In April 1957 the British ambassador to The Hague, Paul Mason, had a warm conversation with the Dutch minister for foreign affairs, Joseph Luns. One of the issues they discussed was – of course – the Suez crisis, which had occupied both British and Dutch foreign policy the previous year. The two men maintained similar views, and subsequently Mason sent a very positive report to London. He concluded: 'How fortunate we are to have in Dr Luns a minister for Foreign Affairs who, from reasoning and temperament alike, is so habitually disposed to share the standpoint of Her Majesty's Government.'

Mason's observation is remarkable for two reasons. First, because most literature on the Suez crisis does not pay much attention to the role of smaller western European countries such as the Netherlands. In an outstanding reader like Suez 1956. The crisis and its consequences the Netherlands is not even mentioned. Although the Netherlands was not directly involved, the Dutch government and especially its minister for foreign affairs tried to support the Anglo-French policy during the Suez crisis more than other west European countries. This article will try to answer the question of how and why the Netherlands tried to be such a staunch ally of Great Britain and France.

The second reason why one should pay attention to Mason's observation is that it is inconsistent with the established Dutch aca-
ademic way of analysing Holland's post-war foreign policy. The Netherlands is supposed to have been a 'faithful ally' of the United States, not of Great Britain. Alfred van Staden, one of the leading experts in Dutch foreign policy matters, concludes, speaking of the 1950s and 1960s, that 'the Netherlands galvanised its loyalty to the United States by giving virtually unconditional support for the American diplomacy and military operations throughout the world'.

Joris Voorhoeve writes in one of the best known books on Dutch foreign policy: 'In the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s the Netherlands tried to be an exemplary ally of the United States.' Dutch Atlantic and pro-American loyalty is supposed to have been caused by the Soviet threat, urgent since the Prague coup of February 1948. In view of the Dutch military weakness vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, adherence to NATO and loyalty to NATO's leading great power seemed logical and inevitable.

Recent publications, however, have questioned the accuracy of this line of reasoning. Several authors have pointed out the fact that the decolonization of Indonesia dominated Dutch policy-making until Indonesian independence in December 1949. In spite of the Soviet threat, the Dutch army was deployed in the Dutch Indies until the end of 1949, that is several months after the foundation of NATO. Foreign minister Dirk U. Srikker even tried to use the North Atlantic treaty talks as a lever on US policy towards Indonesia, which was considered detrimental to Dutch interests. He even threatened to 'reconsider the advisability of signing the Pact'. The Dutch–Indonesian dispute created much anti-American resentment in the Netherlands, and post-colonial conflicts with Indonesia continued to do so throughout the fifties. During the mid-fifties Dutch colonialist obstinacy was stronger than ever, as a result of conflicts with Indonesia over West New Guinea (West Irian). As Arend Lijphart writes: 'In approximately the year 1956 the Dutch were at the peak of self-complacency and self-righteousness in their attitudes toward the New Guinea problem.'

The American ambassador, H. Freeman Matthews, had already warned the State Department in January 1955 that Dutch colonial and anti-American frustrations should not be underestimated: 'In the long run it may gravely affect our future relations and materially reduce Dutch confidence in our integrity and leadership – and conse-
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quently their willingness to follow us." During the Suez crisis the American ambassador would prove to be right.

Dutch ambiguities regarding the United States were not only caused by colonial and post-colonial conflicts. There were other complications during the first half of the fifties, which contradict the assumption of 'exemplary' pro-American loyalty. The Dutch government was critical of the American attitude to the Korean war, and reluctantly accepted the American request to send (a small number of) Dutch soldiers to Korea. During the years 1951–54 the Netherlands had great problems with American policy regarding the European Defence Community. From 1954 until 1956 peaceful coexistence created new misgivings in the Netherlands about the role of the United States in world politics.

This does not mean that Dutch foreign policy during the mid-fifties was overall anti-American. NATO remained one of the cornerstones of Dutch foreign policy. It would make no sense to turn the thesis of Dutch Atlantic loyalty upside down. Dutch foreign policy during the mid-fifties could be better characterized as ambivalent, as a product of both change and frustration. As Mason reported to London in June 1957, 'two schools of thought' could be distinguished in the Netherlands when it came to judging the United States, one stemming from Holland's colonial history and one from present-day economic realities. This ambiguity was even reflected in the composition of the Dutch government during the mid-fifties.

When the Suez crisis broke out, the Netherlands was governed by the third Drees cabinet (1952–56), a 'Roman-red' coalition of the social-democratic Partij van de Arbeid and the three main Christian parties. In this cabinet, two ministers were responsible for foreign affairs. In 1952 both Johan W. Beyen and Joseph M. A. H. Luns had been nominated as minister for foreign affairs, though officially Luns had become minister without portfolio. Beyen became responsible for multilateral relations, Luns for bilateral relations and for non-European matters. This curious situation had resulted from serious conflicts which had hindered the formation of the third Drees cabinet. The Catholic People's Party (KVP), and its robust leader C. P. M. Romme, had wanted a conservative and Catholic minister on foreign affairs, and the KVP had nominated Joseph Luns, a young diplomat
who was serving at the Dutch permanent mission to the UN in New York. Though not well known by the public, Luns had an 'extreme conservative' reputation at the time, especially regarding colonial matters. 12

