

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

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This is a very good article, which carefully articulates the inter-relationship between Dutch neutrality policy and humanitarianism during the Great War. Great care is taken to examine the subject from both a local and government initiative standpoint, offering a range of examples that demonstrate how the Netherlands took its neutrality into its own hands and moulded its foreign policy around it.

What is, perhaps, missing is some broader context - particularly early in the article. It is mentioned in the introduction that neutrality and humanitarianism fed into Dutch military policy, yet this is not mentioned again thereafter. How did this manifest itself? And to what degree had the Dutch army been suitably prepared to defend its borders if neutrality were threatened or if its humanitarian actions were misinterpreted? It might also be worth contextualising Dutch neutrality within the broader developments of neutrality in the 19th Century - Abbenhuis rightly points out the neutrality was a choice and as such was a political tool. What is the Netherlands' relationship with this idea before the First World War. Equally, and possibly linked, are The Hague conferences. These are referred to in the second half of the article, but could have their importance/impact established beforehand. Looking further back to the last major European war (1870/71), Belgium was faced with a similar situation as a neutral bordering a war zone. It faced the same challenges of interning soldiers and offering medical aid/evacuation routes. Is there any reference to the Dutch following Belgium's example or avoiding any perceived errors that landed it in (some) trouble with the German authorities?

Overall, I believe this to be a very good article, worthy of publication. For the benefit of the general reader, some broader context is needed though.