

The Inevitable War

How the Dutch officials securitized the first expedition in the Aceh War towards the Dutch Parliament in 1873



Figure 1: Map of the siege of Aceh and their defenses (bird's eye view), 1873.

Master: International Relations in Historical Perspective

Name: Sophie Prijs

Email: s.d.j.prijs@uu.nl / s.d.j.prijs@students.uu.nl

Date: January 16, 2023.

Supervisor: dr. Ozan Ozavci

Words: 14.949



Universiteit Utrecht

Abstract

The Aceh War was one of the longest and most violent colonial wars that the Netherlands ever waged. It was also the first colonial war in Dutch history that caused so much debate about its legitimacy and its necessity. Therefore, this thesis focuses on how the Dutch officials tried to securitize the first expedition of the Aceh War towards the Dutch Parliament in 1873 by making use of Securitization Theory. The Dutch Parliament formed the formal audience that could exercise substantial influence on the extraordinary measures taken by the state and security decisions in general. In order to solve the puzzle, this thesis uses a substantial amount of secret correspondence from colonial officials and parliamentary proceedings from 1873. The Dutch officials framed an incident whereby the Acehnese sought foreign allies into the 'Acehnese betrayal'. In turn, this was utilized as the *casus belli* for the war and it fostered a feeling of urgency to prevent another Western power from claiming Aceh before the Dutch could. The thesis argues that the Minister of Colonies, Fransen van de Putte, adjusted the frames and arguments within his pleas to his target audience. He framed the Acehnese Sultanate into a threat for the safety of the Dutch colonial empire and the only measure left against it was war. While justifying the war, the Minister used multiple tactics: he used a broad pallet of political, international and economical threats, he appealed to emotions in his pleas and he made use of historical threats and the history of the hostile bilateral relations to help his audience make the connection between Aceh and danger. Throughout the Ministers pleas and correspondence, he tried to frame the war as inevitable and just but imperialistic speech was also present which indicates an imperialistic character of the war.

Key Words

Aceh, Securitization Theory, Fransen van de Putte, James Loudon, Aceh War, Netherlands, Imperialism, Dutch Parliament.

Table of content

ABSTRACT	2
KEY WORDS.....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	5
HISTORIOGRAPHY.....	6
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY	9
SOCIETAL RELEVANCE.....	11
SOURCES	11
STRUCTURE.....	12
CHAPTER 1	13
INTRODUCTION.....	13
HISTORY OF DUTCH-ACEHNESE RELATIONS	13
1873: THE DECLARATION OF WAR AND THE FIRST EXPEDITION.....	16
THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT OF THE ACEH WAR.....	17
PIRACY IN THE STRAIT OF MALACCA	21
CONCLUSION.....	22
CHAPTER 2	24
INTRODUCTION.....	24
JUSTIFICATION WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT	25
<i>Governor-General Loudon</i>	25
<i>Minister of Colonies Fransen van de Putte</i>	29
THE FIRST SPEECH ACTS TOWARDS THE ENABLING AUDIENCE.....	33
IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE WAR, ONE MUST UNDERSTAND THE PAST	35
THE UNAVOIDABLE WAR?	38
CONCLUSION.....	41
CONCLUSION.....	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY	49
PRIMARY SOURCES	49
SECONDARY LITERATURE.....	51
IMAGES.....	53



Figure 2: Map of Aceh and the adjacent Strait of Malacca.

Introduction

*'Your Governor-General, Sire, is about to declare war on the Sultan of Aceh, under contrived pretexts, at most artfully provoked, with the intention to deprive that sovereign of his inheritance. Sire, this is neither graceful, nor noble, nor honest, nor wise.'*¹

The author of this quote is Eduard Douwes Dekker, better known under his writer's pseudonym Multatuli. Multatuli was one of the most famous Dutch critics of the colonial system in the nineteenth century. The paragraph appeared in an open letter to the Dutch king in 1872 wherein he tried to warn the king about the upcoming war with the Acehese Sultanate. And, as it turns out, his worries were not unfounded: the Aceh War lasted for decades, costed more than 127.000 lives and became one of the most expensive and violent colonial wars that the Netherlands would ever wage.²

The war started on the 26th of March 1873. On this day, a Dutch steamship, *Citadel van Antwerpen*, was docked off the coast of Aceh. On the ship was the Dutch Governor's Commissioner Frederik Nicolaas Nieuwenhuijzen. Tasked with negotiating with Sultan Ala'adin Mahmud Shah, Nieuwenhuijzen received orders from the Governor-General to declare war if the Dutch demands were not met within due time. Unfortunately, the negotiations failed and Nieuwenhuijzen presented a declaration to the Sultan in which he declared 'war on the Sultan of Aceh by virtue of the power and authority granted to him by the government of the Netherlands Indies, in the name of that government'.³ According to the manifesto, there were multiple reasons for declaring war on Aceh like treachery, unfaithfulness, national security and the obligation to guarantee safe trade and shipping in the region. Furthermore,

¹ This quote is my own translation. The original text: "Uw gouverneur-generaal, Sire, staat op het punt onder gezochte voorwendselen, hoogstens op grond van kunstig geprovoceerde redenen, de oorlog te verklaren aan de sultan van Atjeh, met het voornemen die soeverein te beroven van zijn erfdeel. Sire, dit is noch dankbaar, noch edelmoedig, noch eerlijk, noch verstandig."; Piet Hagen, *Koloniale oorlogen in Indonesië. Vijf eeuwen verzet tegen vreemde overheersing* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Arbeiderspers, 2018), 442.

² Historians disagree on the official end date of the war and the amount of deaths caused by the Aceh War. In this thesis the numbers given by Piet Hagen will be used since his publication is the most recent. ; Hagen, *Koloniale oorlogen in Indonesië*, 479. ; See also: Paul van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Arbeiderspers, 1969), 1.

³ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'Verklaart uit kracht van de magt en bevoegdheid, aan hem door de Regering van Nederlandsch Indie verleend, in naam van die Regering, den oorlog aan den Sultan van Atjeh'. ; Editor Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden betreffende het ontstaan van den oorlog tegen Atjeh in 1873* (Den Haag: Algemeene Landsdrukkerij, 1881), 121, https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/129726?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=75d1bfa30862b7287b74&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=24&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=17.

it seemed that the Sultan was openly preparing for a battle. Therefore, Nieuwenhuijzen wrote 'that no other meaning can be ascribed to this than that Aceh has willfully mocked the government of the Netherlands Indies and wishes to maintain itself in the hostile position thereby taken'.⁴ Logically, the Dutch government claimed that they now had to act with 'forceful means to ensure [...] the general commercial interest and the demands of its own security in northern Sumatra';⁵ Ergo: the war that Multatuli had feared, thereby begun.

It was no coincidence that Nieuwenhuijzen explained the war by referring to treachery, hostility or unfaithfulness. Nor that he used the argument of the Dutch obligation to safeguard commercial interests, shipping and trade in the region. In fact, the manifesto had been carefully prepared by his superiors in order to justify and securitize the war.⁶ One of the influential groups that had to be convinced of the legality, need and causes of the war was the Dutch Parliament since they could enable and facilitate the war. Yet, how did the officials do this? What arguments did they use? Were all the arguments new or did the officials also refer to already existing or historical threats? To explore this further, this thesis will examine how the Dutch officials securitized the first expedition in the Aceh War towards the Dutch Parliament in 1873.

Historiography

Historians and contemporaries alike have done ample research on why the Dutch state declared war on Aceh. What most scholars have in common, is that they mention the discrepancies between the official reasoning of the Dutch state and the probable underlying motive: colonial expansion. One of the first historians that wrote a comprehensive history on the Aceh War was Paul van 't Veer. He describes the historical context in great detail and emphasizes a change in Dutch colonial policy from abstention to the Aceh War.⁷ He sets forth a diverse range of causes that contributed to the Dutch declaring war on Aceh in 1873 and he gives his insights on how the Dutch tried to justify this war. For instance, he describes that

⁴ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'dat daaraan geen andere beteekenis kan worden toegekend dan dat Atjeh het Gouvernement van Nederlandsch Indie moedwillig heeft gehoond en zich op het daardoor ingenomen vijandig standpunt wenscht te handhaven'. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 121.

⁵ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'krachtdadige middelen, een zoowel door het algemeen handelsbelang als de eischen van hare eigene veiligheid in noordelijk Sumatra gevorderden staat van zaken te waarborgen'; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 120-121.

⁶ See for instance: Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 67.

⁷ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 15-55.

besides the threat of foreign intervention, the argument was used that Aceh had violated the bilateral treaty of Trade, Peace and Friendship of 1857.⁸ Furthermore, according to Van 't Veer, the *casus belli* for the declaration of war was the fabricated story of the Acehnese betrayal.⁹

Another historian who researched the Dutch legitimization of the Aceh War was Janny de Jong. She explained the reason for the war as follows: 'What triggered the sending of the military expedition was the fear of losing territory and prestige in the colonial empire.'¹⁰ She proceeded to clarify that the war was supposed to be a punitive expedition like the Dutch had done many times before, however it turned into something more and the Dutch could not retreat or international humiliation would be the consequence.¹¹ She is the only scholar that sees the annexation of Aceh as an accident which separates her from other scholars.¹² She also discusses how the legitimization of the war led to parliamentary debates.¹³

Scholar Sjoerd de Winter analyzed the legitimization of the Aceh War on the basis of Securitization Theory. In his article, he focused on the correspondence between the Acehnese Sultan and Nieuwenhuijzen and on the correspondence of Governor-General Loudon to the Cabinet. His conclusion was that 'the Dutch colonial government securitised the threat of the Acehnese Sultanate to justify war of colonial expansion' and that the first expedition was justified as 'self-defense' but that their motives were in fact imperialistic.¹⁴ His research therefore fits within the status quo of historical research regarding the Aceh War. Yet, his analysis does not cover how the Dutch colonial officials securitized the war towards the Dutch Parliament, nor did he study the private correspondence of the Minister of Colonies, an important player in the run up to the war.

In his book on colonial wars in Indonesia, historian Piet Hagen examined the Dutch war with Aceh. He too emphasized the importance of the geographical and economic position of Aceh, the already existing tensions between both states and the threat of other powers lurking in the archipelago. However, according to Hagen, the fear for foreign intervention was merely

⁸ Ibid, 52.

⁹ Ibid, 44-48.

¹⁰ Janny de Jong, "'Negotiations in Bismarckian Style' The Debate on the Aceh War and its Legitimacy, 1873-1874," *Itinerario* XXIX (2005): 2, 48.

¹¹ De Jong, "'Negotiations in Bismarckian Style,'" 48.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, 38.

¹⁴ Sjoerd de Winter, "Selling the Aceh War. The Dutch Justification of a War of Expansion against the Sultanate of Aceh," *Militaire Spectator* 188 (2019): 4, 193.

used as a tool to justify military action.¹⁵ Besides these observations he claimed that the Aceh War was inevitable due to the Dutch obligation in the archipelago to prevent piracy.¹⁶ But, to what extent was the fight against piracy used as an argument to justify the war?

Historian Stefan Eklöf Amirell used Securitization Theory in order to research how colonial states expanded their territory by using anti-piracy measures.¹⁷ He explained that colonial powers legitimized colonization and military interventions by using piracy as an argument against local powers.¹⁸ Using this theory, he also sheds light on some of the Dutch anti-piracy efforts in the Strait of Malacca and he makes a start to discuss piracy in relation to Aceh. He states that 'Although piracy had ceased to be a security threat in the Strait of Malacca by the 1860's, it continued to be used to justify colonial expansion, particularly in the 1870s [...] by the Dutch in Aceh.'¹⁹ However, according to Amirell, piracy was not the main reason used by the Dutch to declare the Aceh War, but it did play a role since there was a 'well-established colonial image of Aceh as a pirate or robber state.'²⁰ Yet, his analysis is heavily based on secondary literature and focused on Great Britain. Furthermore, he does not explain in greater detail how the Dutch used the fight against piracy in relation to the Aceh War. By delving deeper into the justification of the Aceh War, this thesis tries to uncover more details about the role that piracy played within the securitization process and if the fight against piracy was an argument that was presented to the Parliament.

It is clear that many historians have put much thought into why the Dutch declared war on Aceh. However, little to no attention is paid to how the justification process, or the securitization process, happened towards the Parliament. How did the colonial officials and the Minister of Colonies securitize the Aceh War amongst themselves and how did this translate to the justification in Parliament? Were there any significant differences and where older threats or arguments used in order to justify colonial warfare? Did the fight against piracy play a role in the justification process? In order to fill the research gap, this thesis will analyze how the Dutch officials securitized the first expedition in the Aceh War towards the

¹⁵ Hagen, *Koloniale oorlogen in Indonesië*, 438-445.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 442.

¹⁷ Stefan Eklöf Amirell, *Pirates of Empire. Colonization and Maritime Violence in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1.

¹⁸ Amirell, *Pirates of Empire*, 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 159.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 155.

Dutch Parliament in 1873.²¹ Due to the span of the thesis, and the duration of the war, only the first expedition is analyzed.