During the two years before his appointment Luns and the KVP leader, Romme, had corresponded regularly. In 1982 parts of this correspondence were published. Luns and Romme primarily discussed the causes and consequences of the decolonization of Indonesia. They agreed that liberal and commercially minded politicians like Dirk U. Stikker, minister for foreign affairs from 1948 till 1952, supported by the socialist Partij van de Arbeid, had squandered Indonesia. This was not to happen again in the case of New Guinea, still under Dutch control since 1949. Therefore, the ministry of foreign affairs had to be led by a strong-minded KVP minister, like Joseph Luns. 13 Luns defended sovereignty over New Guinea consistently till 1963, when it was transferred to Indonesia, once again under American pressure. 14

Beyen had a completely different background. He had no party affiliation and had been nominated by the Partij van de Arbeid because prime minister Willem Drees strongly objected to a Catholic in the office of foreign affairs. Beyen had been a banker, with extensive experience in international financial matters. His interests were focused mainly on economic relations, and he would play a significant role in the process of European integration. Hence, there were not only two foreign ministers from 1952 until October 1956, but they also had completely different backgrounds and points of view. Their mutual antipathy was well known, and soon after their nomination they weren't even on speaking terms. As he said during an interview by the author in the spring of 1990, Luns considered Stikker and Beyen 'weak' ministers for foreign affairs, mostly interested in economic affairs and not in politics.

This peculiar situation symbolized the ambivalence of Dutch foreign policy during the mid-fifties, ambivalence between a modern, internationalist approach, represented by Beyen and his predecessor Stikker, and a conservative, nationalist one, inspired by colonialist frustration and represented by Luns. 15 Stikker, minister from 1948 till 1952, and Beyen, both tried to stimulate trade liberalization and economic cooperation in western Europe. Beyen had initiated the
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Benelux proposal which led to the Messina Conference in 1955. Luns, however, was preoccupied by Dutch–Indonesian relations. During the mid-fifties the conflict with Indonesia increased, mainly as a result of Luns’ uncompromising attitude. The conflict culminated in 1957, when the Indonesian government announced its decision to nationalize all Dutch economic assets and to expel Dutch citizens.

The Suez crisis broke out at the end of the third Drees cabinet’s term, and elections had already taken place. In the fourth Drees cabinet, which would be installed in October 1956 after months of political conflicts, Luns, not Beyen, would return as minister for foreign affairs, which once more illustrates the stubbornness of the conservative tendency in Dutch foreign policy during the fifties. It was not surprising, under these circumstances, that Luns became responsible for policy-making with respect to Suez. Beyen did not question this outcome, though it could be argued that the crisis had obvious multilateral implications. As Beyen would write in his memoirs, he knew that he had only some weeks left as minister. Suez would be handled by Luns.

II

The Egyptian government nationalized the Suez Canal Company on 26 July 1956, one week after the American–British withdrawal of the Aswan Dam offer. Within a few days it became clear in The Hague that France and Great Britain were planning an invasion of Egypt. The American attitude seemed ambiguous. At first, Dulles declared that Nasser had to ‘disgorge’ his prey. It soon turned out, however, that the American government was not going to accept the use of force. During a tripartite conference it was decided by the three Western great powers to call a conference of all states involved, due to assemble on 16 August in London.

Was the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company an illegal act worth starting a war over? A few days after the nationalization, assistant legal advisor of the foreign ministry H. F. van Panhuys argued that Egypt did not violate international law as long as it respected the right of free passage, guaranteed by the Convention of 1888. Nationalizing a private foreign company was in itself not
illegal, according to Van Panhuys. Apart from that, no specific Dutch economic interests were involved, as the Middle East desk of the ministry of foreign affairs concluded, so long as free passage was guaranteed. Thus, it appeared that there were no reasons for Dutch concern.

Nonetheless, from the beginning the Dutch attitude was muscular. On Monday 30 July the secretary-general of the ministry of foreign affairs, S. J. Van Tuyll van Serooskerken, told the Egyptian ambassador on behalf of Luns that ‘all civilized nations condemned the Egyptian action’ and that ‘Egypt apparently did not appreciate friendly relations with other countries anymore’. This strongly worded statement was sent to all Dutch embassies involved. Although no Dutch interests were threatened, the Middle East desk endorsed this tough opinion and considered the nationalization ‘unacceptable’. If the West did not react, comparable actions would follow in the Middle East, as well as elsewhere in the world.

