

Review of: "The soft power of neutrality Dutch humanitarianism in World War I, 1914-1918"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I wish to make three notes about the nature of my commentary:

1. I am focusing my comments exclusively on the author's thesis, and on the three categories of Dutch humanitarianism discussed in the article--relief for Belgian and German children adversely affected by the war, ambulatory relief, and relief/sanctuary for POWs and war internees.
2. I write this without reference to other reviewers' comments. I did not want to find my assessment affected by their observations.
3. I do not suggest that the author is irrefutably incorrect in any assertion the author has made. In all below-noted cases, I wish to read more empirical evidence supporting, and more explanation of, the argument that the author makes about the connection between Dutch humanitarianism and the Netherlands' formal neutrality.

This article identifies a broad spectrum of Dutch humanitarian actions during the First World War. It is intriguing to read of the breadth and depth of private Dutch charitable efforts for non-nationals adversely affected by the conflict. It holds a clear thesis, that "humanitarianism touched the very core of Dutch security policy." I would like to read a bit more on the topic of 'security' in the paper in connection to such unofficial Dutch benevolence. Did the Netherlands' policy makers worry that Western Front and/or naval events could compromise Dutch security? How do archival sources address this topic? A clear linkage of the two 'spheres' of society would strongly indicate that Dutch charitable action may have been non-state, but that it effectively advanced the Netherlands' diplomacy and statecraft. Additionally, I would like to know a bit more about the historiography of this topic. To what extent have other pertinent authors considered how private 1914-1918 Dutch humanitarian relief functioned as a fulcrum of 1914-1918 Dutch foreign policy? Have such authors ignored it completely or partially? Have they incompletely captured the contours of 1914-1918 Dutch humanitarianism?

I found the discussion of German children on holiday in the Netherlands most interesting, which is why it is the most commented-on portion of my review. I would like to read a bit more on the following topics and questions:

1. The author indicates that Dutch charities hoped to help Belgian and German children recover from war's adverse

effects. To what extent do published and archival sources indicate that Belgian and/or German children needed this moral and material uplift?

2. To what extent did Dutch Catholic agencies coordinate this action with Belgian and German authorities, so as to ensure safe conduct for the Belgian children between Belgian and/or German positions?
3. The author notes that in July 1916, “several Dutch newspapers reported on the possible arrival of German children in the Netherlands to gain strength, due to the deteriorating food situation in Germany.” This is an interesting development. Why not call for something akin to the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB) to transport and deliver food among German children akin to the process unfolding in Belgium and Northern France? Is there any indication that Dutch periodicals considered replicating such a process?
4. The author notes that Society for Centres for Child Recovery and Vacations Chairman and liberal MP Leendert Nicolaas Roodenburg supported convalescent programs for war-afflicted German youths. Does this suggest the private venture had some connection to The Netherlands’ foreign policy, much as the author’s later reference to the Netherlands’ Prime Minister’s comments on 25 August 1916? Are there any archival sources that show the venture resonated with Amsterdam’s objectives?
5. The author notes the “anti-German daily *De Telegraaf* argued against an ‘invasion’ or ‘tidal wave’ of up to 300.000 German children.” It might be worth considering whether this response resonates with how many Frenchmen viewed refugees from northeastern France, as “Boches du Nord”, as Philippe Nivet has shown in *Les Boches du Nord*? Also, did *De Telegraaf* see a distinction between this possible “tidal wave”, and Dutch Catholic refugee activity for Belgian children, or was it unaware of the Belgian youths’ assistance?
6. The author notes that the communist *Tribune* likewise “rejected the idea of alleviating the German war effort by feeding that country’s children.” This certainly suggests that attitudes toward Dutch philanthropic ventures crossed the political spectrum. Upon what basis did *Tribune* reject this idea? How was it not consistent with Dutch neutrality? Did The Hague not likewise favor CRB food shipments into occupied Belgium and northern France?
7. Regarding the German youths who in 1916, 1917, and 1918 received a six-week holiday in the Netherlands--To what extent did these German children appear malnourished, emaciated, etc., before their holiday? To what extent do archival sources indicate that the holiday appear to accomplish its ends?
8. The author notes that “in 1919 the relief programs for German, Austrian and Hungarian children were resumed. Until the mid-1920s thousands of them would spend long holidays in the Netherlands.” Is there any sign that these Dutch non-state actors were aware of alike efforts by the statist American Relief Administration and/or the non-state American Red Cross and the American Friends Service Committee?
9. Regarding the January 1917 statements of social democrat MP Jan Duys and the September 1917 acts of German Foreign Secretary Richard von Kühlmann--Duys words suggest that some in government saw a way to link non-state actors to state aims. Was Mr. Duys an outlier in this regard? Also, did any other Dutch politicians return to this line of argument regarding Operation Alberich, in which Germany forcibly relocated tens of thousands of healthy, adult Frenchmen from territory it looted and then abandoned to France? If not, does it suggest that Dutch politicians, journalists, etc., were (like ‘neutral’ America) more sympathetic to the fate of neutral Belgium than they were to belligerents who had signed prewar ententes and alliances? Additionally did von Kühlmann consider Dutch holidays for

German children at all linked to the Netherlands' concurrent foreign policy vis-à-vis the Central and/or the Allied Powers? Was there any effort by Germany to mobilize Dutch supporters of German children's holidays to gain Dutch coal, or gain any material resources from the Netherlands to advance Germany's war effort? In other words, can we see in this a form of what John Horne considered a totalizing war effort?

Regarding Dutch ambulances, I have the following questions.

1. The author notes that ambulance operators undertook their acts due to their "lust for adventure, the wish to be away from home and individual sympathies for one of the warring states." Intriguing. Does this make Dutch ambulance drivers 'fellow travelers' with American men in the Norton-Harjes Unit and the American Field Service? In other words, is there something fundamentally universal in the motives of those who operated ambulances or were the Dutch unique in this regard? A related question--were there female 'neutral' Dutch ambulance drivers as there were American women who operated in this regard?
2. The author references the ambulatory record of Arius van Tienhoven and former Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper . Were there any indications that such Dutch ambulance operators acted neutrally, i.e., that they aided ailing combatants and noncombatants on both sides? If so, it would certainly bolster the argument that official Dutch neutrality and unofficial Dutch humanitarianism were symbiotic.
3. Regarding the Dutch hospital in Paris, the author states "it is hard to find concrete evidence that the Dutch government used this private medical assistance to the belligerents diplomatically in order to strengthen its political stance." This is an intriguing observation. What do the archives, diplomatic dispatches, etc., say about how 1914-1918 Dutch diplomats and politicians viewed the private Dutch hospital?

Regarding belligerents' internment, I have the following questions.

1. The author focuses on the issue of British and German POWs. Was there ever archival evidence indicating that Dutch diplomats thought to create similar opportunities for Italian, Russian, Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Romanian, Greek, and Ottoman POWs?
2. The author notes that Dutch internment of British and German POWs coincided with harsher, war-induced living conditions in the Netherlands, and that these pressures led many Dutch people to look on the internment program unkindly. Did these same pressures affect concurrent Dutch attitudes toward German children entering the Netherlands for a six-week holiday?
3. The author references Dutch general, Marcus Onnen's statement that "The Netherlands government have considered it to be the duty of a neutral state to soothe as much as possible the misery created by war." Is there archival evidence of the extent to which official Dutch policymakers concurred with this sentiment?

I greatly look forward to the answers and insights that the author can provide on these points. I thank the author for contributing to a broader discourse regarding the links between humanitarianism and diplomacy.