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Reframing the Diplomat: Ernst van der Beugel and the Cold War Atlantic Community

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Conclusion: a Call for a New Diplomatic History

By studying Ernst van der Beugel through the lens of New Diplomatic History this study has offered an alternative perspective to traditional state-centered narratives of diplomatic history by putting the unofficial diplomat front and center. In doing so, it has not disregarded the key role that nation states still play in diplomacy. Rather, it has attempted to broaden and deepen our understanding of the diplomatic process by including the unofficial realm of diplomacy in the analysis and through a focus on the goals, *modus operandi* and “diplomatic role” of a private individual in transatlantic relations.

To understand the continuation of Ernst van der Beugel’s role in transatlantic diplomacy as a private actor it was key to also reassess the period before he entered the diplomatic playing field as an unofficial diplomat. While it tends to be clear what a formal diplomat represents – namely his or her nation-state – this is not as obvious in the case of unofficial diplomats. As a result of their greater freedom to act upon their own ideas, the personal convictions that drive private actors become more important in attempts to understand their positions on the diplomatic playing field.

One of the key facets of what makes these private individuals diplomatic actors is the nature of the goals they pursue. The goals pursued by Ernst van der Beugel were clearly diplomatic in character, namely fostering and maintaining a tightly knit Atlantic Community. To understand what this meant and why he pursued these goals we had to go back to some key formative experiences that helped to shape his perspective on international relations. This included the experience of appeasement, war, liberation and reconstruction, which instilled in Van der Beugel an understanding of the fundamental primacy of power relations and a deep appreciation of the American role in these events. In the context of the Cold War this translated into the conviction that the security of Western Europe depended completely on the American security guarantee as formalized through NATO – and anything that threatened this, he opposed.¹ The development of Van der Beugel’s Atlanticism also provided insight into how and why he as a European came to be *plus américain que les américains* repeatedly inviting, encouraging and defending American hegemony on the European continent.

This Atlanticist perspective also determined his attitude towards European integration. Together with some of his closest friends he heartily welcomed the Schuman Plan, but he would never regard European integration as an end in itself, but always only as a means to strengthen the Atlantic Community in the context of the Cold War. Thus, his understanding of the role and preferred blueprints of European integration was tightly linked to his assessment of Cold War power relations. When he came to believe that the Gaullists rising to power in France intended to hijack the process of European integration for their own

¹ EvdB/Kersten Oral History, p. 275 (translation mine).

nationalistic desire to re-establish French grandeur at the expense of American hegemony in Western Europe, he opposed any form of integration that he believed would play into the hand of the Gaullists. This did not mean, however that he was anti-European. He was just convinced that the Atlantic priority trumped everything. Based on his understanding of power relations the primacy of the Atlantic security interest enveloped the Dutch national interest as well as the security of Western Europe as a whole.

While Van der Beugel's ideas crystallized while he was still employed by the Dutch government, from 1959 onwards he was able to carve out a place for himself as a private actor on the transatlantic diplomatic playing field trying to foster and maintain an Atlantic Community based on his realist stream of Atlanticism. The continuation of his diplomatic role in transatlantic relations was enabled by a combination of personal and external factors, which neatly tied into each other.

