Though committed to the policy of isolation in foreign relations, the Dutch nevertheless strongly adhered to the idea that their country was cast for the role of world intermediary. This idea became especially strong in the early decades of the twentieth century. Increasingly the Dutch came to rely upon it as one of the chief pillars of their national security.

The geographic position of the Low Countries on the North Sea near the English Channel and on the deltas of the three important rivers of Western Europe, namely, the Rhine, the Meuse and the Scheldt, had given them an early lead as a commercial intermediary. Likewise, their position on the Germanic-Romance linguistic boundary gave them advantages in becoming a cultural intermediary. Early in the modern period Bruges, Antwerp, Leiden, Rotterdam, Delft and The Hague enjoyed international positions in the commercial and cultural life of Western Europe. It was in the Low Countries that Sir Thomas More conceived his Utopia and Descartes spent his most productive years. Erasmus of Rotterdam enjoyed a personal international position. Holland gave asylum to numerous refugees and exiles. The Mennonites from Bern, the Lutherans driven from Salzberg, and the Huguenots from France found an asylum in this hospitable country. By giving aliens the opportunity to think and write in freedom, Holland played an important part in the Enlightenment. Its universities attracted professors and students from many lands. The country has always been freely accessible to foreign ideas and cultures; its life has been deeply penetrated by waves of French, German and English cultural influences.1 Educated Holland-

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1. See the interesting lecture by Professor Huizinga given January 27, 1933, at the German Hochschule für Politik under the title “Die Mittlerstellung der Niederlande zwischen West and Mitteleuropa.” Professor Huizinga suggests that this easy accessibility may have had its unfavorable side in that it tended to stifle cultural creativity in Holland.
ers read and speak fluently the three neighboring languages.

During the period of the Republic the Dutch were involved in nearly every major European war. In the years of the Republic Dutch explorers and adventurers penetrated into nearly every corner of the world and Dutch merchants quickly followed, supported by their government. The Republic of the United Netherlands, which played the role of a great power, had as the chief article of its foreign policy the maintenance of the peace of Europe by means of the balance of power. The Dutch did not engage in these wars to enlarge their borders; they became involved in them because of their desire to keep the peace of Europe. It is not without significance that the three great peace treaties of 1678, 1697 and 1713—those of Nijmegen, Rijswijk and Utrecht respectively—were all concluded on Dutch soil. That the Dutch policy was one of peace and not war, and was so generally recognized, is also evident from the fact that Utrecht was the choice of Abbe de Saint-Pierre for the seat of his proposed peace union outlined in his *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe* published in 1713. The Abbe preferred this Dutch city because of the wide commercial relations of the Dutch and because of their interest in the maintenance of peace.

It was a Netherlander of this early period, Hugo de Groot, or Grotius, who has come to be regarded generally as the “Father of International Law.” Seeing the anarchy which prevailed about him in interstate relations he sought to advance a new philosophy if not a system of law, governing states in their relations with one another. States are members of a society, he argued, and must recognize the universal supremacy of justice. Dutchmen naturally came to take great pride in the work of their illustrious forebear and many have sought to emulate him. From the day of Grotius until now the Dutch have not been without noteworthy representatives in this field of study. The Government, too, has been eager to make the country a center of the study of international law and the promotion of the codification of its rules, as well as a center of international adjudication.

Long before the fall of the Republic, the Dutch had desired to

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1 Vols. I and II, Utrecht; Vol. III, Lyon. 1717. An abbreviation of the work was published in Rotterdam in 1729.
2 *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*. (1625).