Compared to other countries not directly involved, the Netherlands took a pugnacious stand. Dutch diplomats were instructed to propagate the view that the nationalization was not an isolated fact. The West had failed to act against reckless Afro-Asian leaders, like Nasser, and Indonesia’s president, Sukarno. Luns told the US ambassador, Matthews, personally on 7 August that the American government had willingly tolerated or even accepted the scandalous Indonesian actions vis-à-vis the Netherlands. Three days before, the Indonesian government had announced that it would no longer recognize the financial obligations agreed upon in 1949 when Indonesia’s independence was acknowledged by the Netherlands. That same day the American ambassador to Jakarta had delivered a personal message from President Eisenhower to Sukarno. This coincidence, Luns argued, strengthened the Indonesians in their opinion that the United States had accepted this outrageous step with complete indifference, or even approved of it. It was not the first time that the Dutch government had felt betrayed by American indifference. This attitude, Luns warned, had encouraged the Egyptians. The West should confront this rising tide of violations of treaties and international law. However, the American reactions to the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, Luns told Matthews, did not give him much hope that ‘a new Munich could be prevented’.
On 16 August the first Suez conference in London started. Luns, head of the Dutch delegation, departed for London with no illusions. The purpose of the conference was the creation of an International Suez Authority. The plan was vague and even contradictory, as the ‘legal advisor’ of the ministry of foreign affairs had concluded. The international authority was supposed to replace the nationalized old Company, which implied pushing back Egyptian sovereignty one way or another. It would have no competence, however, in the main problem on hand, that is free passage. Free passage was guaranteed by an international treaty, the Convention of 1888. Thus the proposed authority was ‘too heavy’ (and therefore probably unacceptable to Egypt), the transport advisor underlined, but in respect of the main issue, just as vulnerable as the old Suez Company had proven to be.

Foreign minister Luns was not particularly interested in legal details. Luns, as he stated in London, was in the first place interested in pressuring Nasser. However, the differences of opinion between the three major Western countries, and in particular American reluctance, seemed to block a militant Western front. Luns sympathized with the more bellicose French and British approach to the Suez issue. The Dutch embassy in London had informed The Hague that the British government wanted direct military action, if the Egyptians refused to accept an international authority. The Dutch military attaché in London even assumed that this military action was not only meant to capture the Canal Zone, but also to overthrow Nasser. Apparently, these reports only enhanced Luns’ loyalty to Great Britain and France.

Beyen did not share Luns’ militancy. He was even so concerned about Luns’ views, as he told the other cabinet members, that he had written a letter to his colleague, who was already in London. In this letter Beyen denied the adequacy of comparisons between the Suez crisis and Munich, and between Nasser and Hitler, knowing that Luns had spoken of such comparisons during his conversation with Ambassador Matthews. Hitler wanted to conquer Europe, Beyen explained, and besides that he was not ‘for sale’, as Nasser was. The Suez Canal issue would have to be arranged in such a way that both the West and Egypt would have a substantial interest in the new construction. Beyen endorsed the plan to create an international
authority which would supervise the management of the Canal. Egypt would have to have a major position in the authority.\textsuperscript{25}

Beyen's approach was completely different from that of Luns. Beyen's suggestions pleaded for a 'modern' solution, which would guarantee Western interests by financial means. Beyen was not upset by the symbolic aspects of the nationalization and did not consider it necessary to force Egypt to undo its measure. Dollars had more power than guns. As he stated in cabinet, sooner or later Egypt's full sovereignty over the Canal would have been restored anyway.

At the first Suez conference in London, which started on 16 August 1956, the Dutch delegation and foreign minister Luns repeatedly underlined, in contradiction of Beyen's views, the fundamental political character of the Suez crisis. Without mentioning Indonesia or Sukarno explicitly, Luns pointed out the violations of international law by 'other countries'. This wave of violations had to be stopped. During an informal conversation with the British foreign secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, Luns asked for a firmer British attitude against the Indonesian denunciation of its financial obligations \textit{vis-à-vis} the Netherlands. Lloyd pleased Luns by endorsing the Dutch 'chain reaction theory', and by the statement that the West should unite, in defence of the interests of the great as well as the small powers.\textsuperscript{26} A similar conversation with the American secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, was less satisfactory, however, because Dulles was evasive and even suggested that the American ambassador in Jakarta had already protested against Indonesia's behaviour, which did not sound very convincing to Luns.\textsuperscript{27}

During the Suez conference the Netherlands supported the offensive interpretation of the plan to create an international authority. Luns told the British prime minister, Eden, that the Dutch government would probably decide to stop paying toll-money to the nationalized Egyptian Canal Company. In return, the British deputy assistant secretary of state, Harold Caccia, promised the Dutch delegation that, if necessary, Dutch ships would be escorted through the Canal by British warships.\textsuperscript{28} It is noteworthy that Eden considered the Netherlands to be one of the few participants in the Suez conference prepared to share the British assessment of the Suez crisis. In his memoirs he wrote that 'the Dutch had forebodings that, encouraged by Nasser's action, Indonesia would next confiscate the assets of
Dutch companies. Luns had obviously made his point.

The plan to create an international authority would soon prove to be divisive, rather than uniting the Western powers. Egypt refused any cooperation, which made the plan worthless unless the West could compel the Nasser government to accept it. The Netherlands was in favour of pressure, although the cabinet was opposed to the use of military force. However, there seemed to be other ways to compel Nasser. It was generally assumed that the new Egyptian authorities would be unable to manage the Canal without the assistance of Western experts. Withdrawal of the experts would create chaos, and this would force Egypt to accept the international authority. Directly after the nationalization the Board of the old Suez Canal Company had ordered its non-Egyptian personnel to leave Egypt. The Dutch government followed this boycott policy, and instructed Dutch pilots working in Egypt to sign loyalty pledges to the old Company and to return to Holland as soon as possible. A Dutch dredging company followed suit and announced that it would not negotiate new contracts with the Egyptian authorities. Apart from that, the ministry of foreign affairs tried to convince Dutch shipowners not to pay toll-money to the nationalized Company, but instead to pay it into a special account.