The personal factors depended for a great part on his experience and track record as a formal government representative and can be classified in terms of social, intellectual and financial capital all of which in turn amplified each other. The continuation of Van der Beugel's transatlantic activities was facilitated by *social capital* in the form of his extensive transatlantic network consisting of both government representatives and individuals from the private sector, which he had been able to build up during his work for the Marshall Plan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The fact that he had been a diplomat himself, an insider in a world that is hard to penetrate from the outside, was also fundamental in that it provided him access to formal decision making establishments in Europe and the United States. His social status and track record as a formal diplomat furthermore made that he was seen as a credible professional who could be trusted, for example to serve as an unofficial backchannel between the American and Dutch foreign policy establishments. His appointment as Honorary Secretary General of the Bilderberg Meetings, one of the key meeting places for the official and unofficial Atlantic elites helped to consolidate his unofficial diplomatic position among the Atlantic elite providing him with an extra kind of transnational social capital. It also helped him to expand his network even more across all the spheres from which Bilderberg drew its participants. At the same time his role as a spider in the transatlantic webs connecting the official and unofficial realms also provided Van der Beugel with a great deal of valuable information that official diplomats were eager to hear, thus making him an *interlocuteur valable* in transatlantic diplomacy. This insider information, combined with the knowledge, experience and expertise derived from his career as an official diplomat in the field hence provided him with useful *intellectual capital*. His appointment as professor of Western Cooperation at Leiden University further amplified his status as an expert and even helped to create an illusion of objectivity and academic detachment. This combination of social and intellectual capital made Ernst van der Beugel also an interesting candidate for consultancy positions and directorships in the private sector, which in turn provided the financial basis enabling his unofficial activities in transatlantic diplomacy. These personal factors facilitating the continuation of Van der Beugel's diplomatic role coalesced with external factors of a more

structural nature, in particular the development of the post-war Atlantic elite and the rich constellation of policy forums, exchange programs, think tanks, and other private Atlantic organizations, initiatives and meeting places that provided the infrastructure of the unofficial realm of transatlantic diplomacy in which Ernst van der Beugel became very active.

Already during his days as a formal diplomat, Van der Beugel had been confronted with the fact that there were more stakeholders invested in transatlantic diplomacy than nation states alone. He had experienced this, for example, during the Marshall Plan, a transatlantic venture that served as a key catalyst for public-private cooperation which was instrumental not just in the development of the post-war Atlantic elite, but also in weaving Van der Beugel himself into this elite. Moreover, as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs he – as an official government representative – had even felt restricted in his own pursuit of the Dutch national interest by the influence exercised by Jean Monnet's private activities behind the scenes of transatlantic diplomacy. As a private agent Monnet was able to mobilize not just European legislators, but also the American diplomatic machinery in service of a speedy European integration process along the lines he had set out. After all, as the process of European integration took shape, different blueprints appeared with regards to the desired form that this integration should take and about how it should relate to the broader Atlantic framework.

During the 20th century processes of globalization in the fields of transportation and communication enabled advocates of these different visions from different nations, whether employed by a nation-state or not, to organize themselves in an unofficial capacity into a transnational force on the diplomatic playing field. The result was the development of transnational groups advocating different European and transatlantic perspectives, including Jean Monnet's brand of Atlantic partnership, Clarence Streit's Atlantic federalism, but also those who, like Van der Beugel, subscribed to a more realist stream of Atlanticism. These transnational groups disregarded state lines not just in the sense that their members had different nationalities (although the Gaullist vision was obviously a very French vision closely tied to a desire to elevate the French nation state), but also because their members consisted of both government officials and private individuals. What united them, however, was a shared vision of the transatlantic relationship. The debates about the shape of the transatlantic relationship were thus not only debates between nation states and their representatives. Instead they both transcended and pierced straight through the nation state – as illustrated by the debates at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where Van der Beugel's vision of European integration and the transatlantic relationship differed for example from the blueprints envisioned by Kohnstamm and Patijn, and where he also had to deal with the transnational influence exercised by Monnet. In this context, the Bilderberg Meetings filled up a void left open by the formal diplomatic machinery by offering a forum for the transnational mediation of rivaling blueprints of the transatlantic relationship, while its leadership tried to foster and maintain a basic consensus about the value of the Atlantic Community.