Theoretical framework and methodology

This thesis will use aspects from Securitization Theory in order to analyze how the Aceh War was justified towards the Dutch Parliament. Securitization Theory emerged from the scholarly works of members of the so-called Copenhagen School of whom Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver are generally the most well-known.²² Many scholars have used and adapted Securitization Theory since it allows researchers to analyze what is, and what is not a security threat and how they are 'created'.²³

In short, securitization is a process in which a securitizing actor, usually someone with authority on the matter, shifts 'an issue out of the realm of "normal" political debate into the realm of emergency politics by presenting it as an existential threat.'²⁴ In order to bring an issue from the nonpoliticized realm to the securitized realm, a securitizing actor has to perform a so called 'speech act'. This idea of performing a speech act derives from Speech Act Theory as coined by philosopher John Austin. What Wæver borrowed from this theory is the idea that saying something, is the act itself. As Security Studies specialists Peoples and Vaughan-Williams describe it: 'Certain speech acts are known as "performatives" whereby saying the word or phrase effectively serves to accomplish a social act'.²⁵ Therefore, in the case of securitization, when a person with authority declares something as an existential threat, he also creates the possibility to use extraordinary measures in order to fight it.²⁶ Of

²¹ The existence of this research gap is also endorsed by: Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst van het moderne imperialisme. Koloniën en buitenlandse politiek 1870-1902* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1985), 60.

²² Columba Peoples and Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2010), 76.

²³ One of these scholars is Thierry Balzacq who defines securitization as: 'an articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilized by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions), about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitizing actor's reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customized policy must be undertaken immediately to block its development'. ; Thierry Balzacq, "A Theory of Securitization: Origins, Core Assumptions and Variants," in *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, ed. Thierry Balzacq (London: Routledge, 2011), 3.

²⁴ Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security Studies*, 76.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 77.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 77-78.

importance is that the securitizing actor needs to mobilize language in order to frame a referent subject (that what threatens) into a threat for the referent object (that what is threatened).²⁷

For a speech act to be effective, there are certain conditions that need to be met. For instance, the person that utters the speech act needs to have authority on the subject, the speech act needs to adhere to the right conventions and the context is crucial.²⁸ In addition, the audience needs to accept the proposed threat as credible. Whether they do so depends on the context and on how the speech act was delivered.²⁹ Moreover, the securitizing actor will have more success if the presented issue is associated with things that ‘carry historical connotations of threat, danger, and harm, or where a history of hostile sentiments exists.’³⁰

However, the audience is not one uniform group, in fact it consists of ‘different audiences, which are characterised by different logics of persuasion’.³¹ Political scientist Paul Roe suggested in his article that the audience could be dissected ‘into the general public – who can offer “moral” support regarding the “securityness” of a given issue – and policy-makers, such as parliaments – who can offer the “formal support” necessary for the adoption of the extraordinary measures aiming to tackle a security issue.’³² This thesis expands on this mode of thinking by making a distinction between different audiences and thereby focusing on the enabling (formal) audience: the Dutch Parliament. By looking at how the colonial officials justified the war amongst themselves and thereafter within the Parliament, and by looking at the differences between the narratives and frames presented to each, more can be said about the justification of the first expedition in the Aceh War. In addition, since Securitization Theory originated in Security Studies, this thesis will also provide insight into its ability to explain non-contemporary historical developments.

²⁷ Balzacq, “A Theory of Securitization,” 3.

²⁸ Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security Studies*, 77.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 78.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 79.

³¹ Sarah Léonard and Christian Kaunert, “Reconceptualizing the audience in securitization theory,” in *Securitization Theory. How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, ed. Thierry Balzacq (London: Routledge, 2011), 58.

³² Cited from: Léonard and Kaunert, “Reconceptualizing the audience in securitization theory,” 62. ; Paul Roe, “Actor, Audience(s) and Emergency Measures: Securitization and the UK’s Decision to Invade Iraq,” *Security Dialogue* 39 (Dec. 2008): 6, 615-635.

Societal relevance

Debates about the Dutch role in conflicts in colonial Indonesia are not new, however, the Aceh War has received less attention in comparison to other more contemporary colonial wars. By looking at how the Dutch securitized a colonial war and how different narratives were used to convince different audiences, more can be said about Dutch security culture and it will shed a light on how states framed colonial wars in the past. In addition, this research contributes to our understanding of existential threats at the time, which offers insight into former perceptions, ideas, morals and ideas about legality.

Sources

In order to answer the research question, this thesis will rely heavily on primary source material and secondary literature. The first chapter will rely mostly on secondary literature in order to provide a broad background. The second chapter will rely on the then secret personal correspondence and documents from important colonial officials, namely: the Governor-General, the Minister of Colonies and the Governor's Commissioner. By analyzing their personal correspondence, biographies, telegrams and publications I hope to find out what their intrinsic motivation was, how they talked about the Aceh War in private and what they exactly saw as threats at the time. In addition, how did they speak about convincing the enabling audience? Furthermore, an official government publication, *Officieele bescheiden*, will be analyzed. This publication was meant to explain the start of the Aceh War and was published by the Dutch government in 1881. It contains parliamentary documents, minutes from meetings, private correspondence, memo's and telegrams from the period leading up to the Aceh War which makes it a valuable source. Moreover, in order to uncover what was said within Parliament about the war, minutes from debates in the *Staten Generaal* will be used.

It is, however, important to stay critical about the aforementioned sources. Sources, like the *Officieele bescheiden* were publicized by the government and therefore might be censored or altered in order to strengthen their claim at the time. Moreover, the memoirs or the personal notes of the colonial officials are always subjected to censoring by either a publisher or the official themselves which makes it important to read in-between the lines and to keep this in mind. Furthermore, most of the literature and sources are written from the Dutch or Western perspective. This is due to a language barrier, availability issues and the angle of the thesis. Nevertheless, this ought not to be a problem, since the 'Dutch reality' of

what caused the war influenced decisions taken by officials at the time and it translated too in the speeches given in Parliament.

Structure

In order to answer the research question, this thesis will be divided into two chapters. The first chapter will focus on the context the Aceh War. What was the background of the war and how did Dutch-Acehnese relations develop in the years before 1873? How did the first expedition go and what were the international factors that encouraged the Dutch to declare war? In addition, how did piracy play a role in the past and what was the relationship between Aceh and piracy?

The second chapter will focus on how the Cabinet tried to securitize the Aceh War towards the enabling audience. First it will focus on how Governor-General Loudon and Minister of Colonies Fransen van de Putte tried to justify the war amongst themselves and thereafter the chapter will focus on their message towards the Parliament. What arguments were used to justify the war and how were these arguments framed? Why was it necessary to start the war and what were the threats? In addition, did the officials make connections between the Aceh War and already established threats or historical events in order to convince the Dutch Parliament? The conclusion will offer an answer to the research question and all the related supporting questions raised throughout the thesis. In addition, the significance of the thesis for the current historiography will be discussed as well as a short evaluation of the applicability of Securitization Theory. Moreover, suggestions for further research will be included.

Chapter 1

Introduction

To Aceh, the craton! there resides evil, Lurks infidelity, broods sea robbery and smolders treachery; Exterminate that brood, humiliate that customer: With Dutch tricolor 'civilization' is planted.

P. Haagsma, *Militair Atchinlied*, 1873.³³

This was a verse from a military recruiting song spread in 1873 after the first expedition. The language of the verse was hostile and clear: the evil Acehnese had to be defeated and civilization had to be established by the Dutch. However, what prompted this song? In order to find out, this chapter will outline the historical background of the Aceh War and the relevant international context of the time period. It will discuss the history of Dutch Acehnese relations, the run up to the war, the outbreak of the war and it will elaborate on the international, political and economic context of the war. In addition to this, the context of Acehnese piracy will be outlined.

History of Dutch-Acehnese relations

Relations between the Dutch and Acehnese had been overshadowed by tensions and distrust since the Dutch started to expand their colonial empire in the Indonesian archipelago during the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century these relations deteriorated further. Historian Anthony Reid explains that '[the bilateral relations] were almost uniformly bad, due to Dutch advances on the west coast of Sumatra in the 1830s and 40s, and on the east coast in the 1860s.'³⁴ Namely, the Dutch kept expanding their sovereignty over previously independent regions, amongst them also areas bordering the Acehnese state. Logically, the

³³ This quote is my own translation. Original text: 'Naar Atchin! De kraton! daar zetelt het kwaad, Schuilt ontrouw, broeit zeeroof en smeulde verraad; Roeit uit dat gebroedsel, vernedert die klant: Met Nederlandse driekleur beschaving geplant.' ; Hagen, *Koloniale oorlogen in Indonesië*, 449.

³⁴ Anthony Reid, "Indonesian Diplomacy A Documentary Study of Atjehnese Foreign Policy in The Reign of Sultan Mahmud, 1870-74," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 42 (Dec. 1969): 2 (216), 75.

Acehnese feared that annexation of their territory would be next.³⁵ In fact, by 1874, the Acehne Sultanate was the last autonomous Muslim state left on Sumatra.³⁶

The Sultanate had a special position on Sumatra. It was quite influential because of good international (trade) connections, a favorable geographical position adjacent to trade entrepots, it had a lucrative pepper trade and it was a 'major channel by which Islamic influences flowed from Western Asia to Indonesia.'³⁷ The Dutch assumed that the Acehne Sultan was an all-powerful ruler. However, the reality was much more complicated. Namely, the Sultan had to rule over a fragmented state consisting of many subordinate states that were all pursuing their own interests and who, at times, were in conflict.³⁸ Especially in times of internal conflict, the Dutch tried to take advantage of the situation by supporting the opposition of the Sultan or by trying to intervene in the conflict themselves. In doing so, they quickly expanded their sphere of influence at the cost of the Sultan's authority.³⁹ Aceh's relative favorable position and influence caused it to be seen as an obstacle or a threat to Dutch rule and authority in the Dutch East Indies and from 1852 onwards, Aceh was described as the 'Achilles heel' of Dutch power.⁴⁰

Despite the poor state of Dutch-Acehnese relations in the nineteenth century, there had been attempts at rapprochement between the two states. In fact, in 1857 a treaty was signed on 'Trade, Peace and Friendship'. Within this treaty, agreements were made about Dutch expansionism and the efforts of both parties to stop piracy in the region.⁴¹ According to Reid, 'this treaty annulled the grievances of each party and provided in general terms for friendship and commerce between them.'⁴² Nevertheless, this optimism was short lived since both states failed to fulfill their part of the concluded agreement.⁴³ As a result, the annual contact between both states diluted quickly and border grievances kept the bilateral relations

³⁵ Anthony Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra. Atjeh, the Netherlands and Britain 1858-1898* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1969), 21.

³⁶ Reid, "Indonesian Diplomacy A Documentary Study of Atjehnese Foreign Policy," 74.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 14. ; Reid, "Indonesian Diplomacy A Documentary Study of Atjehnese Foreign Policy," 76-77.

³⁹ Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 88. ; Reid, "Indonesian Diplomacy A Documentary Study of Atjehnese Foreign Policy," 77.

⁴⁰ Reid, "Indonesian Diplomacy A Documentary Study of Atjehnese Foreign Policy," 77. ; Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 21.

⁴¹ De Winter, "Selling the Aceh War," 181.

⁴² Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 22.

⁴³ Reid, "Indonesian Diplomacy A Documentary Study of Atjehnese Foreign Policy," 75.

hostile.⁴⁴ Moreover, the Dutch knew that Aceh would never willingly cooperate with them, namely: the Acehnese would rather be allies with other powers in order to protect themselves from Dutch expansion. Therefore, the Dutch tactic became to 'bluff the Sultanate into a cooperative attitude [...] The message to the Acehnese was that the Dutch colonial army was not to be trifled with.'⁴⁵ The Dutch showed this force by, for example, sending war fleets to states neighboring Aceh in order to intimidate them.⁴⁶

From 1872 onwards, the Dutch and Acehnese tried to mend their diplomatic ties. Both states initiated attempts to discuss the renewal of the treaty on Trade, Peace and Friendship. The Sultan had sent representatives to the Dutch commissioner in Riau, and in return, the Dutch Governor-General Loudon appointed two government commissioners in order to negotiate.⁴⁷ The Acehnese representatives, however, soon stagnated the process in the hope to find an ally in the Ottoman Empire. At first the Dutch were willing to grant them extra time, since they thought that the Sultan needed time to stop a group of anti-Dutch sympathizers and to regain power in Aceh.⁴⁸ In addition, the Dutch provided transportation back to Aceh for the Acehnese representatives. On their way back, the representatives wished to stop shortly in Singapore. But, as the Dutch Commissioner in Riau found out, the Acehnese representatives were there on a secret mission. Namely: they held meetings with the United States and Italy in search of an ally against the Netherlands.⁴⁹ The Dutch felt betrayed by Aceh, and without adequate information, quick decisions had to be made in order to avoid foreign interference.⁵⁰ Consequently, by March 1873, bilateral relations hit a low point and mutual distrust was soaring. Van 't Veer writes about this that 'Apart from the good right of an endangered country to seek support elsewhere, this betrayal story is one of the grossest pieces of falsification in our history.'⁵¹ Historian Hagen writes that when the message of the

⁴⁴ Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 23. ; Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 24-27.

⁴⁵ De Jong, "Negotiations in Bismarckian Style," 41.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 43.

⁴⁸ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 43-44. ; Paul van 't Veer, "Atjeh 1873, een oorlog op papier." *De Gids* 130 (1967), https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_gid001196701_01/_gid001196701_01_0020.php, accessed on Jan. 9, 2023.

⁴⁹ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 43-44. ; Reid, "Indonesian Diplomacy A Documentary Study of Atjehnese Foreign Policy," 81-82. ; Paul van 't Veer, "Atjeh 1873, een oorlog op papier."

⁵⁰ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 44-46.

⁵¹ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'Afgezien van het goede recht dat een bedreigd land heeft elders steun te zoeken, is dit verraadsverhaal een der grofste stukken vervalsing uit onze geschiedenis.' ; Paul van 't Veer, "Atjeh 1873, een oorlog op papier."

