

# Danger

A bride, her hand sought by many an eager suitor. It's a historical image used for seventeenth-century Holland, rich as she was through trade in the East Indies, but also vulnerable. Her scale made sure of that: a small republic of seven provinces in Northern Europe, lacking the stability of central sovereignty and merely a merchant state, up for grabs by its bigger neighbours on the German, French and English sides. Sometimes I like to play mentally with such imagery to see if it's applicable to our own business.

Geomatics is certainly in full swing. After a few years of recession, I hope we've seen the worst and recovery is really on its way, if it hasn't already set in. It's fair to say that stimulus packages and government tenders and contracts helped the sector not to hit rock bottom as severely as other industries. Globalisation helped us bounce back on emerging markets in Asia, South America and even Africa, also perhaps making for a less tough downturn than that experienced by the construction or shipbuilding sectors. The nature of the field, highly technological, helps as well. Society is becoming increasingly technological, incorporating geo-referenced data in many more applications than ever before. Globalisation, government-driven work and an ever increasing focus on and growth in technology: geomatics in the right spot at the right time. There would seem not a cloud in the sky. Alas, I don't want to spoil the party, but the sky is never so blue. It wasn't for the Dutch virgin, the republic of Seven Provinces, around the year 1672, when all her bigger neighbours launched an attack on her.

There are a few developments decision-makers in geomatics need to keep a keen eye on. The environment in which geomatics technology is thriving is marked by big software companies. Undoubtedly they will want a piece of the cake. What is more, those emerging markets - China, India and Brazil - are not thriving thanks just to their fast growing population, but because their universities are turning out hundreds, thousands of smart engineers, determined to take destiny into their own hands and claim their rightful place in it. Thirdly, commoditisation of techniques, solutions and applications will continue, inevitably lowering margins on highly profitable products. But, just as for seventeenth-century Holland, there is a way out of the danger zone. The answer is through diplomacy and politics. Try linking up with outside parties; forge bonds and alliances with third parties. So that you stay the geomatics party and your ally is granted a piece of the action on your own terms and isn't tempted to enter the market himself. At the same time, try yourself finding a foothold outside the market; enter business-to-consumer or other business-to-business markets. Look over fences, see opportunities and don't be afraid to make friends in other sectors. Sounds like the perfect business-to-business environment for the future, and as old as the solution Holland found for her own precarious situation centuries ago.