Summary

From the late sixteenth century onwards, a major transformation in warfare took place. The Military Revolution, leading to radical changes in military strategy, tactics, and organization, was accompanied by fundamental changes in taxation and government. These changes in turn enabled the creation of the fiscal-military state in most Western European states. The key question in this book is to what extent and in exactly what form the organization and particularly the financing of the navy in the Dutch Republic influenced the creation of the fiscal-military state. In order to answer this question, the finances of the boards of Admiralty have been reconstructed comprehensively. With regard to the Zeeland admiralty this reconstruction dates as far back as 1586, whereas for the other admiralties the records go back to 1681. I have established a databank which for the first time enables us to carry out research into the specific details of the revenues and the expenditures of the admiralties.

Processes of state formation not only occurred at a national level. Particularly in the Dutch Republic changes in the level of administrative support and taxation took place, mainly at the regional level. As a result, the choice was made to carry out a case study from the perspective of Zeeland into the organization, the government, and the financing of the admiralties. Although this province does not represent the other provinces in all aspects, this case study is useful to map out both differences and similarities between the provinces and the Generality.

Chapter 1 reviewed the international debate about warfare, financing, and state formation. No consensus exists about the concept of a Military Revolution and to what degree this impacted the process concerning state formation. Nevertheless, scholars agree that three fundamental interdependent changes took place in Western Europe, although these changes did not occur simultaneously and to the same extent in every state: 1) innovations in military tactics, strategy and particularly military organization; 2) increase in taxation; and 3) new governmental institutions. The mutual competition between Western European states culminated in the development of the fiscal-military state, which (according to John Brewer) was characterized by a radical increase in taxation, the development of a national debt on an unprecedented scale, and the growth of a sizable public administration devoted to organizing the fiscal and military activities of the state.

The Military Revolution not only influenced warfare on land, it also resulted in the construction of large, permanent fleets existing of specialized warships from the 1650s onwards. Private merchant ships were no longer used for combat duties. However, companies and businessmen did cooperate on a
large scale with states to provide army and fleet with food and other services, since the administrative body was too small to organize these tasks on its own. As a consequence, the contractor state grew alongside the fiscal-military state, furthering the cooperation with private entrepreneurs.

Chapter 2 elaborated on the traditionally fragmented supervision of the navy in the Netherlands, a situation that did not improve since the late 1590s. Five provisionary boards of Admiralty were established. Three boards were based in Holland (Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and Hoorn/Enkuizen), one in Zeeland, and another in Friesland. Although it was intended to be temporary, the decentralized organization remained in force until the end of the Dutch Republic in 1795.

The organization of the Dutch navy over five separate admiralties is generally considered as inefficient. It is thought that the administration was strongly influenced by provincial and urban particularism. Besides, the cooperation between the boards was not taken for granted. However, Sigmond showed that this decentralized organization resulted in a more efficient use of the infrastructure. Glete points out that this structure led to a closer commitment of the economic elite to the naval administration. Notwithstanding the alleged disadvantages of the decentralized organisation, the maritime force of the Republic turned out to be one of the most effective navies in Western Europe, if not the most successful one, in the seventeenth century. That in itself is sufficient reason to question the alleged inefficiency of the decentralized naval administration. Besides, a centralized naval organization is not a guarantee for an effective organization as has been shown by the English navy halfway through the seventeenth century.

Chapter 3 argued that the supposed decline of the fleet in eighteenth century to a ‘second rate navy’ should be put in perspective. After the War of the Spanish Succession all Western European states drastically decreased the size of their fleets, including the Dutch Republic. The fleet of the Dutch Republic was still the fifth largest in size at the end of the eighteenth century, and the number of convoyers and cruisers was considerable. Brandon points out that the Republic had no need for a battle fleet due to the alliance with Great Britain. The British navy provided backing during acts of war whereas the Dutch Boards of Admiralty could support commercial interests with a ‘light’ navy, without having to increase custom duties that would have been necessary to match the fleet building by other European states. However, the Dutch Republic was not able to modernize its fleet into a heavily armed battle fleet when tensions grew between the Republic and Great Britain at the end of the 1770s. The defeat of the Dutch navy in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war was, according to Brandon, paradoxically caused by the efficiency of the trade protection during the eighteenth century, not by the lack of it.
Navy expenditure constituted a minor part of the total expenses of the Dutch Republic. Particularly after the War of the Spanish Succession the revenues of the Admiralty Boards declined, whereas the revenues of the provinces increased steadily. Subsidies provided by the provinces were required to finance the fleet activities. However, I have shown that the admiralties were less dependent on these subsidies than generally thought. In times of peace the Amsterdam, the Maze, and the Zeeland Admiralties could well finance their activities by using their own regular (tax)revenues and to fulfill their most important duty, protecting the trade and the merchant navy, without provincial subsidies.

