany in this region was fifty percent larger than that of the US.⁹⁸ This had caused great concern for the US. Especially if military situations like this particular one in Venezuela is considered. In the same light, the growing fleet of Germany can be expected to also be of concern to the Dutch government. Throughout the nineteenth century, the might of the Dutch fleet could not be matched by any other state's military that also had interests in the Dutch colonies in the Americas. In this period, the presence of Germany changed this.

Monroe Doctrine and Venezuela

On the other hand, the interests of the Dutch government and the US government can be considered in line if the situations of 1902 and 1908 are considered. The Dutch interest in the conflict of 1902 can be considered twofold. First of all, the commercial interests of Antillean traders needed to be safeguarded in times of peril such as these. Second, the Dutch authority over the Antillean is at this point important to the Dutch government. In this light, the Dutch response in 1902 can be explained. In October 1902, namely, the Dutch government had dispatched two extra warships to the West-Indian waters in order to secure these interest.⁹⁹ The US interest mainly dealt with the Monroe Doctrine. According to this idea, the US would stay neutral in the existing European colonial affairs at the time. In that regard, the military intervention of the Netherlands in 1908 did not form a problem for the US. However, the acts of 1902, by Germany particularly, involved military actions that hinted at new forms of colonization. All the while, preventing new forms of colonization in the Americas was one of the key pillars of the Monroe Doctrine and therefore of US policy in this period. When Germany announced that it intended to resort to an intervention on Venezuelan soil, the US government dispatched warships in order to prevent this from happening.¹⁰⁰ In this way, the Monroe Doctrine and therefore the aligned interests of the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 77.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, "Eindverslag der Commissie van Rapportage over het ontwerp van wet tot vaststelling van hoofdstuk III der Staatsbegroting voor 1903," January 23, 1903, 148.

¹⁰⁰ Judith Ewell, *Venezuela and the United States: From Monroe's Hemisphere to Petroleum's Empire* (London: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 109.

Dutch and US government in these geopolitical developments were aligned. In that light, it can also be gathered that in the actions of 1908, the Dutch government felt it was backed by the existing power relations in the Americas.

Conclusion

As to conclude, the second half of the nineteenth century had seen Germany sparking its interests in foreign territories, most notably in the western hemisphere. This desire was sparked by the recent unification of the German state and by the rise of nationalist sentiment. When the Germans started to engage in the dynamics of the Americas, their point of view has been considered as rather hostile. The idea of legalized privateering, *guerre de course*, was part of the German naval policies in the Americas between 1860 and 1890. In response, the Dutch view on this German policy can best be described as a looming fear. The German expansionist action created a sphere in which questions had been raised about the future of the Antillean islands and other territories of the Dutch. In 1902, a manifestation of German interference in South America can be found. In this year, Germany heads a coalition of European states that blockaded Venezuelan ports in order to combat the Venezuelan tendency to fail in paying back loans. Even in this originally naval dispute, signs of German territorial desires can be gathered. The threat of these desires, however, is reason enough for the US government to make some threats of their own. In light of the US policy, laid out in the Monroe Doctrine, any new colonisations in the Americas are to be prevented. Considering this, the 1908 actions by the Dutch are much more aligned with the policies of the rising hegemon. Thus, the potential threat of Germany to the Dutch position in the Caribbean is apparent. This threat has provided a context in which the actions of the Netherlands in 1908 were being monitored by the territory-desiring German government. On the other hand, the potential threat of the US is not so much a threat as it is a framework in which the Dutch government is expected to have felt protected to engage in the military acts of 1908.

Conclusion

Gathering all the findings of the several chapters, this thesis at this point aims to answer the research question as proposed in the introductory chapter. With this question in mind, the empirical chapters have set out to research four underlying factors for the military intervention by the Dutch government in November, 1908. All these factors have been shown to be aspects of the context to the Dutch-Venezuelan conflict of that year. The longest context can be derived from Dutch-Venezuelan relationships in the nineteenth century. This relationship is characterized by the role of Curaçao as safe haven for political refugees from Venezuela. Furthermore, anti-colonial and nationalist sentiments from the Venezuelan side have also added to the character of the relationship. All the while, the illegal trade routes between Curaçao and Venezuela and the lack of Dutch handling of these, formed the relationship throughout the nineteenth century. If this is combined with the countless revolutions in Venezuela, a relationship of distrust between the governments of Venezuela and the Netherlands is easily distinguished. The adversity that came with this distrust, is pointed out to have created multiple conflicts like the one in 1908. In that regard, the actions of 1908 need to be seen in a context of an adversarial relationship that had caused such conflicts before.

The events in 1908, however, are somewhat unique as the military intervention of the Netherlands is directly followed by a change of presidency in Venezuela. This thesis has shown that the Netherlands had a major preference for the successor in this regime change. Even before the change regime, the successor, Gomez, was indicated by Dutch government officials as a more cooperative partner than the predecessor, Castro. The period directly after this regime change proves this to some degree as the military interceptions are being concluded rapidly. Furthermore, the demands of the Dutch government are being satisfied. On the long term, Dutch companies and subjects enjoy the benefits of the more positively inclined relationship between the Dutch and Venezuelan government. However, the diplomatic ties take more than a decade before they are restored again. Therefore, it cannot be undoubtedly concluded that the diplomatic relationship was fully peaceful right after the regime change. In any way, the Dutch actions did cause extra tensions in Venezuela that were followed by the coup December, 1908. If this is combined with the fact that the Dutch government had much to gain from a new president in 1908, it can be argued that this

regime change was an ulterior motive. Nevertheless, it cannot be concluded that this was the intention of the Dutch government in 1908.

The third underlying factor that this thesis has touched, has delved into the claims on the Antillean islands by Venezuela and the Netherlands. The Venezuelan claim on the islands is based on ancestral and pre-colonial legacy. This claim has been apparent at several instances. These include speeches by former presidents and a case study on a similar dispute over the Aves islands. Through this case study, the conclusion has been drawn that the maturing of the Antillean population and its institutions has been vital in a renewed view of the Dutch on the legitimacy of their rule there. Therefore, it can be concluded that the actions of 1908, were undertaken in the context of the continuing claim of Venezuela and the renewed view of the Dutch on the Dutch Antilles.

The last empirical chapter has delved deeper into the geopolitical tensions that were at play around the time of the military acts of 1908. The threat that Germany posed to the Dutch position in the Americas has been shown through the policies of the German navy in the region. Their hostile approach are in this light combined with the Germany desire for expansion and the actual expansion of Germany's fleet. From that combination, it is logical that the Dutch view towards the potential threat of Germany has been described as looming. The German blockade of Venezuelan ports in 1902 has provided an insightful case study in this regard. In that conflict, the territorial desires of Germany have been made clear. On the other hand, the role of the US in that conflict has shown that the Netherlands are expected to have felt backing of the US by the time it engaged in its own conflict with Venezuela in 1908. And so, it can gathered that these four factors have been important in their own various ways. In any way, it can be concluded that the decree of May, 1908 and the expulsion of the Dutch consul-general of July, 1908 were only the top of the iceberg. The findings of this thesis are beneath it.

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