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**Author:** Feddersen, Carl Fredrik

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## **Chapter 3: The model of overseas diplomacy in the Heeren XVII's Generale Instructies and the advice on Makassar in the particular letters**

### **Section 1: Chapter introduction**

#### *Chapter topic*

During the Company's existence, five sets of General Instructions were sent from the Heeren XVII in the Republic to the High Government in the charter area, namely the *Generale Patriase Instructies* of 1609, 1613, 1617, 1632, and 1650, respectively.<sup>376</sup> These were meant to serve as general manuals for the Company's operations in Asia. The 1613 Instructions is reprinted in the third volume of Pieter van Dam's *Bescryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*,<sup>377</sup> and all the others have been preserved and compiled by P. Mijer.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> See "On the primary sources", above 72.

<sup>377</sup> F. W. Stapel (ed.) 's Gravenhage, Matinus Nijhoff, 1943, 544-556.

<sup>378</sup> In: Mijer, *Verzameling van instruction*, 1848

*Chapter aim*

All these instructions were primarily concerned with the conduct of trade, but the Company's trade was always intertwined with politico-diplomatic implications. Advice on how to act towards local rulers in the charter area was thus also offered in the instructions. The General Instructions may therefore serve as a source of the Directors' ideas about the politico-diplomatic dimension of trade. My aim in this chapter is to reconstruct how the Directors' thinking on overseas diplomacy was reflected in their explicit advice and implicit assumptions in their comments on how the High Government should act when dealing with respective rulers and states in Asia. As for the Directors' comments on Makassar in the particular letters, I have primarily checked these to see to what degree they conform to the thinking in the general instructions.

*Chapter propositions*

Already in 1965, Charles Boxer noted of the 1650 Instructions that in the areas where the Company held no territorial rights or privileges by exclusive treaty, which comprised by far the largest part of its area of operation, the Company was instructed to proceed in a conciliatory and

accommodating manner.<sup>379</sup> In this chapter I propose that pragmatic adjustment to local conditions and context constituted the *basic* approach not only in the advice on diplomacy in the 1650 Instructions, but was a recurring feature in all the instructions from 1609 to 1650. Not only that, I argue that the imperative to act pragmatically and accommodate grew proportionally with the expansion of the Company's trade area. Implicit in this proposition of pragmatism is a relative devaluation of the role of international law in the Company's overseas diplomacy.

I argue that the Directors accorded a restricted and specific role of not only international law but also European legal concepts in their thinking and advice on overseas diplomacy. Legal theory was reserved as rules of conduct or legitimising devices in two specific areas: Relations with other Europeans, and legitimisation of the Company's position as a territorial sovereign and exclusive privileged party. Elsewhere, one had to improvise without being legally compromised. The General Instructions consistently advocate a flexible and accommodating

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<sup>379</sup> C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600–1800* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), 106.

approach to overseas diplomacy based on an assumption that we now would label “cultural relativism.”

Pragmatism goes together with dynamics. The Directors’ “model” of overseas diplomacy became increasingly insistent on the need for an open, flexible approach. Conversely, the stress on the need to adhere to principles of international law became more and more restricted. This tendency seems to have been proportional to the expansion of the Company’s area of operations, and thus invites the proposition that even in the Netherlands, views of overseas diplomacy reflected a learning process in which experience rather than legal theory explained the dynamics.

#### *Plan of exposition and analysis*

My analysis is split in two main parts. In the first part of the chapter I give an overview of context, general concerns, and the relative position of diplomacy in each of the General Instructions. In the second part, I conduct a more detailed textual analysis of the advice on overseas diplomacy in the 1650 Instructions, which ends up by pointing to continuities and changes as compared to prior ones. I have also added a brief section on the Directors’ comments on relations with Makassar in

their particular letters to the High Government. I conclude by summarising the nature and dynamics in the Directors' advice on diplomacy, ending up in a clarification of to what extent and under which conditions we may legitimately speak of a "diplomatic model" in the General Instructions.

Finally I discuss whether it is possible to reconstruct an "ideological superstructure" by which the Company's commercial activity was legitimised by the non-commercial values of the Directors. Affirming this, I give some tentative characteristics of the nature of this ideological superstructure and its implications for the conduct of diplomacy.

As for my selection of examples of diplomatic interaction in the General Instructions, the Banda Islands and Ambon, as conquered Company possessions, fall outside diplomacy proper. The diplomatic interaction with other European parties could be viewed as "inter-European practice and parlour" brought overseas, and thus also falls outside the bounds "cross-cultural diplomacy" proper. I shall, therefore only briefly account for the advice given with respect to the Moluccas and relations with European enemies and rivals, and concentrate my

analysis on the Directors' advice concerning the interaction with independent Asian rulers. Regarding the comments and advice on Makassar in the particular patriase letters, I have placed these at the end of the chapter.

### *Method and issues*

As for method, particularly in the textual analysis of the Instructions, I mainly apply close reading: What was the Directors' meaning and intention in saying what they actually did - or did not say - regarding diplomatic interaction with Asian princes and rulers? From what assumptions about overseas diplomacy did these utterances spring?

## **Section 2: The respective General Instructions 1609–50, and diplomacy’s role in them**

### *The 1609 Instructions*

The General Instructions of 1609 were written the same year that Habsburg Spain and the Dutch Republic signed the Twelve Years’ Truce. The final agreement on the Dutch trade in Asia in the Twelve Years’ Truce was that the Dutch were allowed to trade anywhere outside the domains of the united Spanish-Portuguese crown. In the Dutch Republic, however, there was little faith that the Spanish would honour this agreement. Besides, the agreement was not to become known in the charter area until one year after its original signing. In short, the 1609 General Instructions, although written at the outset of an armistice, were conceived with a particular eye to a condition of war with the Iberian powers.<sup>380</sup> The situation during the Twelve Years’ truce has been called “an armed peace in Europe, and endemic conflict in Asia,”<sup>381</sup> Another significant contextual factor should be mentioned: By 1609, the Company had not yet established an administrative bridgehead, a

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<sup>380</sup> Mijer, *Verzameling van Instructiën*, viii.

<sup>381</sup> Blussé and de Moor, *Nederlanders Overzee*, 119.



“general rendezvous” for Dutch merchants comparable to Portuguese Goa in the charter area.

Seen in terms of the Company’s internal development, the historical importance of the 1609 *Generale Patriase Instructies* is that they laid down the administrative structure that was to last throughout the Company’s existence. Whereas before 1609 the final responsibility had lain with the admirals of the respective fleets, the 1609 Instructions introduced the institutions of the governor-general and the Council of the Indies.<sup>382</sup> As far as the Directors’ handling of the topic of diplomacy in the 1609 Instructions was concerned, it can be split in two: Advice on how to handle European enemies and rivals, and advice on how to handle relations with Asian rulers. Neither of the two was given a separate heading, nor was “diplomacy” as such.

#### *Issues, concerns, and diplomacy in the 1609 Instructions*

The General Instructions of 1609 comprised forty-two articles in all. Articles 1 through 7 laid down the institutional structure and procedures for the administration of the Company in Asia. Articles 8–10 come the closest to offering general advice on diplomacy, covering both relations

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<sup>382</sup> See 1609 Instructions, arts. 1–8, Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, 5–7.

with local kings and princes as well as with the Portuguese. Article 8 introduces a section on particular advice on various issues; whereas article 9 deals with measures to be taken in Banten, then the centre of the VOC's activities in Asia. Tellingly the emphasis is on information gathering, repeated in article 10 which calls for the pursuit of information on local affairs in general and the situation of the Portuguese in particular.<sup>383</sup> Articles 8–10 could be seen as an introductory section to the main body of advice on managing affairs in the different places that the VOC operated in the charter area. The topical consistency is, however, interrupted by three articles concerning the nature of the “general rendezvous” and the role of “*predikanten*,”<sup>384</sup> and a longer section on private trade and the correct keeping of books.<sup>385</sup> The latter is succeeded by a section comprising articles 22–37,<sup>386</sup> which, except for two articles that give instructions on how to behave towards the Portuguese,<sup>387</sup> are all devoted to particular advice on specific places of operation. This section thus comprises by far the lengthiest part of the

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<sup>383</sup> 1609 Instructions, arts. 8–10, *ibid.* 7–8.

<sup>384</sup> 1609 Instructions, arts. 11–13, *ibid.* 9–10.

<sup>385</sup> 1609 Instructions, arts. 14–19, *ibid.* 10 – 13.

<sup>386</sup> 1609 Instructions, arts. 22–37, *ibid.* 13–19.

<sup>387</sup> 1609 Instructions, arts. 28–29, *ibid.* 16.

1609 Instructions, as it would in the later ones. The focus of the final four articles turns to the running of the factory in Banten.<sup>388</sup>

Although the successive General Instructions after 1609 were to become increasingly encompassing and more structured, a general pattern of organisation is visible already in those of 1609, namely in the general division between matters of internal administration and order, and particular advice on respective places of operation. The section on particular places of trade always remained the largest, and although we find articles that include comments on overseas diplomacy in general, most of the advice on diplomacy is found in the respective sections on particular places of trade.

Recommendations for dealing with the Portuguese are a recurrent subject. In the 1609 Instructions the subject is treated in separate articles,<sup>389</sup> but more often than not the subject of the Portuguese is treated in conjunction with the Moluccas or other areas of contest between the Company and the Portuguese. In none of the Instructions is diplomatic performance as such accorded a section in its own right. If the advice on diplomacy in this sense bears a casuistic imprint, the Directors

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<sup>388</sup> 1609 Instructions, arts. 38–42, *ibid.* 19–21.

<sup>389</sup> The 1609 Instructions marks an exception here, which must be explained by the particular 1609 context.

also give clear note, that as for actual performance in diplomacy with local kings and princes, as in the case of trade, it must be up to the High Government to take the final decision. Thus reads, for instance, the message in article 8, which makes the topical bridge between the section on the administration of the Company's headquarters and the section on particular places of operation: "Regarding how you choose to handle other matters [i.e. other than internal administration] government, trade, and alliances with the Kings and Potentates in Asia, we cannot give you any standing instructions, but only advise, instruct, and partly command as follows."<sup>390</sup>

When the Directors proclaimed not to be in the position to offer specific advice on how to behave towards independent Asian rulers it was most likely because of a felt lack of information. Pointing in that direction is that they consistently stressed the need to gather information about local rulers and their external relations, particularly with the

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<sup>390</sup> "Aangaande hoe gij U in andere zaken, de regering, commercie, trafique, mitsgaders de alliantien met de Koningen en Pottentaten van Indië betreffende, zult hebben te gedragen, daarop kunnen wij U geene faste ordre stellen, maar alleen raadgeven, instrueren ok eensdeel ordonneren als volgt." 1609 Instructions, *ibid.* 7. For the same contents, see art. 21, *ibid.* 13.

Portuguese.<sup>391</sup> In this respect the Directors' approach towards independent Asian rulers could be seen as "overseas diplomacy in the making." If fragmentary and lacking in specificity, one permanent feature was established: Diplomatic performance had to be based on optimum knowledge of local goings-on.

### *The 1613 Instructions*

#### *Context and general contents*

Much of what applied to the 1609 instructions applied to the 1613 instructions, too. In the negotiations which ended in the twelve year armistice between the Republic and the Iberian powers the Directors had both been pressing for the conclusion of as many treaties of alliance with Asian princes as possible, as well as plans for a consolidation of the Company's structure in the Charter area.<sup>392</sup> The concerns for internal administrative consolidation is reflected in the 1613 Instructions for instance in the relative number of articles related to the internal administration of the Company, which comes close to two thirds of the

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<sup>391</sup> See particularly arts. 9 and 10, *ibid.* 7–9, see below for textual analysis.

<sup>392</sup> J. van Goor: *De Nederlandse Koloniën: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse expansie, 1600-1975*, Sdu Uitgevers, (1994) 1997, 46.

total (22 out of 36 articles). Elsewise explicit concerns about forging alliances with Asian princes, implicitly also evident in the encouragement to gather information about local political affairs to that purpose, and lastly instructions to stand firm against the Iberian powers are main topics in the 1613 Instructions that all fall in line with the Directors overreaching aims in the first years after 1609.

