

Master's thesis of Global History and  
International Relations at the Erasmus  
University Rotterdam

# A relation of neutrals

The Netherlands and the  
United States during the First  
World War

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## Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the relationship between the Netherlands and the United States at the beginning of World War I, and in 1917 after the United States entered the war. During the beginning of the First World War in July 1914, both countries declared themselves neutral. As the world's leading neutral nation, the U.S. was important to the Netherlands' own neutrality from the standpoint of morality and credibility, and because of the political influence that went hand-in-hand with America's economic power. At the same time the Dutch government desperately tried to preserve their country's neutrality in the face of potential commercial and diplomatic conflict with Great Britain and Germany, two combatant nations whose interests potentially placed the Netherlands, and Dutch neutrality, at risk. I will examine the benign nature of the Dutch-American relations in 1914, a time of concord and diplomatic expressions of cooperation, and compare them to the altered circumstances in which the Dutch found themselves *vis a vis* America after the U.S. entered the war on the side of the Entente.

The historic relationship between the Netherlands and the United States can be traced to colonial America, when Dutch influence in New York and throughout the Eastern Seaboard was significant. Consequently, there was a substantial segment of the American population that could claim Dutch ancestry. Martin Van Buren (1782 – 1862), the eighth president of the US hailed from a Dutch community in New York. Though these historic ties were only nominally important, they were indicative of a long and positive relationship between the two nations going back nearly 200 years by the time war broke out in Europe in 1914.

The First World War was a global conflict that lasted from 28 July 1914 until 11 November 1918. The year 2014, when I started my research for this thesis, marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what has come to be known as the “War to End All Wars.” The belligerents were the Triple Entente, consisting of Britain, France and Russia, and the Central Powers, including Germany and Austria-Hungary. During this conflict, both sides built alliances with countries from throughout Europe, the Far East and other parts of the globe. Though this was a truly global conflict, a number of countries decided to stay out of the war. The United States, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands are examples of countries that formally declared their neutrality at the war's outset. The United States was the most powerful neutral on earth,<sup>1</sup> but it eventually chose to join the Entente on 6 April 1917. The Netherlands, on the other hand, maintained its neutrality throughout the war.

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Frey, ‘Trade, ships, and the neutrality of the Netherlands in the First World War’, *The International History Review* 19:3 (1997) 549.

The First World War was one of history's most devastating conflicts<sup>2</sup> and thus has been the subject of many scholarly works. The ways in which the countries involved thought and wrote about the war have changed over the past century. Many histories of the war have focused on its causes but after the war historiography gradually shifted toward the operational aspects of the war and firsthand experiences of soldiers on the field of battle. More recent historiographical trends have focused on ways in which the belligerents commemorated the war.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the war's toll and incalculable effect on Europe and the world, much of this history has been forgotten. Because of this, and the 100<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the war's beginning, the Netherlands has launched an informational program aimed at informing the Dutch public about the Great War, as it is often called. Television station NTR broadcasted a documentary about the Netherlands during the First World War on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2014, and the *Stichting 100 jaar Nederland en de Eerste Wereldoorlog*<sup>4</sup> was founded. Prominent Dutch First World War historians such as Paul Moeyes and Samuel Kruizinga, have joined this foundation, the goal of which is to create awareness about the First World War among a large, nationwide audience from 2014 to 2018. Since 2011, different scholars collaborated to make an online encyclopedia<sup>5</sup> about the First World War, which was released in October 2014. Authors such as Samuel Kruizinga and Paul Moeyes wrote articles for this encyclopedia. It is in memory of this that I have chosen to focus part of this thesis on the first hundred days following the United States' entry in the war.

## Historiography

According to Dutch historian Maarten Brands, the First World War has no place in Dutch collective memory because the Netherlands remained neutral. The Netherlands, therefore, has no real historical perspective on the war and, thus, there exists a gap in Dutch historiography concerning this important chapter of European and global history.<sup>6</sup> Compared to the Second World War and the Interbellum, there is a decided lack of interest from Dutch scholars.<sup>7</sup> Dutch historian Piet Blaas however disagrees with

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<sup>2</sup> John Keegan, *The First World War* (London 1998) 3.

<sup>3</sup> Yohann le Tallec, 'Historiography of World War One' British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/historiography-of-world-war-one> (visited 30-6-2014).

<sup>4</sup> Stichting 100 jaar Nederland en de Eerste Wereldoorlog, <http://www.100jaarnederlandenwo1.nl/home.php>, (visited 17-8-2015)

<sup>5</sup> International Encyclopedia of the First World War 1914-1918 [http://www.1914-1918-online.net/03\\_encyclopedia/index.html](http://www.1914-1918-online.net/03_encyclopedia/index.html) (visited 06-01-2015)

<sup>6</sup> Maarten Brands, 'The Great War die aan ons voorbij ging. De blinde vlek in het historisch bewustzijn van Nederland' in: M. Bergman and J. C. H. Blom (red.), *Het belang van de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Den Haag 1997) 9-20.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, 17.

Brands, arguing that during the Interbellum there appeared many scholarly works concerning the Great War, and that it was only in the post-Second World War period that the Great War received scant attention.<sup>8</sup> Brands conceded that he erred in his assertion in *Karrensporen onder het asphalt*, which was published in 2013.<sup>9</sup> During the war and Interbellum, historians such as G.W. Kernkamp and H.T. Kolenbrander wrote about World War I in Dutch magazines like *De Amsterdammer* (nowadays: *De Groene Amsterdammer*) and *Vragen des Tijds*. These focused on the political components of the war and the importance of the country's neutrality. At the same time, H. Brugmans and N. Japikse took an historical approach to the war's causes. In 1926, Brugmans published a book on British foreign policy between 1870 and 1914, which was concerned with the causes of the war. This work was commissioned by N. Japikse, founder of the *Nederlandsch Comité tot onderzoek van de oorzaken der Wereldoorlog* (Dutch Committee for Research for the Causes of the World War). The Dutch historian Pieter Geyl also served on this committee. He had been a correspondent for the Dutch newspaper *NRC* in London during the war and saw it as his duty to inform the Dutch public about events in the United Kingdom.<sup>10</sup> The historian Amry Vandenbosch published *The neutrality of the Netherlands during the World War* in 1927, and in 1935 Charlotte van Manen published an extensive research on the Netherlands Oversea Trust (NOT). The archives of the NOT had been closed for the public, except for Van Manen. She was seen during the Interbellum as an extension of the Cort van der Linden-government.<sup>11</sup>

The Second World War ended the tradition of historical research on the First World War. However, the attorney Cornelis Smit spent most of his spare time researching the Great War, beginning in 1945. From 1971 to 1973, he published a three volume work called *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog*. In these books, he concentrated on foreign policy and diplomacy. Volume I describes the most important international pre-war developments and how the Netherlands reacted. In the second and third volumes, Smit describes the dilemma in which the Netherlands found itself during the war years.

In 2001, Paul Moeyes published *Buiten schot*. Whereas Smit focused on foreign policy and diplomacy, this work centers on the domestic situation in the Netherlands. Moeyes states in his preface that the only Dutch publications about the First World War are the works of Van Manen about the Netherlands' Oversea Trust from 1935, and Smit. Moeyes was concerned with the war's impact on the Dutch economy, specifically, the financial sector including trade, agriculture and fishery, mobilization

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<sup>8</sup> Piet Blaas, 'Nederlandse historici en de Eerste Wereldoorlog' in: M. Kraaijesteijn and Paul Schulten (ed.), *Wankel evenwicht. Neutraal Nederland en de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Soesterberg 2007) 15.

<sup>9</sup> Enne Koops, 'Maarten Brands 80 jaar: "Karrensporen" en "Het Arsenaal"', *Historiek.net* <http://historiek.net/maarten-brands-80-jaar-karrensporen-en-het-arsenaal/40439/> (visited 25-06-2014)

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Fedde Kruizinga, *Economische politiek. De Nederlandsche Overzee Trustmaatschappij (1914-1919) en de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam 2011) 6.

