

Dutch Military Thought, 1919-1939: A Small Neutral State's Visions of Modern War. By Wim Klinkert. Modern Warfare. Boston: Brill, 2022. ISBN 978-0-0045-1860-5. Maps. Figures. Tables. Bibliography. Index. Pp. ix, 362. \$191.00 (hardback).

The fascination with great powers and supposedly cutting-edge militaries is hardwired into military history, but is of course totally misleading. Only a tiny minority of states are great powers, and their definition of cutting-edge is generally unhelpful, and, indeed, can explain why they can experience failure; as well as a lack of interoperability with allies. Many states indeed wish for neutrality and see their military essentially as its guarantee as I was recently forcefully reminded when lecturing on strategy at the military academy of a leading Asian state.

Wim Klinkert is well-placed to probe these questions. Already author of the important *Defending Neutrality. The Netherlands Prepares for War, 1900-1925* (Brill, 2013), he has now continued by assessing the interwar period, which for the Dutch ended with German conquest in 1940. With the exception of (significant) colonial campaigning, that was the first war fought by the Dutch since the 1830s when they had failed, in the face of rebellion and French intervention, to retain control over Belgium. Yet World War One had been fought in close proximity, and the Dutch were well-aware that they needed to consider that this might perforce be involved in the next major conflict, which, indeed, became a possibility from the mid-1930s, with Dutch concern from 1934.

Klinkert, Professor of Military History at the Dutch Defence Academy and the University of Amsterdam, focuses on the arguments of six Dutch military thinkers, while also pointing out that their impact on government policy was limited. There were two main potential audiences for the thinkers – military and civilian – but the latter, particularly the Social Democrats, preferred to hold to an “ostrich policy” (p. 249). Indeed, there is good discussion in the book about military views on both disarmament and austerity cuts. Klinkert, who writes well and ably deploys his interesting material, ranges widely to include war and society, notably the profitability in the case of conscription, as well as strategy, not least the vulnerability of Limburg which was far from Fortress Holland. Economic and industrial war preparation attracts attention as does the sense of vulnerability to air power, which was a major issue for the Dutch in the 1930s. The relevant military change came in 1936 with the expansion of anti-aircraft artillery being given high priority in procurement.

“Total war” in the Dutch view especially meant civilians (cities) being attacked from the air in a massive and sudden way as the opening move of a war by a great power, most likely Germany. Linked to this, the Dutch reaction to modern, technological war meant a great increase in interest in psychological factors (morale and group cohesion) as an antidote to an enemy’s technological superiority. The Dutch military emphasised this as an important lesson of World War One and stressed its value in their doctrines. Resilience was to the fore.

The analysis by Michael Rudolph Calmeijer, the last of the thinkers discussed, of the conquest of Poland in September 1939 is interesting. He argued that the Poles had failed to concentrate their power, and that spreading out their army along the border gave the Germans the advantage. He was to argue that in 1940 the Dutch population lacked resolve. Having served bravely in that campaign, Calmeijer was a prisoner of war. Postwar, he became Deputy-Chief of the army staff and eventually junior Minister of Defence.

Klinkert's important book is very expensive, but invites attention. Hopefully he can expand his work to consider comparisons and contrasts with other neutrals in the period. Belgium is the obvious case. There is also more to be said about the Dutch position in what is now Indonesia. Yet, these points underline the strength of this book. It leaves you wanting more.

(615 words)

JEREMY BLACK

University of Exeter