The Bilderberg meetings also served as an important instrument in Ernst van der Beugel's private efforts to manage, mediate and strengthen the transatlantic relationship. After Charles de Gaulle challenged the Atlantic Community in his famous 1963 press conference, for example, Van der Beugel used the Bilderberg Meetings as an instrument not just to mediate these different views, but also to contribute to the management of the transatlantic relationship. On the one hand Bilderberg offered a podium for a freer exchange of thoughts than formal diplomatic meetings, also allowing the Gaullists a podium to express their views. Thus Van der Beugel made sure to keep the French engaged in the transatlantic conversation. At the same time, however, fearing an American retreat into isolationism as a result of what might be perceived as anti-American Gaullist rhetoric, he used the Bilderberg Meetings to demonstrate to the American Foreign policy elite that de Gaulle did not speak for all of Europe – a message Foreign Secretary Luns, for example, also decided to transmit through formal diplomatic channels after taking note of Gaullist exposition at Bilderberg. During the subsequent Bilderberg conference in Williamsburg, Virginia Van der Beugel made sure that the meeting could be used by the U.S. State Department to foster elite support for the MLF. While Bilderberg could be useful in the context of processes concerning the creation of transatlantic policy, he also very consciously used the Bilderberg Meetings to socialize new, and preferably younger, members into the Atlantic elite in efforts to preserve the mindset and social fabric at the heart of the Atlantic Community for the long run.

Preserving the Atlantic mindset was crucial, because, as Van der Beugel understood, the Atlantic alliance could only exist and function properly as long as the Atlantic Community as a community of shared values and interests remained alive in the minds not just of the elite, but also in the mind of the 'average man' in the form of an imagined community. This became even more important in the context of the democratization of foreign policy. In this context, 'those in the know', to which Van der Beugel counted himself, had an obligation to explain and transmit the Atlantic mindset undergirding the Atlantic alliance to the public at large. To this end, Van der Beugel engaged in private efforts at transatlantic public diplomacy and psychological warfare by fighting European anti-Americanism while keeping the enemy image of the Soviet Union alive. He did so through his own massive contribution to the public debate in the form of speeches, publications and interviews, but also tried to foster a conducive atmosphere for close transatlantic relations behind the scenes, for example by socializing journalists into the Atlantic elite. He also arranged introductions to prominent Americans for journalists from whom he expected sympathetic reports on the United States while he kept these gates closed for more critical voices. In the meantime, he also tried to explain the Dutch and broader European position to the American foreign policy elite. After all, during this entire period, he also remained active through the more traditional diplomatic channels connecting the formal diplomatic establishments behind the scenes.

In fact, all these activities were part of one big concerted and continuous effort to foster and maintain an Atlantic Community, thus contributing to the multidimensional management of the Cold War transatlantic relationship by nation states and transnational actors, through

official and unofficial channels. As the preceding chapters have demonstrated, the official and unofficial spheres of transatlantic diplomacy did not exist in isolation from each other. Instead, they were intimately connected through social networks and meeting places where the official and unofficial elites mingled and interacted. At the same time, it is important to point out that many of the private Atlantic organizations, like the Bilderberg Meetings and the Atlantic Institute and many other Atlantic NGO's, were grass-root initiatives. They were not set up, instigated or orchestrated by nation states, although government representatives did acknowledge and at times encourage their roles in the diplomatic process. They happily cooperated when in pursuit of shared diplomatic goals. At times officials believed private diplomats and organizations could do things even more effectively than formal representatives of NATO or a nation states. As private actors they could speak more freely, for example, and come across as more credible in the context of public diplomacy and psychological warfare efforts, which when executed by a government representative might start to reek of propaganda. At the same time the Bilderberg meetings, for example, in turn offered a place where officials could also speak more freely and where relationships of trust as well as a consensus could be fostered between diverse transatlantic influentials that endured beyond changes in governments. Thus, at times the official and unofficial realms of transatlantic diplomacy neatly complemented each other. At other times they also challenged each other.

The same can be said of Ernst van der Beugel's relationship to the nation state as a private actor. As an unofficial diplomat he was not a mere extension of the Dutch government nor a puppet of the Americans. To the contrary, as he mentioned himself during his 1961 speech at the Chamber of Commerce in London, being a free agent was a liberating experience. It allowed him to speak his mind and pursue his own diplomatic goals more purely based on his own convictions, without having to follow 'his master's voice' as he had to when he was a government official. Thus, he cooperated for example with Dutch government officials in their struggle to gain American landing rights for KLM, but he also did not shy away from using his American connections to put pressure on the Dutch government, for example to raise the defense budget. He also gladly cooperated with the State Department's theologians in their efforts to foster transatlantic elite consensus concerning the multilateral force through Bilderberg. At the same time he did not shy away from criticizing the American role in the process of European integration or their lack of strong Atlanticist leadership. From Van der Beugel's perspective, these efforts did not only serve the Dutch or American national interest but above all a shared Atlantic interest. The landing rights issue, for example, fed anti-Americanism in the Netherlands. While in this specific case he believed these anti-American sentiments to be justified they were also detrimental to the cohesion of the Atlantic Community. Interesting in this context is also Henry Kissinger's remark that "he was equally comfortable in Europe as in the United States (...) we did not really look at Ernst van der