<sup>11</sup> Blaas, 'Nederlandse historici en de Eerste Wereldoorlog', 23.

and the army, and refugees. Moeyes finds that there is no “standard work”<sup>12</sup> on the history of the Netherlands during the First World War, noting that because no clear image of a neutral Netherlands emerged from this conflict, the idea arose that nothing of importance had occurred.<sup>13</sup>

Studies of America’s participation in the conflict are plentiful. These cover the war in general, as well as policy and diplomacy, domestic mobilization, army operations, domestic dissent, developments in air and seaborne warfare, and peacemaking.<sup>14</sup> Wilson and Ernest May wrote *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* in 1954. John Coogan published *The End of Neutrality* in 1981, wherein he analyzes the development of neutrality until the war, and the decision of Wilson to end it for the U.S. According to Coogan, the U.S. was already no longer legally neutral by April 1915.<sup>15</sup> Thomas Knock’s *To End All Wars*, published in 1992, takes a positive view of U.S. president Woodrow Wilson’s (1856 – 1924) search for a new world order. Robert H. Ferrel published a study of Wilson as a peacemaker and a war leader in *Woodrow Wilson and WWI, 1917-1921* in 1985.<sup>16</sup>

Relations between the Netherlands and the United States during the First World War have received minimal attention in scholarly literature. In 1982, J.W. Schulte Nordholt and Robert P. Swierenga published a collection of essays entitled *A Bilateral Bicennial: A History of Dutch-American Relations, 1782-1982*.<sup>17</sup> The book was written because of the commemoration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce by which the Netherlands recognized the American republic. The book contains fourteen essays of Dutch and American scholars and touches subjects of immigration, diplomatic and economic relations and bilateral perception. It does not, however, include the relations of the two countries during the First World War. Nearly the same scenario played out later. In 2009, Hans Krabbendam, Cornelis van Minnen and Giles Scott-Smith published a compilation entitled *Four Centuries of American-Dutch Relations: 1609-2009*. In this expansive volume, Hubert van Tuyl wrote only one short essay about the relations between the Netherlands and the U.S. during World War I. Van Tuyl’s perspective on the two nation’s relationship was that it was a comparatively minor chapter in a much larger story.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Moeyes, *Buiten schot. Nederland tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam 2001) 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Dennis Showalter, ‘The United States in the Great War: a historiography’, *Magazine of history* 17 no.1 (2002) 5-13.

<sup>15</sup> John W. Coogan, *The end of neutrality: the United States, Britain and maritime rights, 1899-1915* (London 1981); Harvey Strum, ‘The end of neutrality; The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915 by John W. Coogan’, *The public historian* 4 no. 3 (1982) 112-115.

<sup>16</sup> Robert H. Ferrel, *Woodrow Wilson and WWI, 1917-1921* (New York 1985)

<sup>17</sup> J.W. Schulte Nordholt and Robert P. Swierenga, *A Bilateral Bicennial: A History of Dutch-American Relations, 1782-1982* (Amsterdam 1982)

<sup>18</sup> H. Krabbendam, C.A. van Minnen and G. Scott-Smith (eds.), *Four centuries of Dutch-American relations 1609-2009* (New York 2009).

## Research question and hypothesis

This leads to my research question: What were the effects of neutrality on the relations between the Netherlands and the United States at the outset of the First World War, and after the entry of the U.S. into the war in April 1917? I propose to examine the following hypothesis: At the start of the war, the Netherlands profited from U.S. neutrality, but America's entry into the war in April 1917 left the Netherlands vulnerable to belligerents on both sides and undermined the Dutch government's attempts to remain neutral based on international law.

In order to test my hypothesis, I will compare two time periods. The first is 28 July to 5 October 1914; the second is 6 April to 14 July 1917. These time frames comprise the first 100 days of the First World War and the first 100 days from the entry of the United States into the conflict. In comparing these periods, I will point out the effects of neutrality on the relations between the Netherlands and the U.S. I am aware that there are potential issues with using 100 days as a recurrent theme, and that it could limit my research. Some important events simply exceed the limits set by these time frames; therefore, I have not been too strict in applying them.

In order to answer my research question, I propose two sub-questions. The first is: Did the Netherlands profit from the United States' neutrality during the first 100 days of the war? I will seek to answer this question in my first chapter. In chapter two, I will address my second sub-question, which is: What did the United States' entry into the war mean to the Netherlands as a neutral country? Having answered these sub-questions, I will answer my main research question in the conclusion.

## Methods and sources

I will draw comparisons based on qualitative evidence drawn from histories of the period and from correspondence between Dutch and American government officials. Specifically, I will compare the relationship between the United States and the Netherlands before and after the U.S. came into the war, assessing the consequent effect on the Dutch government's efforts to remain neutral.

In my research I used a number of primary and secondary resources. My secondary sources are academic works that explain the position of the Netherlands and the United States and their relations during the First World War. Many of them are discussed in the historiography. The primary sources I have used to conduct research on the issues not yet addressed in academic research regarding the topic of this dissertation. Hereby I would like to briefly explain these sources.



### The correspondence of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Washington

The Dutch National Archives (NA) in The Hague contain the correspondence of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Washington. The main representatives were E. H. Ridder Van Rappard (1852 - 1829), Dutch ambassador in Washington, and Willem Hendrik de Beaufort (1845 - 1918), Chargé d’Affaires of the Dutch embassy.

### The Lansing papers

Robert Lansing (1864 – 1928) served as the Secretary of State of the United States under Woodrow Wilson from 1915 until 1920. Lansing was a lawyer and conservative democratic politician, who advocated the rights of neutrals and freedom of the seas. I was able to recover digital versions of the documents on via the University of Michigan.<sup>19</sup> The first volume of the Lansing papers covers the period wherein the U.S. was neutral, while the second volume reports on the period of American participation in the war. The papers document the later years of Robert Lansing. During his tenure as Secretary of State from 23 June 1915 to 13 February 1920, the United States entered the First World War on the side of the Entente Powers. Deliberations and negotiations associated with the precarious neutrality which preceded this event and the troubled peace which followed it dominated Lansing's time in office and are reflected in his papers. Lansing's interests as a lawyer, which were international in scope and substance, and the diverse subjects which commanded his attention as a writer – subjects ranging from biblical history to English etymology – are also evident. The Lansing Papers consist of official papers, personal papers, writings and speeches, diaries, sketches, and photographs. Though by no means exhaustive, they shed light on many aspects of Lansing's life and time.

### Ernst Heldring’s diaries

Ernst Heldring (1871 – 1954) was a Dutch ship-owner, banker and politician during the First World War. He was a member of the board of directors of the Netherlands Oversea Trust. He also was director of the Royal Dutch Steamship Company (KNSM) from 1899 until 1937 and director of the Royal West Indie Mail Service (KWIM) from 1912 until 1928. In 1902 he was a great enthusiast for a conglomeration of Dutch ship-owning companies in order to make a strong stance against the influence of German ship-owners. He kept a diary throughout his entire life. His diary gives an insight from the perspective of Dutch businessmen, in addition to my governmental sources. Heldring mainly deals with trade issues in his personal reports about the war years.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> HathiTrust’s digital library, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015018612500;view=1up;seq=2> (visited 01-03- 2014)

<sup>20</sup> Ernst Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek* (ed. Johan de Vries) (Groningen 1970).

## Chapter 1: 1914

In this chapter, I examine the first 100 days of the First World War, with a focus on the United States and the Netherlands, and their mutual relations. I will try to answer the sub-question that underscores this chapter, which is: Did the Netherlands benefit from the United States' neutrality during the first 100 days of the First World War, between 28 July and 5 October 1914?

In the first section, I describe the events that led up to the First World War and analyze the situation in general, including which countries were involved and which decided to be neutral. I will also take a further look into neutrality in this section. In the second and third sections, I will describe the respective positions of the Netherlands and the United States during the early stages of the war. I will then describe the bilateral relations and communications between both countries between 28 July and 5 October 1914. I will conclude this chapter by looking at the events, relations and communications between the Netherlands and the United States and the role neutrality played in it, and formulate an answer to this chapter's central question.