*General presentation of the contents in the 1613 Instructions*

The 1613 Instructions comprise thirty-six numbered articles,<sup>393</sup> where the first article lay down rules for the constitution of the Council of the Indies, and the final one simply declares the completion of the Instructions. The remaining thirty-four articles concern various topics as the authority of the governor-general and the Council, to the maintenance of the Company's ships. I shall briefly point out the issues and concerns in the respective articles before I go on to analyse comments made on diplomacy in the text more specifically.

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<sup>393</sup> All the references to the General Instructions of 1613 are to the reprint of it in: F. W. Stapel (ed.) : Pieter van Dam: *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, Deerde boek, 'S-Gravenhaage, 1943, 544-56. From now on: Stapel (ed.), 1943.

The first article lays down the rules for the constitution of the Council of the Indies (note: 545),<sup>394</sup> whereas article. 2 establishes the authority of the governor-general and Council who are free to appoint the personnel, i.e. commanders, captains and soldiers at the respective forts. Article 3 concerns the administration of internal justice, whereas article 4 regulates the handling of fines and confiscations.<sup>395</sup> ArticleArticles 5 and 6 concern, respectively, the oath of loyalty to be sworn by all officials<sup>396</sup> and arrangements to be made when Company officials, governors etc., would come visiting where the governor-general might reside, or vice versa when the governor-general visited such authorities at their place of residence,<sup>397</sup> whereas article 7 returns briefly to the administration of internal justice.

After having thus delimited various aspects of the Company's internal organisation in Asia in the first seven articles, article 8 demonstrates the great space of authority placed in the hands of the governor-general and Council by the Directors, in that as for the issues to be treated in the rest of the Instructions, be they about other items of

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<sup>394</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 544-45.

<sup>395</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943 545.

<sup>396</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 545-46.

<sup>397</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 546.

internal government, trade and diplomatic relations with kings or potentates in Asia, the Directors did not consider themselves in a state to give general orders, but would offer advice in the specific,<sup>398</sup> Article 9 instructs the governor-general and Council to obtain as updated and comprehensive information as possible on the state of affairs, and particularly the performance of the personnel in the Company's service at respective other factories, outside Banten,<sup>399</sup> and thus concerns the relationship between the governor-general and Council in Banten and the other factories.

The conduct of commerce and diplomatic dealings with Asian princes in general is mentioned in article 8 (546), as topics on which, as we saw above, the Directors considered themselves not to be able to offer general advice. Still, in article 10, diplomacy with the Asian rulers with whom the Company did trade is presented as a topic in its own right, although not entirely, as the Asian princes' relations with the Portuguese and thus the Company-Portuguese is the dominant topic. I

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<sup>398</sup> *geen vaste ordre stellen, maar alleen raet geven , instrueren, oock eensdeel ordonneren als volght*, Stapel (ed.), 1943, 546.

<sup>399</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 546.



shall treat both these aspects of instructions on the Company's diplomacy in more detail below.

To continue listing the content of the articles, article 11 covers the internal, administrative structure in a narrower perspective as it deals with the issue of where the Council should make its headquarters,<sup>400</sup> whereas article 12 concerns the internal running and coordination of the Company's business, with instructions that when where to establish the headquarters has been decided, copies of the letters from the Directors in Patria should be sent to all the other Company factories in the Charter area.<sup>401</sup> Article 13 treats another internal aspect of the Company's settlement, namely where to post the respective schoolmasters and preachers sent over.<sup>402</sup> A quite different matter, the overseeing of the respective factories, is the issue of articles no 14 and 15, where a request to make an inventory of all the factory's assets, and a general accounting book, is given with specifics in detail.<sup>403</sup> Article 16 again deals with practical matters, but of a different nature, namely the loading and

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<sup>400</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 547

<sup>401</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 547-48.

<sup>402</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 548.

<sup>403</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 548-49.

arrangements for placing the goods on the return fleet and how to avoid damages.<sup>404</sup>

In article 17 the Directors ask to be informed about the state of the Company's ships and the eventual need for more ships in Asia, which is followed up by repeating the ban on private trade and sanctions for those breaking it in article 18.<sup>405</sup> The following article is about proper maintenance of the ships, which is followed up by an article on a quite different subject, as it gives instructions on how to go about trade, and also contains a paragraph regarding boosting morale and dedication to the Company's cause.<sup>406</sup>

Article 21 will be analysed in more detail below as it exclusively and explicitly gives advice on how the Company should act towards Asian princes and thus on the mode of the Company's overseas diplomacy. The same goes for article 22 as it, in addition to dealing with the relations with Banten and complaints about the high tariffs demanded by the rulers of the Sultanate, also expresses concerns about what this

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<sup>404</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 549.

<sup>405</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 549.

<sup>406</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 550.

harassment might do to the prestige and standing of the Company and thus indirectly comments on overseas diplomacy.

Advice on the diplomatic approach with respect to specific places and in conjunction with the approach of trade is also given in article 23, whereas the treatment of trade with China, in article 24, is solely focused on the possibilities of trade and trade relations.<sup>407</sup>

Article 25 is another article that concerns a purely practical topic, namely an instruction to unload and fit out for return the ships coming in from Patria as quickly as possible because of the wear and tear on both ships and equipment when in Asian waters.<sup>408</sup> The following article, article 26, is again about diplomacy, but not with Asian princes, as it returns to relations with the Portuguese and Spaniards. I shall treat this and all the other articles concerned with diplomacy in a separate section on diplomacy below.

ArticleArticles 27 and 28 establish the unrestricted authority of the governor-general and Council,<sup>409</sup> which is logically followed up in article 29 by the requirement that as the Governor-General Reynst had sworn to uphold the regulations in the Instructions before leaving Patria,

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<sup>407</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 551.

<sup>408</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 551-52.

<sup>409</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 552-53.

the members of the Council, not yet having done so, should do likewise on arrival in Asia.<sup>410</sup> ArticleArticles 30 and 31 concern the reorganisation of the sailings for trade with Ambon and Banda, as well as China,<sup>411</sup> whereas article 32 gives encouragements about the prospects for trade in sandalwood in Timor.<sup>412</sup>

Article 33 concerns a particular incident of the murder of a Company servant in Surat and how the Company should respond, but as this topic leads to reflections that carry advice on the mode of diplomacy, I shall analyse this aspect and article 33 in conjunction with the other articles which do the same.

In articles nos 34 and 35, the focus is again on internal issues as these articles provide instructions on the succession procedure in case of the death of the Governor-General Reynst, and practicalities concerning provisions for former members of the Council.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 553.

<sup>411</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 553-54.

<sup>412</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 554.

<sup>413</sup> Stapel (ed.), 1943, 554-55

*On diplomacy in the 1613 Instructions*

From the overview of topics given in the above paragraph, it could be said that as for relative volume, diplomacy plays a secondary role compared to the matters concerning the running and consolidation of the Company's presence in the archipelago. But still there are some features in the treatment of diplomacy in the 1613 Instructions well worth commenting upon.

In chronological order, diplomacy, whether it is with Asian princes or the Portuguese or the two viewed together, appears in the 1613 Instructions in article articles 8, 10, 21, 22, 23, 26 and 33. I shall first treat them in chronological order, and then see whether some general traits can be drawn from the particular advice given. Still, to begin with, I would like to point out that the bundle of advice on diplomacy that we *do* find is not grouped in a particular section of the Instructions, and as often as not, it crops up as afterthoughts on other subjects, rather than as a subject in its own right.

### *Article 8*

The first time the topic of diplomatic dealings with Asian princes in the general is mentioned is in article 8, but there is little else to remark on it than that it juxtapositions trade and diplomacy.<sup>414</sup>

### *Article 10*

Article 10 on the other hand is more specific in that it requires the obtaining of precise information about the standing and attitude towards the Company of all the princes and peoples that the Company had dealings with in all quarters of the Company's area of operation.<sup>415</sup> In addition one should also in particular determine the position of these local princes and rulers towards the Portuguese, currently, as well as before the coming of the Dutch.

In this connection, international law is brought into the picture in that one is asked to find out who were friends and who were enemies of the Portuguese, and in particular the legal standing of the Portuguese in

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<sup>414</sup> Compare the formulation: *Aangaende hoe ghy in alle andere saken en regieringe, de commercie en traffique misgaders de alliantien met de coningen en potentaten van Indiën, sult hebben te gedragen.* . .Stapel (ed.) 1943, 546.

<sup>415</sup> *Pertinentelijck informeren op de genegentheden, affection ende gunsten van alle ende iegelycke koningen, natiën, ende volkeren van de gantsche quartieren van India.* Stapel (ed.) 1943, 547.

relation to their Asian friends.<sup>416</sup> An imperative to access and communicate information to the Directors regarding trade relations as well as the judicial standing of the Company with Asian princes and rulers likewise required this for the Company's Asian contacts.<sup>417</sup>

Overseas diplomacy is the implicit topic of article 10, in the request to gather information about the attitude of local princes towards the Company and the Portuguese, but it must be added that possibly the issue is understood primarily in conjunction with the Company's relationship with the Portuguese. One trait is worth noticing regarding the relative weight put on the legal side of the matter. I am inclined to argue that this must primarily be seen as the struggle with the Portuguese, as a point of interest in getting to know what the legal standing of the Portuguese was with Asian princes, and as a pre-emptive instrument by the Company to make their own alliances and block the Portuguese. Anyway, in the next article where diplomacy is treated, article 21, international law is given a more universal quality.

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<sup>416</sup> *wel examinerende wie vrienden of vyanden mette Portuguesen sijn, omme wat redenen ende op wat consideratie van state alle 't selve gegrondet en gevestight is.* Stapel (ed.), 1943, 547.

<sup>417</sup> *Men overal goede intelligentie magh hebben, ende sooveel mogelijk is te vermeerderen; te oordelen en wetenen wat state des Compagnies saecken staan, op wat punten van state, alsmede van trafique en handel deselve rusten* Stapel (ed.), 1943, 547.

### *Article 21*

Article 21 starts by emphasising the importance of maintaining steady correspondence with Asian princes as a necessary support for keeping up and expanding trade.<sup>418</sup> “Correspondence” in this context should be understood as the exchange of diplomatic letters. The Directors also have some advice as to how to go about this task. One must proceed wisely with care and discretion (*wijsselijck en gantsch discretelijck*) so as to maintain good relations, and must pay close attention to who might be considered as potential friends as well as foes.<sup>419</sup> After having laid down these rules, the Directors again stress international law as the basis for the considerations on relations and treaties.<sup>420</sup> The actual treaties, be they of a political or commercial nature, must however also be concluded with an eye to the glory of God, the welfare of the Republic and the

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<sup>418</sup> *alle goede correspondentie, met de koningen van Indiën ...een groot deel van de conservatie van den Indischen handel voor ons en onse nakomelingen gelegen is.* Stapel (ed.) 1943, 550.

<sup>419</sup> *wel overleggende wie...uwe vrienden ofie vyanden behoeven of behoren te zijn.* Stapel (ed.) 1943, 550-51.

<sup>420</sup> *op dat stuck en die overlegginge uwe consideratie in materie van state gegrondet hebbende...* Stapel (ed.) 1943, 551.



Company's best, the article concludes.<sup>421</sup> Possibly at a risk of exaggerating, the juxtaposition still leads to the thought that international law was regarded as an instrument which furthered both the heavenly and earthly goals of the Company.

### *Article 22*

As mentioned above, article 22 deals at the outset with complaints about the ruler of Banten imposing new and too high tariffs and tolls on the Company. But concerns are voiced in conjunction with these complaints about the negative effects of these actions. They might lead to a loss of the Company's prestige with other rulers. The Bantenese action was thus not only insulting but could result in serious loss for the Company.<sup>422</sup>

The remedy offered is to keep up good appearances, while at the same time gather information, and if possible, apply countermeasures

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<sup>421</sup> *daarna alle alliantiën en verbonden, soo op 't stuck van materie van state, als van proffitelycke traffique met deselve maeckende, ...tot Godes eere, der landen welvaart en des Compagnies profijt gevordert.* Stapel (ed.) 1943, 551.