Acehnese dealings in Singapore reached The Hague, the Dutch wanted to make their claim on Aceh known to the world as soon as possible, and the only way to do this was by ‘military display of power’.⁵²

1873: The declaration of war and the first expedition

After the Dutch Minister of Colonies was notified about the Acehnese betrayal by Governor-General Loudon, the Dutch Governor’s Commissioner Nieuwenhuijzen was quickly sent to Aceh on a secret mission. Nieuwenhuijzen’s task, however, was rather unclear. Namely, the officials were still discussing how the situation had to be handled by the time Nieuwenhuijzen had left for Aceh.⁵³ On his arrival, he was instructed by Governor-General Loudon “to demand from Atjeh the recognition of Netherlands sovereignty within 24 hours, and to declare war in the case of non-fulfilment.”⁵⁴ Even though the Minister of Colonies did not agree with this language because it would look bad internationally, Loudon had decided that “As long as [Atjeh] does not recognize our sovereignty foreign intervention will continue to threaten us like the sword of Damocles [...] Atjeh has cast the die.”⁵⁵ With these instructions in hand, Nieuwenhuijzen sought contact with the 16 year old Sultan.⁵⁶

Regardless of Nieuwenhuijzen’s threats, the Sultan claimed that he wished for a peaceful relation and that he had done nothing wrong.⁵⁷ Since this answer was not satisfactory, Nieuwenhuijzen declared war on behalf of the Dutch East Indies Government, on the 26th of March 1873 and symbolically fired the first shot at the Acehnese beach.⁵⁸ The Acehnese ‘betrayal’, according to Van ‘t Veer, would be used as the *casus belli* for the war manifesto.⁵⁹ Interestingly enough, the Dutch Parliament was only alerted about this in the beginning of April. By then, it was too late to interfere and the Dutch armed forces were already on their way to infiltrate Acehnese territory.⁶⁰

⁵² Hagen, *Koloniale oorlogen in Indonesië*, 445.

⁵³ Van ‘t Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 45-51.

⁵⁴ Cited in: Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 94.

⁵⁵ Cited in: Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 95.

⁵⁶ Van ‘t Veer, “Atjeh 1873, een oorlog op papier”.

⁵⁷ Hagen, *Koloniale oorlogen in Indonesië*, 446.

⁵⁸ Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 94-96. ; Hagen, *Koloniale oorlogen in Indonesië*, 446.

⁵⁹ Van ‘t Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 44.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 51-52.

The Dutch armed forces had little time to prepare for the war and consequently, the expedition was ill-prepared. Not only the weaponry was insufficient, but assembling the troops proved to be difficult. Furthermore, the Dutch navy was in a poor condition which also made transporting the troops challenging.⁶¹ As De Jong writes:

Though the feeling was that the matter would come to a head in the very near future, this did not mean that actual military measures were taken to invade Aceh [...] Consequently, when the war broke out in March 1873, the navy was inadequately equipped, the infantry did not have enough modern rifles and in any case had been drilled insufficiently with those they had, and furthermore the army lacked a General Staff.⁶²

Besides the poor preparations of the armed forces, the Dutch lacked vital information: they had no adequate maps of Aceh, they lacked information on its general geography and they had no idea where the capital was that they needed to conquer. Besides, while the Dutch had expected a swift victory, they were surprised by fierce resistance from the Acehnese.⁶³ After seventeen days, the death of the commander, the loss of over eighty men and more than 411 injured, the first expedition had to retreat and was thus a huge fiasco.⁶⁴ Reid concludes: 'The Dutch force of 3,000 men [had] suffered the most decisive repulse ever given to Dutch arms in the East.'⁶⁵

The international context of the Aceh War

Besides fickle Dutch-Acehnese relations, there were multiple (international) circumstances, events and relations that influenced the course of action taken by both parties. For instance, an important international development in the run-up to the war was the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Due to its opening, the east side of Sumatra and the adjacent waterway gained traffic and it enabled commerce in the area to rise. Consequently, control of this waterway and adjacent ports became more important. Aceh, for that matter, formed the last hurdle on Sumatra that was not yet under Dutch control.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Ibid, 50-51.

⁶² De Jong, "Negotiations in Bismarckian Style," 41.

⁶³ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 52-53.

⁶⁴ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 54. ; Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 75.

⁶⁵ Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 96.

⁶⁶ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 30-31. ; Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 66.

Equally important were the relations that both states established with other states. For instance, the Dutch closely monitored the international relations of Aceh. In doing so, the Dutch were alerted that Aceh tried to transfer its sovereignty to the Ottomans in 1868 in the hopes of thereby receiving protection against the Dutch. The Imperial Sultan had to decline due to circumstances, but the Acehnese would try again.⁶⁷ In addition, the Acehnese also approached the French, the Spanish, the British, the United States and Italy for protection against the Dutch.⁶⁸ Logically, the Dutch tried to stop these developments for it would not benefit their interests in Sumatra if Aceh gained an ally against them.

Throughout the nineteenth century, and in the run up to the Aceh War, Anglo-Dutch rivalry was of great importance. In order to prevent this competition from ending in a violent clash, both states initiated the signing of treaties. One of the more important treaties was the Sumatra Tractate of 1824.⁶⁹ With this treaty the British and Dutch drew ‘an imaginary line down the Straits of Melaka and Singapore between the territories into which the Dutch and the British could intervene and those in which they could not’.⁷⁰ Resulting from this was that the British relinquished their claims over Sumatra, if the Dutch would guarantee the autonomous status of Aceh. Furthermore, the Dutch agreed to take on the task of monitoring and negotiating with the Acehnese about not obstructing the safe passage of ships, merchants, sailors or cetera in their adjacent seas.⁷¹ Consequently, with this treaty, the Dutch gained influence over Aceh under the watchful eye of Britain.

In 1871, another Anglo-Dutch treaty was signed. In this treaty, the British no longer demanded the independency of Aceh in return for trade benefits on Sumatra and Dutch colonial territory in Africa. In addition, the Dutch became fully responsible for the protection of ships and commerce in the seas surrounding Aceh and from there onwards they could take more firm action.⁷² Nonetheless, the Dutch Minister of Colonies at the time stated that: ‘it was not the Dutch intention to deal with the Acehnese in any unfriendly way nor to expand

⁶⁷ Van ‘t Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 30-31. ; Reid, “Indonesian Diplomacy A Documentary Study of Atjehnese Foreign Policy,” 75.

⁶⁸ Van ‘t Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 39. ; Reid, “Indonesian Diplomacy A Documentary Study of Atjehnese Foreign Policy,” 82.

⁶⁹ Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 1-14.

⁷⁰ Nicholas Tarling, “Maritime Security and Piracy,” in *Maritime Security in East and Southeast Asia. Political Challenges in Asian Waters*, ed. Nicholas Tarling and Xin Chen (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 18.

⁷¹ Van ‘t Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 12. ; De Winter, “Selling the Aceh War,” 181.

⁷² De Winter, “Selling the Aceh War,” 181. ; Van ‘t Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 32-35.

colonial territory. But, if necessary, the Dutch were now able to act.⁷³ His statement was in line with Dutch colonial policy of 'abstention'.⁷⁴ As De Jong explains: 'the general feeling was that the empire was already too big and military expeditions ought to be undertaken only if strictly necessary. The Dutch had neither the means nor the men to pursue a policy of colonization.'⁷⁵ Therefore, expansion was only deemed sensible if it was profitable. Nonetheless due to a "colonial paradox", territorial expansion happened regardless of profitability.⁷⁶

At the time of the 1871 Anglo-Dutch treaty, many smaller subordinate Acehnese states at the shore were at war with one another which obstructed the commercial interests of both powers. Therefore, they discussed that, if the Dutch were to take control in the region and stop the unrest, this would be beneficial for both colonial powers.⁷⁷ The British allowed the Dutch to take control because they reasoned that 'strategic corners of the world were better in Dutch hands than in those of some stronger Power'.⁷⁸ Reid writes about the treaty that '[it] was explicitly made at the expense of Atjeh, which once again was neither consulted nor responsibly considered.'⁷⁹ Due to these treaties that were supposed to regulate Anglo-Dutch rivalry, the Dutch now had the power to harm Acehnese sovereignty permanently.

Of particular influence on the haste of Dutch actions was also the fact that other Western states came looking for trade opportunities and opportunities to colonize in South-East Asia. Reid describes a development in the second half of the 19th century in which 'France and America, soon to be followed by Germany and Italy, were ready to dispute the Anglo-Dutch colonial monopoly in South-East Asia.'⁸⁰ For example, there were Italian war vessels spotted in the Indonesian waters that were looking for new trade routes and a location for a penal colony. This in turn worried the Dutch since they deemed this area within the 'Dutch sphere of influence' and they were not eager to share with another power in the region.⁸¹ De Jong writes that 'The imminent danger of other Western nations taking possession of Aceh had grown immensely since the opening of the Suez Canal. This new waterway made the

⁷³ De Jong, "Negotiations in Bismarckian Style," 41.

⁷⁴ Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 21. ; De Jong, "Negotiations in Bismarckian Style," 41.

⁷⁵ De Jong, "Negotiations in Bismarckian Style," 41.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 32-35.

⁷⁸ Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 52. ; De Jong, "Negotiations in Bismarckian Style," 40.

⁷⁹ Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 51.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 52.

⁸¹ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 40-41.

possession of trading stations very desirable.⁸² Sightings of foreign vessels in Indonesian waters happened often and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs conversed about these concerns with foreign states that were spotted in the area.⁸³ Because of this external pressure and because of Aceh's eagerness to find a new ally against the Dutch 'the Expansionists in Batavia were not slow to exploit the new bogey of foreign intervention as the only way of inducing tight-fisted politicians to allow a forward step.'⁸⁴

By extension, imperialism played a role in the international political scene at the time and it affected interstate relations and choices from Dutch colonial officials. Historians are in debate whether the Aceh War should be seen as the start of Dutch imperialism.⁸⁵ Historian Maarten Kuitenbrouwer defines imperialism as "a historical process, shaped by the intended and unintended consequences of the efforts of Western powers to establish hegemony over non-Western societies."⁸⁶ Historian Eric Tagliacozzo writes how Dutch colonial expansion moved in 'fits and starts, sometimes on the basis of policy decisions, but at other times in response to events in various peripheral locations.'⁸⁷ In line with this, Kuitenbrouwer describes that the Dutch already had a history of resorting to violent means when a foreign power tried to claim regions that they deemed theirs. The Aceh War is then a prime example of this tendency.⁸⁸ Tagliacozzo concludes that the Aceh War 'signaled the real beginnings of a sea-change in Dutch policy. Expansionism now became a vital part of government discourse, as the civilizing mission of the Netherlands was trumpeted with great fanfare, and nationalism grew as a shaping force in politics and policy.'⁸⁹

⁸² De Jong, "Negotiations in Bismarckian Style," 43.

⁸³ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 40-41.

⁸⁴ Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, 21. ; De Jong, "Negotiations in Bismarckian Style," 41.

⁸⁵ Confer: Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, "Het imperialisme-debat in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving," *BMGN* 113 (1998): 1, 56-73.

⁸⁶ This quote is my own translation. The original quote: "een historisch proces, gevormd door de bedoelde en onbedoelde gevolgen van het streven van Westerse mogendheden naar de vestiging van heerschappij over niet-Westerse samenlevingen." ; Cited in: Kuitenbrouwer, "Het imperialisme-debat in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving," 60.

⁸⁷ Eric Tagliacozzo, "Kettle on a Slow Boil: Batavia's Threat Perceptions in the Indies' Outer Islands, 1870-1910," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 31 (Mar. 2000): 1, 90.

⁸⁸ Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst van het moderne imperialisme*, 59.

⁸⁹ Tagliacozzo, "Kettle on a Slow Boil," 91.

Piracy in the Strait of Malacca

The Strait of Malacca, on which Aceh was situated, was prone to piracy (figure 2). This was stimulated by a lack of political control in the Strait in combination with a surge in traffic and commerce. These conditions drew Acehnese pirates and marauders from the whole region to the Strait. Of these pirates, most were based in areas controlled by the Dutch like the Riau-Lingga Archipelago or Sumatra.⁹⁰ These pirates were not only active at open sea, nor were they solely looting precious cargo: they also attacked coastal towns and they captured people to sell them as slaves.⁹¹ Suppressing these pirates proved challenging for colonial powers.⁹² The British and Dutch, tried to make agreements for battling piracy in their treaties from 1824 and 1871.⁹³ However, ‘the efforts of the colonial powers to suppress piracy and other forms of maritime violence in the Strait of Malacca in the nineteenth century were hampered by imperial rivalry.’⁹⁴ Furthermore, by battling piracy emanating from Sumatra and the Strait of Malacca, the Dutch asserted their sovereignty which was of importance in the context of Anglo-Dutch rivalry and colonial expansion.⁹⁵

Historian À Campo writes that ‘piracy was constructed in the confrontation of colonial and indigenous states.’⁹⁶ Likewise, Amirell describes how the Dutch labeled entire indigenous communities as pirates and in doing so they could legitimize (maritime) violence. By doing this, and by being active in battling ‘piracy’ in the Strait of Malacca, the Dutch used the label of piracy to justify colonial expansion.⁹⁷ Even though the fight against piracy was used as a tool for colonial expansion, ‘[combatting piracy] kept pace with this expansion but could not outstrip it, because social reforms were required to eradicate the roots of piracy.’⁹⁸ In addition, the Dutch saw the battle against piracy as a way to bring ‘civilization’ to the colony. When successful in their efforts, the Dutch saw their colonial state legitimized.⁹⁹

⁹⁰ Amirell, *Pirates of Empire*, 106.

⁹¹ Ibid, 106-107.

⁹² Ibid, 121.

⁹³ Ibid, 105-106.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 105.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 112.