Beugel as a foreigner,”² suggesting that Van der Beugel was not seen as a national agent. While Kissinger and Van der Beugel did not share the same nationality they did share a deep appreciation for the Atlantic Community to which they both belonged. Thus, as a private actor tightly integrated in the web of formal and informal transatlantic structures Ernst van der Beugel manifested himself not as a national, but as an independent transnational actor, more specially as an unofficial ambassador for an Atlantic Community.

As the preceding chapters have demonstrated, Ernst van der Beugel as well as other non-state actors involved in the unofficial dimension of transatlantic relations were an integral part of the diplomatic process in which relationships are fostered and maintained, differences explained, tensions mediated and frustrations alleviated; where policy is shaped, consensus generated and ideas transmitted. In this context, Ernst van der Beugel as well as his Bilderberg companions also understood their own role to be ‘diplomatic’ in nature speaking of themselves in terms of “private diplomats” engaged in “unofficial international relations”.

Ernst van der Beugel was an independent diplomat who acted upon his own instigation and upon his own convictions – as did many other private actors that appear in this narrative. From a traditional state-centered perspective many of these unofficial activities would remain under the radar and only sporadically pop up when Ernst van der Beugel or another private actor entered the official diplomatic realm. Consequently, traditional state-centered approaches can only offer a very limited appreciation of Ernst van der Beugel’s diplomatic role, which cannot do justice to his contributions to the diplomatic process – nor to this diplomatic process itself. However, by reassessing his role through the lens of New Diplomatic History by putting the unofficial diplomat, instead of the nation state, front and central, combined with a focus on the diplomatic process and its machinery and the (un)official diplomat’s *modus operandi*, it becomes clear that his private diplomatic activities were not just sporadic incidents, but part of a continuous and concerted effort contributing to the multidimensional management of transatlantic diplomacy in which more stakeholders were involved than nation states alone. This could only be revealed, however, by changing the framework of diplomatic history on the basis of the idea that being a ‘diplomat’ does not depend on one’s official status as a government representative, but is rather determined by an actor’s role in the diplomatic process serving “a set of interests, a cause or collective unit above and beyond themselves, and which in some way involves the crossing of borders and the inter-relationship of political entities.”³ In doing so, this study did not only attempt to do better justice to Ernst van der Beugel’s role in and contributions to the diplomatic process. It also constitutes a call to reconsider the way in which we study diplomatic history and above all to pay more attention to the unofficial realm of diplomacy.

This does certainly not mean that diplomatic historians should disregard the nation state. Also in this study nation states still played a key role. They were however, not the only

² Henry A. Kissinger, interview with the author, 4 January 2012.

³ Weisbrode, “The Task Ahead”.