<sup>422</sup> *niet alleen schadelijck, maar oock schandelijck tot kleynaghtinge van onse natie, 't welck by alle andere koningen een quade consequentie soude mogen causeren en ons schade, schande en groot nadeel mogen gedyen.* Stapel (ed.) 1943, 551.

secretly.<sup>423</sup> The comments on diplomacy in article 22 demonstrate the secretive side of diplomacy, beneath the legal and formal level.

### *Article 23*

Article 23 says nothing about the conduct of diplomacy, but encourages keeping or establishing friendly relations with, engaging in trade with, and establishing factories in Johor, Patani, and a number of other places. The instruction is formulated generally to “maintain and establish new alliances of friendship and trade and establish factories wherever possible,<sup>424</sup> with the additional instruction that this be done according to an evaluation of what would serve the Company best. The article does not say anything about the mode of diplomacy; once again it primarily demonstrates the intertwining of diplomacy with trade.

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<sup>423</sup> *moet men haar voor onse uytterlycke beeste en erste vrinden houden, waartegens soovel met contrapracycquen en secrete inteeligiën gearbeyt worden als mogelijk is sonder noghtans de uytterlycke vrede an rulers of vrintschap eeninghsints te breecken of te alteren*, Stapel (ed.) 1943, 551.

<sup>424</sup> *onderhouden en maecken alliantie van vrientschap en traffique, en overal comptoiren en commissen leggen* Stapel (ed.) 1943, 551.

*Article 26*

The subject of article 26 is the relations with the Iberian powers and thus strictly speaking it falls outside of my field, as it does not say anything about Asian rulers. Suffice it therefore to say that here the Directors warn that Portugal and Spain will definitely try to harass the Company, which on its side should seek to deter the Iberians in every possible way.

However, if the Portuguese and Spaniards should forget and [breach treaties?] then reparations must be sought.<sup>425</sup>

*Article 33*

Article 33 represents an example where the article starts by commenting on a concrete-specific case and then evolves into more general advice, in this case on diplomacy. This issue at the outset is retaliation against Surat because of an incident including the murder of a Company servant there. The instruction is to retaliate by all means possible.<sup>426</sup> But, a diplomatic

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<sup>425</sup> *met alle mogelycke middlen soecken te weren*, Stapel (ed.) 1943, 552.

<sup>426</sup> *sult pogen by alle mogelycke wegen sooveel schepen, goederen en personen van Suratte onder uw geweld te krygen als immermeer mogelijk wesen sal*. Stapel (ed.) 1943, 554.

concern is added as a necessary precondition: One must retaliate in such a manner so as not to provoke Company-friendly Asian rulers.<sup>427</sup>

To my mind, the latter modification sums up the essence of the advice on diplomacy in the 1613 Instructions. The Company should approach Asian rulers with the aim to increase its influence and trade, and should do so by relying on treaties according to international law. But this may also turn to violence, as seen in the instructions with respect to the Iberian powers as well as in the instruction on retaliation against Surat. Still, above all, as is implicit in the emphasis put on acquiring information on local affairs and political relations, and as explicitly stated as concerns in article 22 on Banten and no 33 on Surat, the primary function of diplomacy remained to establish friendly relations and possibly alliances to facilitate the conduct of trade. Knowledge of local affairs and knowledge of how not to provoke, which was the same as to say knowledge of local manners, were essential constituents in this part of the package.

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<sup>427</sup> *sonder alteratie van onse gunstige koningen en volckeren van Indiën*. Stapel (ed.) 1943, 554.

*The 1617 Instructions*

Mijer characterises the 1617 Instructions as more encompassing, more determined in tone, and more structured in the ordering of issues than the preceding ones.<sup>428</sup> It is also significant that the 1617 Instructions were confirmed and included in both the 1632 and 1650 Instructions.<sup>429</sup>

Besides the obligatory section on particular places of operations, the 1617 Instructions covered a number of topics such as administration of internal justice, the promotion of the Christian creed, conditions for allowing private trade, as well as the promotion of settler-colonisation by free burghers.<sup>430</sup> The Moluccas was the pressing issue as far as the Company's external challenges were concerned. In 1615, Governor-General Reynst had decided to settle the score with the Portuguese by conquest, but the expedition under his personal command failed. It was left to Jan Pieterszoon Coen to complete the task. Appointed bookkeeper-general in Banten by Pieter Both in 1613, Coen wrote several letters to the Heeren XVII offering advice on the Company's strategy before he was named governor-general in 1619. The most famous is his *Discourse aen de Edele Heeren Bewindhebberen*,

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid. Inleiding, p. ix.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid. Inleiding, p. ix.

<sup>430</sup> Stapel, *Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch Indië*, 3.123.

*toucherende den Nederlandsche Indischen Staet* (Memoranda to the honourable Directors concerning the state of affairs in the Netherland's Indies) of 1614, in which he advocates a decisive stand and firm action against both European rivals and local rulers who were undermining the Company's monopoly.<sup>431</sup> The issues that Coen raised were included in the 1617 Instructions, but the policy recommended against intrusion by rival Europeans and the measures to be taken against local breaches of monopoly agreements were less militant.<sup>432</sup>

#### *Hierarchy of concerns by structure of exposition*

The 1617 Instructions comprised eighty articles, almost double those of the 1609 Instructions, and well over double of the Instructions of 1613. The subjects can be grouped into issues in the following order: Articles 1 through 6 covered the administrative structure of the factory in Banten, including the order of succession in case of the death of the governor-general, the enlargement of the Council of the Indies from five to nine

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<sup>431</sup> Stapel, *Geschiedenis van Nederlansch Indië*, 118, 121.

<sup>432</sup> Compare particularly arts. 35 and 45, Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, 1617 Instructions, 34 and 37 respectively.

members,<sup>433</sup> and the distribution of administrative tasks among the councillors.<sup>434</sup> Articles 7–34 concerned the organisational structure and running of the Company’s operations in the charter area, covering both political and commercial issues, as well as instructions about “education” and missionary work in the Moluccas.<sup>435</sup>

Articles 35–44 covered miscellaneous topics such as how to handle third-party intrusion into the Company’s monopoly possessions,<sup>436</sup> instructions for the return-fleet,<sup>437</sup> and regulations for private trade.<sup>438</sup> Articles 45–47 started with the general recommendation to stick to peaceful relations and avoid war with Asian rulers.<sup>439</sup> This obviously has diplomatic implications, but it is succeeded by the issue of eliminating or reducing tolls paid in Banten and elsewhere,<sup>440</sup> how to proceed in expanding trade with China,<sup>441</sup> and the issue of military provisions for the fort of Ambon.<sup>442</sup> The relations with Banten and China required negotiations and diplomacy. In the case of Banten, the High

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<sup>433</sup> 1617 Instructions, arts. 1 and 3, *ibid.* 25–26.

<sup>434</sup> 1617 Instructions, art. 4, 1617, *ibid.* 26.

<sup>435</sup> 1617 Instructions, art. 34, *ibid.* 34.

<sup>436</sup> 1617 Instructions, art. 35, *ibid.* 34.

<sup>437</sup> 1617 Instructions, arts. 36–40, *ibid.* 36.

<sup>438</sup> 1617 Instructions, arts. 40–44, 1609, *ibid.* 37.

<sup>439</sup> 1617 Instructions, art. 45, 1617, *ibid.* 37.

<sup>440</sup> 1617 Instructions, art. 46, 1617, *ibid.* 37.

<sup>441</sup> 1617 Instructions, art. 47, *ibid.* 37.

<sup>442</sup> 1617 Instructions, art. 48, *ibid.* 37.

Government was instructed to avoid any cause for war.<sup>443</sup> Regarding China, the instructions counselled conducting trade in such a way that relations might improve.<sup>444</sup> One may see articles 45–47 as a body of diplomatic advice concerning interactions with independent Asian rulers; but if so, the general message and particular advice offer little more guidance than to avoid war. War was also the implicit issue in the next seven articles<sup>445</sup> concerning the defence of the Company's position in the Moluccas and measures to be taken against the Iberian powers.

The next seventeen articles all concern regulations on private trade.<sup>446</sup> Of the remaining articles of the 1617 instructions, one single article is dedicated to the settlement of expatriate Chinese in Company-controlled areas.<sup>447</sup> The issue of provisions for the overall importance of the defence of the Company's possessions in the Moluccas is emphasised in article 75.<sup>448</sup> The next two articles express the need to establish an

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<sup>443</sup> 1617 Instructions, art. 46, *ibid.* 37.

<sup>444</sup> 1617 Instructions, art. 47, *ibid.* 37.

<sup>445</sup> 1617 Instructions, arts. 49–45, *ibid.* 38–39.

<sup>446</sup> 1617 Instructions, arts. 56–73, *ibid.* 39–43.

<sup>447</sup> 1617 Instructions, art. 74, *ibid.* 43.

<sup>448</sup> 1617 Instructions, art. 75, *ibid.* 43.



independent rendezvous and the requirements that had to be met for it.<sup>449</sup>

Article 78 returns to the issue of war with the Portuguese with instructions to undertake a maritime campaign against them on an annual basis.<sup>450</sup> The two concluding articles both confirm the powers and prerogatives of the High Government.<sup>451</sup>

### *The role of and approach to diplomacy*

Although we may agree with Mijer that there is a more defined structure in the 1617 Instructions than there is in those of 1609 and 1613, we should at the same time notice that diplomacy is not accorded a section of its own in the 1617 Instructions, either. It is treated in conjunction with respective relevant cases. These comments demonstrate a defined contrast. Advice on performance towards independent Asian princes recommends accommodation. Recommendations on how to approach the Iberian powers, which occur mostly in conjunction with the advice on the Moluccas, are bellicose, completely unlike the approach to the former. This pattern we have already seen in embryo in the 1609 Instructions and

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<sup>449</sup> 1617 Instructions, arts. 75 and 76, *ibid.* 44.

<sup>450</sup> 1617 Instructions, art. 78, *ibid.* 45.

<sup>451</sup> 1617 Instructions, arts. 79 and 80, *ibid.* 45.

fully articulated in the Instructions of 1613, and it is repeated in those of 1632 and 1650.

### *The 1632 Instructions*

Of particular interest in our context is that the Instructions for Governor-General Hendrik Brouwer and the Council of the Indies dated March 17, 1632, were the first after the Company had established Batavia as its Asian headquarters. It is thus not surprising that almost half of the ninety-six articles are dedicated to the administrative and judicial running of the Company's headquarters in the charter area. The 1620s had witnessed a phase of geographical expansion of Company-trade, which is reflected in the more extensive advice on conduct in particular places of trade in the 1632 Instructions. Growing self-confidence given the successful repulsion of the attacks on Batavia in 1628 and 1629 must also be taken into account when considering the background of the 1632 Instructions. Fear of rising defence costs is a prominent topic in the 1632

Instructions,<sup>452</sup> though not when it concerns the defence of the Company's possessions and monopoly rights in the Moluccas.<sup>453</sup>

### *Contents and structure of the 1632 Instructions*

The 1632 Instructions have an even more defined structure than the preceding one. They can be split in three main parts. The first thirty-nine articles all concern the running of Batavia as a colonial institution, with articles 1-3 covering the administration of justice and the rest are devoted to various practical matters related to the daily running of Batavia. The next forty-six articles<sup>454</sup> deal with the commercial regime and conduct of trade in the charter area. Particular instructions as to the Moluccas make up a considerable part of this section.

### *The Moluccas*

Articles 63 to 80 are all dedicated to the Moluccas<sup>455</sup> and cover such diverse issues as the repair and upkeep of defence works,<sup>456</sup> measures to

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<sup>452</sup> For warnings against unnecessary defence costs, see arts. 19 and 33, Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, 54, 56.

<sup>453</sup> See below, 88-89.

<sup>454</sup> 1632 Instructions, arts. 40–86, Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, 57-67.

<sup>455</sup> 1632 Instructions, arts. 62–65, *ibid.* 62-63.