⁹⁶ J.N.F.M. à Campo, “Discourse without Discussion: Representations of Piracy in Colonial Indonesia 1816-25,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34 (2003): 2, 199.

⁹⁷ Amirell, *Pirates of Empire*, 158.

⁹⁸ J.N.F.M. à Campo, “Asymmetry, Disparity and Cyclicity: Charting the Piracy Conflict in Colonial Indonesia,” *International Journal of Maritime History* XIX (2007): 1, 62.

⁹⁹ À Campo, “Discourse without Discussion,” 213.

The Dutch characterized Aceh as ‘a nest of pirates [...] the piratical inclinations of the Acehnese were linked to their adherence to Islam, which combined with the country’s geographical position to make it a particularly prominent hotbed of piracy.’¹⁰⁰ Piracy was thought to be in the nature of the Acehnese.¹⁰¹ Consequently, Aceh was seen as a *roofstaat* (robber state) and the Dutch blamed the Acehnese for all piratical incidents surrounding Sumatra. Even though some Acehnese were involved in piracy, Amirell describes that ‘There was very little piratical activity around the Acehnese coast for most of the 1860s and early 1870s’.¹⁰² Therefore, he concludes that ‘When the Dutch in 1873 decided to invade Aceh, piracy was thus not a credible *casus belli*. In fact, the piratical activity that still occurred along the east coast of Sumatra seemed mainly to reflect badly on the colonial authorities rather than on Aceh.’¹⁰³

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the political, economic, international and historical context of the Aceh War. It started off by showing how the Dutch Acehnese relations deteriorated in the 19th century due to Dutch expansionism on Sumatra. It also discussed how the Dutch and Acehnese were often in conflict with one another, despite one treaty, and how they constantly tried to undermine each other. Aceh was the last state on Sumatra that was not under Dutch control by 1874.

Since Aceh was trying to protect itself from Dutch expansionism, they tried to transfer sovereignty to the Ottoman empire on multiple occasions and they had contact with different Western powers to form an alliance. The Dutch on the other hand took a more aggressive stance in the hopes of bluffing Aceh into a new treaty. In 1872, the Acehnese and Dutch tried once more to mend their relationship. Yet, the Acehnese were in contact with other Western powers as well. The Dutch spoke of an ‘Acehnese betrayal’ which would form the *casus belli* for the war. After sending the Governor’s Commissioner to Aceh to negotiate on Dutch terms, the negotiations led to nothing. Thus, an ill prepared war was declared that ended in a humiliating loss of the first expedition for the Dutch.

¹⁰⁰ Amirell, *Pirates of Empire*, 154.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 158.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 154.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*.

As for the international context of the war, there were multiple reasons that made the Dutch anxious to act quickly. Acehnese relations with other states worried the Dutch and the opening of the Suez Canal made Aceh a more important (economic) strategic position. In addition, Anglo-Dutch rivalry had an influence on Dutch actions and it obliged the Dutch to provide safety in the Acehnese seas. In relation to this, conflicts between subordinate Acehnese states were causing issues in the coastal areas. The British and Dutch discussed that they would both benefit if the Dutch were to take control in the region and bring back peace. Yet, one of the most influential circumstances was the fact that other states came to the Indonesian archipelago in order to find territory to colonize. The Dutch deemed the whole region to be within their sphere of influence and they would not risk losing it. Imperialism thus also played a role.

Piracy and associated slavery had been a problem for a long time in the seas surrounding Aceh. The Dutch and British had tried to eradicate the issue, yet the pirates were hard to fight and imperial rivalry complicated matters. By framing indigenous populations as pirates, the Dutch justified the use of violence and the term piracy became a tool for colonial expansion. Aceh in particular was known for piracy and the Dutch blamed the piratical incidents in its adjacent seas on them. Piracy was also an argument for the start of the Aceh War. Even though, in retrospect the number of piratical incidents was not that high in the run up to the war. How did these historical, international, political and economic contexts translate into the pleas of the officials to justify the Aceh War towards the Dutch Parliament?

Chapter 2

Introduction

How do you convince a Parliament of a war you already started? This question must have crossed the mind of the Minister of Colonies, Fransen van de Putte when he addressed the House of Representatives about the Aceh War in April 1873. In fact, he had his work cut out for him since the Aceh War was one of the most debated wars in the press and in the Parliament throughout 1873. More so, after the first expedition ended in a humiliating defeat, the Minister had to endure a lot of criticism and discerning questions as to why and how the war was started.¹⁰⁴

Historian Van 't Veer stresses that the Aceh War was unique in history since it was the first colonial war that was not seen as self-explanatory, not even by its participants. Moreover, he stated that 'For the first time the question was raised whether this war against the largest of the still independent empires in the Indonesian archipelago, was justified on moral grounds.'¹⁰⁵ He writes that this development affected the way in which colonial wars were fought from hereon, since the question of moral justification became routine. During the Aceh War, the question of moral justification was mostly debated through publications and Van 't Veer states that it had caused the most publications about a colonial war, ever.¹⁰⁶

In relation to the justification of the war, historian De Jong writes that there was one big difference between the Aceh War and previous colonial wars: 'the news about the defeat now spread more quickly and on a wider scale' and she sees an 'increasing role of public opinion and the press.'¹⁰⁷ One can therefore only imagine how important it was for the Cabinet to successfully justify the war towards the Dutch Parliament, above all since 'The political elite in The Hague certainly would have been able to "significantly influence decisions in the field of security" with regard to the Acehnese question.'¹⁰⁸

This chapter is dedicated to the reconstruction of how the Aceh War was securitized. First the analysis will focus on how the war was justified within the Cabinet itself by focusing

¹⁰⁴ De Jong, "Negotiations in Bismarckian Style," 38-39. ; Van 't Veer, "Atjeh 1873, een oorlog op papier".

¹⁰⁵ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'Voor het eerst werd de vraag gesteld of deze oorlog tegen het grootste der nog zelfstandige rijken in de Indische archipel, wel op morele gronden gerechtvaardigd was.' ; Van 't Veer, "Atjeh 1873, een oorlog op papier".

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Both citations: De Jong, "Negotiations in Bismarckian Style," 40.

¹⁰⁸ De Winter, "Selling the Aceh War," 188.

on the then secret correspondence from Governor-General Loudon and Fransen van de Putte. Thereafter, the chapter will focus on how their personal motives translated into the justification towards the enabling audience: the Dutch Parliament. What were their personal reasons for supporting a war against Aceh and which reasons were presented to the Dutch parliamentarians? Moreover, how were the arguments presented to Parliament, what frames were used, what threats were discussed and what modes of argument were dominant?

Justification within the government

Governor-General Loudon

On the 15th and 16th of February 1873 Governor-General Loudon received letters from the Consul of Singapore warning him about secret negotiations between the Acehnese and the Italians and Americans. This Acehnese action, framed as the Acehnese betrayal, was seen by Loudon as an existential threat to the Dutch colonial empire and he immediately contacted the Minister of Colonies in order to discuss how they should proceed. His message set in motion a process that would lead to the first military expedition in April that year.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, most historians agree that Loudon was the, somewhat impulsive and naïve, instigator of the war.¹¹⁰ According to De Winter, the personal correspondence of Loudon should be seen as ‘the internal speech act aimed at the political elite in the Hague.’¹¹¹ In fact, Loudon’s letters to the Minister of Colonies, that are analyzed here, were secret and only shared within the Cabinet. Yet, what did he try to convince them of and what were Fransen van de Putte’s own believes?

In his correspondence, the Governor-General argued that there was no time to waste nor that there was any other satisfactory outcome than Dutch sovereignty over Aceh since Loudon felt that other outcomes would not be a permanent solution.¹¹² Therefore, Loudon wrote that he wanted to act firm and quick by demanding that the Acehnese Sultan would

¹⁰⁹ Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Collection 232 James Loudon, number access 2.21.183.50, inventory number 1. (Hereafter: NL-HaNA, Loudon, James, 2.21.183.50, inv. nr. ...).

¹¹⁰ Confer: Van 't Veer, “Atjeh 1873, een oorlog op papier”. ; De Jong, “Negotiations in Bismarckian Style,” 41-48.

¹¹¹ De Winter, “Selling the Aceh War,” 184.

¹¹² Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Collection 442 F.N. Nieuwenhuijzen [1819-1892], number access 2.21.205.44, inventory number 68. (Hereafter: NL-HaNA, Nieuwenhuijzen, 2.21.205.44, inv.nr. ...) ; NL-HaNA, Loudon, James, 2.21.183.50, inv. nr 1.

recognize Dutch sovereignty within 24 hours.¹¹³ According to De Jong, Loudon wished to pressure the Acehese authorities and he wanted to make them ‘understand that the Dutch would not allow themselves to be ridiculed and that an end had to be made to their independent behaviour.’¹¹⁴ She describes that Loudon had envisioned ‘a quick punitive action, followed by a treaty’, as had been a common method for the Dutch when in conflict with an indigenous state.¹¹⁵ Yet, she also argues that he never wanted to annex Aceh.¹¹⁶ De Winter in turn writes that Loudon wanted to act quick and with violence in order to pressure Aceh into a peaceful solution and to deter other Western states at the same time.¹¹⁷

Throughout his correspondence, Loudon framed the war as inevitable for multiple reasons. He wrote how the Acehese misconduct and uncooperative attitude had left the Dutch with no other options than to use violence. Moreover, he stated that the treaty of 1871 obliged the Dutch state to intervene and he wrote that if the Dutch did not respond, it would risk their position as a colonial power. He concluded: ‘there was undeniably a casus belli present.’¹¹⁸ This mode of thinking, that not acting would threaten the Dutch position in the archipelago, was also often connected to thinking about Dutch honor throughout his writing. By example: ‘That war, by the way, was unavoidable, if we did not want to completely forfeit our so indispensable prestige in the Archipelago.’¹¹⁹ In addition, he often wrote how Aceh had offended Dutch prestige without repercussions and that it was about time to act up: ‘We could not risk our prestige in the Archipelago by idly enduring and doing nothing.’¹²⁰ It is therefore clear that Loudon framed the Acehese behavior into a threat for the Dutch prestige and the power of the colonial empire in general.¹²¹ According to De Winter, Loudon’s letters to

¹¹³ NL-HaNA, Loudon, James, 2.21.183.50, inv. nr. 60. ; NL-HaNA, Loudon, James, 2.21.183.50, inv. nr. 1.

¹¹⁴ De Jong, “Negotiations in Bismarckian Style,” 42.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 41-42.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ De Winter, “Selling the Aceh War,” 192.

¹¹⁸ This quote is my own translation. The original text: ‘het is steeds mijne overtuiging geweest, dat na het Londensche traktaat van 1871, onze afrekening met Atjeh niet kon uitblijven, en dat het aanmatigend, tartend en beleedigend gedrag van het rijk, ons tot uitersten zou dwingen, wilden wij ons standpunt als koloniale mogendheid niet prijs geven [...] er was ontegenzeggelijk een casus belli aanwezig.’ ; NL-HaNA, Loudon, James, 2.21.183.50, inv. nr. 1.

¹¹⁹ This quote is my own translation. The original tekst: ‘die oorlog was trouwens niet te vermijden, als wij ons zoo onmisbaar prestige in den Archipel niet geheel wilden verspelen.’; NL-HaNA, Loudon, James, 2.21.183.50, inv. nr. 1. ; See also: NL-HaNA, Loudon, James, 2.21.183.50, inv. nr. 33. ; De Winter, “Selling the Aceh War,” 192-193.

¹²⁰ This quote is my own translation. The original text: ‘Wij konden niet ons aanzien in den Archipel op het spel zetten door lijdzaam dragen en niets doen.’ ; NL-HaNA, Loudon, James, 2.21.183.50, inv. nr. 1.

¹²¹ NL-HaNA, Loudon, James, 2.21.183.50, inv. nr. 1.

Fransen van de Putte met the criteria of securitization and he '[succeeded] in constructing an existential threat whilst proposing war as the only viable option left to the Dutch Cabinet.'¹²²

In Loudon's instruction for Nieuwenhuijzen he enclosed an exposition of reasons why this mission was necessary, if not justified, besides the actual instructions for the mission. He wrote that the Dutch general interests in the archipelago were at risk and that safe trade and shipping were under pressure. He continued by emphasizing the treacherous behavior of the Acehnese in Singapore and the therefrom resulting threat of foreign interference.¹²³ Furthermore, he stressed how Aceh had violated the treaty of Peace, Friendship and Trade.¹²⁴ He emphasized how the Dutch interests and presence in the Indonesian archipelago and on Sumatra in particular, were at risk. Considering all this, Loudon wrote that the treacherous behavior of the Acehnese should be put to an end.¹²⁵ Furthermore, Nieuwenhuijzen was tasked with preventing foreign powers from gaining access to Aceh, however, he had to avoid getting into conflict.¹²⁶ Loudon concluded that force was the only tool left and that he only cared 'to make Atchin recognize our sovereignty, and thereby keep foreign influence from Sumatra [...] to keep foreign countries out of our affairs.'¹²⁷ It is clear that Loudon used his instructions to Nieuwenhuijzen to justify the war since Nieuwenhuijzen was not only told what to do, but he was also given reasons why this expedition was just. This was probably also a strategic move by Loudon since Nieuwenhuijzen now had the correct reasonings for the war declaration and because Loudon must have known that these instructions were bound to become public at one point.

Loudon wrote in his memoires that the threat of a possible intervention by Italy or the United States sped up the process in the run up to the war.¹²⁸ Some historians however, are critical about whether this was true or whether the threat was merely an excuse for Dutch expansionism. Historian Read for instance writes that: 'Fear of immediate foreign intervention in Atjeh was certainly not the cause of Batavia's impetuousness [...] A series of rumours about foreign intentions did however enable [...] Loudon to maintain the feeling of urgency they

¹²² De Winter, "Selling the Aceh War," 188.