The Netherlands supported the economic warfare against Egypt wholeheartedly. A memorandum, written on 1 September by the head of the office of western cooperation of the ministry of foreign affairs, said that the Netherlands 'supported all attempts to bring Nasser on his knees', and was even prepared to make financial sacrifices, 'not only for weeks, but also for months'. In spite of Dutch willingness, this boycott of Egypt soon proved to be a failure. The Egyptians seemed quite capable of managing the Canal on their own. Moreover, most countries (in fact most shipowners) continued to pay tolls to the nationalized company. Dutch shipowners were not prepared to take the lead in this respect. So in the first half of September, there seemed, apart from war, no alternative to organizing a second Suez conference.

Before the second Suez conference, the British prime minister announced the foundation of a ‘users association’, later to be known as the Suez Canal Users Association (SCUA). He presented the plan in an uncompromising way. The same day Dulles, who was the ‘auctor
intellectuals' of the plan, publicly repudiated Eden's interpretation. 'The United States did not intend itself to shoot its way through', Dulles later declared. Once more, British and American opinions were widely opposed.

Foreign minister Luns had little confidence in the second Suez conference. One sign of this was the size of the Dutch delegation, which was much smaller than the one a month before. In vain Luns tried to support the British and the French during this second conference. Again, he expressed his great concern over the growing tendency of 'certain countries to discard their international obligations and to further their own national ends through unilateral actions violating the rights of others', and rejected the conclusion that only the question of free passage mattered. He told his audience not to be interested in quibbling over whether the nationalization was legal or not. The international character of the Canal was nullified and had to be restored.

At the end of the second Suez conference the SCUA was founded, but it would not play a significant role during the following months. Luns had no confidence whatsoever in the Users Association, and rightly concluded that this new organization would hinder rather than stimulate an offensive Western attitude. As Ambassador Van Royen had reported from Washington, the American government did consider the Association nothing more than a consultative body. The SCUA could not, for instance, impose new terms of payment without Egyptian consent.

The American Suez policy roused growing uneasiness and indignation in The Hague. On 2 October 1956 Dulles had made his notorious 'slip of the tongue', declaring that 'the United States [could] not be expected to identify itself 100 per cent either with the colonial powers or the powers uniquely concerned with the problem of getting independence as rapidly and as fully as possible'. Dulles quickly disavowed this statement. Ambassador Van Royen commented, however, that Dulles probably meant what he had said. The American press took a similar stand, according to the ambassador. These opinions, Van Royen concluded, gave new Afro-Asian countries the possibility of 'presenting their violations of international law and order as anti-colonialism'.

The Dutch rejection of American foreign policy had become well
known in the meantime, in Holland and abroad. On 9 October the Dutch newspaper _de Volkskrant_ reported that according to the British _Daily Telegraph_ the Dutch ministry of foreign affairs had completely lost confidence in the foreign policy of the United States. _De Volkskrant_ explained that 'high circles' in The Hague maintained the opinion 'that Washington avoided irritating any new Afro-Asian anti-colonial power, no matter what it did or demanded'.\(^{36}\) When asked, the ministry of foreign affairs had no comment.

On 29 October 1956 Israeli troops invaded the Sinai desert. The Israeli operation was part of an Anglo-French-Israeli collusion, laid down in the so-called Sèvres agreement. On 13 October a diplomatic settlement seemed possible when the Security Council accepted a six-point resolution, in which both Egypt's sovereignty and the need for international control were laid down. Apparently, it was too late for political solutions. According to the Sèvres plan, France and Great Britain issued an ultimatum one day after the Israeli invasion, demanding that both parties withdraw on either side of the Suez Canal. Egypt naturally refused to agree. On 31 October British and French planes started to bombard Egyptian targets. A Franco-British fleet sailed out from Malta to arrive at Port Said on 5 November.

During this phase of the Suez crisis the Netherlands continued to support France and Great Britain. When the crisis was discussed in the NATO Council on 31 October, only the Dutch backed Great Britain. The next day the American National Security Council evaluated the consequences of the Franco-British bombardments of Egypt. Dulles stated that the British had only 'secured the support of the Netherlands for their action against Egypt'. 'Other members', Dulles added, 'are opposed to the Anglo-French action'.\(^{37}\)

Although various diplomatic sources had informed The Hague of possible collusion, Foreign Minister Luns defended the 'ultimatum myth'. The cabinet and Luns presented the Israeli action as legitimate self-defence. The Anglo-French intervention was considered 'unfortunate' and not very well motivated, but logical and understandable. When asked about Anglo-French-Israeli collusion, Dutch diplomats were instructed to state that the governments involved had denied the existence of such preliminary consultation.\(^{38}\) Ambassador Van Royen, however, informed The Hague several times that the American government assumed that consultation had taken place. On
6 November he reported that the State Department had at its disposal 'written proof' of French-Israeli collusion. 39

