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THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE NETHERLANDS

*Text of a broadcast by Eelco N. van Kleffens,
Netherlands Foreign Minister, pronounced
via Radio Orange, London, on December 28,
1943, and directed to occupied Holland*



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THAT monument of cool courage in the highest sense of the word, the underground press of the Netherlands, brings confirmation of the fact that in Holland many people are devoting their thoughts to the line of conduct which their country will have to adopt towards other countries after its liberation.

It will be for the Netherlands people themselves to decide what this foreign policy is going to be. For one day—and it will be in the not too distant future—they will be free once more, free to say what they like, within the limits of the law, and free to determine their own fate.

Therefore, if I say a few things tonight about our future foreign policy, my intention is merely to contribute a few stones to the building you are going to erect yourselves. They are stones most of which are at this juncture accessible to you, although certain others are perhaps not within your reach at the present time.

I begin with this statement—it is my firm conviction that we are agreed, every one of us, that our pre-war policy of aloofness is stone dead. But what is to take its place?

An Englishman—and indeed not a mere nobody—asked me once in public, 'Why on earth did not the Netherlands make military agreements with us while there was still time before the German

invasion?' I answered, also in public, 'Even if we had wanted to, the question could not arise, were it only because England had gone too far in her disarmament at that period.'

The course of this war has proved this only too clearly. Against a Germany that was arming ever more strongly, stood an England incapable of sufficient resistance. To make military agreements with such a country would have been folly, although it was perfectly true that England could at the same time have addressed the same reproach towards us.

With a view to the future this point should be noted carefully. We, Netherlanders, can think of military collaboration only if we ourselves possess armed forces commensurate with the circumstances. We need not be armed to the teeth all the time if Germany is disarmed, and on the other hand if those with whom it is proposed to collaborate possess and keep in being a sufficiently important military apparatus. When, therefore, Marshal Smuts advises us to collaborate with England after the war, my answer is, 'We can only consider this provided the British Empire, and Great Britain particularly, show, like ourselves, that they have no intentions of once more going the way towards large-scale disarmament. This implies, in any case, that we cannot tie ourselves once and for all.'

Would it be a good thing, however, to seek future co-operation with England under the terms of this great proviso? You must build up your own conclusions. My task here is only to provide the stones. But there are a few cardinal facts.

First, I must mention the tendency which Germany has been displaying for many years. It is hardly to be expected that it will suddenly show a radical change and turn into the gentlest of lambs. Germany is going to lose this war, which will breed a spirit of revenge. The future masters of Germany may perhaps present themselves as if they were gentle lambs, for the German people has reached great heights of chicanery and hypocrisy wherever this suited its book. Do not let us be taken in by this. It is conceivable, of course, that Germany, having learned how vulnerable it is from the air, will keep quiet for a time, but only for that reason and not because it has given up its craving for violence. There is little in such a change that could provide a solid basis on which to build.

'Second, we must keep in view the fact that the morality of a large proportion of the German people, none too high since the end of the previous World War, has been thoroughly vitiated through the inculcation of Nazi doctrines. All pretty talk of 'Justice is what is useful for the German people,' the nonsense of a Herrenvolk for which all others must run errands—all these doctrines have been drummed into the present younger generation of Germans and have turned them into a nation of savages whose official doctrine of salvation is nothing but the code of morals of beasts of prey. Let us never forget that a wolf in a cage may look tame but that it never really will be tame.

Third, we must clearly visualize the fact that in modern times no nation can be militarily strong without having at its disposal an enormous industrial organization. In the Netherlands, left to themselves, no such organization will ever exist. If we continue to stand by ourselves, we can never make sure that in the hour of peril we shall possess the requisite armaments or be able to obtain them. If others do not know to what extent they can count on us, they will be reluctant to assist us with our armaments.

We have, therefore, a choice between isolation or joining other peoples of goodwill. This is a choice which you will have to make. I need not say much more on this occasion regarding this question of future isolation. But if the choice were to be collaboration with others of goodwill, we should be wise to make clear who are those we wish to join.

Enemy propaganda is trying to make out that we have been asked to merge the Netherlands into the British Empire. You may put your minds at rest—we have been asked nothing of the sort. And if we were ever to be asked anything, it would certainly not be to merge ourselves into the British Empire. The British Empire is a community that is kept together by the allegiance of all parts to the Crown—to the British Crown.

The State of the Netherlands knows no allegiance except to the Crown of the Netherlands, which to the exclusion of all others, is hereditary in the House of Orange. There can be no question therefore of absorption of our Kingdom into any other commonwealth, not even in an attenuated form of becoming subordinated to it.

But although any such subordination or absorption is unthinkable, collaboration is far from being excluded. What we shall have to ask ourselves, therefore, is whether such collaboration will have to be restricted to the British Empire. This depends not only on us. It depends also on the other partner with whom we have common interests as a result of our position on the fringe of the Pacific Ocean. I am referring, of course, to the United States. It is too early to say what attitude the United States will adopt at the end of the war towards political and military collaboration with other nations.

It is conceivable that concerning southwest Asia, where China occupies such important positions, the attitude of the Americans will not be entirely the same as towards Europe. But assuming that America is prepared to collaborate with the British Empire and with us—an eventuality that would undoubtedly be desirable for us—it would still appear to be too early to discuss the form to be given to implementation of this readiness.

The main thing is that we may hope that, instructed by bitter experience and a wider understanding, the United States may acquire consciousness of the vital interests of America in effective preservation of peace in Europe. Twice the people of the United States have seen that German aggression against the Netherlands, Belgium and France is in fact an attack on England, and I believe it realizes more clearly than previously that with the fall of England a dagger would be placed at the heart of the United States.

If things move in this direction we would see a strong formation in the West with America, Canada and other British Dominions as an arsenal and a vast reservoir of power, with England as a base, especially for air power, and the west European mainland—by which I mean the Netherlands, Belgium and France—as a bridgehead.

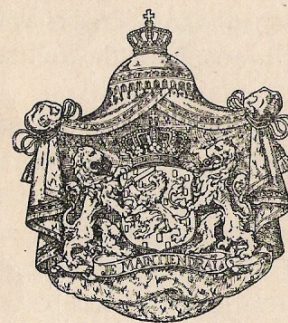
A development of this nature would indeed compel us to rely on the western powers, but conversely they would also need us. It is difficult to imagine a stronger position for our country. This formidable western bloc would find its eastern counterpart in Russia. Once Japan has been defeated, Russia's heart will be protected to the North, East and South by natural frontiers. But, like ourselves, it will have to devote full and continued attention—and it will wish

to do so—to the security of its open frontier on the German side. This picture brings, as it were automatically, to the fore the need for preservation of good relations between the Netherlands and the Soviet Union.

If all this could be achieved, it looks in my view as though a long period of peace is guaranteed. In this structure, France must resume its still-open place in the circle of the western powers. Let us hope it will rise purified and strengthened from the purgatory into which it was thrown three years ago. That Belgium will stand on our side is not a matter of doubt.

It would indeed be inconceivable that in an exposition like the present one, however objective it tries to remain, the direction taken by the thoughts of the man who addresses you, should not appear between the lines. Well, you have the fullest right to know this direction.

The present government will not take binding decisions in the sphere of foreign policy or in any other sphere as long as the Germans continue to occupy our country—unless this is absolutely unavoidable. For events are not at a standstill and it is therefore not always possible to wait for the day of Hitler's defeat. Up to now it has not yet been necessary to take such decisions. But I can give you the assurance that in this respect, as far as humanly possible, everything will be left to the free, considered expression of the will of the resurrected Netherlands.



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