<sup>456</sup> 1632 Instructions, arts. 63, 72, 69, and 79, *ibid.* 62-63, 64, 66. Art. 69, on Ambon, is actually on the reduction of the garrison, to economise the Company's expenses.

be taken against the illegal sale or production of cloves,<sup>457</sup> and measures to be taken against Makassarese “smuggling” and influence in Ambon.<sup>458</sup> This section also includes a proposal to replace the original population on Banda with slaves, a plan based on the assumption that, given their “inherently defect” human nature, trying to change the character of the Bandanese by schooling or religious instruction was useless.<sup>459</sup> As the policy on private trade from the 1617 Instructions had been reversed, a section of the 1632 Instructions includes six articles on the prohibition of private trade and sanctions to be used against those breaking it.<sup>460</sup>

There follow five articles that cover “miscellaneous” issues as the inspection of the factories outside Batavia,<sup>461</sup> prohibitions on offering sea-transport to anyone who had travelled overland to Asia,<sup>462</sup> and worries about the cost of keeping excessive numbers of slaves.<sup>463</sup> The concluding article ends with an instruction to get rid of unqualified

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<sup>457</sup> 1632 Instructions, arts. 65, 73, and 78, *ibid.* 63-64, 65, 66.

<sup>458</sup> 1632 Instructions, arts. 66–68, and 80, *ibid.* 64, 66.

<sup>459</sup> “Het aanhouden van scholen aldaar, nademaal het naturel van de Bandanezen bevonden woort zoo kwaadaardig te zijn, dat er geen hoop is om deselve te verwinnen ... en daarom oordelen de kwaadaardige Bandanezen te versenden.” 1632 Instructions, art. 75, Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, 65–66.

<sup>460</sup> 1632 Instructions, arts. 84–90, *ibid.* 67-68.

<sup>461</sup> 1632 Instructions, art. 90, *ibid.* 67–68.

<sup>462</sup> 1632 Instructions, art. 94, *ibid.* 69.

<sup>463</sup> 1632 Instructions, art. 95, *ibid.* 69.

personnel, and a “mobilising appeal” to renew the Company servants’ dedication to the Company.

*The treatment of diplomacy in the 1632 Instructions*

Diplomacy is not accorded a subsection in its own right in the 1632 Instructions. There is, for instance, no general formulation on “foreign policy” stating that international law is the foundation for overseas diplomacy equivalent to the statement in article 1, which declares “the laws and practices in the United Provinces” to be the basis of the judicial regime in Batavia.<sup>464</sup> A parallel formulation explicating the legal foundations and general principles of diplomatic interaction with Asian princes seems alluringly close, but, as in its predecessors, the comments on diplomatic interactions with locals and approaches to rival Europeans are mixed with particular advice on the conduct of trade.

The 1632 Instructions by virtue of the sheer volume of advice on places of commercial operations in the second section, contains broader and richer material regarding explicit and implicit advice on diplomatic conduct than the predecessors. I shall give some examples on the

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<sup>464</sup> “eene regtmatige justitie ... mag worden bediend volgens de instructien en praktijken in de Vereenigde Nederlandsche Provinciën doorgaans.” 1632 Instructions, art. 1, *ibid.* 47.

treatment of diplomacy to illustrate the complexity of the overseas diplomatic challenges, and the Directors' empirical and pragmatic approach to how to handle the Company's diplomatic challenges.

The section on the conduct of trade covers the Company's commercial operations from Persia to Japan. The articles concerning trade in Persia instruct how to deter the recurrence of English influence<sup>465</sup> and how to present the Persian ruler with a "substantial gift" (*eerlijke veerering*) to improve bilateral relations.<sup>466</sup> In three articles on trade between China and Japan via Formosa,<sup>467</sup> the Directors approve a proposal suggesting submission to (*demping*) rather than accommodation with (*onder sauvegarde*) pirates in the South China Sea to get better access to trade in China. In that connection, it was deemed necessary drive the Spanish out of their stronghold on Formosa.<sup>468</sup> Instructions for the use of violence against the Portuguese are repeated in article 62, which calls for systematic attacks on the Portuguese ships sailing

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<sup>465</sup> 1632 Instructions, art. 40, Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, 57.

<sup>466</sup> 1632 Instructions, art. 43, *ibid.* 58.

<sup>467</sup> 1632 Instructions, arts. 56–58, *ibid.* 61.

<sup>468</sup> 1632 Instructions, art. 57, *ibid.* 61.

between Japan and Macau.<sup>469</sup> Both these articles primarily concerned access to trade. The common denominator regarding relations with the Asian states in question was accommodation, in the case of the Persians, gifts, and in the case of the Chinese, abstention from behaviour that might provoke retaliation. The advice on behaviour towards other Europeans was to minimise their local activities and influence, as in the case of the English in Persia, or to regularly oust them by military means, as with the Spanish in Formosa. This piece of advice summarises the Heeren XVII's general principle of overseas diplomacy with independent Asian polities of size and power well: Maximise friendly relations with the former, minimise the influence held by Europeans, and fight the latter when necessary. In the case of the Moluccas, the balance between the rose and the nailed glove was somewhat different. But both applied in the Moluccas too.

### *The Moluccas: Political concerns and diplomacy*

The Moluccas fell under the category in which third-party influence had to be countered given the Company's sovereignty and monopoly rights

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<sup>469</sup> “om den Portuguesen dien handel infructueus te maken 1632 Instructions, art. 62, *ibid.* 62.

on Ambon and the Banda islands. As we have seen, this meant military concerns of territorial defence and the ability to protect the Company's monopoly rights by force. But it also meant keeping a sharp eye on the other island polities in the Eastern Archipelago, and if possible trying to make alliances with them. Ternate was the obvious ally in the Eastern Archipelago in blocking Makassarese influence and actions in the archipelago. The 1632 Instructions offered a lengthy passage on how to sustain the alliance with Ternate. Article 64, on relations with the king of Ternate, reads:

Despite the fact that we consider all this behaviour feigned, and try to keep him estranged from the Spanish, and support him with courteous compliments, under no circumstance must we, except for reasons of utmost importance, fall into conflict with him, which would jeopardise the cause of the Company and only serve the interests of the enemy. Therefore, one must post rational, reasonable, and wise men there who would know how to defend the interest of the Company with competence ... because if we from our side act properly, we may expect them to act in an obliging manner.<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> De koning van Ternate “niettegenstaande Wij al zijn doen voor geveinsd, en hem vervreemd van den Spanjaard houden en met hoofsche complimenten onderhouden, en men geene, als om hoogwigtige redenen in rupture van vrede met hem te vervallen,



If the stakes were higher in the Moluccas, the instructions on Ternate were in line with the advice on trade on Persia and China above. The latter two reflected a context where European rivalry meant a kind of “diplomatic competition” for local goodwill. That logic required men of tact and competence to handle relations with local power-holders more than intimate acquaintance with international law. This approach can be found as an assumption in all the *General Instructions*, but was explicated to the fullest in the 1650 Instructions.

### *The 1650 Instructions*

A tripartite order of the Company’s diplomatic position and subsequent approach was formalised in the 1650 Instructions. The three categories were areas where the Company held sovereignty rights, areas where it held exclusive contracts, and areas where it had to trade on equal terms with other parties.<sup>471</sup> Although an explicit formalisation of these categories was written down for the first time in the 1650 Instructions,

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waardoor de zaken van de Compagnie al te zeer verachten en den vijand te groot voordeel op Ons krijgen zoude. Verstandige, kloeke vredzame personen, het regt van De Compagnie met goed beleid wetende te defenderen, dienen aldaar, zoo als hiervoor gezegd is, want als Wij van Onze zijde wel doen, kunnen van hen afvorderen ’t geen zij schuldig zijn te presteren.” 1632 Instructions, art. 64, *ibid.* 63.

<sup>471</sup> 1650 Instructions, art. 18, *ibid.* 76.

the tripartite division is also discernible in prior Instructions. After all, the arrangement was taken over from the Portuguese.<sup>472</sup>

The 1650 Instructions can be regarded as the richest source of information about the Heeren XVII's model of overseas diplomacy of all the General Instructions, not only for its explication of the Company's overseas diplomatic system, but for its sheer length—164 articles in all, covering places of operation across the whole charter area. Still the 1650 Instructions conform with their predecessors in that no one section or group of articles deals strictly with how to conduct bilateral diplomacy. Except for the article on the tripartite system, the advice on diplomatic mode was given in conjunction with particular cases. Not only did this case approach still apply, but as Mijer stresses, one of the peculiarities of the 1650 Instructions was its enhanced casuistic nature, which went both for approach and style.<sup>473</sup> Still, it holds true that the 1650 Instructions also contained general observations and advice on the mode of the

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<sup>472</sup> C. G. Roelofsen, "De periode 1450-1712," in *Compendium volkenrechtsgeschiedenis*, edited by A. C. Eyffinger and C. H. Bezemer, (Deventer: Kluwer, 1991), 58.

<sup>473</sup> Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, "Inleiding," xi–xii.

Company's operations, but as in the prior ones, such general advice appears in conjunction with or as generalisations from case comments.

Its comprehensive and practical nature helps explain why the 1650 Instructions was the last body of General Instructions for the Company. As late as 1746, they were still acknowledged as the basis for the Company's operations in the charter area.<sup>474</sup>

### *The context of the 1650 Instructions*

The years between 1632 and 1650 were the “dramatic period” of Van Diemen's governor-generalship,<sup>475</sup> with its offensive against the Portuguese and bold territorial expansion. With the death of Van Diemen and appointment of Van der Lijn as governor-general in 1646<sup>476</sup> and the peace of Münster in 1648, the Company was in for the less “dramatic” reign of Joan Maetsuyker (1653–78), characterised more by consolidation and securing prior gains than acquiring new ones. It should also be added that by 1650, peace had been concluded with Batavia's two territorial neighbours on Java, Banten, and Mataram.<sup>477</sup> A more immediate concern for the Directors in 1650 was about the moral fibre

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid. Inleiding, xiii.

<sup>475</sup> Governor-General 1636–45.

<sup>476</sup> To be followed by Carel Reynierzoon in 1650.

<sup>477</sup> In 1645 and 1646, respectively.

and conduct of their servants in the East, more specifically the twin problems of private trade and corruption.<sup>478</sup> This went all the way to the very top, and perhaps proportionally so. Governor-General Van der Lijn was allowed to seek retirement in an act of grace, but his second in command, Director-General Francois Caron, was called back to The Netherlands in 1650, on accusations of corruption.<sup>479</sup> Thus rather than expansion, consolidation, both internal and external, was the keyword for the 1650 Instructions.

### *Textual analysis, the 1650 Instructions*

As the 1650 General Instructions offer the richest material for a reconstruction of a Patriase model of diplomacy of the four extant Instructions, I shall analyse them in detail to demonstrate that, while the Directors' approach towards diplomatic performance should be viewed as pragmatic at the outset, this pragmatism became ultimately more embedded and increasingly explicit in the 1650 Instructions.

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<sup>478</sup> Stapel, *Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch Indië*, 285.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.* 285.

I start by giving an overview of the relative position of international law, and the advice on the relative position on the use of force versus accommodations and negotiations regarding the three categories of the 1650 Instructions. Here I draw particular attention to the emphasis that the Directors put on acquiring information about local conditions and affairs. After reviewing the “diplomatic model” of the 1650 Instructions, I return to its predecessors with an eye to demonstrating the extent to which the pragmatic model of diplomacy was developed or foreshadowed in these. I conclude by discussing whether, and on which grounds, it is fair to speak of a non-commercial ideological dimension in the Directors’ General Instructions that may have implications for the interpretation of its approach to and conceptualisation of overseas diplomacy.

*The balance between war and diplomacy regarding independent Asian princes*

As in all the General Instructions, the Company’s possessions in the Moluccas, namely the areas that had been won by the sword and areas where the Company held contracts of exclusive privilege (covered in categories 1 and 2 of the 1650 division) were also to be defended by the

sword.<sup>480</sup> This relative position between diplomacy and war was inverted in category 3. The advice about Persia is quite explicit that war should only be resorted to as defensive retaliations and only when there were no other options at hand: “Our military might must only be applied against violence and injustice done against us, and then only when the grievances cannot be solved by peaceful means.”<sup>481</sup> The principle goal of the mercantilist diplomacy articulated in category 3, where the Company held no special privilege, was to set down the terms for a treaty of trade. Its preferred means was peaceful negotiations. War was a means of last resort.