### 1.1 The start of the War and the role of neutrality

John Keegan describes a “European harmony”<sup>21</sup> in his book *The First World War*: in the summer of 1914 “the impossibility of general war seemed the most conventional of wisdoms”.<sup>22</sup> Europe was peaceful, productive and enjoyed a ready and abundant exchange of goods, funds and ideas. The improvements in means of communication, by railway, telegraph and post led to international cooperation and the full utilization of these technologies. The International Telegraph Union and the International Postal Union are two examples of the many international organizations that were established in the second half of the nineteenth century. International organizations were also developed in the area of commerce: examples of these include the Association of Accountancy in 1911 and the Unification of Maritime Law in 1965. These organizations were founded to regulate and standardize international buying and selling, distribution, and insurance. The trend toward international standardizing was not only of a commercial nature, but also intellectual, philanthropic and religious. Christianity was the shared religion throughout Europe.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Keegan, *The First World War*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, 12.

In 1914, mounting tensions between the great European powers, generated by the race for empire, led to widespread warfare. The spark that triggered the explosion was ignited in the Bosnian city of Sarajevo, where the Austrian-Hungarian heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated by a young Serbian student named Gavrilo Princip. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, and a chain of alliances began to draw the Great Powers inexorably towards war. Two blocks formed: the Allies, or Triple Entente on the one side, and the Central Powers on the other. Russia was the first to mobilize its army, coming to the aid of Serbia and thereby provoking a German declaration of war. Bound by its treaty with Russia, France mobilized its armies as well, while Britain declared war when Germany violated Belgium's neutrality. Other European powers were rapidly drawn into the conflict, leading to the first truly global war. Several countries declared neutrality, including the Netherlands, Belgium and the United States.

Combat began on 4 August 1914, when a German task force crossed the Belgian border and quickly overran the country. Eight days later, Austria invaded Serbia. Russia attacked Germany by advancing into East Prussia, as well as the eastern provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After achieving a major breakthrough in France, the German offensive began to stall just fifteen miles from Paris. On the eastern front, the Germans inflicted a crushing defeat on the Russians at Tannenberg in late August 1914. On the western front, the Allies counterattacked at Le Marne, driving the Germans back and, at Ypres, the Allies fought off a German offensive aimed at capturing the vital Channel ports, as both sides raced to the sea in an effort to outflank each other. By the end of December 1914, the western front was more or less stable, and a solid frontier line stretched from the English Channel, through France and Belgium, to Switzerland. On the eastern front, the Russians withdrew from East Prussia when the Germans attacked Poland.<sup>24</sup>

It was Germany's utter disregard for Belgium's neutrality that caused the greatest controversy.<sup>25</sup> The observance (or violation) of a sovereign country's right to neutrality was no small matter, given that the lack of large scale international conflict, a deterrent balance of power and a growing respect for international law had produced something of a golden age for neutrality from 1815 to 1914. At the The Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907, the law of neutrality was proclaimed, based on hundreds of court decisions and three centuries of treaties. It is ironic that at the same time attorneys were working out the particulars of neutrality at The Hague, the German High Command was developing the Von Schlieffen Plan - named after the German field marshal Alfred von Schlieffen (1833 – 1913) - Imperial Germany's strategy for overwhelming the French and which would eventually take their armies right through neutral

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<sup>24</sup> Keegan, *The First World War*, 18-25.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Lyon, 'Neutrality and the emergence of the concept of neutralism', *The review of politics* 22 (April 1960) 259.

Belgium. However, the diplomats of Europe already suspected that Germany would violate Belgium's neutrality in an upcoming war.<sup>26</sup>

The most important aspect of Dutch-American relations during the war is neutrality. In the war's beginning, the U.S. and the Netherlands were both neutral. The U.S. wanted to remain neutral from a position of strength: it could function even if foreign trade was disrupted. For the Netherlands, this was completely different because it was a commercial nation with financial interests throughout the world. American neutrality was based on isolationism, whereas the Dutch wanted nothing to do with isolation.<sup>27</sup>

But what does neutrality mean? A neutral state is one that explicitly declares itself neutral to the belligerent parties in a war. A non-belligerent, therefore, is not necessarily neutral. On the conclusion of the Treaty of Paris in March 1856, which ended the Crimean War, the warring parties signed the Paris Declaration Respecting Maritime Law. The treaty established maritime law among the major powers of Europe. Ultimately, it was ratified by 55 nations. The treaty regulated the relationship between neutrals and belligerents and introduced new prize rules, which concerned the capturing of ships during wartime.<sup>28</sup>

In 1899 and 1907 international treaties and declarations were negotiated at the Peace Conferences in The Hague. The conferences were about disarmament, laws during wartime and war crimes. The main goal of the conference of 1899 was to limit armament, but this particular proposal failed. The second conference built further on the negotiations of the first one, with a focus on naval warfare. During this conference, the proposal for limitation of arms was not accepted. There were, however, a number of conventions approved concerning the rights and duties of neutral powers, submarine mines, enemy merchant ships and the proposition of an international prize court. This court handled the capturing of prizes, such as enemy ships, during war. Although the prize court did not come into existence, it was the first attempt for the establishment of an international court and also gave individual parties, such as ship owners, rights in international law.<sup>29</sup>

From 4 December 1908 until 26 February 1909, Great Britain held a conference with nine other naval powers: Germany, the U.S., Austria-Hungary, Spain, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands and Russia. This International Naval Conference constituted the Declaration of London. These 10 countries agreed that the rules of this declaration recognized the principles of international law. The rules of the Declaration were about blockading; contraband; un-neutral service; transfer of an enemy vessel to a neutral flag; convoys; resistance to search; and compensation of an illegal capture. In England, the

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<sup>26</sup> *Idem*, 260.

<sup>27</sup> Hubert P. van Tuyll, 'Dutch-American relations during World War' in H. Krabbendam, C.A. van Minnen and G. Scott-Smith (eds.), *Four centuries of Dutch-American relations 1609-2009* (New York 2009) 420-421.

<sup>28</sup> Natalino Ronzitti, *The Law of Naval Warfare: A Collection of Agreements and Documents with Commentaries* (Dordrecht 1988) 64-65.

<sup>29</sup> Manley Hudson, 'The Proposed International Prize Court', *The Permanent Court of International Justice 1920-1942* (New York 1943) 71-79.

Declaration was initially received with indifference. Later, however, opposition arose - some believed it would be too favorable to neutrals, while others saw it as too conciliatory toward warring parties. Sir Edward Grey (1862 – 1933), the British Foreign Secretary, emphasized the maintenance of belligerent rights essential for asserting sea power and the establishment of greater security for the trade of British ship-owners and merchants when they were neutral. In 1911, the British rejected the Declaration just two years after its introduction.<sup>30</sup>

The First World War proved that neutrality had no merit as a legal concept and a foreign policy tool, according to Dutch historians Samuel Kruizinga and Johan den Hertog. What neutrals had come to believe as their rights, particularly the right to trade with whomever they wished, could only happen if the warring parties allowed it. Neutrals had to be smart and strong enough to remain neutral.<sup>31</sup> During the war, neutrality was compromised in three ways, according to Nils Orvik in *The Decline of Neutrality*: belligerents failed to respect it; small neutrals were generally too weak to enforce it; and powerful neutrals were simply too strong to allow themselves to be constrained by it. Orvik contends that neutrals were often treated as faceless or powerless, with the United States being the exception.<sup>32</sup> The U.S. saw itself as the defender of neutrality and President Woodrow Wilson was officially committed to it.<sup>33</sup> The protection of Dutch neutrality depended on a legal approach and the independent actions of non-governmental intermediaries, such as business interests.<sup>34</sup> I am curious whether the neutrality of the United States and the Netherlands, though they remained neutral for quite different reasons, had a positive influence on their relationship.