stakeholders in the diplomatic process that has been described. By looking at Cold War transatlantic diplomacy from the perspective of New Diplomatic History, it becomes clear that formal transatlantic diplomacy during this period did not take place in a vacuum, but was closely entangled with unofficial individuals, networks and ventures. To recognize these links also helps us understand formal diplomacy better. However, from the perspective of New Diplomatic History it is crucial to recognize that these unofficial actors were not only part of the diplomatic process when they were directly linked to a nation state, but also acted independently and on their own instigation. They had their own agency. Thus, while the distinction between state and non-state actors has proven to be a valuable distinction, as it indicates how these actors operate from different positions in different capacities, this should not lead to the idea that only those linked to nation states can be diplomatic agents. The fact that Ernst van der Beugel as a private agent was still such an integral part of transatlantic diplomacy demonstrates that a narrow focus on nation states and their representatives limits our understanding of the actual diplomatic process. Instead, we can do better justice to the diplomatic process if we identify “the diplomat” not so much on the basis of his or her relationship to the nation state, but by focusing on how actors relate to the diplomatic process by focusing on their diplomatic role: what they do and why and how they do this. Since both state and non-state actors were part of the same diplomatic process they deserve to be recognized as such. To this end, it is not only useful to add a transnational layer to our investigations of the diplomatic process, but also to speak of “unofficial” or “private diplomats” on the one hand and of “formal” or “official” diplomats on the other hand – both of them worthy subjects of study by diplomatic historians in their own right. Such an approach would not only offer a more holistic understanding of the diplomatic process, but also opens up new venues for further research.

By following Ernst van der Beugel behind the scenes of transatlantic diplomacy the preceding chapters have offered a window upon the broader unofficial dimension of the Atlantic Community. In doing so, they provided not more than a glimpse of the other individuals and organizations active in this realm, many of them requiring further exploration. While a group of historians has started to describe the role of organizations like the Bilderberg Meetings and the Atlantic Institute in transatlantic diplomacy, other Atlantic NGO’s like the London based International Institute for Strategic Studies, have barely received any attention. In addition, more studies analyzing the roles of private individuals or groups of individuals on the diplomatic playing field can provide more general insight not only into their diplomatic roles, but also into the factors that enabled these actors to play such a role. Ernst van der Beugel’s track record as a formal diplomat, for example, helped to facilitate his role as a private diplomat. Studies focusing on other individuals may identify other factors and qualities and may even demonstrate that also prior government experience is no prerequisite for a diplomatic role. A bigger reservoir of studies on 20th century unofficial diplomats may also enable the development of a greater body of theory on this topic with regards to the qualities and characteristics shared by private diplomatic actors during this period,

comparable to the work done by historians of New Diplomatic History focusing on the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.⁴

Finally, the remarks by Victor Halberstadt and Minister van Aardenne describing Ernst van der Beugel as “the Netherlands’ only private diplomat” who “may very well be the last ‘private’ diplomat for whom few doors in the Western world remain closed”,⁵ seem to indicate that Van der Beugel belonged to a rare and almost extinct breed. The diversity, breadth and scope of spheres in which Ernst van der Beugel was active is indeed uncommon – at least in the Dutch context. In this sense, Ernst van der Beugel was especially a rather ‘un-Dutch’ phenomenon, as Ben Knapen has also pointed out; more representative of the American East Coast Establishment with its revolving door between public and private spheres.⁶ While there was only one Ernst van der Beugel, this dissertation has demonstrated that there were many more unofficial stakeholders involved in Cold War transatlantic diplomacy – and that processes of globalization have enabled them to proliferate in ever greater numbers. Their stories not only deserve to be told, but by including them in our narratives we will be able to do better justice to the complexity of the diplomatic process, particularly in a globalizing world.

⁴ The greater proliferation of studies focusing on private individuals participating in the diplomatic process during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period has led to a greater body of theory about the characteristics of these individuals, for which researchers of those periods use the term ‘agents’. See for example: Marika Keblusek and Badeloch Vera Noldus, eds., *Double Agents: Cultural and Political Brokerage in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014).

⁵ Victor Halberstadt, “Opmerkingen bij aanbidding Ernst H. van der Beugel Fellowship, 2 februari 1983”, Scrapbook XVIII, AHB; G.M.V. van Aardenne, “Toespraak Z.E. Drs. G.M.V. van Aardenne, Minister van Economische Zaken”, Scrapbook XVIII, AHB.

⁶ Ben Knapen, interview with the author, 4 February 2013; Ben Knapen, “Woord vooraf” in: “For Ernst Only” (*Liber Amicorum*), 1997, AHB; Busby and Monten, “Without Heirs: Assessing the Decline of Establishment Internationalism in U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Perspectives on Politics* 6:3 (2008), 454.