The Admiralties suffered substantially from financial troubles in the eighteenth century. According to Hovy’s thesis, the Republic was not able to adapt to new circumstances in the eighteenth century due to its so-called ‘institutional incompetence’. The provinces were financially independent and could not be forced to contribute to the army and the navy. Within the existing structures, a higher level of efficacy was pursued, but any proposition that would limit the independence of the provinces in favour of a fundamental state reform could not stand a chance. However, this institutional incompetence was not limited to the eighteenth century. Brandon has pointed out a remarkable level of continuity between the finances of the Dutch Admiralties during the peaceful period in the 1680s and 1720s, 1760s, and 1770s. The height of the expenses in the 1780s proves that the Republic was able to spend larger amounts than in the Nine Years’ War and the War of the Spanish Succession. I have shown that this was also the case for the Zeeland Admiralty. Apart from that, the provinces had to subsidize the building and the high maintenance of the battle fleet since the Admiralties were not able to pay for that either during the seventeenth century. In times of peace the provinces could not be forced to contribute. With the exception of the period prior to the First Anglo-Dutch War, the Boards of Admiralty did not really suffer from this free riding. The Dutch navy was prevented from considerable decline by the many wars that were fought at sea, which made the provinces willing to pay their amount in the subsidies. Yet, after the War of the Spanish Succession the peaceful period lingered on for such a long time that the fleet suffered from neglect. In my opinion, the resistance of the provinces to invest sufficiently in the army and the navy in order to keep it up to standards was not characteristic of the eighteenth century only. During its whole existence the Republic suffered from this endemic problem, although the consequences were disclosed finally after the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War.

The most important sources of revenue of the Admiralty Boards were the duties upon in- and outgoing goods. Collecting these custom duties, the so-called convooien en licenten and the last- en veilgeld, had been conferred on the Admiralty Boards back in 1586, which made them responsible for
collecting the taxes that sustained their activities. As a result, the financial basis of the navy differed fundamentally from that of the army, which was financed by the provinces using a share ratio. The admiralties had at their disposal a rather large administrative body in order to collect duties. In 1750 about 520 people were employed in the various offices in ports and near the borders to collect the customs, next to the 70 courts and ministers, and the 168 employees ashore and supporting staff. Even from the 1750s onwards, when the provinces started employing tax collectors instead of leasing out contracts, they spend less money on contracts. Having such a large administrative body for the purpose of fulfilling the tax collecting duties, the military task, and the maintenance of a permanent navy, the Admiralty Boards fulfilled one condition for the existence of a fiscal-military state according to Brewer’s theory.

However, the second condition, the increased tax revenue, was not met. The largest amount of provincial tax revenue was always spent on the army, which was almost twice as expensive as the navy, and increasingly on debt charges. The revenues existing of taxes and customs of the admiralties decreased slowly during the eighteenth century. The navy’s contribution to the total tax revenue of the Republic was even smaller due to the continuing increase in tax revenue of the provinces in the 1690s.

The admiralties did not contribute to a huge increase in national debt either, the third condition required for a fiscal-military state. The revenues of the admiralties existing of taxes and customs were not sufficient to meet all expenditures, certainly not during wartime. In order to build new ships or extraordinary equipments subsidies from the provincial taxes, provided by the provinces, were required. The inland provinces often defaulted in paying the subsidies fully and in due time to the admiralties, especially during peace. As a result, the admiralties were forced to borrow money. These loans, however, did not attain the level of borrowing by the provinces. The Zeeland Admiralty was the most indebted of all admiralties but the province of Zeeland had to pay an interest twenty times as much over its debt. The debts of Holland and Friesland were much higher than the debts of the admiralties based there. These facts show that the contribution of the admiralties in meeting the third condition for a fiscal-military state of a huge increase in national debt was not relevant.

Regarding Brewers conditions that have to be met for a fiscal-military state, the organization and the financing of the navy of the Republic only contributed marginally. Although a relatively vast administrative body was created to collect taxes and to maintain the fleet, the tax revenues and the debt were negligible when compared to the provincial finaces.

According to Glete strong fiscal-military states were based on successful aggregation of (political) interests between rulers and various interest groups in society. The process of aggregation of interests eventually led to the creation of a permanent fiscal, military, and governmental organization: the fiscal-military
state. In this view, the role of the organization and the financing of the navy was far more important. The economic elites became involved in the governance of the navy and as suppliers and (sub)contractors they were able to reap the benefits of the activities of the navy. One of the results of the decentralized organization was the equipment of the fleet through various channels, which led to a closer involvement of other elites. Even though the fundings were rather small, the navy did actually contribute to a permanent fiscal, military, and governmental organization.