Before the war, the international community had worked hard to define the rights and duties of neutrals. During The Hague Peace Conference of 1907 and the Declaration of London of 1909, these were defined and agreed upon by the world's leading (seafaring) nations. Nevertheless, the British who rejected the Declaration of London, and tried to block all transit traffic to Germany. They also wanted to block a substantial share of neutral products like dairy, potatoes and fish for low prices. Conversely, the Germans wanted to prevent these products from reaching their enemies and launched a U-boat campaign in 1915, thereby threatening the lives of neutral sailors. Both British and Germans infringed on the carefully

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<sup>30</sup> Geo. G. Wilson, 'The Declaration of London', *The American Journal of International Law* 5 (1911) 842-843.

<sup>31</sup> Johan den Hertog and Samuel Kruizinga (eds.), *Caught in the middle. Neutrals, neutrality and the First World War* (Amsterdam 2011) 1-2.

<sup>32</sup> Nils Orvik, *The decline of neutrality, 1914-1941. With special reference to the United States and the northern neutrals* (London 1971) 29-31.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin Coates, 'Upon the neutral rests the trusteeship of international law. Legal advisers and American unneutrality' in Johan den Hertog and Samuel Kruizinga (eds.), *Caught in the middle. Neutrals, neutrality and the First World War* (Amsterdam 2011) 35.

<sup>34</sup> Johan den Hertog, 'Dutch neutrality and the value of legal argumentation' in Johan den Hertog and Samuel Kruizinga (eds.), *Caught in the middle. Neutrals, neutrality and the First World War* (Amsterdam 2011) 18.

described rights of neutrals in 1907 and 1909.<sup>35</sup> Because of these actions, Orvik states that the First World War meant the end of the idea of neutrality. According to him, political bargaining in international relations was no part of the legal defense of neutrality.<sup>36</sup> However, Den Hertog disagrees with this assertion. In the Netherlands, law was looked upon as the best method of defending its neutral status. The relevance of international law remained important to the Netherlands and this did not change during the war. Dutch foreign secretary John Loudon (1866 – 1955) and Dutch Prime Minister Pieter Cort van der Linden (1846 – 1935) tried to adhere to these rules as much as possible and Loudon became infamous for resorting to endless legal stratagems in his dealings with the warring parties' governments.<sup>37</sup>

For neutrality to be effective, a common respect for international law was needed. However, traditional neutrality was never truly effective because it required independent action. The breakdown of The Hague Conferences and Declaration of London did not put an end to the Dutch legal approach to neutrality.<sup>38</sup> The Dutch successfully adhered to international law in defending its neutrality, but the American position in the debates over international law is a source of controversy. John Coogan wrote in *The End of Neutrality* that if the U.S. had followed international law properly, it would have remained neutral and thereby strengthened the position of all neutrals.<sup>39</sup>

Dutch foreign policy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was much as it had been throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a product of the Treaty of Utrecht, which led the Netherlands to emphasize what the Dutch historian C. B. Wels calls “abstentionism.”<sup>40</sup> Rather than a new political phenomenon, neutrality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was part of a national political conviction that had rejected the destructiveness that accompanied the kind of alliances which destroyed the old European power structure and redrew national boundaries after 1918. As a small country hemmed in by larger, more powerful European neighbors, the Dutch adopted a practical view of their geopolitical position, a perspective that informed their actions through the war years.

Like the Netherlands, the United States for much of the 18<sup>th</sup> century remained self-consciously non-aligned, fostering a spirit of isolationism that the American populace would continue to demand of its government in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the years following the Civil War, the country's leaders took advantage of relative stability in Europe by concentrating on the doctrine of Manifest Destiny and the doctrine of American dominance throughout the North American continent and in much of the Western hemisphere. In 1877, President Rutherford B. Hayes (1822-1893) proclaimed that America's “traditional

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<sup>35</sup> Den Hertog, ‘Dutch neutrality and the value of legal argumentation’, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Orvik, *The decline of neutrality*, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Den Hertog, ‘Dutch neutrality and the value of legal argumentation’, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Den Hertog, ‘Dutch neutrality and the value of legal argumentation’, 33.

<sup>39</sup> Coogan, *The end of neutrality*, 193.

<sup>40</sup> C.B. Wels, *Aloofness and Neutrality: Studies on Dutch Foreign Relations and Policy-Making Institutions* (Utrecht 1982).

rule of noninterference in the affairs of foreign nations has proved of great value in past times and ought to be strictly observed”, a refrain that subsequent presidents would repeat for another half-century.<sup>41</sup>

## 1.2 The Netherlands in the War's first hundred days

When the war broke out in 1914, the Netherlands was a small and militarily weak country, but it possessed important colonies in America (Surinam and the Antilles) and Asia (the Dutch East Indies). The Dutch trading fleet was an important factor for the Dutch economy. Besides that, its economic life was largely dependent on the transit traffic to the German industrial hinterland.<sup>42</sup> The geopolitical position of the Netherlands was precarious: just between the two belligerent parties: the Germans in the east, and the British in the west.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, Queen Wilhelmina declared the Netherlands to be a neutral country. A search for diplomatic letters sent to foreign government was undertaken in support of this study, though none were discovered. On 4 August 1914, the Dutch Secretary General sent the neutrality proclamation of the Netherlands to the Dutch embassy in Washington.<sup>43</sup> Given that six million people lived in the Netherlands, declaring and maintaining neutrality was of paramount importance for the Dutch. Avoiding to appear favorable to one side or the other was also key. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the Netherlands had grown into a great seafaring commercial power. As such, it was home to some of the most important ports in Europe. The city of Rotterdam became an especially important point of entry for Germany's industrial Ruhr area during the late nineteenth century. Through the ports of Rotterdam came various bulk goods, including grain from the U.S., iron ore from Sweden and Spain, and copper from Norway were exported to Germany, while manufactured goods from Germany were shipped all over the world. In 1913, Rotterdam was second only to Hamburg as Germany's gateway to the world.<sup>44</sup>

Wielding economic power was the Netherlands' only true means of making its influence felt, but the Dutch were unaccustomed to using economic strength as a weapon of statecraft. This became an important factor, because at the beginning of the war, American and British interests were at odds. The British Royal Navy's strategy was to cut Germany off from overseas trade, unfortunately, the British Atlantic blockade also interfered with neutral trade and commerce.<sup>45</sup> The outbreak of the First World War

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<sup>41</sup> George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (London 2008) 272.

<sup>42</sup> A. Vandenbosch, *Dutch foreign policy since 1815. A study in small power politics* (The Hague 1959), 108.

<sup>43</sup> 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 931 1914: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 2991.

<sup>44</sup> Frey, 'Trade, ships, and the neutrality of the Netherlands', 541 – 562.

<sup>45</sup> Floyd, *Abandoning American neutrality*, 189.

sounded the death knell for an era of economic growth and international cooperation because the war caused interruptions in the flow of imported goods and raw materials. Though the demand for raw materials and products rose, exports were hindered both physically and politically. The Dutch hoped, as they always had, that they might continue to conduct commercial activities despite the war. For neutral countries like the Netherlands, the war brought obstacles, but also chances. Politics had an enormous influence on the economy.<sup>46</sup>

Although the Netherlands stayed successfully out of the war, the country was affected by it. Limits were put on the transfer of capital, trade routes became both physically and politically blocked and borders were closed.<sup>47</sup> The threat of war caused the Amsterdam stock exchange to close in July 1914 because of an enormous fall in shares, not reopening until 9 February 1915. When gold exports were banned, the Netherlands chose to leave the Gold Standard.<sup>48</sup> To be sure, the Dutch protested against violations of international law that harmed Dutch neutrality. Cornelis Smit argues that this made little sense because the treaties and accepted rules of behavior that prevailed in peace time were adversely affected by war regardless of who was protesting.<sup>49</sup> Kruizinga and Den Hertog, however, disagree, insisting instead that the Netherlands' emphasis on international law certainly helped its position. However, Smit counters that the warring nations did display some consideration toward neutral countries, while soldiers from the warring nations that violated Dutch territorial rights were captured and interned in prisoner of war (POW) camps. Officers were set free, but only if they promised not to violate the terms of their freedom. Those that broke their promises were often returned to POW camps in the Netherlands by their own governments. The Germans compensated the Netherlands for damage caused by unjustified torpedo attacks. Smit describes the Dutch government's strategy as "maneuvering and compromise".<sup>50</sup>

Moeyes states that in the beginning of the war, there were interesting opportunities for the Dutch trading fleet. The fleets of belligerent countries were restricted from leaving enemy ports, and ships were confiscated by the navy to be used for transport of troops and supplies. Therefore, a lot of ships were not available anymore for neutral trading, and the demand for shipping space grew enormously. In the beginning of the war, the Dutch sold their old ships for high prices to German bidders. The loss of cargo space could be compensated by the building of new ships. However, the steel imports from Germany stagnated and the building of new ships slowed down. With the Schepenuitvoerwet of 18 March 1916, the

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<sup>46</sup> Keetie E. Sluyterman, *Dutch enterprise in the twentieth century. Business strategies in a small open economy* (New York 2005) 68.