¹²³ NL-HaNA, Nieuwenhuijzen, 2.21.205.44, inv.nr. 67. ; NL-HaNA, Nieuwenhuijzen, 2.21.205.44, inv.nr. 68.

¹²⁴ NL-HaNA, Nieuwenhuijzen, 2.21.205.44, inv.nr 67. ; NL-HaNA, Nieuwenhuijzen, 2.21.205.44, inv.nr. 68.

¹²⁵ NL-HaNA, Nieuwenhuijzen, 2.21.205.44, inv.nr. 67. ; NL-HaNA, Nieuwenhuijzen, 2.21.205.44, inv.nr. 68.

¹²⁶ NL-HaNA, Nieuwenhuijzen, 2.21.205.44, inv.nr. 67. ; NL-HaNA, Nieuwenhuijzen, 2.21.205.44, inv.nr. 68.

¹²⁷ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'om Atsjin onze souvereiniteit te doen erkennen, en daardoor vreemden invloed van Sumatra te weren [...] om het buitenland buiten onze zaken te houden.' ; NL-HaNA, Nieuwenhuijzen, 2.21.205.44, inv.nr. 67.

¹²⁸ NL-HaNA, Loudon, James, 2.21.183.50, inv. nr. 1.

thought necessary to carry through a strong policy.¹²⁹ Historian Hagen agrees that the argument of foreign intervention was merely an excuse to use force.¹³⁰ Fransen van de Putte and Loudon also knew by the time that the war commenced that Italy nor the United States were serious about an alliance with Aceh.¹³¹ Historian De Jong however, states that Loudon's private correspondence clearly shows that he in fact was afraid of foreign interference and that another state would form an alliance with Aceh before they could.¹³²

De Winter analyzed frames and narratives used by Governor-General Loudon throughout some of his letters. He saw a few reoccurring frames and described how 'In the second half of the 19th century the political context in the Netherlands was characterized [...] by a legalistic and moralistic approach to international relations in general and the rise of modern imperialism regarding its colony in the East Indies.'¹³³ This translated into framing the Aceh War as a just war on the one hand and on the other hand De Winter clearly saw imperialistic motives throughout the correspondence.¹³⁴ De Winter states that 'just war theory regards war only permissible in self-defense. The concept of imperialism is at odds with just war theory.'¹³⁵ This however, is an interesting contradiction since imperialism was also a part of Loudon's narratives to frame the Aceh War. De Winter states that 'imperialism was driven by economic incentives and the inclination to compete with other colonial empires over unconquered territory.'¹³⁶ This was clearly present in Loudon's letters analyzed above and De Winter saw it in 'phrases such as "Dutch existence on - and possession of Sumatra" and advancing arguments for a forceful response to Italian and American attempts to establish relations with the Sultan.'¹³⁷ Furthermore, he writes that throughout his letters, Loudon appeals to the emotion of the reader to realize quick action.¹³⁸ This was also found in the letters analyzed above. Are these tendencies also visible in Fransen van de Putte's correspondence?

¹²⁹ Read, *The contest for North-Sumatra*, 95.

¹³⁰ Hagen, *Koloniale oorlogen in Indonesië*, 445.

¹³¹ NL-HaNA, Nieuwenhuijzen, 2.21.205.44, inv.nr. 67. ; Hagen, *Koloniale oorlogen in Indonesië*, 445.

¹³² De Jong, "'Negotiations in Bismarckian Style,'" 42.

¹³³ De Winter, "Selling the Aceh War," 188-189.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 192-193.

Minister of Colonies Fransen van de Putte

After analyzing the correspondence of the Minister of Colonies with Loudon, there are a few noticeable returning arguments, threats and reasons for him and the Cabinet to support the first expedition. Like Loudon, he too emphasized the threat of foreign influence, even possible intervention in Northern Sumatra, the Acehese betrayal and the Dutch obligation to provide safety in Acehese waters.¹³⁹ For him too, the main reason to send Nieuwenhuijzen to Aceh was the fear for foreign intervention.¹⁴⁰ Even though he did express doubts about whether this threat was real enough, he stated that he was not willing to risk it.¹⁴¹ The risk of a foreign power reaching Aceh before the Dutch, required the utmost urgency, or the Dutch freedom to act in the archipelago would be at risk.¹⁴² Yet, he wanted to be cautious in order to avoid a conflict with another state.¹⁴³ In relation to this, he argued that foreign intervention would violate Dutch rights in the region and would cause Aceh to be a bigger threat. This would of course force the Dutch to use violence.¹⁴⁴ He wrote that: ‘such an intervention is [...] to be considered as an illegal interference in difficulties between the State of the Netherlands and Aceh; is to be considered as taking sides for Aceh against the Netherlands in a pending dispute.’¹⁴⁵ These arguments emphasize the role imperialism has in Fransen van de Putte’s correspondence.

His *casus belli* for the war was the refusal of Aceh to meet Dutch demands of providing guarantees and explaining their betrayal.¹⁴⁶ He stated that if the Dutch were to tolerate these Acehese actions, it might look as if they were doubting the purity and lawfulness of their own actions.¹⁴⁷ He wanted it to be clear that Acehese behavior and treachery had left the Dutch with no other choice than to respond with violence.¹⁴⁸ Ergo, he wanted to prove that the war was just. According to the Minister, there could only be safety in the region if European

¹³⁹ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 66-68. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 53-59.

¹⁴⁰ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 44. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 53-55.

¹⁴¹ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 44. ; NL-HaNA, Loudon, James, 2.21.183.50, inv. nr. 60.

¹⁴² Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 58.

¹⁴³ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 60.

¹⁴⁴ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 54.

¹⁴⁵ This quote is my own translation. The original text: ‘zoodanige tusschenkomst is, gelijk ik in mijn telegram opmerkte, te beschouwen als eene onregmatige inmenging in moeijelijkheden tusschen den Staat der Nederlanden en Atjeh; is aan te merken als het kiezen van partij voor Atjeh tegen Nederland in een hangend geschil.’ ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 58.

¹⁴⁶ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 58.

¹⁴⁷ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 58.

¹⁴⁸ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 64.

influence was present and this European influence should be provided by the Dutch since ‘the largest part of Sumatra is subject to Dutch authority, because Aceh borders the Dutch territory, and because the nature of the insular colonial possession implies that mixing of European influences on the same island, which so easily leads to clashes, should be avoided.’¹⁴⁹ More so, he wrote that the Dutch had the right to ‘demand that the foreign powers refrain from any measures which might interfere with our fulfillment of obligations imposed on us both by international agreements and by our position in the Indian Archipelago, and on Sumatra in particular.’¹⁵⁰ This plea also shows the same argument as Loudon about the Dutch obligation and right to guarantee safe seas, and it clearly shows his imperialistic reasonings.¹⁵¹

Throughout the analyzed correspondence, Fransen van de Putte appeared engaged with the justification process that needed to happen towards the Dutch Parliament, citizens and the international community. In fact, proving that the war was just seemed to be prominent throughout his letters. In his correspondence, the Minister requested more proof of the Acehnese betrayal from Loudon in order to justify the war. For example, he wrote that such proof ‘will undoubtedly come in handy, and for informing the government here at home in itself, and in consulting with foreign powers, and for accountability to the States General.’¹⁵² Moreover, he often wrote about the ‘lawfulness’ of Dutch actions throughout his correspondence therewith also showing his preoccupation with proving that the war was just.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ This quote is my own translation. The original text: ‘dringend noodig was die bestendige veiligheid te verzekeren door de gematigde uitoefening van Europeschen invloed, en waar dit eenmaal vaststond, kon het geene vraag meer zijn wie dien invloed moest uitoefenen. Nederland was daartoe de aangewezen mogendheid, omdat het grootste gedeelte van Sumatra aan het Nederlandsch gezag onderworpen is, omdat Atjeh aan het Nederlandsch gebied grenst, en omdat de aard van het insulair koloniaal bezit medebrenghet, dat vermenging van Europesche invloeden op hetzelfde eiland, die zoo ligt tot botsingen leidt, vermeden worde.’ ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 54. ; See also: Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 55.

¹⁵⁰ This quote is my own translation. The original text: ‘ons regt om te verlangen dat de vreemde mogendheden zich onthouden van maatregelen, die ons zouden kunnen bemoeijelijken in het vervullen der verpligtingen, welke ons zoowel door internationale overeenkomsten als door onze positie in den Indischen Archipel, en op Sumatra in het bijzonder zijn opgelegd.’ ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 53-54.

¹⁵¹ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 58.

¹⁵² This quote is my own translation. The original text: ‘Zij zullen ongetwijfeld te pas komen, en voor de inlichting der Regering hier te lande op zich zelve, en bij het overleg met vreemde mogendheden, en voor de verantwoording tegenover de Staten-Generaal.’ ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 61. ; See also: Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 46. ; NL-HaNA, Loudon, James, 2.21.183.50, inv. nr. 1.

¹⁵³ See for instance: Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 61. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 46.

His attention to the vindication of the war was also noticeable in the way he discussed the war manifesto with Loudon into great detail and his additional dislike of Loudon's plan to demand sovereignty straight away: 'When acting firmly and quickly it is all the more important to show that justice and thoughtfulness guide us. This could be doubted if sovereignty [...] were roughly put in the foreground. Such a thing seems as unnecessary as it is uncommon.'¹⁵⁴ He voiced that if Loudon were to demand sovereignty before negotiations had taken place, that it would leave a bad international impression since it would let others think that the Dutch were pursuing aggressive annexation-politics while he wanted it to be clear that they were acting out of self-defense.¹⁵⁵ Therewith showing the clash between imperialism and the consensus about what made a war just. He emphasized how the introduction and language of the manifesto were of great importance and how the 'form of the manifesto to Aceh controls the results there and the impressions here and with foreign powers.'¹⁵⁶ After he wrote to Loudon about his wishes for the manifesto, he stated that 'when our manifesto says all this clearly, and says nothing but this, it must make a good impression in the Indies, in the Netherlands and with foreign powers.'¹⁵⁷

Fransen van de Putte also wanted to influence what the international community heard about Dutch actions and motivations. Therefore, he wrote a letter to the Minister of Foreign affairs containing a carefully written explanation of Dutch-Acehnese relations and he added narratives about the Dutch stance in the conflict. Thereafter, he asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to use this narrative for communicating with foreign powers. What were the arguments that were supposed to convince colleagues abroad?

Fransen van de Putte starts of by stressing the legality of Dutch actions as opposed to Acehnese actions or a possible disruptive international interference.¹⁵⁸ Throughout his letter he framed the conflict as a battle between the civilized European and the barbaric

¹⁵⁴ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'Ons verschil betreft inleiding en vorm, maar die zijn hiervan groot gewigt. Bij krachtig en spoedig handelen blijft het te meer van belang te toonen dat regtvaardigheid en bedachtzaamheid ons leiden. Daaraan zou kunnen getwijfeld worden indien souvereiniteit, al moet die volgen, ruw weg op voorgrond werd gesteld. Zoo iets schijnt even onnoodig als weinig gebruikelijk.' ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 49. See also: Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 66-67. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 46.

¹⁵⁵ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 67.

¹⁵⁶ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'de vorm van manifest aan Atjeh beheerscht uitslag dáár en indruk hier en bij vreemde mogendheden.'; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 48.

¹⁵⁷ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'En wanneer ons manifest dit alles duidelijk zegt, en niets anders zegt dan dit, moet het in Indie, in Nederland en bij vreemde mogendheden een goeden indruk maken.' ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 67.

¹⁵⁸ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 54.

Acehnese.¹⁵⁹ Per example, he wrote that the Dutch tried to stop ‘barbaric customs’ and he wrote that within Aceh there was ‘orderlessness, injustice and arbitrariness [...] to the great detriment of the orderly and for commerce and the general civilization.’¹⁶⁰ Therewith stating that general civilization and economic safety were under threat by the Acehnese. He stressed that the Dutch were the only ones who could resolve this situation and bring back order and safety.¹⁶¹ He did not only see the Dutch fight against Aceh as a conflict of civilization, he even felt that ‘We would be taking a great step backwards, and giving proof of weakness to the whole of Europe and America, as well as to the princes and peoples of the Indian Archipelago, if we allowed ourselves to be indulged in the treatment that Aceh is giving us, and did not press on vigorously’.¹⁶² Hereby arguing that the Dutch and the European honor in general, were at risk and therewith trying to convince other states to support the Dutch efforts.

His characterization of Aceh as uncivilized was typical, namely De Jong describes how Western diplomats did not consider Aceh as an equal to a Western state and she writes how in other countries people saw the conflict as a conflict between the civilized and uncivilized. Furthermore, the conflict also carried symbolic importance since it would affect the dignity, power and prestige of every European colonial power.¹⁶³ De Jong states that the conflict therefore caused feelings of European solidarity and ‘it was obvious that the Dutch had to prevent losing the war with Aceh at all costs. For if they failed, would not be the conclusion be drawn that the Netherlands was too small to rule a large empire? Other nations could step in and take its place.’¹⁶⁴ It is clear that Fransen van de Putte tried to capitalize on these European sentiments when writing his letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Both Ministers were careful with what information they shared. In fact, Loudon and Fransen van de Putte wanted to keep their plans to send Nieuwenhuijzen to Aceh a secret for

¹⁵⁹ He also does this in other correspondence, see for instance: Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 58.

¹⁶⁰ This quote is my own translation. The original text: ‘ordeloozen toestand, van het onregt en de willekeur, welke thans in Atjeh heerschen, ten voordele misschien van de magthebbende, maar tot groote schade van de ordelievenden en van het handelsverkeer en de algemeene beschaving.’; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 54.

