

Bloemendal, Albertine: *Reframing the Diplomat. Ernst van der Beugel and the Cold War Atlantic Community*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers 2018. ISBN: 9789004359178; 327 S.

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Although the 1960s and 1970s, the heart of this book, are still very much in living memory, in important respects this is a story from another time. The „Atlantic Community“ from the title is in the process of disintegration, and the United States (so admired by the book's protagonist Ernst van der Beugel) and its leader are the main cause. In addition, ours is an era of populist revolt – the opposite of, and perhaps a reaction to, the time when influential elite-networks in which Ernst van der Beugel played such an important role, held sway.

Whether Van der Beugel would endure the current crisis in good health is questionable. From Albertine Bloemendal's account it emerges that in his time, this unreserved defender of the United States and champion of the Atlantic alliance worried constantly about the future. At one point she calls the Dutch diplomat and power-broker an „Atlanticist Jeremiah“ (p. 261). Compared to our own time, however, the Gaullist rebellion or the upheaval over the United States war in Vietnam appear trivial.

Bloemendal keeps a clear distance from comparisons with the present. This is a historical study, based on thorough research at more than a dozen archives in the Netherlands and the United States, along with numerous published materials and oral history sources (most notably a very extensive series of oral history interviews with Van der Beugel himself). It was written as a dissertation at Leiden University (2017), where Van der Beugel held a special Chair in Western Cooperation from 1966 to 1984 and where currently a special Chair in his name is held by Giles Scott-Smith, the author's adviser. The author had the full cooperation of Van der Beugel's daughter, yielding valuable private papers. The book is not a biography, even though we do learn a good deal about Van der Beugel's youth and student years. This part on his

early life is primarily there, however, to help illuminate the central part of the story, namely Van der Beugel's informal transatlantic diplomacy in the 1960s and 1970s through his extended and long-standing personal and professional networks. Through this focus on what can be seen as the most significant part of Van der Beugel's life and career, the author seeks to contribute to the so-called *New Diplomatic History*, in this case of the Cold War.

This approach shifts the emphasis from the level of the state and its representatives to non-state actors (who often remain connected to the state), while the process of international relations, broadly defined, and the role played by a variety of actors get more attention than outcomes. The goal is to add an important dimension to traditional diplomatic histories in order to create a more complete picture.

The study under review makes abundantly clear why Ernst van der Beugel's career lends itself for a *New Diplomatic History* on the role of elites and their networks in international relations. Belonging to the financial-economic and political-administrative elite of the Netherlands since his student days, in the late 1930s, Van der Beugel started working at the Ministry of Economics at the end of the Second World War. This is how he became a member of the Dutch delegation to the 1947 Paris conference for the preparation of the European response to the Marshall Plan. And the rest is history, one could say.

His central role during the implementation of the Marshall Plan in the Netherlands put Van der Beugel into close contact with top-policymakers in the United States and Western Europe. When in 1950 American military assistance to Europe became ever more important, Van der Beugel became „the ultimate middle man“ (p. 92) here also, now at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Later in the decade, he would be closely involved as State Secretary (Deputy Foreign Minister) with a crucial phase of the process of European integration.

Although he was capable of implementing policy, Van der Beugel was not a technocrat. Rather, he was, or he became, an ideologue of Atlantic cooperation. Writing about a later phase in his career, Bloemendal calls

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him „anti-ideological and anti-emotional“ (p. 304). However, if her study shows one thing, it is the enormous extent to which Van der Beugel was shaped personally and professionally by having experienced the failure of the British policy of *appeasement* before the war („Munich“) and, on a much more positive note, United States leadership after it. These two experiences were truly formative, and they drove Van der Beugel's work throughout his career, but especially in the second half of it. About a third element, always implicitly present, namely Van der Beugel's assessment of the threat posed by the Soviet Union (it must have been invariably alarmist), we read very little.

That second part of Van der Beugel's career began in 1958 and the author devotes three chapters to it: „The Gaullist Challenge,“ „Defense, Détente, and the 'Average Man,“ and „The Challenge of the Successor Generation.“ At first, at the head of KLM (Royal Dutch Airlines) Van der Beugel felt out of place. He was much more attracted by an independent role – as a board member or advisor for numerous corporations, foundations, and committees and commissions; as an author and part-time academic; and especially as Honorary European Secretary-General of the annual Bilderberg meetings between influential North American and European businessmen, politicians, intellectuals, and (ex-)policymakers. This way, Van der Beugel became what one could call the ultimate networker, or the master operator of the transatlantic elite.

Bloemendal's approach is mostly descriptive, and she is restrained in raising critical questions of Van der Beugel's life and work. In constructing her account, the author relies frequently on Van der Beugel's own retrospective account (the oral history) or the dissertation, entitled „From Marshall Aid to Atlantic Partnership“ (1966), which he wrote under the guidance of a former colleague – turned professor from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and which can be seen as a very contemporary history of events in which Van der Beugel had himself participated. The dissertation was published with a foreword by Henry Kissinger, at that time already a good friend. For this project, Kissinger has shared his correspondence with Van der Beugel, and we do

get interesting information this way, as when Kissinger in August 1968 shares how he „detests“ (p. 237) Richard Nixon, then the Republican nominee for the presidency. However, virtually in the next breath, we're told that Kissinger's appointment to serve as National Security Adviser to the same Nixon gave Van der Beugel a direct line to the White House – without any reflection from Van der Beugel's viewpoint on how Kissinger made the transition. Later, the account of Van der Beugel's interactions with the Nixon administration peters out before reaching the 1973 „Year of Europe“ crisis between the transatlantic allies to which Kissinger made a significant contribution, to say the least.

Perhaps more significant, where we learn that after leaving government service and his position at KLM Van der Beugel only wanted to spend about 50% of his time on his many board memberships and the like, we read virtually nothing about those activities. But if the goal of this *New Diplomatic History* is to draw a more complete picture of the „Atlantic Community“ on which Van der Beugel spent so much energy, it would be especially interesting to get a sense of the interaction between the financial-economic and political spheres. This way, the more fundamental question could also be raised of whose interests exactly were served by the informal networks in which Van der Beugel played such an active role. There was, of course, Van der Beugel's lobbying on behalf of KLM's quest for new landing rights in the United States, which the author does discuss. But this is likely just one small part and one, moreover, that has already been revealed in the work of others. Finally, if the goal of the *New Diplomatic History* is to bring into view the informal sphere of, in this case, transatlantic relations during the Cold War, one wonders where the women are in this story. Until late in the book, when the account moves to Van der Beugel's attempts to contend with, and groom, a „successor generation“ to his own and there is some discussion of how eventually women were invited to Bilderberg meetings, Van der Beugel's „Atlantic Community“ is very much a man's world. Did wives, other relatives, or female staff play any role at all? The question at least deserves to be asked.

In conclusion, measured against the objectives of the *New Diplomatic History* as formulated by the author, this book can certainly be considered a success. It is clear that the part played in Cold War transatlantic relations by informal actors such as Ernst van der Beugel could be significant, and an account such as this one is a valuable addition, not only to the traditional, state-oriented historiography, but also the already existing work on networks such as Bilderberg. It is not a criticism to point out that the account also points the way to further research in this area, also on Van der Beugel's life and career. But perhaps it can also be argued that this work leaves room, also, again, on Van der Beugel, for what could be labeled *critical new diplomatic history*. Pushing the envelope a little, here and there, could help bring the story of Cold War transatlantic relations into even sharper focus. Perhaps that could also help us understand why everything accomplished by Van der Beugel and his generation has turned out to be less durable than most of us have long taken for granted.

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