<sup>47</sup> Sluyterman, *Dutch enterprise in the twentieth century*, 75.

<sup>48</sup> *Idem*, 76.

<sup>49</sup> Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog. Deel 2*, 65.

<sup>50</sup> *Idem*, 163.



Dutch government decided that the sale of Dutch ships to foreign parties only could be done with the acknowledgement of the Department of Trade.<sup>51</sup>

One of the main concepts in understanding Dutch neutrality throughout the First World War was the Netherlands Oversea Trust Company (Nederlandsche Overzee Trustmaatschappij, or NOT). The first days of the war presented the Dutch with an array of political and economic challenges, which they were hard pressed to overcome. The Netherlands was a nation built on international trade and commerce, so when war broke out in 1914 it not only heralded tremendous change but threatened the very survival of one of the world's most economically successful neutral countries. On 22 August 1914 the Dutch government denied an official request by the British government to guarantee that Dutch imported goods were not 'contraband goods' and traded to Germany. This contraband existed out of goods described on a specified list. Granting such a request would be an un-neutral act. The Dutch however found themselves with the problem that a naval blockade by the British would ruin its economy, which was largely dependent on overseas trade.

In the struggle of the Dutch government to remain neutral, a window of opportunity was offered by Dutch businessmen. The trade minister, Marie Willem Frederik Treub (1858-1931) and top banker Cornelis Johannes Karel van Aalst (1866-1939), proposed to the business community to offer the British the assurance they wanted: a committee of businessmen, led by Van Aalst founded the Netherlands Oversea Trust Company on 24 November 1914.<sup>52</sup> The Netherlands Oversea Trust was able to offer the British something what the Dutch government could not: they promised that goods that were defined as contraband by the British, would not reach Germany. This British demand was met, without the Dutch government losing its neutrality.

The Dutch government was not formally involved in this venture and thus neutrality was not endangered. The NOT immediately initiated a campaign that was equal parts politics and economics, promising the Allies that no contraband goods shipped by the NOT would be traded to Germany, insisting that such goods would be for the Dutch home market only. According to Sluyterman, the NOT's administration turned into "a bloated bureaucracy".<sup>53</sup> There were other problems as well. Though the NOT promised not to ship contraband goods to Germany, it did not possess the authority necessary to force shipping interests to guarantee that goods arriving in the Netherlands would not be shipped to Germany. The Dutch government had political and diplomatic reasons for discouraging Dutch companies

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<sup>51</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 180.

<sup>52</sup> Samuel Kruizinga, 'Netherlands Oversea Trust (NOT)', *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, [http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/netherlands\\_overseas\\_trust\\_not](http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/netherlands_overseas_trust_not) (visited 27-5-2015)

<sup>53</sup> Sluyterman, *Dutch enterprise in the twentieth century*, 77.

from exporting goods to Germany, which included a threat to limit domestic distribution and consumption.<sup>54</sup>

Satisfied by the controls of the NOT, the Allies allowed contraband goods to pass the North Sea blockade. The Dutch ships were however demanded to visit a British port for inspections. The NOT demanded in return that several luxury goods from the Dutch East Indies were removed from the contraband list, such as coffee and tobacco. Van Aalst himself had great interests in shipping these products from the Dutch East Indies. Many of these products were eventually secretly smuggled to Germany. During the war the NOT grew into “a state within the state”<sup>55</sup>, with a thousand employees during its high days in 1917, while the ministry of foreign affairs only employed a couple of dozen of people.<sup>56</sup>

The Dutch ship-owner Ernst Heldring looks back on the start of the war as a period of maneuvering of the Dutch government. He states that only a straightforward declaration of the British government that a violation of the Belgian and Dutch neutrality would force the British to declare war to Germany, would be the only reason that would have kept Germany from violating it.<sup>57</sup> He was surprised Sir Edward Grey (1862-1933), the British foreign secretary, did not make such a declaration. As the director of the Royal Dutch Steamboat Company (KNSM), and member of the board of directors of the Netherlands Oversea Trust, Heldring was closely concerned with the negotiations between the NOT and the Dutch government on one side and the British government on the other. The immediate effect of the start of the war on 4 August 1914 was the shutting down of the trade fleet, describes Heldring. He states that the Dutch feared battles between the English and German fleet on the North Sea and that the Dutch would be pulled into the war either because of the reckless Germans (“niets ontziende Duitschers”)<sup>58</sup> or by the British capturing the Schelde.<sup>59</sup> In the Declaration of London the contraband laws were described. However, Great Britain did not ratify these agreements, but declared them official on 20 August 1914, with some additions. These adjustments denied many of the securities for neutral trading vessels.<sup>60</sup> It is noteworthy that in Heldring’s 1914 diary notes, the role of the United States was not mentioned.

It’s a reoccurring theme that the war offered opportunities for the Dutch, but when the war continued big problems arose. During 1916, German submarines sunk twelve Dutch merchant ships,

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<sup>54</sup> Idem, 78.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Kruizinga, ‘Netherlands Oversea Trust (NOT)’, *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, [http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/netherlands\\_overseas\\_trust\\_not](http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/netherlands_overseas_trust_not) (visited 27-5-2015)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 191.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Charlotte van Manen, *De Nederlandsche Overzee Trustmaatschappij*, part I, 15.

while seventeen ships were lost due to sea mines. Despite these losses and higher expenses on wages, coal and insurances, both 1915 and 1916 were good years for Dutch ship owners. Scarcity drove freight prices to enormous heights and stockholders got paid dividends that varied between fifty and hundred percent.<sup>61</sup> During the first weeks of the war, Dutch fishing vessels remained in the harbors. In October, most ships were back at sea. Although the minefields and patrolling warships made fishery dangerous, the prizes had risen so much due to foreign demand, that most fishermen took the risk. Before 1914, on average 31 people died at sea. This rose to 42 in 1914, 86 in 1915 and 194 in 1916.<sup>62</sup>

Protecting their citizens and their frontier was a key concern for the Dutch before the war and during its initial 100 days. To that end, the Dutch government tried to maintain a delicate diplomatic balance in which they sought to establish good relations with the great powers while avoiding a strong relationship with any one of them.<sup>63</sup> This was an important objective, because the Netherlands did not have an army well-equipped or strong enough to protect the country against an invader, despite the fact that it was a respectably sized force at 200.000 men. Determining that the Netherlands' best hope lay in diplomacy and international law, the Dutch government slashed military spending rather than expanding its military capacity. It was the position of Dutch socialists that the Netherlands would be powerless against the greater powers anyway, which made defense spending unnecessary, even self-destructive. Democrats and liberals in general agreed with this vision.<sup>64</sup> The Dutch government refuted this notion in 1910, warning that the Dutch army would respond against any belligerent who failed to respect Dutch neutrality.<sup>65</sup> The Dutch government had to reverse a pre-war position which held that the Netherlands would fight against any aggressor that refused to respect Dutch neutrality, the belief being that the Dutch army would be able to weaken the attacking force.<sup>66</sup>

The influence of the Nederlandsche Overzee Trustmaatschappij and the impact of U-boat warfare and mines on the merchant fleet played a large part in the Netherlands' ability to navigate the troubled political waters during the war's early period. Both German and British mines cost the Dutch fleet losses. Loose mines that floated away formed a major threat, with about 6,000 of them washing ashore on the Dutch coast.<sup>67</sup> It should, however, be noted that there was a moral, as well as political, difference between the German and British maritime activities. Smit contends that Germany failed to comprehend that the conscience of the world was outraged by the 1,200 non-combatant ships that were sunk by U-boats. This was clearly morally different from the British maritime blockade, because it could be ended

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<sup>61</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 202.