¹⁶¹ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 54.

¹⁶² This quote is my own translation. The original text: ‘Wij zouden eene grote schrede achterwaarts doen, en voor geheel Europa en Amerika, evenals voor de vorsten en bevolkingen van den Indischen Archipel, en bewijs van zwakheid geven, wanneer wij ons de bejegening, die Atjeh ons aandoet, lieten aanleunen, en niet flink doortastten, tot dat ons de voldoening is gegeven die wij kunnen vorderen.’; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 58.

¹⁶³ De Jong, “Negotiations in Bismarckian Style,” 44-45.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 48.

as long as possible.¹⁶⁵ In line with this, Fransen van de Putte was strategic about what information he shared with Parliament. Per example, he wrote to Loudon that he had shared no information about the international circumstances of the Aceh situation with the House during his speech on the 27th of February.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, he wrote in another letter that there were rumors about an upcoming Dutch expedition to Aceh, but that he had been careful with sharing information in the House and that he was able 'to calm the rising anxiety of the public by correct information and to prevent further exaggerations and misrepresentations. The impression made by the interpellation is, in my opinion, quite satisfactory.'¹⁶⁷ Knowing of his carefully thought-out speeches, how did he try to persuade the Parliament? Were the same arguments used, how were these arguments presented and contextualized and what material was in fact provided by the Ministers in order to convince the audience?

The first speech acts towards the enabling audience

The first time the Dutch House of Representatives was made aware of the rising tensions in the Dutch-Acehnese relations was on the 27th of February 1873, one month before the start of the war. The Minister of Colonies addressed the House and started his speech by describing past threats in the Indonesian Archipelago. He emphasized the constant difficulties in Dutch-Acehnese relations, whereby referring to Acehnese piracy and human trafficking and he made arguments about the unsafe situation for shipping and trade in the region. He proceeded and explained how the Sultan was doing nothing to solve these threats, nor did he deem him powerful enough to act. According to the Minister, these threats were commonplace and to make matters worse, Dutch friendly initiatives to mend the relationship were met with gross deception by the Acehnese. Considering this, Fransen van de Putte argued, the government had to 'act with greater vigor, in order to preserve our rightful influence in Sumatra.'¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 63.

¹⁶⁶ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 45.

¹⁶⁷ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'de klimmende ongerustheid van het publiek door juiste mededeelingen tot bedaren te brengen en verdere overdrijvingen en verkeerde voorstellingen te voorkomen. Over den indruk, dien de interpellatie gemaakt heeft, kan men, naar mij voorkomst, alleszins tevreden zijn.' ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 63.

¹⁶⁸ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'met meer kracht optreden, ten einde onzen regtmatigen invloed op Sumatra te bewaren.' ; Verslag der handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal (hereafter HTK) [Parliamentary Proceedings, House of Representatives], 1872-1873, 27-02-1873.

The Minister emphasized throughout his speech that it was absolutely not the goal of the government to expand their governance into Aceh, their sole goal was to ‘increase those guarantees for the exercise of moderate European influence, by us, without which - as has been shown again now, as in 1824 - no security for trade and shipping in the north of Sumatra can exist, and which is indispensable for our position in the Indian archipelago, and in Sumatra in particular.’¹⁶⁹ With this statement he already tried to deny any claims that the Dutch were perusing annexation politics instead of acting out of self-defense. Yet, there was also clearly imperialistic aspects in his plea that day. With this interpellation, Franssen van de Putte presented Aceh as a threat to general, political and economic safety in the archipelago and the Dutch empire in particular and therewith laid the groundwork for his speech acts in the upcoming April of that year.

The war had been going on for nine days by the time that the Dutch Parliament was officially informed about it on the 4th of April. Consequently, many of the speech acts, or securitizing moves by the government, had to be done from April onwards. The Minister of Colonies appeared to be the chosen representative for the Cabinet since he was the one who spoke the most during debates in Parliament. So, what arguments did he use to convince the them?

On the 4th, Franssen van de Putte presented a number of threats and situations to explain why war was declared on Aceh. Interestingly enough, he often referred to what he had said on the 27th of February and used those arguments as building blocks for his plea that day. Yet, his speech was not a complete repetition since he introduced the threat of foreign interference in North-Sumatra that had put the Dutch colonial empire and its interests at risk. The *casus belli* of the war was the Acehnese betrayal, as he had told them about before. Thereafter, he accounted for what had happened to the mission of Nieuwenhuijzen. He explained how the Acehnese had taken a hostile attitude towards the Dutch and that they were clearly arming themselves. Besides, the Sultan had failed to provide the demanded clarification. What else could Nieuwenhuijzen have done but to declare war? Interestingly enough, the Minister refused to give any additional information or explanations. When he was

¹⁶⁹ This quote is my own translation. The original text: ‘die waarborgen voor de uitoefening, door ons, van gematigden Europeschen invloed te verkrijgen zijn, zonder welke – gelijk thans weder, even als in 1824, gebleken is – geen veiligheid voor handel en scheepvaart in het noorden van Sumatra kan bestaan, en die voor onze stelling in den Indischen archipel, en op Sumatra in het bijzonder, onmisbaar is.’ ; HTK, 1872-1873, 27-02-1873.

asked critical questions, he invoked state secret or he emphasized that the House should form a united front behind the government. Furthermore, when deputies were critical, he often questioned their patriotism.¹⁷⁰

In order to understand the war, one must understand the past

Fransen van de Putte argued in the House of Representatives that if the parliamentarians wanted to understand the Aceh War, they should be familiar with its history.¹⁷¹ In order to achieve this, he distributed a carefully written memo on the history of the relations between Aceh and the Netherlands from 1824 onwards in the Senate and the House of Representatives. The memo was obviously not just meant to objectively inform the parliamentarians, but also to convince them of the Dutch course of actions.¹⁷² In fact, it was quite smart from Fransen van de Putte to use history in order to convince his audience, namely as Peoples and Vaughan-Williams explain, a securitizing actor will increase the acceptance of the speech act by the audience if the presented problems 'carry historical connotations of threat, danger, and harm, or where a history of hostile sentiments exists.'¹⁷³ What were these historical threats that Fransen van de Putte presented to his audience?

It is clear that the Minister wanted the Acehnese to be seen as a threat. Throughout the memo, he framed the Acehnese as bad, violent, unreliable, fickle, murderous, predatory, looting, scheming and arrogant people as opposed to the Dutch who were depicted as patient, helpful, noble, loyal, kind and just. Moreover, various crimes and violent behaviors of the Acehnese were highlighted throughout the memo to confirm that they were a real threat and that history proved that they could not be trusted.¹⁷⁴ Historian Tagliacozzo elaborates on historical threats within the Dutch empire at the time. One of the biggest threats was formed by the indigenous populations of Indonesia and then especially by the ones living in the outer-islands where Aceh was also situated. He writes that the Dutch took a number of measures to gain control over these populations throughout time, like for instance wars of conquest

¹⁷⁰ HTK, 1872-1873, 04-04-1873.

¹⁷¹ HTK, 1872-1873, 29-04-1873.

¹⁷² Interestingly enough, the memo contained footnotes with references to the original source or with the sources themselves in there as to make the memo appear neutral and reliable.

¹⁷³ Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security Studies*, 79.

¹⁷⁴ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 8-39.

against sultanates.¹⁷⁵ He states that: ‘These wars of conquest against “native enemies” are important in understanding perceptions of threats against the state at the turn of the century.’¹⁷⁶ In addition, these border areas, where Aceh was situated, were also commonly associated with the threat of uncontrolled violence.¹⁷⁷ It is clear that Fransen van de Putte referred to these already established threats throughout his memo.

Many times over, the memo frames Aceh's actions as defiant and disrespectful towards the Dutch East Indies Government and therefore as a threat.¹⁷⁸ This was done by describing multiple historical incidents in which the benevolent Dutch were wronged by the Acehnese, without provoking them. For instance, stories were told of the arrogant Sultan who did not want to receive Dutch envoys or who even tried to mislead and poison them.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, Dutch territories or protectorates were violated by the Acehnese, for instance because of looting or because the Sultan was annexing territories under Dutch protection. The Acehnese were also accused of stirring up people against the Dutch.¹⁸⁰ It was therefore clear that the Dutch were at risk of losing their prestige and honor in the region because of Acehnese misconduct.¹⁸¹ Thereafter it was argued that, if the Dutch did not retaliate after being wronged so many times, what is to stop other subordinate states from doing the same as Aceh?¹⁸² Or worse, if the Dutch did not intervene in Aceh, another power might step up and do it. Logically, the threat of foreign interference in the Dutch territory or sphere of influence is hereby important.¹⁸³

The next thoroughly emphasized historical threats were Acehnese piracy, slavery and human trafficking.¹⁸⁴ These threats had been used many times in the past by the Dutch colonial state to legitimize the use of violence against local populations and it was a well-established threat to the power of the colonial state at the time. Tagliacozzo writes that ‘One of the principal perceived threats to colonial state-making in insular Southeast Asia was piracy – the looting, robbing, and violence practiced by various seafaring peoples in the region.’¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁵ Eric Tagliacozzo, “Kettle on a Slow Boil,” 70-90.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 91.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 76-78.

¹⁷⁸ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 13. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 24.

¹⁷⁹ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 18.

¹⁸⁰ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 23-24.

¹⁸¹ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 13.

¹⁸² Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 26.

¹⁸³ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 8. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 15.

¹⁸⁴ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 11-19. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 26-32.

¹⁸⁵ Tagliacozzo, “Kettle on a Slow Boil,” 71. ; See also: Amirell, *Pirates of Empire*, 6.

By giving a historical overview of many violent cases of piracy, and by even providing sources and international news articles from various incidents, Fransen van de Putte showed how this threat was still relevant and required a Dutch intervention. In addition, the threat of piracy was often coupled to the unsafe situation for trade, shipping and commerce in the Acehnese seas. It was argued that this unsafe situation had to be remedied by the Dutch, since it was their obligation to guarantee safety in the Acehnese seas due to international treaties. Besides, if the Dutch would not intervene in the unsafe waters, another power might try to.¹⁸⁶ By writing this, another argument for a Dutch intervention, using piracy, is made, like it was done many times before. According to Amirell, the argument of piracy played a subordinate role in the Dutch justification for the war but it was still relevant to use since people were familiar with the image of 'Aceh as a pirate or robber state.'¹⁸⁷

The memo had to convince its reader of the fact that the war was just. The Dutch had always tried to find peaceful solutions when they were in conflict with Aceh, even when they had the right to retaliate with violence: 'How often had we, while for the protection of our territory and of the populations subject to our authority, for the honor of our flag, it would have been desirable to act more forcefully towards Aceh, contented ourselves with a purely defensive or even passive attitude in order to avoid war with Aceh.'¹⁸⁸ In relation to this, the violation of the bilateral treaty of 1857 was mentioned and according to the memo, Aceh has been guilty of violating the treaty several times throughout history.¹⁸⁹ Therewith endorsing the argument that a war was just and legitimized. Also endorsing this idea was the argument that peaceful solutions were not possible with Aceh since they were never willing to cooperate.¹⁹⁰ The war was presented as inevitable and Aceh would never cease to form a threat to Dutch possessions and interests in Sumatra.¹⁹¹ In conclusion, the message of the

¹⁸⁶ Officieele bescheiden, 27. ; See also: Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 14-15. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 27-33.

¹⁸⁷ Amirell, *Pirates of Empire*, 155.

¹⁸⁸ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'Hoe dikwijls hadden wij, terwijl het voor de bescherming van ons grondgebied en van de aan ons gezag onderworpen bevolkingen, voor de eer ook van onze vlag, wenschelijk ware geweest krachtiger tegenover Atjeh op te treden, ons met eene zuiver defensieve of zelfs lijdzame houding vergenoegd, ten einde den oorlog met Atjeh te vermijden. Voor onze noordelijke bezittingen op Sumatra bleef Atjeh steeds een gevaarlijke nabuur, daar in zijne vijandige gezindheid jegens ons geen verandering scheen te komen.' ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 27. ; See also: Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 21. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 13. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 25.

¹⁸⁹ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 24.

¹⁹⁰ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 13. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 24.

¹⁹¹ Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 27. ; Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 24.

memo could not have been clearer: history showed how the war was justified, unavoidable and long overdue.

The unavoidable war?

De Jong describes that 'On 23 April 1873, both the reserved and the public gallery of the Second Chamber were packed with people who wanted to pick-up first-hand information about the state of affairs in Sumatra. [...] Panic lured just of the horizon.'¹⁹² News of the Dutch defeat in Aceh had spread and there was still a lot of unclarity about the war in the first place. On the 23rd of April the debates finally continued and the Minister of Colonies had a lot to account for. Discussions were held about why the war was started, about the historical memo, about what had proceeded between Nieuwenhuijzen and the Governor-General or Nieuwenhuijzen and the Sultan and there were multiple quarrels about the humiliating loss of the first expedition. How could this all have happened and how was the Cabinet going to justify it all?

An important argument throughout the debates was the inevitability of the war. On multiple occasions, the Minister of Colonies referred to the bilateral relations as unsustainable and he reasoned that 'a solution could only be obtained: either by force, or by the amicable cooperation of Aceh'.¹⁹³ Consequently, if amicable cooperation was not possible, a war was inevitable and justified.¹⁹⁴ Repeatedly the Minister emphasized how the Dutch had tried to stay friendly in order to find a peaceful solution. This mode of argument always ended with the Acehnese betrayal, therewith showing that all peaceful options had been exhausted.¹⁹⁵ As the Minister of Foreign Affairs framed it, 'nothing remained for us but to lay hands on the sword.'¹⁹⁶ Or, as the Minister of Colonies uttered to the House of Representatives: 'Those who know our relationship in the Archipelago, examine the history of Atchin, as communicated by

¹⁹² De Jong, "Negotiations in Bismarckian Style," 39.