### *Treaties and negotiations in category 3*

To understand the meaning of “treaty” in the nexus between the VOC and independent Asian states, one must first repeat the obvious: These contracts were vehicles for profitable trade. If and when political matters were regulated, they were regulated with the intention of facilitating trade. It therefore seems more relevant to analyse these treaties as

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<sup>480</sup> 1650 Instructions, arts. 19 and 20, Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, 76.

<sup>481</sup> “Onze magt en wapenen... alleen gebruikt moeten worden tegen geweld en ongelijk, dat Ons aangedaan wordt, als hetzelfde met vrede niet uit den weg kan gelegd worden.” 1650 Instructions, art. 72, *ibid.* 89.

commercial contracts in which legal and political issues were addressed pragmatically as a means to secure profit rather than principally to secure an international order in its own right. At best, international law was a means to legitimise a political trading regime. But it did not form it. This is not to say that “law” had nothing to do with it, but in the process of the actual treaty making, it was secondary. The Directors’ primary concern regarding the High Government’s performance was that the latter negotiate the most profitable treaty possible. Their basic concern about the treating parties was that they honour their contractual obligations. This latter concern really amounted to a feeble hope that they could be trusted to do so. The difficulty of establishing contractual arrangements in Persia, for instance, was attributed to an inherent lack of trustworthiness on the part of the Persian people. Contracts with the Persians had “always been renewed under the most difficult and arduous conditions, due to the devious, proud nature of that people.”<sup>482</sup>

By implication: To get a bilateral treaty with local rulers—and not least to convince them to stick to it—took both knowledge and skills.

This is a point that is stressed repeatedly in the Instructions’ advice on

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<sup>482</sup> “Zoodanige contracten altijd vernieuwd geweest zijn met vele moeilijkheden en vexatiën, naar den aard van die schrapende, superbe natie.” 1650 Instructions, art. 67, *ibid.* 88.

particular places of trade, far more often than specific comments on legal aspects per se. For one simple reason, I propose, the legal dimension lay in the right *to* conclude contracts of trade or make alliance bonds. The rest was left to improvisation. Guidelines for how this improvisation should proceed were offered in the Directors' advice on overseas diplomatic interaction but these were precisely general guidelines advocating contextual adaptation and pragmatism.

*Adaptation, accommodation, and pragmatism as the general principle in diplomatic interaction with rulers in category 3*

The heterogeneity of the overseas context in category 3, which comprised polities of such different size and power as Tokugawa Japan, China, the Mughal, and Safavid Empires, on one hand, and lesser states and port polities in southern Indian and the Indonesian archipelago on the other, meant that the diplomatic mode had to be adjusted to a variety of local conditions and circumstances. This in turn begged for an awareness and appreciation of the particularity of context and local conditions and modes. In other words, diplomatic interaction in category 3 posed a challenge that by its very composite nature opposed a generalised "Eurocentric mode of thinking," if the Company should



reach its goals. Here, the Company's submissive approach to defend their position in Japan is often pointed to.<sup>483</sup> But Japan was but one extreme case where the Directors' advice ran along the principle of "approach-diversification" dictated by particularities of local context. The 1650 Instructions actually propagate an advice that pragmatism must generally prevail.

The particular advice on the conduct of trade in Persia in the 1650 Instructions illustrates both the point of a case approach, and the way specific advice on a case could slide into more general ideas on transcultural diplomacy. Here the Directors' shifted their focus from particular advice to advocating a pragmatic, even cultural relativistic approach as a first principle of overseas diplomacy. They emphasise that the High Government must not try to enforce European standards in places where they "find the law and do not bring it." The only permissible principle is to adhere closely to local norms and rules: "The above mentioned trade cannot be pursued by applying our own standards or by use of force, as we (in these places) *must adapt to existing laws*,

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<sup>483</sup> See for Instance, Blussé and de Moor, *Nederlanders Overzee*, 227–28, and Van Goor, *De Nederlandse Koloniën*, 106–107.

*and not bring it.*”<sup>484</sup> Intriguingly this relativistic and pragmatic stand is given a pedagogic counter-illustration by the Heeren XVII: Imposing one’s own norms on autonomous Asian princes would be just as unacceptable as if outsiders should claim the right of interference in areas where the Company held legitimate control: “Just as the Company in the places under its jurisdiction would not tolerate it should any (outside) nations dictate its manner of operation by their own laws.”<sup>485</sup>

The recommended cultural relativism argued above was at the outset conditioned by the relative imbalance of strength in favour of the Safavid Empire. So, even though it could be argued that the above examples do not explicitly point to “cultural relativism” (an anachronistic term, in any case) as a general principle in the Directors’ thinking, what stands out as a general rule is that the Company was instructed to assess local norms and follow them as far as need be.

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<sup>484</sup> “Den vornoemden handel Ons op eigen concepten niet toeigenen en zoodanige natiën met magt daartoe mogen constringeren Alwaar Wij de wetten vinden en niet brengen moeten.” 1650 Instructions, art. 71. Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, 89; emphasis in the original.

<sup>485</sup> “Gelijk de Comp. ook niet verstaan zoude kunnen, dat op plaatsen onder haar gebied sorterende, andere natiën op de manier van handelen haar de wet zoude willen stellen.” 1650 Instructions, art. 71, *ibid.* 89.

Different terms, same substance. The practical consequence of this pragmatic advice was cultural accommodation.

*Cultural accommodation*

Article 53 of the 1650 Instructions underlines the accommodating approach to be applied, taking particularly the pride of the people in the overseas areas into consideration. The article starts with a reminder of how misconduct has previously damaged the interests of the Company:

The differences regarding the relative value accorded to prestige by the Dutch and the Asian peoples must be taken into account in all the Company's dealings in the East ... the debauches of many Company [servants?] in many quarters of India has caused setbacks in their daily dealings, whereby it is important to take into consideration that Asian peoples are very sensitive as to respect, and therefore harbour little affection for the Dutch nation.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> “Dat de debauche van vele Compagnie ministers in verscheiden kwartieren van Indië extraordinaire verachtering in de dagelijksche affaires geeft, waarbij geconsidereerd, dat de Indische natiën zeer gevoelig van hun respect zijnde, daardoor kleine affective tot de Nederlandsche natie zetten.” 1650 Instructions, art. 53. *ibid.* 84.

Put between the advice particular to Malacca and Sumatra, the generality of the message is all the same clear: Lack of appreciation of local ways and sensitivities was counterproductive to the goals of the Company. The way to further these goals was accommodation to local standards. The message was repeated in connection with the advice on Tonkin. “Take care not to cause the slightest offence to the king or his nobles”<sup>487</sup> ran the counsel regarding North Vietnam.

Tonkin was of a strategic commercial importance in that it delivered silk that could be traded for silver in Japan. Its relation to the Company represented a typical category 3 constellation in that the Dutch could have no realistic hope of forcing their own conditions of trade upon the local rulers. The instructions on the Tonkin trade represent yet another example where the Directors go on to enunciate a principle of cultural relativism as the basis of Company diplomacy in places where it could not itself make the rules: “There is no alternative but to play the game according to local rules, in particular in places where we are in no

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<sup>487</sup> “Onze ministers zich voor al wachten moeten, om den Koning en den grooten van’t rijk eenige de minste offensie te geven.” 1650 Instructions, art. 116, *ibid.* 100.

position to change things, but must conduct our trade on the basis of local laws.”<sup>488</sup>

The Directors’ reasoning regarding interaction with cases in category 3 was then that in some, if not most, of those places, “rules were different.” As the Company was neither in a position, nor had the legitimate grounds, to change the rules, it must and should play by the local ones. But to do that, one needed Company servants who were culturally observant and knew how to “play the game” by the local rules.

#### *The desired quality of personnel*

General human qualities such as the ability to observe and accommodate local norms were the qualities that counted in the kind of personnel the Directors wanted to be appointed to positions in the places where the Company could dictate neither the law nor customs. “Do primarily base your conduct on modesty, humbleness, politeness, and amity; always acknowledging your inferior position,” ran the advice to the governor in

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<sup>488</sup> “Niet anders te doen is, als anderen met gelijke munt te betaalen, zonder te denken op feitelijke resistentiën, inzonderheid op plaatsen, daar wij niets te zeggen hebben, maar ons naar de wetten van die landen op het stuk van den handel reguleren moeten, 1650 Instructions, art. 116, *ibid.* 100.

Deshima in the 1650 Instructions.<sup>489</sup> Although Japan represented an extreme case, as already noted, in essence this advice represented the norm more than the exception with respect to desired personal conduct in category 3. Neither the 1609 nor the 1617 Instructions had such explicit remarks on “modesty” as a preferred quality, but the 1632 Instructions did. Regarding whom to appoint as governor of Ambon, for instance, the Directors stressed that he must be: “good natured, not arrogant; forthcoming towards the (local) inhabitants, and able to spot their sensibilities and accommodate them in minor matters.”

Admittedly, Ambon was not an independent state, but the qualities and mode of performance sought for in prospective governors fit perfectly well with the recommendations for personal qualities and mode of performance in diplomatic interaction with independent states offered in the 1650 Instructions. The advice essentially came down to this: do not stir feelings of discontent or disrespect, accommodate to local standards, and be pragmatic as long as it serves the interest of the Company. This “principled pragmatism” also stands out as a defining

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<sup>489</sup> “Compagnie’s ministers ...vooral gewapend moeten gaan met) modestie, nederigheid, beleefdheid en vriendschap, altijd de minste zijnde.” 1650 Instructions, art. 114, *ibid.* 99.

trait in the Directors' advice on the respective means of diplomacy at hand in dealing with the Asian rulers in category 3 of the 1650 Instructions.

*Means of diplomacy: The diplomatic gift*

Gift exchange and diplomatic missions were constituent elements in the diplomatic interaction in early modern South East Asia as it was in Europe.<sup>490</sup> The exchange of gifts and, to a lesser degree, paying homage stand out as the two particular means for establishing or maintaining peaceful relations in both regions. In the overseas context such gift giving and embassies were considered political “overhead” for the conduct of commercial transactions. In the advice on relations with Siam, the function of the gift as “grease money” is made quite explicit. Gifts must be seen as politico-diplomatic overhead to secure the prospects of profits from the trade in Siam: “In order to get the goodwill of the king and foreign minister of Siam, it is necessary to offer them annual gifts with compliments to their liking, and, given the great profits for the Company resulting from the trade there, no pettiness must be allowed as

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<sup>490</sup> For a balanced comparison between European and Asian diplomatic systems and modes in the Early modern period, see Jeremy Black, *A History of Diplomacy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 33 ff.

far as the costs are concerned.”<sup>491</sup> In other words: Today’s politico-diplomatic investment is tomorrow’s commercial gain, and the two must be calculated in relation to each other.