The case study focusing on Zeeland in chapter 4 shows that neither at the level of this province, nor at the level of the Dutch Republic, the conditions were met for a fiscal-military state. The administrative body of the Zeeland Admiralty was much larger than that of the province, but compared with Zeeland the tax revenues and the debt were negligible. Following Glete’s view though, the organization and the financing of the navy in Zeeland too has been important for the development of the fiscal-military state in the last quarter of the sixteenth century and its existence in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

In Zeeland the Admiralty was considered as the Admiralty ‘of’ Zeeland. Although the board was installed in 1597 as a Generality board, Zeeland agreed on that for one year only. The province defended itself against any possible encroachment on its naval policy by the States General. The presence of its admiralty not only resulted from, but also strengthened provincial particularism. To a large extent Zeeland was able to organize its own maritime defense and the protection of the trade and fishery independent from the other provinces. This self-defence became crucial when the land provinces were no longer willing to contribute financially to the admiralties at the end of the seventeenth century. The extraordinary equipments were often made possible because Zeeland provided financial support in time. Hence, the Zeeland Admiralty was able to act as the Admiralty of and for Zeeland.

More than the Admiralty Boards in the other provinces, the Zeeland Admiralty was dominated by representatives originating from its ‘own’ province. The fact that these representatives were able to serve long terms and that they could combine it with the function of Provincial Executives of the States of Zeeland resulted in a substantial influence of the province in the Admiralty. Since the Provincial Executives of the States of Zeeland in the same capacity took office in the Board of the Admiralty, the entitled cities were guaranteed a direct influence in the governing board of the admiralty. The successful aggregation of political interests is substantiated by the minutes of the States of Zeeland: issues concerning the Admiralty or the navy usually were no source of conflicts. Although the various cities had different interests, they often agreed
on the interests of the Province of Zeeland in maritime businesses. This strong aggregation of interests led to swift and efficient decision-making.

Administratively and organizationally, the Zeeland Admiralty was incorporated successfully in the administrative structure of Zeeland. Due to their dual function the Provincial Executives had a strong influence on collecting and spending tax revenues in the province of Zeeland. They collected not only the provincial taxes but also the custom duties and other taxes on trade in Zeeland on behalf of the Generalty. Therefore, the Admiralty furthered the creation of an oligarchy in the administration of Zeeland.

The collection of custom duties was subject to fraud throughout the Dutch Republic. Several scholars claimed in literature that fraud was of a larger scale in Zeeland than elsewhere. Taking the administrative relationships between the province and the admiralty into account, it was easy to favour the inhabitants of Zeeland, or to engage in fraud with the collusion of the Admiralty, or even to falsify the accounts. However, neither De Vries, nor any other author is able to support the statement that the fraud in Zeeland ‘certainly’ amounted to 80% by any source material. The observation that fraud was more widespread in Zeeland than elsewhere should not be taken for granted.

In literature, the *brokerage state* is used for states that contracted out much of the organization and the financing of warfare to independent brokers and entrepreneurs. The role of brokers varied from being responsible for recruiting and maintaining hired troops to facilitating and supplying food and other essential services. This model of *contractor state* is perfectly applicable to the Zeeland Admiralty. The admiralty intensively made use of the services of local suppliers and contractors. Several activities in the wharfs were put out to tender in public. Moreover, local captains were deployed as entrepreneurs. They had to recruit a crew and were personally responsible for providing food and beverages on board of the ship.

If the admiralty is compared with the States General and the province of Zeeland, the model of the *brokerage state* is applicable on this level as well. Generally, the Zeeland Admiralty acted in the maritime interests of Zeeland, financed by the taxes and duties collected on Zeeland territory. If desired, the admiralty could be ‘contracted’ by the States General to equip ships, subsidized by the inland provinces. From the perspective of the Generalty the Zeeland Admiralty could be considered as entrepreneur instead of an administrative body.

Although the 1597 Instruction was meant to be applied for a single year, it functioned for nearly two centuries. The organization and the financing of the navy played a major role in the development of the Dutch Republic as a fiscal-military state in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, but from the early seventeenth century onwards only contributed to its preservation. The influence
of the States General was limited and centralization was out of order. Charles Tilly’s description of the Republic as a weak state seems appropriate, although be it on the level of the Generalty.

The situation is rather different on the provincial level. The conclusion that the organization and the financing of the navy no longer contributed substantially to the development of the Republic as a fiscal-military state in the seventeenth century and only preserved it, also applies to Zeeland. On an institutional level no longer changes could be detected after 1597: there were no higher tax revenues and the contribution to an increase of national (or rather provincial) debt was limited. However, in contrast to the level of the Generalty, the measure of centralization on the Zeeland provincial level was enormous. The Provincial Executives of the States of Zeeland, appointed by the First Noble and the city council of the entitled cities, seized total control of the administration of the Zeeland Admiralty. Besides, the Zeeland States interfered intensively with the Admiralty. The aggregation of political interests in Zeeland heavily influenced the decision making process regarding warfare and the use of funding for maritime purposes.

Along the lines of Glete’s theory, Zeeland could be described as a relatively strong fiscal-military state. The Zeeland Admiralty is a good example of the fiscal-military state being accompanied by the contractor state. Although the financial contribution to the army and the fleet decreased in the eighteenth century, the Zeeland Admiralty played an important role in this fiscal-military state. While the navy contributed only marginally to the development of the fiscal-military state on the Generalty level, on the level of the province of Zeeland this contribution was essential.