<sup>62</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 203.

<sup>63</sup> C. Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1899-1919). Deel 1: 1899-1914* (Groningen 1971) 184.

<sup>64</sup> Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog. Deel 1*, 148.

<sup>65</sup> Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog. Deel 1*, 174-175.

<sup>66</sup> Idem

<sup>67</sup> C. Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1899-1919). Deel 2: 1914-1917* (Groningen 1972) 62.

anytime, while the effects of German U-boat attacks were irreversible.<sup>68</sup> However, it is important to bear in mind that had Dutch merchants tried to break through the British blockade, they would have been sunk as was the case with the Germans.

### 1.3 The United States in the War's first hundred days

The United States was in a much different situation than the Netherlands at the war's outset. For the Americans, isolation meant something much different than neutrality meant to the Dutch. As one of the world's leading states, the U.S. could afford to maintain an isolationist position due to its favorable geographic position, its dynamic economy and abundant resources. The Netherlands had very close commercial connections among the international community and, while it might well argue in favor of neutrality as the war began, the Dutch could hardly expect to isolate itself from the world at large. Woodrow Wilson had been elected president in November 1912 on the promise that his foreign policy would emphasize "keeping the U.S. out of war".<sup>69</sup> It was this campaign promise that helped Wilson win reelection in 1916 as a peacekeeper bent on doing everything in his power to end the war. Wilson's foreign policy was important to the Dutch, who saw U.S. neutrality as a kind of guarantor of Dutch neutrality and sovereignty. This was an important factor for the Netherlands, because the British had been inclined to see this small, North Sea country as just another part of Germany, a politically expedient position with respect to the British blockade.<sup>70</sup> In the war's early stages, trade ties between the Netherlands and the United States forced the British to take the Netherlands' neutrality into consideration. This political reality encouraged the Dutch government to try and draw on U.S. support for every diplomatic protest the Dutch filed against the British and Germans. The primacy of the United States' position in the international community made the Dutch superfluous since the U.S. foreign office could simply direct its attention towards the British, instead of using the Dutch for political leverage: the U.S. had its own political leverage.<sup>71</sup>

During the war's early stages, British and German propaganda was aimed at influencing and winning over American opinion. The British tried to get the U.S. on its side, while the Germans were more concerned with encouraging the U.S. to stay neutral. For the British, one of the biggest hurdles to establishing an entente with the Americans was Woodrow Wilson himself, who wanted no part of the war, and had promised his country that it would remain stolidly isolationist. However, a disconnect

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<sup>68</sup> Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog. Deel 2*, 102.

<sup>69</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over here. The First World War and American society* (New York 1980) 25.

<sup>70</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 25.

<sup>71</sup> *Idem*, 255-256.

between German diplomats and the German military high command made it difficult for Imperial Germany to maintain a coherent policy *vis a vis* the United States. Most notably, Germany's submarine warfare, which was responsible for sinking the *RMS Lusitania* in May 1915, produced outrage in the U.S. Significantly, Kaiser Wilhelm II elected to temporarily halt the U-boat assault on neutral ships.<sup>72</sup> It was a measure of the importance the Germans placed on American public opinion that they were willing to halt their most successful strategy in order to avoid angering the American public and alienating the U.S. government.

The U.S. posed a clear threat to whichever side angered them most, but officials from the U.S. Foreign Office were not clear when it came to their position toward neutrals or belligerents. Protecting neutral trade was an important American principle, but it would not deter the U.S. from its commitment to free trade, war or no war. U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing advised the British that the U.S. would not interfere with the trading interests of American merchants, since the export of what the British referred to as contraband was legitimate. Thus, Washington made clear that it was not going to forbid contraband trade from American businesses to the Central Powers. Lansing explained that neutral American traders had the right to trade with whomever they wished and if the British wanted to stop contraband trade, they would have to stop commercial traffic themselves.<sup>73</sup> This failed, however, because the British failed to recognize how important government non-interference was to American business interests. Ultimately, Lansing's aim in the war's early stages was to make certain the Entente Powers understood that America's long-standing commitment to free and unimpeded commercial oceangoing traffic was too important to Washington, which would refuse to restrict U.S. international trade. The Americans were also concerned that they not appear to favor either side. The U.S. government realized that any agreement with the British concerning interdicting commercial traffic would influence American public opinion and appear to Germany, and to German-Americans, that the U.S. favored the Entente, which would undermine the Wilson administration's popularity.<sup>74</sup>

Wilson remained convinced that it was his duty to end the crisis in Europe while maintaining America's neutrality, though the weight of managing such a delicate international situation and keeping his country out of the war wore heavily on him. This became increasingly more difficult; the U.S. was accused of having allowed the British to violate the Hague Convention concerning the shipment of goods to belligerents, and of accepting British policy on the sale of conditional contraband to neutral countries.<sup>75</sup> This made it appear that the U.S. had sided with the Entente, a situation that damaged the administration's reputation among German-Americans.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Floyd, *Abandoning American neutrality*, 61.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

In the summer of 1915, U.S. Consul-General Robert Skinner suggested to the U.S. State Department that he should organize a meeting about U.S. shipping interests, in light of American disagreement over the British government's March 11 Order in Council. However, Skinner changed his mind.<sup>76</sup> In a September 16 letter to Lansing, he explained that American merchants were able to carry on trade relations with the Netherlands through the NOT, and that U.S. goods were reaching their markets as they had before the war. Other neutrals were able to operate in this way. The Merchants Guild of Copenhagen worked along the same lines as the NOT, enabling Americans to trade with Denmark as well.<sup>77</sup>

America's emphasis on protecting free trade, and its diplomatic concerns over remaining neutral complicated relations between the U.S., the Netherlands, Germany and Britain. The Netherlands was drawn into Germany's attempts to keep the U.S. neutral and out of the war by playing on the Americans' isolationist inclinations. As early as August 1914, British ships began destroying most of the German telegraph cables along the German and Dutch North Sea coasts, which forced the Germans to find alternative ways of communicating with the U.S. The British discovered rather soon that the Germans stayed in contact with their representatives in the U.S. by using Dutch mail boats. The British, who had little regard for the Netherlands' neutrality, began to stop and search Dutch ships at sea. Mail bags were confiscated and only sent to their receivers after being carefully checked. The British answered Dutch protests with the explanation that these confiscations happened in British waters and that such measures were necessary for maintaining the blockade of Germany. British control became even stricter when they forced Dutch ships to visit British ports on their travels.<sup>78</sup>

In the war's early stages, sentiment among the American public was divided between the chief belligerents. "For many in government and journalism, and for those involved in academic, religious, and cultural pursuits among the eastern seaboard and in large cities in other parts of the country, sympathy for England was automatic and immediate, though the story was quite different in the Midwest and other parts of the U.S".<sup>79</sup> Despite Wilson's best efforts, America was inexorably drawn into the war. German atrocities in Belgium stirred anger among the American public just as they did in Europe, and produced a highly effective propaganda campaign in the United States. Posters depicting rapacious German soldiers began appearing throughout the country, successfully vilifying the Germans as a savage and barbaric race bent on conquest. "One spoke of 'the vicious guttural language of (German) Kultur'"<sup>80</sup>, although Wilson,

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<sup>76</sup> Idem, 177.