*Notions of cultural relativism and pragmatic accommodation to local ways in the pre-1650 General Instructions*

Article 10 of the 1609 Instructions illustrates how pragmatism was built into the Directors’ perception of overseas diplomacy from the start. The article states that the Company must gather information on Asian princes and their ways of trade and on the standing of the Portuguese; but it also puts emphasis on the need to gather information about the political situation in different ports of call. The article opens with an order to “accurately inform [the Directors] of the circumstances, the feelings, and approach of each and every one of the kings, nations and peoples over

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<sup>491</sup> “De gunst van de grooten te mogen capteren, de Koning en Berquelang met jaarlijksch vereering, hun aangenaam zijnde, begroet moet worden; welke kosten, ten aanzien van de groote commoditeit daaruit voor de Compagnie resulterende, op profijit aangelegd worden, en derhalven niet te menagerende mogen zijn.” 1650 Instructions, art. 85, Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, 92.



the whole of Asia where the Company conducts or is licensed to conduct trade.”<sup>492</sup>

The pursuit of information must be understood as being sought after because it was instrumental to trade, but the desired knowledge was not restricted to matters of commerce alone. Included was information about the diplomatic relations between local rulers, as well as their relations with other Europeans. The governor-general and Council were instructed to take note of Asian princes’ relations with the Portuguese and others: Who were their enemies? Who were their friends? And what were the legal foundations and considerations of their relationships? The quest for this kind of information was obviously motivated by the Company’s struggle to wrest control of the trade dominated by the Portuguese. Still, in the overseas context, this struggle was a triangular affair with the commercial prospects and political stand of Asian trading states as one of the dimensions. To get a better idea of the Asian dimension, the Directors asked for information not only of the current state of politico-diplomatic stands of the Asian princes, but about their

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<sup>492</sup> “Zult gij U pertentelijk informeren op de genegenheid, affection en gunsten van alle en een iegelijke koningen, natiën en volken van de gansche kwartieren van India ... om te weten, welke gunst en genegenheid dezelve koningen, natiën of volken tot den handel met die van de Compagnie zijn hebbende.” 1609 Instructions, art. 10, *ibid.* 8.

political and economic power and diplomatic performance towards the Portuguese and the Dutch in the past. The article goes on to specify the kind of information one should look for. Information about Asian polities was thus not restricted to trade relations, it was meant to serve the purpose of establishing and easing the Company's diplomatic relations with them:

“One therefore must seek information about domestic politics: such as “specifically by whom and in what manner all the respective states were governed in all matters, (and) by which means to communicate and establish relations with them, and consistently increase the Company's pool of knowledge.”<sup>493</sup>

What is being demonstrated here is that already in the first of the General Instructions, the Directors regarded information on local conditions of power, politics, and policy as the foundation for the Company's success when interacting with independent Asian rulers. Although the implications for diplomatic practice could have been more

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<sup>493</sup> “als te weten: hoe, bij wie en welke personen alle zaken in de resp. Rijken gereegeerd worden; wat middel, om communicatie en access hij dezelve te hebben, aangewend moet worden, ... goede intelligentie ... zooveel mogelijk is te vermeerderen.” 1609 Instructions, art. 10, *ibid.* 8.

explicit, the message is nonetheless clear: the Directors were not ethnographers, they were men of business, and the information they sought served the purpose of establishing and preserving profitable trade relations. No sane person with that intention would go about it by breaking local customs and rules or challenging the local rulers and authorities. The pragmatic approach and accommodating mode outlined in the 1650 Instructions is implicitly preconceived in the emphasis laid on the importance of gathering information about Asian rulers, their politics, and their policies in the 1609 Instructions.

Squeezed between an article on the general conduct of trade and particular advice on the trade in the Moluccas,<sup>494</sup> article 21 of the 1609 Instructions entails a formulation that comes as close as it can to a full enunciation of pragmatism and accommodation in diplomatic relations: “As for good correspondence with the kings in Asia,” the Directors wrote, admittedly making no reference to diplomatic correspondence in particular, but implicitly including it, they considered themselves unable to give any specific advice, but would in general remark that the perseverance of the Company’s trade in Asia now and in the future

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<sup>494</sup> 1609 Instructions, arts. 20 and 22, respectively, *ibid.* 13.

depended on such contact. Therefore, the governor-general and Council was advised to “proceed with caution and act discretely” in deciding whom to befriend and whom to consider the Company’s enemies, whether from concerns about trade or for other reasons.<sup>495</sup> I take this to foreshadow the more explicit elaborations of a culturally accommodated approach in the 1650 Instructions.

#### *International law and “treaty” in the 1609 Instructions*

The 1609 Instructions state that law was the foundation upon which to build the Company’s interaction with Asian rulers. Having considered who to fight and who to make friends with “on the basis of law” (*materie van state*), all contracts of friendship relations or alliances guaranteeing the Company free access to trade had to be based on the same legal footing. The Directors do not use the phrase *regt van alle volkeren* or any other seventeenth-century synonym for “international law,” but what they had in mind must in all probability have been the universal right to

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<sup>495</sup> “Belangende alle goede correspondentiën met de koningen van Indië te houden, daarop kunnen Wij U geen particulariere vaste instructie geven, maar in ‘t generaal zeggen, dat aan ‘t zelve een goed deel van de conservatie van den handel voor Ons en Onze nakomelingen gelegen is, zulcks gij U dienshalve zeer wijselijk, voorzigtelijk en gansch discretelijk moet gedragen, wie om haar profijjt of uit haar eigen belang Uwe vrienden of vijanden behoeven of te zijn.” 1609 Instructions, art. 21, *ibid.* 13.

trade, given by the principles of natural law,<sup>496</sup> as the basis for bilateral treaties to regulate conditions for and terms of trade. But of the two, the latter took precedence, and besides that the treaty was but the tip of the iceberg or the end result of negotiations or war, or both combined. The diplomatic effort proper lay in the challenge of getting a treaty.

International law primarily came into the picture as a basis for the appeal to get it, and the defence of it in the case of third party intrusion. Still bilateral negotiations centred on the treaty were thus the crux of the Company's overseas diplomacy. This explains the emphasis on information about local context and conditions. Assessing the prospects for securing a treaty and the right performance in getting it were dependent on accurate assessments of local conditions. Implicitly contextual awareness and cultural sensitivity were vital to successful diplomatic performance. This is the same kind of configuration between information-gathering and pragmatic diplomatic performance and treaty making that we find fully elaborated in the 1650 Instructions.

This “pragmatic package” can also be found in the 1613, 1617 and 1632 Instructions, as we have seen, articles no 21 of the 1613 and no

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<sup>496</sup> Roelofsen, “De periode 1450-1712,” 91–92.

45 of the 1617 Instructions more or less repeat the wording of article 21 of the 1609 Instructions by stating that the High Government must keep its correspondence and make friendships and alliances with “all the kings, princes, republics, and men of power” in Asia with all due discretion and caution,” yet again leaving the actual decisions about how to proceed up to the High Government, as it “thought best in the interest of the Company.”<sup>497</sup> Significantly, however, the 1617 Instructions add, like those of 1613, that the Company’s performance on the ground must generally be conducted in a manner “not to offend anyone or to run into conflict and war with anyone over petty matters.”<sup>498</sup> If the term “accommodate” was not used, that was still the core of the message.

Although the Directors’ basic approach regarding the purpose and mode of diplomacy remains the same in 1617 as in 1609 and 1613, there are differences. The naming of the Asian counterparts in general terms as “the kings, nations, and peoples” in 1609 and in the same general terms in 1613 is replaced by a more nuanced terminology in 1617 which then

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<sup>497</sup> 1613 Instructions, art. 21, Stapel (ed.) 1943, 550-51, 1617 Instructions, art. 45, Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, 37.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.* 37.

included “kings, princes, republics, and men of power.”<sup>499</sup> One should be careful to read too much into such differences but still the difference might be taken as an indication of growth of knowledge about the Asian counterparts that had taken place in the eight years between the two sets of instructions. If this is correct, the difference in wording supports the proposition that the Directors’ understanding of overseas diplomacy was subject to a dynamic learning process. Another difference is that the 1609 and 1613 explicit insistence on law as the basis of interaction and relations with Asian rulers was left out in 1617. Possibly the formal legal footing went without saying, but it might also reflect that legal justifications did not constitute the primary challenge in making treaties.

In the 1632 Instructions, regarding trade on Siam, an appeal for accommodation and pragmatism is made explicit. To get a firm foothold in the Siam trade, the Directors had discussed whether to approach the king directly or to approach subaltern ministers responsible for his trade<sup>500</sup> in a given area. It was stressed that, if and when doing so, one should at the same time take care to stay on good terms and conduct

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<sup>499</sup> “Alle koningen, prinsen, republikeinen en heeren.” Ibid. 37.

<sup>500</sup> “gedelibereerd zijnde, of met den handel met den koning of met particuieren ... stabiliëren zoude.” 1632 Instructions, art. 41, ibid. 57.

regular correspondence with the kings' ministers at court.<sup>501</sup> The advice sprang from fear that a direct approach to the king's ministers at the regional level might cause royal offence. The Directors ended up by stating that the advice regarding Siam could serve as a general example, in that the governor-general and Council must "seek to have all disagreements that may prop up tackled in a way that would best serve the interests of the Company."<sup>502</sup>

In this case the Directors did not consider it sufficient or relevant to act dogmatically and try to force the Company's rights by reference to international law. The whole process of negotiating terms of access to, and rules for the conduct of trade was far too concrete and specific than to be handled by in general terms of law in the final instance. The Directors knew this in 1632, as they did in 1609, 1613 and 1617, even if they would most unequivocally express it in 1650. If cultural sensitivity, accommodation to local norms and pragmatism in negotiating the political terms of trade with independent Asian rulers were only fully

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<sup>501</sup> "Houdende nietteminmet Malambeek en alle andere van den koning dependenderende goede vriendschap en correspondentie." 1632 Instructions, art. 41, *ibid.* 57.

<sup>502</sup> "Alle openstaande dissentiën ten meesten dienste van de Compagnie zoude zoeken af te handelen." 1632 Instructions, art. 41, *ibid.* 58.



explicated in the 1650 Instructions, these precautions were no doubt all foreshadowed and if not fully expressed in the preceding Instructions.

*Conclusion: The Directors' model of overseas diplomacy in the General Instructions, 1609–50*

Pragmatism was the Directors' recommended means to get what the Company wanted in a political environment different from their own. International law could only do so much: Give legitimacy to the claim to trade on par with third parties in category 3, and legitimise sovereignty and exclusive monopoly rights in the Moluccas, that is categories 1 and 2 of the 1650 Instructions. But this is where the function of international law actually stopped. The basic building block of the Company's overseas interaction regime remained the bilateral treaty concluded on site and designed to meet the requirements defined by local conditions and policies. That is why the Directors' General Instructions bore the stamp of a principled pragmatism. That in its turn was founded on an assumption of cultural difference.

### Section 3: Commerce, diplomacy, and ideology

I have so far treated the Directors' advice on diplomacy as embedded in a pragmatic, commercial logic. I think that was the core of it, but this still does not give us the whole picture. There was also an idealistic—and not necessarily ideological—dimension as far as values and motives were concerned.

Configuring a hierarchy of values or means-to-an-end relations in the General Instructions on one hand puts one in the position of repeating the obvious. The Company was a commercial institution, and its primary purpose was to conduct profitable trade: “De eenige ziel van’s Comp. lichaam zijnde.”<sup>503</sup> By simple inference, diplomacy and treaty making served the purpose of facilitating profitable trade first and foremost. But the question remains whether “profit” was the sole motive or reigned supreme in the Directors' worldview. The evidence strongly suggests that commercial concerns were not only intermixed with non-commercial concerns, but that some of the latter were treasured as values in their own right. Pride in power and prestige are two candidates that stand out.

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<sup>503</sup> 1650 Instructions, art. 123, particular advice on Coromandel, *Ibid.* 102.

Qualifying the proposition that the pursuit of the “Glory of the Company” may have been a motive in its own right for the Directors is that such appeals may well have been instrumental to the accumulation of diplomatic capital, which in turn might have been perceived as helping to achieve the ultimate goal: maximisation of profit. Still, my point is that whatever the exact configuration of the relationship between means and ends with respect to concerns other than profit, a survey of the more encompassing package of mixed concerns that I *do* find points to the fact that the Directors’ perspective was broader than the proposition of a singular and all dominating profit motive suggests.

I shall narrow the problem down to how non-commercial concerns were presented in the Directors’ General Instructions. Whether they served legitimating purposes or were conceived as values in their own right is difficult to tell, but generally, my proposition is that the rational “Reasons of Company” thinking was supplemented by “idealistic,” moral-religious, and even emotional dimensions.

*The Company’s success as providential blessing*

As for the evidence of religious appeal in the Directors’ General Instructions, I have tried to leave out the instances where references to

“higher powers” (God) are purely conventional. My focus will be on instances where the Directors depict the venture of the Company as part of a “greater plan” and interpret its successes as a sign of “providential blessings.” Such appeals are particularly found in the closing paragraphs where the Company’s secular success is portrayed as evidence of providential blessings for a righteous, “higher” cause. The two are actually depicted as two sides of the same coin.