A week before this, a Uniting-for-peace resolution had put the Suez crisis on the agenda of the General Assembly, which would convene on 1 November. Luns decided to leave for New York himself. A special cabinet session discussed the position the Dutch delegation should take. Luns expressed his apprehension over the Uniting-for-peace resolution. He suggested that the Dutch delegation challenge the correctness of the Uniting procedure, because the Israeli attack was self-defence and furthermore the Security Council discussions were not deadlocked. 40 Although some members doubted Anglo-French integrity, the cabinet supported Luns' conclusions. The same day, permanent representative C. W. A. Schürmann was instructed to support France and Great Britain as much as possible, in view of their difficult situation. Dutch solidarity was necessary because of the fact 'that Europe could hardly count upon decent treatment in the UN'. 41

The Netherlands fully supported all British political manoeuvres in the United Nations. When Eden announced that Britain was willing to accept a cease-fire, under three conditions (which were totally unacceptable to Egypt), Schürmann was instructed to approve and support the British proposals. The permanent representative had to declare that a return to the 'status quo ante' should be out of the question. When Schürmann addressed the General Assembly on 3 November, he spoke of Arab threats against Israel, Soviet weapons shipments to Egypt, the unacceptable nationalization of the Suez Canal, and UN impotence. No one could blame Israel, France or Great Britain 'for stepping in where the United Nations had failed to act'. 42 These statements, of course, completely contradicted the American standpoint in the UN.

On 4 and 5 November 1956 the ministry of foreign affairs sent permanent representative Schürmann several instructions. The situation in New York had become complicated because of the Soviet intervention in Hungary, which was also put on the agenda of the General Assembly by means of a Uniting-for-peace resolution. Schürmann was told that 'solidarity with France and Great Britain' had to be his first priority, while isolation and too much identification with these countries should be guarded against. He had to make it clear that the Soviet intervention was not to be compared with the
Anglo-French action in Egypt, which was basically directed at upholding international law.43 Hungary, in short, could be used to relieve the pressure on France and Great Britain.

On 6 November 1956 a cease-fire took effect in Egypt. Looking back, Luns has said that he regretted that the British government gave in so soon to international pressure.44 Nevertheless, the Netherlands continued to support British and French efforts to exploit their 'position of strength' in the Canal Zone, that is to exchange withdrawal for Egyptian concessions. When Prime Minister Drees addressed the Second Chamber as acting foreign minister – Luns was still in the US – he stated, prudently as always, that war should have been prevented. He added, however, that the ambiguous attitude of the United States had negatively influenced Anglo-French actions. Apart from that, neither Israel, nor Great Britain and France could be expected to withdraw without guarantee.45 Helping to obtain these guarantees would be the main goal of Dutch policy-making with respect to the Suez question during the following months.

Three related issues were at stake: withdrawal of the Israeli and Anglo-French forces, the creation of a UN Emergency Force (UNEF), according to a General Assembly resolution, and the clearance and reopening of the Canal. As regarded the withdrawal of the Anglo-French forces and the creation of the UNEF, the Netherlands again fully supported the British and opposed the American point of view. There could be no question of unconditional withdrawal. In the Dutch view, the UNEF had to be stationed in the Canal Zone (not only at the Israeli–Egyptian border), and had to be used to put pressure on Egypt so that it would accept internationalization of the Canal.

On 10 November Luns had a 'long and frank' conversation with the UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, who expressed, as Luns reported to his ministry in The Hague, 'extremely sharp and emotional views' concerning the Anglo-French action. In contradiction of Hammarskjöld's point of view, Luns emphasized that the UN should use the 'position of strength' which was created by the Anglo-French intervention. Hammarskjöld, of course, disagreed, and eventually asked Luns why the Netherlands had refused to support the United States resolutions condemning Israel, France and Great Britain. Luns answered that in view of recent developments both
Israel, and France and Great Britain, had 'good cases' for intervention. He stated that the Dutch government and people could not forget that the United States had always remained silent when Indonesia had repeatedly violated the Treaties of 1949, when they were now in such a remarkable hurry to condemn – in cooperation with the Russians – Israel, France and Great Britain.46

The Netherlands had by now won an explicit pro-British-and-French reputation in the UN. This was exemplified by the following fact. On 5 November The Hague had instructed permanent representative Schürmann that Holland was prepared to take part in the UN Emergency Force. Three days later Schürmann answered that the Netherlands were probably not going to be invited, 'being a colonial power and in view of our support of Great Britain and France'.47 Luns himself experienced being treated with the same detachment by President Eisenhower as were his French and British colleagues. Eisenhower refused to receive the Dutch minister, formally for reasons of health. For Luns this refusal corroborated Eisenhower's 'inclination to stay aloof in the present crisis and to hide behind the UN in order to spare Afro-Asian susceptibilities as much as possible'.48

The last British and French forces left Egypt on 22 December 1956, without Egyptian concessions. The American standpoint, the American–Soviet agreement on this point and the clear anti-Anglo-French majority in the General Assembly had made an unconditional withdrawal inevitable. The UN Emergency Force would not be stationed in the Canal Zone, only at the borders between Egypt and Israel. The UNEF would be composed of forces coming from states which had taken a neutral or even anti-Anglo-French stand during the Suez crisis, and, to Dutch indignation, even Indonesian forces would take part.