<sup>77</sup> Floyd, *Abandoning American neutrality*, 177-178.

<sup>78</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 255-258.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Ziegler, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (Lanham 2000), 15.

<sup>80</sup> Idem, 82.

for his part, tried to maintain a rational distinction between the German people and the brutal military leaders who had encouraged mass murder in Belgium.<sup>81</sup>

German military strategy may have produced measurable results when it came to confronting Britain and France early in the war, but did little to help Germany ensure American neutrality. Germany's U-boat campaign directly affected American shipping, American public opinion and significantly degraded American-German relations. Through the war's first months, American public opinion was largely divided, but that changed dramatically as indiscriminate German torpedoing took its toll. Thus, Germany's intentional sinking of merchant vessels, including American ships, pushed the United States closer to the Entente powers. When the *RMS Lusitania* was torpedoed and sunk in a U-boat attack in May 1915 and American lives were lost, Wilson adopted a hard line, accusing the Germans of inhumane action.<sup>82</sup> That accusation presaged the entry of the U.S. into the war in April 1917.

Germany's violation of its pledge to cease unrestricted U-boat warfare, and the German government's subversive activities in Mexico, aimed at undermining American security, led Congress to declare war. German chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg had warned that submarine warfare would push the Americans into the war against Germany, and the build-up of America's armed forces that Wilson had authorized was a threat that a beleaguered Germany army could little afford after three exhausting years of war.<sup>83</sup> The 1916 Army Reorganization Bill federalized the National Guard, and authorized the War Department to raise a volunteer army of 250,000 men, a force that could be scaled up based on need.<sup>84</sup> This foresight in planning made it possible for the Americans to mobilize and arrive in Europe with a battle-ready army earlier than expected, and to begin making their presence felt on the Western Front at a crucial point in the war. The initial wave of American soldiers arrived in France approximately two months after Congress declared war.

Clearly, America's priorities had to be reconstituted in order to help win the war and help establish the kind of lasting peace that Wilson had envisioned. A consequence of this change was the Americans' relationship with its neutral allies and trading partners. When the U.S. entered the war, its exports to neutral countries, like the Netherlands, fell to a bare minimum. This led to food shortages and made government regulation in food distribution and rationing necessary. M. Treub, the Netherlands' liberal Minister of Finance, became more conservative in his later years, and according to Moeyes his experiences during the war certainly contributed to this. If the government allowed merchants and farmers

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Philip K. Lundeberg, 'The German Naval Critique of the U-Boat Campaign, 1915-1918', *Military Affairs* 23 no. 3 (1963) 108.

<sup>83</sup> Lundeberg, 'The German Naval Critique of the U-Boat Campaign, 1915-1918', 109.

<sup>84</sup> Justus D. Doenecke., *Nothing less than war: a new history of America's entry into World War I* (Kentucky 2011) 190.

some space, they exported as much as possible. Therefore, it was necessary for the government to adopt strict measures and try to put the market mechanism out of order. Moeyes states that the danger was not overwhelming, considering the average fisherman wage rose from fifteen gulden to fifty.<sup>85</sup> During the war, unemployment increased significantly and there was a scarcity of fuels and foods. This took place while food exportation was still going on, in exchange for fuel. This led to problems with the Dutch people in 1918 and resulted in riots.

#### 1.4 Relations between the Netherlands and the U.S.

As the world's leading proponent of neutrality, the Netherlands saw the Americans as guarantors of the rights of neutral countries, particularly in light of the conflict that was spreading ever closer to its borders. On 8 August 1914, the legislature of the Netherlands received the first of a number of neutrality declarations from the United States signed by President Woodrow Wilson. The U.S. responded to every declaration of war by sending a declaration of neutrality entitled "A Proclamation".<sup>86</sup> These encouraging administrative gestures led the Dutch government to see the Americans as officially committed to protecting Dutch neutrality as well as their own. Indeed, before the onset of hostilities the two countries had been involved in attempts to safeguard themselves and others from the dreadful consequences of war.

The two nations had worked together for several years before the war began. The Netherlands and the United States agreed to an arbitration treaty through the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in 1911.<sup>87</sup> The Permanent Court of Arbitration is an intergovernmental organization founded in 1899 at the first Peace Conference in The Hague. Its goal was the simplification and resolution of conflicts between sovereign states, intergovernmental organizations and private parties. The PCA was the first global mechanism of the settlement of disputes between states and state like parties. At the The Hague Peace Conference of 1907 the PCA was further revised, with the goal of mediation between states at the request, and at the permission, of the involved states.<sup>88</sup>

Beginning in 1913, U.S. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan (1860 – 1925) negotiated a number of bilateral treaties for the Advancement of Peace. The intent of these treaties was to prevent a war, through the offices of a permanent commission existing of a national and foreign citizen of both countries and a fifth member of another nationality, appointed by the first four members. The goal was to

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<sup>85</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 272.

<sup>86</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 931 1914: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 2868.

<sup>87</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), Archiefnummer: 722: Stukken betreffende het arbitrageverdrag tussen Nederland en de Verenigde Staten 1911-1915

<sup>88</sup> 'PCA', [http://www.pca-cpa.org/showpage.asp?pag\\_id=363](http://www.pca-cpa.org/showpage.asp?pag_id=363) (12-06-2014)



discuss the dispute and make a report within a year before the countries would go to war with each other. The year's delay was built in in order to prevent military acceleration and lessen tensions. Forty-eight of these treaties were made, but few disputes were committed to these commissions.<sup>89</sup>

The United States and the Netherlands signed a bilateral peace treaty that had been initiated by Bryan on 18 December 1913. The Netherlands was the first country to have taken such an action. In a letter to Loudon, Bryan stated that the wishes of the Dutch government have been included in the treaty.<sup>90</sup> On 14 August 1914, Bryan sends a letter to W.H. de Beaufort informing him that the U.S. Senate had ratified the treaty. "I have the honor to inform of the ratification [...] and I may add that it gives me great gratification to be able to communicate this fact to you", he wrote.<sup>91</sup>

Before the First World War, the diplomatic and strategic relationship between the U.S. and the Netherlands was limited, though both nations were concerned about the expansion of Japan in Asia. The outbreak of the war did not at first alter relations between the U.S. and the Netherlands because both countries had similar goals, albeit for different reasons.<sup>92</sup> As the historian Hubert van Tuyll points out, the Dutch-American relationship prior to World War I was concerned with their common economic concerns in the Far East, where Japan was perceived as a potential threat. The Asian question offers a good example of the complexity and interconnectedness of the Dutch/American/British relationship. "Fear of losing (their) colonial connection led the Dutch to develop a telegraph net with the Germans that utilized American-held islands to circumvent the British-controlled networks".<sup>93</sup>

On 22 August 1914, De Beaufort sends a letter to Loudon. He relays to him what Robert Lansing told him on 16 August. In the beginning of the European conflict, Lansing thought the U.S. had to take steps with the belligerent parties in order to localize the battle in the Far East as much as possible, and to make the Chinese treaty ports neutral. According to him, the U.S. should ask the Japanese government about its plans. Lansing, however, changed his opinion and advised Bryan not to do so. If the U.S. would protest against Japan, European nations might think that this was for the good of Germany.<sup>94</sup> Lansing also thinks that Russia represents America's salvation in the Far East, because it will still have resources after the war and is best able to help the U.S. oppose Japan. Japan issued an ultimatum to Germany, which

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<sup>89</sup> Denys P. Myers, 'Status of the treaties for the advancement of peace', *The Advocate of Peace* 77 (March, 1915) 69; NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 726: Stukken betreffende Bryan-verdrag 1913-1917, 2003.

<sup>90</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 726: Stukken betreffende Bryan-verdrag 1913-1917, 2003.

<sup>91</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 726: Stukken betreffende Bryan-verdrag 1913-1917, 2024.

<sup>92</sup> Van Tuyll, 'Dutch-American relations during World War I', 421.

<sup>93</sup> *Idem*, 420-421.