The concluding article of the 1650 Instructions<sup>504</sup> for instance is clearly intended as an ideological spur to the High Government’s total commitment to the cause of the Company. It starts with a reminder to the members of the High Government that they “may every day dedicate all of your thoughts and interventions to the general and particular workings of the Company.”<sup>505</sup>

The commitment of the High Government is then put into a religious perspective. All their efforts “will fall upon them lightly, especially as God himself, who knows what is best for man, will give the

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<sup>504</sup> 1650 Instructions, art. 164, Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, 115–16.

<sup>505</sup> “Dat Ued. Alle Uwe gedachten en mediatiën op het generaal en particulier werk van de Comp. dagelijks latende gaan.” 1650 Instructions, art. 164, *ibid.*

work his blessings.”<sup>506</sup>The “conceptual figure” or “moral lesson” here is that there exists a heavenly ordained symmetrical relation between worldly efforts and returns on earth. Dedicated work brings its reward by God’s blessing—a Company variety of *Devotio moderna*, or a connection between “the Protestant ethic and a “Spirit of Company”, if you wish. In the following paragraph from article 164, however, it is not so much heavenly returns that are stressed, but the more mundane returns for the Company to be earned by a collective high moral standard and the dedication of its servants in all fields of office:

But, as all good results finally depend on the moral example of the persons in charge, must we remind you members of the High Government and the Councillors of the Indies to serve collectively as an exemplary model in all your domains of office, execution of justice, law-enforcement, trade and all other matters.<sup>507</sup>

One should of course be careful not to read too much into such formulations. Cynically read, the text might basically mean, “Stop your

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<sup>506</sup> “zeer ligt en onbezwaard toevallen zal, inzonderheid als God de Heere, die weet wat den mensch nut is, ‘t zelve gelieft te zegenen.” 1650 Instructions, art. 164, *ibid.*

<sup>507</sup> “Maar gelijk alle deugden haar gevolgen krijgen uit goede opperhoofden en voorgangers wordt UEd. En den Raden van Indië gezamentlijk, als een lichaam representerende, ten hoogste gerecommandeerd med goede exempelen in de justicie, policie, handel en al hetgeen daarvan verder dependert, te toonen.” 1650 Instructions, art. 164, *ibid.* 116.

individual smuggling.” But what is also clear is that the Directors’ stress that just as righteous conduct has rewards and blessings at the individual level, so does the Company’s success as a corporate body depend on the virtue and moral conduct of the High Government as a collective body.

In the final paragraph of article 164, a unity of morals at the individual- and at the corporate level is linked together. Committed service to the Company according to the “laws of God” would bring it secular rewards guaranteed by providential blessings:

That you Councillors of the Company should take the interest of the Company so to your heart that the long awaited fruits may be anticipated, for which we pray to the Lord that you jointly, will be spared all ‘misfortunes,’ and that he will bless trade more and more under his long continuing blessings and protection.<sup>508</sup>

The same linking of God and the Company’s success is found, although in a somewhat different form, in article 10 of the 1609 Instructions, which summarises the general aim and purpose of the

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<sup>508</sup> “Dat Ued. Het welvaren van deze loffelijke Nederlandsche geocrtiojeerde Oost-Indische Comp. zoo te harte gaat, dat daarvan de lang verwachte vruchten te gemoet mogen zien waartoe wij God den Heere bidden, Ued. te zamen en in het bijzonder voor alle ongeluk en onheil te bewaren, den handel van Inidië onder Ued. beleid meer en meer te zegenen, en onder Zijne heilige bescherming lang voorspoedig te willen houden.” 1650 Instructions, art. 164, *ibid.* 116.

Company as being “Not only to continue, but to seek to increase and broaden the commercial activities in the name of Christ, to the salvation of the non-Christian peoples, to the honour and respect of our Nation and to the benefit of the Company, in all possible ways.”<sup>509</sup>

As it stands, it is not explicitly made clear what the priorities among mission, national glory, and profitable trade should be. In fact, article 10 could be read to mean that trade was instrumental to mission (*den handel tot verbreiding*), but this was quite simply not the case, for the Company’s commercial mission was restricted to areas conquered from the Portuguese, and colonisation schemes such as that on the island of Formosa were the exception.

We find a more secular “trinity” in article 20 of the 1609 Instructions, which concerns the Company’s intra-Asian trade. The Directors do not find themselves in a position to give specific advice on this, but in general the trade must be conducted to “serve the Republic, accrue profit to the Company, and protect and defend the honour of the

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<sup>509</sup> “Om den Oost-Indischen handel tot verbreiding van den naam van Christus, zaligheden der onchristenen, eere en reputatie van Onse natie, ten profijt van de Comp. niet alleen te continueren, maar bij alle mogelijke middelen en wegen te vergrooten.” 1609 Instructions, art. 10, *ibid.* 8., and is repeated almost word by word in article 10 of the 1613 Instructions, Stapel (ed.) 1943, 547.

Company.”<sup>510</sup> “God” re-enters the trinity in the following article, however, at the expense of the Company’s honour: “Our friendship and trade must be promoted and carried out to the glory of the Lord, the well-being of the country, and the profit of the Company.”<sup>511</sup>

In the concluding article of the 1632 Instructions, heavenly providence and corporate commitment are called upon in the following manner: “That the prosperity of the honourable United Company so goes to your heart that we may reap the fruits, for which we pray God to spare you from all mischiefs and accidents, (and) to preserve the trade of the Indies.”<sup>512</sup>

Here, then, we encounter the same configuration as in the 1650 Instructions: Individual commitment to the Company is likened to taking part in an endeavour for a collective body under heavenly blessings.

References to “God” or appeals to a “higher order” are also invoked as a source of consolation and encouragement in the face of

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<sup>510</sup> 1609 Instructions, art. 20, Mijer, *Verzameling van instructiën*, 13.

<sup>511</sup> “Onzen voet in Indië vast, Onze vriendschappen en de trafique tot Godes eere, der Landen welvaart, en den Comp. Profijt bevorderd en gedreven mag worden.” 1609 Instructions, art. 21, *ibid.* 13.

<sup>512</sup> “Dat U.Ed. het welvaren van de loffelijk Vereenigde Geooctroieerde Oost Indische Comp. Zoo ter harte gaat, dat daarvan de vruchten zullen mogen tegemoet zien, waartoe God bidden U.Ed. voor alle onheilen en ongelucken te bewaren, den handel van Indie te willen onderhouden.” 1632 Instructions, art. 96, *ibid.* 70.



hardship. In the concluding paragraph of article 72 of the 1650 Instructions (concerning trade with Persia), the High Government is instructed not to retaliate violently to local injustice or harassment, unless clearly provoked to do so, and then only as a last resort. The sufferings and injustice that may be inflicted upon the Dutch should instead be viewed with calm and as being temporary. At the end of the day, seen from the perspective of cosmological justice, the wrongdoers would be punished and those showing restraint and righteous conduct rewarded: “Just as one must never lose confidence in the justice of God, it is our aim that those who follow evil ways will receive punishment, just as those who follow the righteous path in this behaviour can expect God’s blessings.”<sup>513</sup>

There is a common denominator in all these references to the providential dimension to the Company’s venture. Divine blessing is consistently linked to the secular success of the Company, which again is combined with an implicit or explicit appeal to individual commitment and dedication to the execution of work in the Company’s service. What

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<sup>513</sup> “Gelijk aan Gods rechtvaardigheid geenzins getwijfeld mag worden, zoo gaat ook zeker, dat degenen, die onregtvaardig wegen inslaan, de straffen daarvan gevoelen zullen, maar degene den regten weg in hunnen handel volgende, Gods zegen daarop te verwachten hebben.” 1650 Instructions, art. 72, *ibid.* 80.

is particularly relevant in this context is the relationship between means and ends; in the final instance providence and individual morale are both seen as means to the Company's collective success. This is, I think, as far as we can get in trying to establish a more general worldview or ideological framework from the Generale Instructiens. It represents a *raison de compagnie* argument, mixed with corporate pride, and a sense of belonging to the happy few. This has implications for the understanding of the Directors' diplomatic model in the sense that it is hard to imagine that diplomacy was perceived as being extrinsic to moral standards or void of emotions or motives of prestige and pride. I would thus propose that although the Directors' thought in pragmatic terms, their thinking also had an idealistic component. However, the idealistic dimension mentioned to in the above, is less evident in the comments and advice on Makassar in the particular letters from the Directors to the High Government.

## **Section 4: Approaches to diplomacy in the entries on Makassar in the particular patriase letters to the High Government 1634–1669**

### *Section introduction*

All in all nineteen entries were made about Makassar in the particular patriase letters to the High Government in the period covered by my study<sup>514</sup>. The first is a comment on illicit trade via Makassar in a letter of September 3, 1634,<sup>515</sup> and the final ones are two comments in a letter of May 9, 1669<sup>516</sup> on the situation after the various peace settlements with Makassar 1667-68.

The Directors' remarks and advice on Makassar cover a wide range of issues such as smuggling of spices via Makassar, as in the letters of September 2, 1634, April 21, 1635<sup>517</sup> and September 25, 1642,<sup>518</sup> or

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<sup>514</sup> The sources consulted in this subsection are respectively: Johan van Hoorn's book of extracts of letters by the XVII to the GGs 1629-1697: *Notulen getrocken uijt de brieven van de Heeren Bewindhebberen van de Generale Nederlandsche Geotroijeerde Oostindische Compagnie ter Vergadering vande Seventienen : Beginnende met die van den 28 Augustij anno 1629 en Eijndigende met die van 27 December 1697*, KITLV, collection H 45, from now on: "Van Hoorn, Notulen", and the original letters in the NA: VOC, 1.04.02, Invnrs. 316-319.

<sup>515</sup> Patriase letter, September 3, 1634, Van Hoorn, Notulen, fol. 7: NA, Inv.nr. 316 fol. 45b.

<sup>516</sup> Patriase letter, May 9 1669, two entries, Van Hoorn, Notulen, fol. 108b and 113b respectively. NA, Inv.nr. 319, unf.

<sup>517</sup> Patriase letter, April 21, 1635, Van Hoorn, Notulen, fol. 7b, NA, invnr. 316, fol. 67b.

<sup>518</sup> Patriase letter, September 25, 1642, Van Hoorn, Notulen, fol. 14b, NA, invnr. 350, fol. 380-380b.

where to buy sappanwood of the best quality<sup>519</sup>. Whereas one entry occupies itself with taking actions to secure the supply of rice from Makassar,<sup>520</sup> another concerns technicalities on modes of payment and credit<sup>521</sup> and yet another gives orders not to enter “imaginary profits” into the bookkeeping.<sup>522</sup> None of the above entries will be analysed here however, as I shall concentrate on comments which contain implicit perceptions or explicit remarks on policy and mode of diplomacy towards Makassar.

*Letters containing politico-diplomatic implications or direct advice on diplomatic approach*

The particular patriase letters containing direct and specific advice on policy and mode of diplomacy towards Makassar are in chronological order the letters of: September 22, 1648, October 13, 1656, October 9, 1657, August 23, 1661, August 24, 1663, October 23, 1666, May 14, 1667, August 22, 1668 and of May 9 1669, already mentioned.

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<sup>519</sup> Patriase letter April 7, 1663, Van Hoorn, fol. 74. NA, invnr. 318, fol. 591.

<sup>520</sup> Patriase letter September 21, 1644 Van Hoorn, fol. 17., NA, invnr. 317, fol. 3b-4.

<sup>521</sup> Patriase letter April 29 1664, Van Hoorn, Notulen, fol. 78 b, NA, invnr. 351, fol.666-667.

<sup>522</sup> *Imaginereede winsten de boeken te brengen*, Patriase letter 7 November 1665, Van Hoorn, Notulen, fol. 89 , NA, invnr 351, fol. 814.

In their letter of September 10, 1650, the Directors called upon the High Government to “evict all Portuguese from Batavia and close all other Company residencies to them as their presence was “bad for the Company.”<sup>523</sup> Considering the strong Portuguese position in Makassar, this obviously indirectly had to do with Company relations with Makassar, but the entry contained no further explicit advice on how the High Government should act towards the Sultanate or the Portuguese there, and thus falls outside the sample of policy advice concerning Makassar.