In the case of the clearance and reopening of the Canal, the Dutch again vainly tried to strengthen the position of Great Britain and France. Directly after the cease-fire the Netherlands had supported the British proposal that the Anglo-French forces, while still in Egypt, should begin to remove the wreckage in the Canal, including that outside the area they had occupied (thereby more or less legitimizing and even extending their presence in the Canal zone). Egypt refused to accept this proposal, and later agreed that the Canal should be
cleared under the auspices of the UN. In order to raise the necessary funds, the UN requested Canal users, like the Netherlands, to pay contributions in advance. The Dutch government tried to use this fund-raising once more to obtain concessions from Egypt. The Netherlands would pay one million dollars in advance, if the countries most involved, that was Egypt, France and Great Britain, were prepared to start negotiations based upon the Security Council resolution of 13 October. Luns had not been particularly enthusiastic about that resolution, but times had changed, and regarding the reopening of the Canal anything seemed to be better than unilateral Egyptian conditions. Luns instructed his representatives in the countries which had been requested to finance the UN operation to propagate the Dutch proposal. However, no other government was really interested. On 22 January 1957 the cabinet decided to halve the requested amount and pay only half a million dollars to the UN.

The Dutch initiative with respect to the UN fund-raising caused the former foreign minister Dirk U. Stikker to write a very critical letter to the ministry in The Hague. In 1952 Stikker had become ambassador to London. As ambassador, Stikker was deeply involved in the Suez crisis, and had become a member of the Board of the Suez Canal Users Association. In December he was even mentioned as a future chairman. Luns, however, was not interested in SCUA as long as it did not put any pressure on Egypt, and he instructed Stikker not to accept the chairmanship. Stikker was disappointed, probably partly out of personal vanity, and on 12 January 1957 he wrote a long and sharp letter to the ministry in The Hague.

Several countries, Stikker wrote, had concluded that the Dutch government and Dutch public opinion had backed Anglo-French actions, especially in the UN, more than had those of any other state. This support was seen as reminiscent of the emotions which were supposed to have influenced Dutch policy-making during the years of Indonesian decolonization. Many, Stikker wrote, were of the opinion that the Netherlands had risked damaging Dutch interests in the Middle East and had excluded itself from a possible role in the solution of the Suez crisis. The Dutch policy regarding the Users Association had been destructive. SCUA could play a positive role in bringing the American and Anglo-French points of view together. This was vital in order to defend western European interests and to
prevent neutralist points of view, like Hammarskjöld’s, from becoming dominant. The Dutch initiative with respect to the UN fund-raising had only weakened the status and reputation of the Netherlands, Stikker concluded. It had suggested that the Netherlands wanted a ‘Suez Canal Usurers Association’ more than a Users Association.49

Stikker was not the only high-ranking diplomat who disagreed with Luns’ policy. The Dutch ambassador in Cairo, W. Cnoop Koopmans, had fundamental objections as well. Hiding behind the opinions of anonymous Dutchmen in Egypt, he reported to The Hague that many considered the Dutch Suez policy counterproductive. It was hindering the main objective, that was to keep Egypt in the Western sphere of influence. Isolated initiatives could only harm Dutch economic interests both in the Arab world and in many other Afro-Asian countries.50

Luns defended his Suez policy in a long personal message to Stikker. He denied that Dutch interests had been damaged. Nonetheless, other elements had also influenced policy-making, such as the necessity to create an international arrangement for the Suez Canal, the political and economic interests of Great Britain and France, and the illegitimate character of the UN decisions. Luns denied that colonialist emotions had played a role and that the Netherlands had isolated themselves. Though the initiative with respect to the UN fund-raising had backfired, it had strengthened the opinion that a return to the ‘status quo ante’ was dangerous. Luns repeated his low opinion of SCUA and once more refused to endorse Stikker’s possible chairmanship.51

Nevertheless in the end a return to the ‘status quo ante’ proved to be inevitable. Only Israel would in fact benefit from the war, and the Dutch government backed Israel as much as it could.52 UNEF troops were ultimately stationed in the Gaza strip and at the Gulf of Akaba, thereby breaking the Egyptian blockade of the Gulf. However, Egypt won all conflicts over the conditions under which the Suez Canal would be reopened. On 4 April 1957 the Dutch government stated – in accordance with the British point of view – that Dutch ships still should not pass the Canal. Two weeks later, however, some cabinet members suggested that this position was no longer in the Dutch economic interest. Prime Minister Drees agreed, but thought that
resumption of Dutch passage through the Canal was still politically difficult. On 1 May the communist delegate M. Bakker brought to Luns' attention that the American government had stated itself to have no objection to resumption of passage, and asked why Dutch ships could not proceed accordingly. Four weeks later Luns answered that this had happened in the meantime. Nonetheless, as the ministry of foreign affairs had stated on 1 May, resumption of passage by Dutch ships was not to be considered as an acceptance of the unilateral Egyptian declarations with respect to the legal status of the Suez Canal, a statement which was in fact nothing more than verbal emptiness.53

