Herman Amersfoort, Wim Klinkert (eds.), ***Small Powers in the Age of Total War, 1900-1940*** (History of Warfare 65; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011, xii + 372 pp., ISBN 978 90 04 20321 1).

This book is the result of an international conference held at the Netherlands Defence Academy in Breda on 26th and 27th November, 2008. The topic of the conference was to compare the policies of small European powers towards the threat of war in the first half of the 20th century. This international perspective is indeed an important focus, which has been neglected for too long.

The way this important issue is treated, by randomly asking scholars from different countries to present there views, is however somewhat less satisfying. The book consists of an enormous variety of articles. Four of them deal with the Netherlands, three with Denmark, two with Switzerland, one with Norway and one with Belgium. In absence of all small Balkan states, or for instance Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the proper title of the book should therefore be *Small States in Western Europe in the Age of Total War* (although Sweden, Portugal, Ireland, and Luxembourg would then still be missing). Moreover, two articles in the collection seem out of place. One article deals with the Dutch East Indies between 1936 and 1941, suddenly bringing the whole colonial dimension into the discussion. The piece about the German Army in the interwar years should have been left out as well, unless of course, one is willing to consider Germany in this period as a small power. Another problem with the selection of countries is that it apparently leads to the premise that the only obvious choice for small European powers was to follow a policy of neutrality. The conduct of Finland, Romania or Bulgaria in both World Wars, however, shows that this was not necessarily the case.

Fortunately there are three contributions with a more general focus, which brings the great variety of articles more together: the introduction of the editors; Abbenhuis on the European hope for neutrality before 1914; and Murray about small European nations under the threat of war between 1914 and 1940. Especially in these chapters, important conclusions are draw from the comparison between several neutral Northwest European small powers between 1900 and 1940. All small countries were facing the question of the credibility of their neutrality by being strong and flexible at the same time (the so-called 'balancing act'). 'Strong' meant building a defense that could serve as a kind of deterrent (armed neutrality), while 'flexibility' could be found in a cooperative diplomacy and trade policy designed to appease big powers. Pragmatism and realism were the primary

URN:NBN:NL:UI:10-1-109876 | www.bmgn-lchr.nl | E-ISSN 2211-2898 | print ISSN 0615-0505

motivations for the choice for neutrality, which seemed to offer the best chance to stay out of a future war. For most of the decision makers, the political and military elite, idealistic justifications of neutrality policy, like the contribution to international law and peace, hardly played a role. As Murray points out, big powers, on their part, had a similar pragmatic approach and were making plain strategic cost-benefit calculations of a possible attack on a small power.

Lastly, the book makes clear that the development of warfare in the first half of the twentieth century seriously weakened the position of small neutral states. After the First World War small powers were falling behind the big powers militarily because, especially in a time of economic crisis, they could not afford the high expenditures that were needed to maintain a modern army with a high degree of professionalism. Furthermore, the introduction of mechanized units made small countries much more vulnerable to a surprise attack. In this analysis the influence of the development of airpower, which brought a new dimension to warfare in this period, is, with the exception of the article on the air defense of Copenhagen during the First World War, hardly mentioned in the book. The growth of air forces meant that small powers not only had to guard the neutrality of their airspace, but it also made them more attractive for occupation by big powers for the purpose of establishing airbases.

Amersfoort and Klinkert claim that after the First World War neutrality policy became militarily bankrupt. Abbenhuis draws a similar conclusion by writing that the Second World War killed the traditional ideal of neutrality completely. The age of total war made a neutral position almost impossible to uphold. This may be a defendable statement, but it would have been helpful to include an article in the book on small power policies after 1945, when most small Western-European states chose to abandon neutrality and instead became part of the military alliance of NATO. But at same time, the postwar era still showed small states in Western Europa that firmly stuck to their neutrality based upon a strong defense and flexible diplomacy, like Switzerland, Ireland and Sweden. It is no coincidence that these countries were able to maintain their neutral position during the Second World War, and that they also enjoyed a clear advantage in geography, not being located in a strategic hotspot of Europe and being in possession of natural barriers like mountains or other less accessible terrain.

To conclude, with its international perspective the book is filling a gap in both the study of military history and of international relations, but it is only a beginning and more research on the subject is needed.

Tobias van Gent, Roosevelt Academy Middelburg