Within the sample of advice on policy towards Makassar proper, the series of letters up to October 23 1666 is broken by insertions of advice on practical and commercial matters as already noted above. But in the letters after the sending of Speelman’s expedition in 1666 up to and including the ones of May 9, 1669 the patriase comments on Makassar form an unbroken chain of reflections and advice. I shall analyse the Directors’ view in the whole sample with a particular eye to how it fits in with or contradicts my findings in the analysis of the Directors’ model of diplomacy in the General Instructions.

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<sup>523</sup> *Batavia en alle andere residentien van de Comp: Van de Portuguesen Suyveren, en deselve aldaar geen toegange meer geven ... als quaat voor de Comp.*, Patriase letter, September 10, 1650, Van Hoorn, Notulen, fol. 32, NA, Invnr. 317, fol. 89b.

I have not been able to find any comments by the Directors on the 1637 Treaty. The first entry containing direct advice on mode of diplomacy is thus in the letter of September 22, 1648, where the subject is whether the Company should go to war or find peaceful solutions with Makassar. The Directors come up with a strong advocacy for the latter: a war against Makassar is hard to win, and one should strive to maintain the friendship so as not to end up with even more enemies. The ideal situation was to continue “trading in peace”<sup>524</sup>.

The letter of October 13, 1656 also concerns the issue of war and peace, but this time in a more immediate context, on account of the Directors’ fears that the Company might become involved in a war with Mataram and Banten. The High Government is therefore recommended to keep peace with Makassar so as to avoid a situation where the Company is “threatened from all sides”<sup>525</sup>.

When in the letter of Oct. 9, 1657, the High Government is reminded by the Directors to just keep an eye on Makassar with no other

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<sup>524</sup> *om met selver (Makassar) in vriendschap te blyven om geen meer vyanden op onsen hals te hebben ... vreedsame negotie*, Patriase letter, September 22, 1648, Van Hoorn, fol. 25b, NA, Invnr. 317, fol. 111.

<sup>525</sup> *den Mataram ende Bantam ... ons van alle kanten op luyf souden vallen*, Patriase letter, October 13 1656, Van Hoorn, Notulen fol. 48, NA, Invnr. 317, fol. 450.

specific instructions,<sup>526</sup> it falls in line with the fears of falling into war and the wish to avoid it as expressed in both 1648 and 1656.

The comments on Makassar in the patriase letter of August 23, 1661, written in the aftermath of the successful campaign against Makassar in 1660, are more specific than the prior ones. The Directors start by expressing their joy over the victory in the general and the destruction of Portuguese ships at the Makassarese roadstead in particular. Then they go on to emphasise that when the Makassarese had been forced to conclude “such an advantageous peace”, it contributed to increasing the Company’s reputation in the area<sup>527</sup>. But except for the congratulations on the victory and the comment regarding the increased standing the victory gave the Company, no concrete advice or instructions on policy were offered.

More concrete and specific advice was given in the letter of August 24, 1663, however, where the High Government was asked to approach and invite the Sultan of Ternate’s brother, Calamatta to Batavia instead of having him walk freely in Makassar which meant “running the

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<sup>526</sup> To keep an eye on the goings on in Makassar , Patriase letter Oct. 9, 1657, Van Hoorn, Notulen, fol. 52b, NA, Invnr. 317, fol. 508b-509.

<sup>527</sup> *(de vrede) nu soo avantajieus gesloten zynde, sal het selve geen kleyne luyster aan ‘t Comp. Reputatie d’omleggende gewesten geven*, Patriase letter of August 23, 1661, Van Hoorn, fol. 65b. NA, Invnr. 318, fol. 406-407.

risk that he might conspire with the English.”<sup>528</sup> This advice thus conforms to the cautious reminders we saw in the letters of September 22, 1648, October 13, 1656, and Oct. 9, 1657, except that in 1663 the caution took the form of preempting tactics to guard against any third party scheming to undermine the peace with Makassar.

In the letter of October 23, 1666, the Directors state that they are awaiting what will eventually happen regarding the relations with Makassar, but repeat their general advice to stay out of trouble and conflict, while at the same time stressing that the High Government must consolidate the Company’s position in the Eastern quarters.<sup>529</sup> In other words the Directors’ comments reflect a combination of calling for caution and advising that necessary precautions be taken. In the former respect the advice represents an echo of prior ones.

Even more so does the following letter of May 14, 1667, where the appeal to seek peaceful solutions once again is voiced. In 1667 the

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<sup>528</sup> *dan pericuel te lopen darby op Macassar blyvende ofte sigh onder Engelse begevende*, Patriase letter August 24, 1663, Van Hoorn, Notulen fol. 76, NA Invnr. 351, fol. 611.

<sup>529</sup> blyven de Heeren afwagten , met recommandatie om met dat ryk (Makassar) buyten werveyderinge en hostileyten te blyven, ... in de oosterse quartieren te consolideren, Patriase letter October 23, 1666, Van Hoorn, Notulen fol. 91b, NA Invnr. 319, unf.



appeal for peaceful solutions starts by the Directors expressing their hopes that relations with Makassar would improve, and that the Company would soon be allowed to trade there again.<sup>530</sup> Then an implicit statement of recommended policy is offered by stating that “lately the Company had had good profitable trade and made advances in Makassar”<sup>531</sup>. The implication is clearly that because of the war, trade had suffered and that the Directors were looking forward to an ending of the war so that peaceful relations and thereby profitable trade could be resumed.

With the news of Speelman’s victories in the fall of 1667<sup>532</sup> the Directors’ cautious tone changed somewhat, but not without qualifications. The section on Makassar in the letter of August 22, 1668 started with the Directors’ congratulations on Spellman’s “great victory”, and then went straight on to express the wish for the conclusion of an “honourable peace.” The latter point was expressed as a matter of some urgency however, as the Directors expressed their doubts as to whether

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<sup>530</sup> Hopen dat de saken met Maccassar ten beter sullen uytvallen, en wy daar verder geadmittert, Patriase letter May 14, 1667, Van Hoorn, Notulen fol. 93. NA Invnr. 319, unf.

<sup>531</sup> geen vordeligh ... een considerable negotie en... goede advancen gehad, Patriase letter May 14, 1667, Van Hoorn, Notulen fol. 93. NA Invnr. 319, unf.

<sup>532</sup> See chapter 1 and on the Bongaya treaty in chapter 8.

the Company would have the necessary military might to keep the Makassarese suppressed for long.<sup>533</sup> Unnecessary continuation of the war would in addition mean a non-wished for draw on limited resources that were needed elsewhere, for instance Ceylon, they pointed out.<sup>534</sup> In support of establishing a final peace settlement as soon as possible, the Directors also argued that the Company in dealing with the Makassarese was “dealing with people of a stubborn nature.”<sup>535</sup> A prolonged war might thus well mean that the Makassarese would become even more dedicated in their struggle against the Company.<sup>536</sup>

The Directors’ comments on how to deal with Makassar after the victories of 1667 thus on the one hand expresses pride in the Company’s victories but on the other hand also worries that a final settlement be established as quickly as possible so as not to jeopardize the Company’s current advantageous position. This ambiguity signals that the Directors

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<sup>533</sup> dat hierop een honorable vrede gevolgt was, alsoo ‘t niet apparent is, wy met continuatie onser wapenen met voordeel , de Makassaren geheel t’onder sullen brengen, Patriase letter August 22, 1668 Van Hoorn, Notulen fol. 105.: NA Invnr. 319, unf.

<sup>534</sup> daar ...op Ceylon soo noodige is, Patriase letter August 22, 1668 Van Hoorn, Notulen fol. 105.: NA Invnr. 319, unf.

<sup>535</sup> uit een hartneckigh wolck te doen heben, Patriase letter, August 22, 1668 , Van Hoorn, Notulen fol. 105. NA Invnr. 319, unf.

<sup>536</sup> de Makassaren by langere continuatie van den Oorlog ...dardor te stoutmoedigen worden, Patriase letter, August 22, 1668 , Van Hoorn, Notulen fol. 105. NA Invnr. 319, unf.

in autumn of 1668 perceived the Company's position in relation to Makassar had not been radically changed so as to call for a reconstruction of the political map of South Sulawesi with the Company as hegemon, which in fact became the de facto result of the war. The Directors' mode of arguing in August 1668 however much jubilant, was still one basically characterised by caution and restraint.

There are two entries about Makassar in the patriase letter of May 9, 1669. The first entry is based on news in a letter from Speelman that the Makassarese have guns and are able in using them. Apart from worries over this fact, the Bewindhebbers state that victory over Makassar depends on the support of the Bugis.<sup>537</sup> The tone in the entry that followed is far more optimistic, here the Directors express their surprise that the High Government had been able to humiliate the Makassarese to accept such a "dishonourable and unfavourable contract of accommodating submission."<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> Patriase letter, May 9, 1669, in Van Hoorn, Notulen, Folio 108b and and 113b, NA Invnr. 319, unf.

<sup>538</sup> hadden noit gedagt dat wy Makassar tot sulken vernedringe souden hebben kunnen brengen dat hy tot het aangaan van sulcken disreputatien en nadeligen contract, in genoegsame submissie soude hebben kunnen verstaan, Patriase letter, May 9, 1669, Van Hoorn, Notulen fol. 113b. NA Invnr. 319, unf.

The two entries on Makassar in the May 1669 letter must have been entered respectively before and after knowledge of the contracts with Prince Tello and Karaung Linques in Mars 1668, which finally secured the settlement of the Bongaya treaty<sup>539</sup>. This chronology would explain why the first one reflects the same kind of worries about the final outcome as the letter of August 22, 1668, whereas the second entry signals unrestricted joy over final victory with no remarks of caution.

*The nature of the Directors' advice on approach towards Makassar in the particular patriase letters*

Speelman's was praised for his outstanding performance in the middle of the dehumanising effects of war, a war which he had brought to a happy conclusion by his vigilance, dedicated effort and bravery.<sup>540</sup> Still it remains a fact that the jubilant reaction in the May 9 letter forms the exception to the rule. The Directors' advice on diplomacy towards Makassar generally conveys a message to tread lightly and above all to seek to avoid or to end wars at the earliest possible moment. In this

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<sup>539</sup> See chapter 7.

<sup>540</sup> *de chandelycke, en mensch verslindende oorlogh..., de vigilantie, en onvermoeylycken arbeit, voort dapperheyt en goede conduite den E. Cornelis Speelman ... Patriase letter, May 9, 1669, Van Hoorn, Notulen fol. 113b. NA Invnr. 319, unf.*

regard the advice in the particular patriase letters falls in line with the model of pragmatic approach in the Directors' General Instructions.

### *Chapter conclusion*

Strictly speaking, the "Patriase model of overseas diplomacy" in the General Instructions issued between 1609 and 1650 can hardly be called a "model" at all, if by "model" we mean an explicit set of general principles from which are deducted more elaborately defined rules.

Advice on diplomacy there was, but the process of formulating advice was not a deductive one, it was an inductive one. The predominant body of advice on diplomatic performance offered by the Directors reflected a pragmatic approach by which a recommended line of action was suggested, where the actual implementation of it to a large degree was put in the hands of the Company's authorities in Asia. From time to time, the Directors' particular advice would slide into more general reflections, but the point of departure was in the final instance case-bound. In other words, the Directors' "model" of overseas diplomacy has to be reconstructed from this bundle of practical advice and general elaborations originating in specific cases.

Three characteristics of this “model-in-the-making” stand out: the way by which it testifies to a general pragmatic approach towards overseas diplomacy at the outset; how appeals to take a pragmatic stand were implied or explicitly inscribed in the texts of the Instructions; and an inherent drive to acquire as precise information about local conditions as possible. To assume that principles of international law directed the Company’s overseas diplomacy is misguided at best. The evidence in the General Instructions, as well as the in the Directors’ particular advice on Makassar suggest that their approach towards overseas diplomacy was neither Eurocentric, nor legally dogmatic, but culturally sensitive and inter-culturally pragmatic.