A losing battle was being fought, albeit vehemently, by the Netherlands. During the whole crisis the Dutch attitude had been bitter and harsh. In the course of the settlement of the Suez crisis after the invasion, resentment and frustration grew in The Hague, especially regarding the roles of the US and the United Nations. On 23 November 1956 Luns had revealed his real thoughts when he said to the American under-secretary of state, Herbert Hoover, that the UN had become an anti-Western platform as a result of the 'ad absurdum' growing number of Afro-Asian members. If the present tendency were to continue, Luns even suggested that many in the Netherlands would doubt the wisdom of continuing with UN membership.54 On 28 November Luns addressed the General Assembly. 'It is unfortunate', the Dutch foreign minister stated, 'that political discussions in the United Nations show increasing signs of lack of intellectual consistency.' Dissociating himself from the American policy, Luns said that people in the Netherlands were 'profoundly shocked by the fact that a number of delegations were less anxious to make the tragedy of Hungary a subject for concerted action than to meet developments in the Middle East.55

With the exception of the Dutch Communist Party, Luns was supported by the Second Chamber. As the conservative-liberal delegate C. Berkhouwer concluded, 'If there was ever a "bellum jus tum", it was the so-called "aggression" which England and France were obliged to launch against Egypt'. The social-democratic Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA) took a somewhat ambiguous stand. Following the American point of view, a majority of the PvdA rejected the Anglo-French intervention because it had damaged the Atlantic alliance and
the reputation of western Europe in the Afro-Asian countries. Denying the rumours about collusion, however, the PvdA – like all other parties apart from the communists – considered the Israeli attack as legitimate self-defence.

When the Suez crisis was extensively discussed in the Second Chamber, 4–6 December 1956, several delegates criticized the American Suez policy. Delegate J.J.R. Schmal of the protestant Christian Historical Union (CHU) declared that he had ‘little respect’ for the American attitude during the Suez crisis. Others expressed regret at American ambiguity and indulgence vis-à-vis the Afro-Asian countries. L.W.G. Scholten, delegate of the Calvinistic Anti-Revolutionary Party, said that the United States risked losing their leadership of the Western world. Even the majority of the Social Democrats, in principle following the American point of view, regretted the lack of American leadership, and nostalgically referred to the days of the Truman doctrine and Marshall Aid. Several delegates expressed their hope that the Soviet intervention in Hungary would strengthen the Atlantic Alliance and would stimulate the United States to fulfil its obligations as leader of the Western world.

The Second Chamber endorsed Luns’ disappointment with the role of the United Nations. Most delegations criticized the UN policy of returning to the ‘status quo ante’, which was considered by some to be a deliberate attempt to restore Nasser’s power. A right-wing Social Democrat, J. de Kadt, doubted whether democratic countries could remain members of such an organization. In his reaction in the Second Chamber, Luns once more underlined his pro-British and pro-French point of view. The Anglo-French intervention had been directed against ‘excessive nationalism, dictatorship and fanaticism, which threatened stability in the Middle East and vital interests of a free Europe’. When British and French vital interests were at stake, so were those of the Dutch. The foreign minister rejected the conclusion that Great Britain and France, acting without prior consultation with the US, had been responsible for the tensions within the Atlantic Alliance. Consultation of the US government would have had no results, according to Luns, because of the negative American attitude. As the British ambassador in The Hague wrote in his ‘Annual Review for 1956’: ‘The Dutch Government and people have . . . been in the main strong supporters of the British and French actions
regarding the Middle East and the Suez Canal.' And they had been 'highly critical of the United States policy (or lack of one) in the Middle East'.

III

Dutch Suez policy was no accident. The Suez crisis was seen as part of a long-term development. Radical Afro-Asian leaders like Sukarno and Nasser threatened to disrupt the international system. Confronted with actions like the nationalization of the Suez Canal or the unilateral actions of the Indonesian government vis-à-vis the Netherlands, the West had to stand firm and defend its interests, if necessary by military means. American ambiguity and reluctance, however, made such an attitude impossible.

Though supported by the Second Chamber and most of the press as well, Luns' policy was criticized by some high-ranking diplomats and foreign ministry officials. Beyen and former foreign minister Stikker concluded that Luns' policy was immoderate and counter-productive. Critics like Stikker and Beyen followed the American line of reasoning, though they had to admit – as Beyen did in cabinet – that the American attitude was not stern and consistent. Beyen and Stikker represented the 'modern', internationalist tendency in Dutch foreign policy, and logically opposed Luns' Suez policy. Luns represented the conservative, 'atavistic' tendency in Dutch foreign policy. Stikker rightly suggested that colonialist emotions had played a role in Dutch policy-making regarding Suez: there were no material Dutch interests involved, and the most important lobby – the Dutch ship-owners – even explicitly disagreed.