¹⁹³ This quote is my own translation. Original text: 'Eene oplossing kon alleen verkregen worden: òf door geweld, òf door de minnelijke medewerking van Atchin.' ; HTK, 1872-1873, 29-04-1873.

¹⁹⁴ HTK, 1872-1873, 30-04-1873.

¹⁹⁵ HTK, 1872-1873, 30-04-1873. ; HTK, 1872-1873, 02-07-1873.

¹⁹⁶ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'bleef ons niets anders over dan de hand te leggen op het zwaard.' ; HTK, 1872-1873, 30-04-1873.

the government, and judge impartially, will admit that war was inevitable.¹⁹⁷ Therewith also showing the importance of the historical memo for proving that the war was just.

The House had to understand that the Dutch honor had been at stake and that the war was therefore a necessary evil. The Minister of Foreign affairs plead multiple times that the government had to respond quickly to the rude Acehnese behavior or the Dutch honor would have been harmed. He even plead that the disrespectful behavior of Aceh 'had only lasted too long, and that our honor and our dignity urgently demanded an end to it.'¹⁹⁸ Besides, he stated that 'we no longer wanted to be humiliated and taunted'.¹⁹⁹ With these kinds of statements, he justified the war if the parliamentarians cared about protecting Dutch honor and prestige and if they recognized that a loss of prestige could eventually cost them their colony and international standing.

It was argued that the war was necessary because the Dutch had an obligation to fulfill in the Indonesian archipelago which they could not forsake. Throughout his debates, Franssen van de Putte emphasized that the Dutch had the responsibility to provide safe trade, shipping and passage in the Acehnese seas due to their international treaties and therefore they had to react to Acehnese misconduct.²⁰⁰ In addition, he stated that Aceh itself was too weak to solve the security issues and on top of that, even the Acehnese subordinates had asked for Dutch protection.²⁰¹ His argument was therefore that the Dutch were not only obliged to guarantee safe waters, they were also the only ones that could provide it.²⁰² Therefore, it was argued that if the Dutch were to uphold their responsibility and honor, war was inevitable and by the obligation of the international treaties, it was justified.

An argument that concentrated more around the legal side of the war was the argument that Aceh had violated the treaty of Trade, Peace and Friendship and that therefore the war was justified.²⁰³ The Minister of Colonies proved these Acehnese violations using his

¹⁹⁷ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'Zij die onze verhouding in den Archipel kennen, de geschiedenis van Atchin, gelijk die door de Regering is medegedeeld, nagaan en onpartijdig oordelen, zullen toegeven dat de oorlog onvermijdelijk was.' ; HTK, 1873-1874, 18-12-1873.

¹⁹⁸ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'al te lang had voortgeduurd, en dat onze eer en onze waardigheid dringend eischten dat daaraan een einde kwam.' ; HTK, 1872-1873, 30-04-1873.

¹⁹⁹ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'wilden wij ons niet langer laten vernederen en honen' . ; HTK, 1872-1873, 30-04-1873.

²⁰⁰ HTK, 1872-1873, 29-04-1873.

²⁰¹ Verslag der handelingen van de Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal (hereafter HEK) [Parliamentary Proceedings, Senate), 1872-1873, 16-06-1873. ; HEK, 1873-1874, 18-09-1873. ; HTK, 1872-1873, 29-04-1873.

²⁰² HTK, 1872-1873, 29-04-1873.

²⁰³ HEK, 1872-1873, 16-06-1873.

historical memo and by describing how Nieuwenhuijzen had seen that the Acehnese were preparing for a battle in plain side which was in violation with the treaty.²⁰⁴ Moreover, this behavior proved the untrustworthy character of the Acehnese officials according to the Minister.²⁰⁵ Fransen van de Putte plead: 'is now in connection with the treaty of 1857 the declaration of war justified, yes or no? The government believes that it can claim with full right that the war is justified'.²⁰⁶ Here again, the narrative of a just war is important.

The *casus belli* of the war was of course often reused as an argument by both the Minister of Colonies and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Often the Ministers would warn the House about the possible consequences of the Acehnese betrayal, namely: the loss of influence and power on Sumatra, or in the colony as a whole, at the cost of another Western state.²⁰⁷ They reasoned that if Aceh found an ally in another state, that this would be detrimental for the government's interests: 'to exercise proper influence, without interference from others, to oppose slave trade and to improve the situation in Atchin.'²⁰⁸ The Minister of Colonies therefore argued that the Acehnese betrayal was a solid reason to declare war and he rhetorically asked the House whether they even had the right to say that that this was not so?²⁰⁹ The Minister even felt so strongly about this that he stated that 'It was the duty of the Dutch government to prevent foreign interference in Sumatra, and if Atchin had succeeded in giving their sovereignty [...] to foreign Governments as the price for an alliance against the Netherlands, the responsibility of the Minister of Colonies here would have been quite a bit greater than it is now.'²¹⁰ These reasonings are clearly influenced by the imperialism.

²⁰⁴ HEK, 1872-1873, 16-06-1873.

²⁰⁵ HEK, 1872-1873, 16-06-1873.

²⁰⁶ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'is nu in verband met het tractaat van 1857 de oorlogsverklaring gerechtvaardigd, ja dan neen? De Regering meent dat zij met volle regt kan beweren dat de oorlog is gerechtvaardigd'. ; HEK, 1872-1873, 16-06-1873.

²⁰⁷ HTK, 1872-1873, 30-04-1873.

²⁰⁸ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'dat wij regtmatigen invloed moeten uitoefenen buiten inmenging van anderen, tot het te keer gaan van slavenhandel en tot verbetering van den toestand in Atchin.' ; HTK, 1872-1873, 29-04-1873. ; See also: HEK, 1873-1874, 18-09-1873.

²⁰⁹ HTK, 1872-1873, 23-05-1873. ; HEK, 1872-1873, 16-06-1873.

²¹⁰ This quote is my own translation. The original text: 'Het was de pligt der Regering vreemde inmenging op Sumatra te voorkomen, en indien het Atchin gelukt ware de souvereiniteit, die het, ook nog onlangs, aan vreemde Gouvernemenen heeft aangeboden als prijs voor een bondgenootschap tegen Nederland, te doen aannemen, dan zou de verantwoordelijkheid van den Minister van Kolonien hier vrij wat grooter geweest dan nu.' ; HTK, 1873-1874, 18-12-1873.

The declaration of war, normally a document that carries much weight in order to convince an audience, was only made public on the 13th of May, almost two months after the war had started and many of the debates had already taken place. The manifesto became public via the *Nederlandse Staats-Courant* (Dutch State Gazette), a newspaper which was state controlled and contained only approved official news and political announcements. The content of the manifesto was an exact repetition of what Fransen van de Putte had already told the Parliament for weeks by then and it was a complete copy of the instructions that Loudon had send to Nieuwenhuijzen. Therefore, it did not add new arguments and only repeated what Fransen van de Putte had already pleaded in order to securitize the war.²¹¹

Conclusion

This chapter started off with analyzing the correspondence of Loudon and Fransen van de Putte in order to uncover their personal motivations for the war. Namely, Fransen van de Putte represented the Cabinet and Loudon had a special role in the sense that he, as the representative of the Dutch East Indies Government, had to convince the Cabinet of the urgency to send an expedition to Aceh and was therefore responsible for securitizing the war towards the Dutch government. He and Fransen van de Putte often had the same reasonings for sending the expedition to Aceh and they both feared that another colonial power would gain a hold over Aceh before they could. Yet, they disagreed about Loudon's wish to immediately demand sovereignty from the Sultan and therefore about the form of the war manifesto.

Scholar the Winter had shown how narratives of imperialism and ideas of just war theory were dominant in the letters from Loudon in combination with appeals to emotion. The analysis of the correspondence of Fransen van de Putte confirmed that this was also the case throughout his correspondence. He however, also seemed to be occupied with the international reputation of the Netherlands and with the lawfulness of their actions. Furthermore, by carefully discussing what information to share or to keep, how to write the manifesto, how to talk to other states and by gathering evidence in order to strengthen their

²¹¹ Writer unknown, "Binnenlandsche Berigten." [Domestic Messages], *Nederlandsche staatscourant*, May 13, 1873, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB08:000144490:mpeg21:p003>, accessed on Dec. 9, 2023.

claim, it is clear that Fransen van de Putte was strategically planning to convince his audience.²¹²

The securitization of the Aceh War happened in multiple stages. The first speech act was done on the 27th of February and this plea laid the foundation for the debates from April that year. From the sources it appeared that Fransen van de Putte employed different tactics in order to convince his audience. Not only did he give many speeches, he also used a historical memo on the Dutch-Acehnese relations in order to convince his audience. Throughout this memo, many historical threats were presented like the threat of piracy, the threat of indigenous populations and the threat of uncontrolled violence. By referring to these threats he clearly tried to persuade his audience to form a connection between these established threats and the threat that he was trying to securitize: the Acehnese Sultanate. In general, using history and already known threats in a speech act is seen as a strong tactic in Securitization Theory. Using the danger of piracy in particular is interesting since this threat had been securitized in the past in order to legitimize violence and wars of colonial expansion in the Indonesian archipelago.²¹³

Throughout his pleas in Parliament there were clear threats, frames and arguments that the Minister kept repeating. Namely, the war was inevitable, the war was just, there was no other option, the Dutch were obliged to intervene, the Dutch honor was scrutinized and they were at risk of losing Aceh to another state. Moreover, there were political and economic threats presented by, for instance, referring to piracy, the problems with the obstruction of trade in the region and the risk of losing political influence in the archipelago or the colony altogether. Throughout his pleas in Parliament, imperialistic speech was used. Whether the speech acts succeeded is difficult to discern since the extraordinary measures were already taken. However, the fact that the war was not discontinued and that the Cabinet did not fall that year, or that Fransen van de Putte and Loudon were not dismissed, would indicate that the war could count on enough support apart from some critical voices.

From the historiography on the Aceh War, it appears that the war would gain a religious character since it became more important that the battle was fought between Christians and Muslims. Besides, as Tagliacozzo describes, the (militant) Islam was seen as a

²¹² Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden*, 45.

²¹³ Amirell, *Pirates of Empire*, 158.

threat to Dutch rule.²¹⁴ Moreover, the fact that the Acehnese were seen as pirates was also often linked to the fact that they were Muslims.²¹⁵ Interestingly enough, it was never mentioned in the analyzed source material that the Acehnese were Muslims, nor that Muslims were a threat.

‘And now I ask the Assembly, to everyone, who still understands our position in the Archipelago, whether such an answer was not sufficient to justify, two, yes three declarations of war?’²¹⁶ Spoke Fransen van de Putte in one of his speeches in Parliament that year. Historian Van ‘t Veer argues that the Dutch state used the narrative of the of Acehnese betrayal and the threats of piracy and slavery as an excuse for colonial expansion.²¹⁷ Scholar De Winter agrees with him and writes that ‘By securitizing the threat of the Acehnese Sultanate, the colonial government was able to circumvent normal political procedures in favor of a swift military expedition to expand its colony on Sumatra.’²¹⁸ Historian De Jong on the other hand, stresses how the course of the war and the outcome of annexation were accidental.²¹⁹ The imperialistic speech found throughout the analyzed sources in this thesis would indicate that imperialism was part of the motivation of the officials to start the war.

²¹⁴ Tagliacozzo, “Kettle on a Slow Boil,” 88.

²¹⁵ Amirell, *Pirates of Empire*, 154.

²¹⁶ This quote is my own translation. The original text: ‘En nu vraag ik aan de Vergadering, aan ieder, die nog begrip heeft van onze positie in den Archipel, of een dergelijk antwoord niet voldoende was om twee, ja drie oorlogsverklaringen te rechtvaardigen?’ ; HEK, 1872-1873, 16-06-1873.

²¹⁷ Van ‘t Veer, “Atjeh 1873, een oorlog op papier.”

²¹⁸ De Winter, “Selling the Aceh War,” 193.

²¹⁹ De Jong, “Negotiations in Bismarckian Style,” 48.

Conclusion

The Aceh War formed an anomaly in its time because it was the first war in Dutch history that was not seen as self-explanatory and that needed to be justified by the Dutch government towards multiple audiences. Times were changing: news about the war traveled faster and further than before. Consequently, the influence of public opinion grew. Furthermore, the Aceh War was the most discussed colonial war in Dutch history on paper and a hot topic in Parliament throughout 1873. The historiography on the Aceh War focusses on the context of the war and the real intentions of the Netherlands for starting it. This thesis researched how the Dutch officials tried to justify the first expedition in the Aceh War towards the Dutch Parliament in 1873. The Dutch Parliament was carefully chosen since this audience has not been studied yet in the historiography. Nevertheless, the Parliament formed an influential audience since they could influence security decisions and the implementation of extraordinary measures. Its support for the Cabinet's war and their actions was therefore vital. Building on Securitization Theory, this thesis researched how securitizing actors framed an issue into an existential threat and therewith justified extraordinary measures, in this case the war.