Dutch Suez policy was inspired by resentments stemming from the decolonization of the Dutch Indies and the continuous Dutch–Indonesian conflicts. Fixed on the role of Afro-Asian leaders like Nasser and Sukarno, the Netherlands rejected the American policy, which tried not to jeopardize relations with the newly independent nations. The American government was in fact accused of being indulgent vis-à-vis both the Afro-Asian and the socialist countries, and therefore responsible for the Western weakness during the crises of 1956.

Returning to the discussions mentioned above, it is clear that the
Netherlands did not act as ‘an exemplary ally of the United States’ during the Suez crisis. It did not give ‘unconditional support’ to American Suez diplomacy. On the contrary, in The Hague criticism and resentment prevailed with respect to the role the United States played during the Suez crisis. Dutch post-colonial frustrations were still fresh and strong, which explains the Dutch attitude during the Suez crisis, extreme compared with those of other west European countries not involved. These sentiments cannot be discarded by labelling them as an exception to the pro-American rule. They would in fact hinder Dutch foreign policy-making until the transfer of sovereignty over West New Guinea in 1963.

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NOTES

1. Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), Kew, Richmond, FO 371/130393, Mason to Lloyd, No 92, 3 April 1957, WN 1051/3. The author wishes to thank Cees Wiebes for his useful comments and Rachel O’Connell for her linguistic advice.


8. National Archives (Washington DC), RG59, Box 3429, 756.00/1–555, Foreign Service Despatch, Freeman Matthews to Department of State, No.551, 5/1/1953.


10. In May 1957, however, some cabinet members concluded that the Netherlands would
have to leave NATO if the United States continued to support the Sukarno government with weapons. Algemeen Rijksarchief (National Archives, hereafter ARA), 2.02.05, Cabinet minutes 23 May 1957.

11. PRO, FO 371/130930, Mason to Lloyd, No.151, 1031/57, 20 June 1957.


15. As Ambassador Mason rightly reported to the Foreign Office in May 1956, Dutch foreign policy was dominated by two main 'preoccupations', European economic integration and Indonesia. In PRO, FO, 371/124751, Mason to Lloyd No.350, 1012/56, 9/5/1956.


18. ABZ, GS, 613.020, file 779, memo DAM/MO (Middle East desk), probably 30 July 1956.


22. ABZ, GS, 613.020, file 794, message from London to The Hague, Hasselman 87, 1 Aug. 1956.


24. ARA, 2.02.05, file 404, MR 130, cabinet minutes 20 Aug. 1956.


30. ABZ, Departments Archives (Departmental Archives, hereafter DA), Code 6, 613.020, file 'Egypt; militaire maatregelen i.v.m. S.K.M.' (Egypt; military measures concerning nationalization Suez Canal Company), memo chef DWS (head office of western cooperation), 1 Sept. 1956.


34. Quoted in Eden, *Full circle*, p.498.
37. Eisenhower Library, Whitman File, NSC Series, Box 8, Minutes of 302nd Meeting of the National Security Council, 1 Nov. 1956.
38. ABZ, DA, Code 9, 921.322, file 'Franco-British attack on Suez Canal Zone 1956–57' ('Franco-British attack on Suez Canal Zone 1956–1957'), message from The Hague to Baghdad, Celer 14, 6 Nov. 1956. Celer means in the name of the minister, when he is abroad.
40. A Uniting-for-peace procedure assumes that discussions and decision-making in the Security Council are deadlocked.
41. ABZ, GS, 921.322, file 2142, message from New York to The Hague, Schirrmann 284, 10 Nov. 1956.
42. ABZ, CA, 2.02.05, Cabinet minutes MR 1943, IS April 1957; question Bakker: Proceedings Second Chamber, 1956–1957, Appendix 91 II; and ABZ, GS, 521.1, file 521, message from The Hague to London, Celer 12, 1 May 1957.
43. Conversation with Hoover, ABZ, GS, 921.322, file 2142, message from Washington to The Hague, Van Royen 798.
44. ABZ, DA, Code 999, 999.222, file 'VN UNEF I', message from New York to The Hague, Schirrmann 275, 8 Nov. 1956.
45. ABZ, GS, 921.322, file 2142, personal account by Luns in message from New York to The Hague, Schirrmann 323, 22 Nov. 1956.
46. ABZ, GS, 521.1, file 524, personal letter from Stikker to Secretary-General Van Tuyll van Serooskerken, 12 Jan. 1957.
48. The Netherlands has a pro-Israeli reputation. Nonetheless, the support for Israel during the later stages of the Suez crisis was in the first instance a result of the anti-Egyptian standpoint of the Dutch government. In the end, only Israel proved to be capable of materializing its 'position of strength' vis-à-vis Nasser.
49. ARA, 2.02.05, cabinet minutes MR 1943, 15 April 1957; question Bakker: Proceedings Second Chamber, 1956–1957, Appendix 91 II; and ABZ, GS, 521.1, file 521, message from The Hague to London, Celer 12, 1 May 1957.
50. Conversation with Hoover, ABZ, GS, 921.322, file 2142, message from Washington to The Hague, Van Royen 798.
51. ABZ, DA, Code 999, 999.214, file 'Verenigde Naties; Hongaarse kwestie in de V.N., deel 1, Nov.-Dec. 1956'.