The justification process towards the Parliament started off by a speech from the Minister of Colonies in the House of Representatives on the 27th of February. In this speech he discussed the Aceh question and presented some of the most important threats which caused a more violent attitude of the Dutch state towards Aceh. Throughout his plea, he contextualized his arguments by describing historical threats in the region and the history of hostile bilateral relations. According to him, there were a few reasons why this more aggressive stance was necessary: there was piracy and slavery in the region in combination with internal Acehnese conflicts along the shore. This caused an unsafe situation for trade and shipping and therewith threatened the economic security and the general security of peoples. To make matters worse, the Acehnese had now also betrayed the Dutch when they were trying to sign a treaty. Therewith all friendly options had been explored. Due to Acehnese actions, Dutch political security in the region was also at risk. The Minister emphasized that colonial expansion was not the motivation for their coming actions, but that the Cabinet only wanted to protect the colonial empire, exercise 'moderate European influence' and provide safety in the seas. The securitizing actor therewith presented Aceh as treacherous, dangerous

and unwilling to cooperate. Extraordinary measures were inevitable and justified since they were taken out of self-defense in order to protect the Dutch colonial empire and its interests. His threats clearly also sprung from the political, economic, international and historical context at the time as outlined in chapter one. Interestingly enough, Fransen van de Putte did not introduce the threat of a foreign intervention yet, which he did on purpose. This shows how Fransen van de Putte strategically chose what information to share with the Parliament in order to have the strongest narrative.

The first time Fransen van de Putte spoke about the war to Parliament was on the 4th of April. Throughout this plea, he used the same arguments and threats from the 27th of February and by repeating them he added new urgency to the matter. He also introduced a new big threat to the Dutch empire, namely: the threat of foreign interference which would threaten Dutch presence in the region. The Acehnese quest of finding allies was framed as a betrayal. This 'Acehnese betrayal' was used by the Dutch as the *casus belli* of the war. Besides providing these threats, he accounted for the actual outbreak of the war, made an argument for its inevitability and justified it by describing how the Acehnese were already preparing for a fight when Nieuwenhuijzen came to negotiate.

A clear tactic used by the Minister to convince his audience was to use history in order to support his claims. He did this, for instance, by spreading a memo on the history of Dutch-Acehnese relations. The memo was full of arguments in favor of the Dutch declaring war and the presented history was full of frames and dangerous situations that proved the Ministers story. Furthermore, the Minister tried to make connections between his historical narrative and already known threats to the Dutch colonial state. By framing the Acehnese as dangerous, hostile, evil etcetera, the Minister referred to the threat that indigenous populations already formed to the Dutch state. By describing violent incidents and Acehnese attacks in the region, he referred to the already known threat of uncontrolled violence in the region. By including news articles about piratical incidents and by emphasizing violent cases of piracy, he tried to make use of the already known connection between Aceh and piracy. Furthermore, all of these historical threats had been used in the past by the colonial state to legitimize the use of violence. The emphasis on piracy in particular happened often throughout the memo and in his first speeches. This is interesting since this historical threat had justified violence and colonial expansion in the past. Moreover, the Dutch had framed indigenous populations as pirates before in order to justify interventions as outlined in the first chapter. Aceh was

already known for dangerous piracy and slavery so by utilizing this frame, the Minister made it easier for people to trust his plea.

The (mis)use of history was a smart tactic since, as explained within Securitization Theory, using the past and using past difficulties and threats will improve the chances of a successful speech act. Another tactic that Fransen van de Putte and the Minister of Foreign Affairs used was to appeal to emotions in the public by talking about the risk of losing Dutch honor and prestige, or by questioning the patriotism of parliamentarians who criticized arguments. By doing this, the Ministers made the audience believe that if they loved the Netherlands and all the values it represented, the war was inevitable and just. This too is described as a tactic within Securitization Theory that increases the chance of a successful speech act.

From the 23rd of April 1873 onwards, fierce debates were held in the House of Representatives in which Fransen van de Putte had to justify the Cabinet's course of actions. According to the Minister, the war was the only way out due to Acehnese hostilities and if they wanted to protect Dutch honor. He wanted it to be clear that the war was out of self-defense, since all peaceful options had been tried. Throughout his speeches he often referred back to his historical memo, showing that it was an important document in his efforts to securitize the war. The argument of the Dutch obligation in the archipelago to guarantee safe seas was also often posed. He framed the Dutch as the only power that could provide safety in the region, and if they would forsake this duty, another power would take their place. In addition, Aceh's violations of the bilateral treaty were also used to claim that the war was just. The Acehnese betrayal and the threat of foreign intervention were of course brought up in order to justify Dutch actions. The Acehnese were thus framed into a political and economic threat to the Dutch empire as well as a threat for the general safety of the peoples in the Archipelago. The Minister's pleas in Parliament were infused with imperialistic speech. Even though annexation politics were denied by the officials, multiple historians claim that the arguments used by the Dutch state were a tool to justify colonial expansion.

The biggest difference between the correspondence between Loudon and Fransen van de Putte and the justification towards the Parliament was the use of history in general and historical threats in particular. In addition, towards Parliament, all threats were presented with more context. Both Loudon and Fransen van de Putte used appeals to emotion in order to convince their audiences. Moreover, in the correspondence between Loudon and Fransen

van de Putte, the argument about the Dutch obligation to guarantee safe trade in the Acehese seas, or the argument about Acehese violations of the bilateral treaty, seemed to be more on the background as compared to the speeches given in Parliament. Furthermore, throughout the analyzed sources, the (historical) threat of piracy was used multiple times, but was less prominent in the analyzed correspondence between the officials.

Borrowing from Securitization Theory revealed how multiple frames and techniques were used by the colonial officials to vindicate the war. It also revealed that history played an important role in the strategy of the officials to convince their audience and it showed how there were multiple speech acts performed by Fransen van de Putte. However, on a more critical note, one can wonder if Securitization Theory is a perfect fit for studying non-contemporary wars fought by a non-democratic colonial state since the decision-making process is quite complicated and fragmented with two governments: one colonial and one national with both different authorities and agendas. Furthermore, the Aceh War was already started before the securitization process towards the Parliament took place which asked for a bit of creativity when using the theory.

This thesis contributes to the historiography by filling the research gap about the Cabinet's justification towards the Parliament and by using a broad range of primary source material. Furthermore, it has shown that the officials adjusted their arguments, and the contexts that they embedded them in, to their audience by referring to frames and sentiments that the audiences were familiar with. Fransen van de Putte did this towards an international European audience, as well as with the Dutch Parliament. This thesis has also shown how already established threats to the Dutch state were utilized by the officials to convince their audience and it was uncovered that imperialistic speech, as well as, arguments to claim that the war was just were not only prominent in the speech acts from the Governor-General, but also in the speech acts from the Cabinet to the Parliament. The analysis showed that the argument of piracy had more of a supporting role as compared to the more imminent threats presented. Furthermore, the political, economic, historical and international context of the war could also be recognized in the presented threats and reasonings to commence the war. Even though the threat of foreign interference was often disregarded by historians as a mere excuse, the private correspondence from Loudon and Fransen van de Putte did show that the threat occupied their minds. In addition, to contribute to the debate about whether the Aceh War was imperialistic or not: from the analyzed source material it appears that imperialistic

ideas were present which indicates the presence of imperialistic motivations. Furthermore, the fact that nor Islam nor Muslims were named as threats in the analyzed sources could indicate that the argument of religion did not play a big role in the beginning of the war or with this particular audience.

The arguments that were used by the officials tell something about the Dutch threat perception at the time because the Minister of Colonies knew his audience and strategically planned how to convince them. In turn, this also sheds light on Dutch security culture since it tells us more about the perceptions of danger at the time, about what people thought constituted a just war, about what people gathered to be legitimate arguments and it tells more about what issues were seen as threats to the state.

Future research can offer insights into how the government securitized the war towards the moral audience: the Dutch general public. Did they use different arguments in order to convince them, was there censorship or propaganda, did the government spread different narratives in the colony compared to the Netherlands? Moreover, since the Aceh War lasted multiple decades it would be interesting to research how the justification changed throughout time, what arguments went in or out of style and if the implementation of universal suffrage in 1918 changed the way in which the war was justified since it made the moral audience more important as potential voters. The Delpher newspaper database would suit the direction of this research.

In conclusion, the Dutch colonial officials tried to securitize the war towards the Dutch Parliament in 1873 by using history, appeals to emotion, established threats, legal, political, economic and international threats and by a carefully framed *casus belli* that caused a feeling of urgency. Where the Dutch officials had expected a quick victory, the Aceh War turned out to be more than what they had bargained for. The War would become one of the most expensive and violent colonial wars that the Netherlands would ever fight. Whether the war was fought out of genuine fear for foreign interference, or whether it was a war for colonial expansion, or both, one thing was for certain: the Aceh War was made inevitable.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Editor Unknown, *Officieele Bescheiden betreffende het ontstaan van den oorlog tegen Atjeh in 1873* (Den Haag: Algemeene Landsdrukkerij, 1881),

https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/129726?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=75d1bfa30862b7287b74&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=24&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=17.

Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Collection 232 James Loudon, number access 2.21.183.50, inventory number 1.

Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Collection 232 James Loudon, number access 2.21.183.50, inventory number 60.

Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Collection 232 James Loudon, number access 2.21.183.50, inventory number 33.

Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Collection 442 F.N. Nieuwenhuijzen [1819-1892], number access 2.21.205.44, inventory number 68.

Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Collection 442 F.N. Nieuwenhuijzen [1819-1892], number access 2.21.205.44, inventory number 67.

Verslag der handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal [Parliamentary Proceedings, House of Representatives], 1872-1873, 27-02-1873.

Verslag der handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal [Parliamentary Proceedings, House of Representatives], 1872-1873, 04-04-1873.

Verslag der handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal [Parliamentary Proceedings, House of Representatives], 1872-1873, 29-04-1873.

Verslag der handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal [Parliamentary Proceedings, House of Representatives], 1872-1873, 30-04-1873.

Verslag der handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal [Parliamentary Proceedings, House of Representatives], 1872-1873, 23-05-1873.

Verslag der handelingen van de Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal [Parliamentary Proceedings, Senate], 1872-1873, 16-06-1873.

Verslag der handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal [Parliamentary Proceedings, House of Representatives], 1872-1873, 02-07-1873.

Verslag der handelingen van de Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal [Parliamentary Proceedings, Senate], 1873-1874, 18-09-1873.

Verslag der handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal [Parliamentary Proceedings, House of Representatives], 1873-1874, 18-12-1873.

Writer unknown, "Binnenlandsche Berigten." [Domestic Messages], *Nederlandsche staatscourant*, May 13, 1873,

<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB08:000144490:mpeg21:p003>, accessed on Dec. 9, 2023.

Secondary literature

À Campo, J.N.F.M. "Asymmetry, Disparity and Cyclicity: Charting the Piracy Conflict in Colonial Indonesia." *International Journal of Maritime History* XIX (2007): 1, 35-62.

À Campo, J.N.F.M. "Discourse without Discussion: Representations of Piracy in Colonial Indonesia 1816-25." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34 (2003): 2, 199-214.

Amirell, Stefan Eklöf. *Pirates of Empire. Colonization and Maritime Violence in Southeast Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Balzacq, Thierry. "A Theory of Securitization: Origins, Core Assumptions and Variants." In *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, 1-30. Edited by Thierry Balzacq. London: Routledge, 2011.

De Jong, Janny. "'Negotiations in Bismarckian Style' The Debate on the Aceh War and its Legitimacy, 1873-1874." *Itinerario* XXIX (2005): 2, 38-52.

De Winter, Sjoerd. "Selling the Aceh War. The Dutch Justification of a War of Expansion against the Sultanate of Aceh." *Militaire Spectator* 188 (2019): 4, 180-193.

Hagen, Piet. *Koloniale oorlogen in Indonesië. Vijf eeuwen verzet tegen vreemde overheersing*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Arbeiderspers, 2018.

Kuitenbrouwer, Maarten. "Het imperialisme-debat in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving." *BMGN* 113 (1998): 1, 56-73.

Kuitenbrouwer, Maarten. *Nederland en de opkomst van het moderne imperialisme. Koloniën en buitenlandse politiek 1870-1902*. Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1985.

Léonard, Sarah and Christian Kaunert. "Reconceptualizing the audience in securitization theory." In *Securitization Theory. How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, 57-76. Edited by Thierry Balzacq. London: Routledge, 2011.

Peoples, Columba and Nick Vaughan-Williams. *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Reid, Anthony. "Indonesian Diplomacy A Documentary Study of Atjehnese Foreign Policy in The Reign of Sultan Mahmud, 1870-74." *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 42 (Dec. 1969): 2 (216), 74-114.

Reid, Anthony. *The Contest for North Sumatra. Atjeh, the Netherlands and Britain 1858-1898*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1969.

Roe, Paul. "Actor, Audience(s) and Emergency Measures: Securitization and the UK's Decision to Invade Iraq." *Security Dialogue* 39 (Dec. 2008): 6, 615-635.

Tagliacozzo, Eric. "Kettle on a Slow Boil: Batavia's Threat Perceptions in the Indies' Outer Islands, 1870-1910." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 31 (Mar. 2000): 1, 70-100.

Tarling, Nicholar. "Maritime Security and Piracy." In *Maritime Security in East and Southeast Asia. Political Challenges in Asian Waters*, 7-22. Edited by Nicholas Tarling and Xin Chen. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Van 't Veer, Paul. "Atjeh 1873, een oorlog op papier." *De Gids* 130 (1967), https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_gid001196701_01/_gid001196701_01_0020.php, accessed on Jan. 9, 2023.

Van 't Veer, Paul. *De Atjeh-oorlog*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Arbeiderspers, 1969.

Images

Figure 1:

Map of the siege of Aceh and their defenses (bird's eye view), 1873.

https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/856658?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=b5fdc43a24022b298d00&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=3

Figure 2:

Map of Aceh and the Strait of Malacca.

Amirell, *Pirates of Empire*, 97.