<sup>94</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 937: 1908-1918 Zuidzee entente, 3002.

states that there is a danger the United States might become involved in the war as well. The Japanese government stated it was not looking for expansion, but just wanted Germany out of the Far East. The State Department advisor was afraid that Japanese actions would not go well with China. The Japanese advised not doing anything before contacting the U.S. government. Lansing told De Beaufort that he was sure about the honest intentions of Japan and said that Japan needed the friendship of the United States commercially and financially because the European nations would be exhausted after the war.<sup>95</sup>

However, some representatives of the Dutch government had few illusions about the likely effectiveness of America's diplomatic maneuvering. E.H. Van Rappard wrote a remarkable note about Bryan in a letter to the Foreign Office in The Hague. On 2 March 1914, he wrote a short letter about the American peace plan and the Bryan treaties in which he asserted that Bryan is known as a "groot voorstander"<sup>96</sup>, a great advocate, of such peace plans and that the U.S. Senate had nothing against them.<sup>97</sup> Van Rappard advised that the Netherlands would be satisfied enough with the plan, and that it should accept it. This brief letter seems to imply that such a treaty will prove to be insignificant. As such, Van Rappard appears to have been suggesting that the Dutch government had nothing to lose by adhering to these "hobbies"<sup>98</sup> of the U.S. On the surface of it, this may seem a cynical, even flippant stance to take under such weighty circumstances, but it was understandable considering that the Netherlands stood to lose so much more than the United States should Bryan's efforts come to nothing.

The U.S. and the Netherlands cooperated on the diplomatic stage, each side advising the other as to the best efforts to take in the interest of maintaining their neutral status. On 22 August 1914, De Beaufort send a letter to Loudon, informing him that at the beginning of war in Europe, Robert Lansing told him that the U.S. had to take stronger measures with the belligerent parties in order to localize the conflict in the Far East as much as possible and to ensure the neutrality of Chinese ports. Lansing believed the U.S. should speak with the Japanese government to determine the nature of its plans. Lansing, however, altered his opinion and advised Bryan not to do so since an American protest against Japan might make European nations believe that such a move was in Germany's best interest. Lansing also informed Dutch authorities that Russia was a potential asset for the U.S. in the Far East, since it would still have resources after the war and would be in the best position to help the U.S. in opposing Japan. Japan responded by warning Germany that there is a danger that the Americans might become involved in the war. The Japanese government advised that it was not seeking expansion, but just wanted

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 797: Stukken betreffende een arbitrageverdrag tussen de Verenigde Staten en Denemarken 1913-1914, 0340.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

Germany out of the Far East. The State Department advisor feared that Japanese actions would not go well with China. The Japanese stated not to do anything before contacting the U.S. government. Lansing told De Beaufort that he was sure about the honest intentions of Japan and that the Japanese needed the commercial/financial friendship of the United States because the nations of Europe would be economically drained after the war.<sup>99</sup>

In the first days of the war, the Dutch embassy received a number of telegrams from Dutch-American citizens, asking if the Netherlands was in danger. There was also an American lawyer, offering his services to the Dutch government in broken Dutch.<sup>100</sup> But from the war's beginning, the relationship between the U.S. and the Netherlands was complicated by the actions of the war's primary maritime belligerents, Britain and Imperial Germany.

In October 1914, there was a great deal of communication between the British and American governments concerning Britain's revised views on the Declaration of London. On 20 October, Lansing wrote Wilson that he did not believe that an agreement with the British government concerning this matter could be reached.<sup>101</sup> Lansing expressed his concern that the belligerents fully intended to gain all rights over neutral commerce found passing within enemy territory without declaring war against the neutral country. According to Lansing, the U.S. had to take a strict position with respect to existing international law. "If the British Government seeks belligerent rights they must bear the burden of belligerency. They cannot declare a nation to be neutral and treat it as an enemy, and expect other neutral nations to submit to having their commerce subjected to rules which only apply to commerce with a belligerent".<sup>102</sup> Lansing was convinced that if trade between a neutral country and a belligerent is un-neutral, other belligerents are not allowed to restrict the trade of the neutral, but only to issue an ultimatum. On 23 November 1914, Lansing wrote to Wilson that the United States had to take a stand against the actions of belligerents that did not respect The Hague Conventions. Because the U.S. ratified these conventions, it should formally protest these actions to the belligerent governments in question. Two days later, Wilson responded in the affirmative on this point.<sup>103</sup>

As the American government gradually grew closer to the British in terms of policy and interpretation of international commercial treaties, the Dutch government became more alarmed that this would result in the United States renouncing its neutrality, with the Dutch left to shift for themselves on the outside. The greatest fear, of course, was that a Netherlands without a strong international patron

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<sup>99</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 937: 1908-1918 Zuidzee entente, 3002.

<sup>100</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 931 1914: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 2878.

<sup>101</sup> Michigan University Library, *Lansing papers vol. 1: The World War: period of American Neutrality*, 255.

<sup>102</sup> *Lansing papers vol. 1: The World War: period of American Neutrality*, 255.

<sup>103</sup> *Idem*, 13.

would be far more vulnerable to the depredations of belligerent nations. This fluid diplomatic situation, exacerbated by German aggression on land and British interdiction of commercial trade on the seas, raised fears in many quarters. The situation forced commercial shipping interests to take a stance. On 4 August 1914 De Beaufort received a letter that German and Austrian men had booked passage on *The Rotterdam*, of the Holland America Line, with intent to join the Central army. That same day, De Beaufort sends a letter to the Holland America Line warning the company's officials not to transport Austrian or German reservists. Because a state of war existed, neutral nations were not permitted to transport soldiers of belligerent parties.<sup>104</sup> The Holland America Line responded, in a letter from its manager, W. F. Piek, that it would no longer transport German and Austrian reservists.<sup>105</sup>

On 10 August 1914, Lansing wrote to De Beaufort, informing him that he had been advised about Dutch naval measures along the Netherlands' North Sea coast. The light ships *Terschellingerdell* and *Haaks* had been decommissioned because of the war, and the lights were out at IJmuiden, Scheveningen, Hoek van Holland and Westerhoofd. Merchant vessels were allowed to enter IJmuiden and the Nieuwe Waterweg day and night, and the navigation of the Scheldt for Dordrecht and of the Texel roadstead for Harlingen remained open by day only. However, merchants were however obliged to take service as Dutch pilots.<sup>106</sup>

On 10 August 1914, De Beaufort received a letter from Charles L. Magee, secretary of the American Red Cross. The letter stated that Mr. C. J. Apeldoorn, "a Hollander"<sup>107</sup>, wished to return to Europe in order to join one of the Red Cross hospital units. The Apeldoorn case was an exception. "While it is not at all probable that we shall send to Europe anyone but surgeons and trained nurses, yet we shall be pleased to remember Mr. Apeldoorn's application in case services such as he might render are required".<sup>108</sup> Apeldoorn had no medical training, but wished to serve in the Netherlands because of his Dutch ancestry. On 13 August, Magee wrote De Beaufort about a reverend named J. A. C. Pegginger Auer of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who wished to be sent to Europe with the Red Cross hospital units. He states that it is unlikely that the Red Cross would send other than medical professionals, but that he hopes De Beaufort would agree with the application of Reverend Auer.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 931 1914: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 2878.

<sup>105</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 931 1914: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 3052.

<sup>106</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 931 1914: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 2958.

<sup>107</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 931 1914: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 2928.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 931 1914: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 3241.

On 29 August 1914, De Beaufort received a telegram from Loudon informing him of a shift in British policy concerning seaborne passage. It stated the following: “My wire fifteenth British government does not any longer consent transport belligerent reservemen”.<sup>110</sup> On 25 August 1914, Bryan thanked De Beaufort for the way in which the Dutch government had treated Mr. Henry S. Breckinridge, Assistant Secretary of War, who had been placed in charge of rendering financial assistance to Americans in Europe. Breckinridge had left The Hague with his party for Berlin on 22 August, traveling across the German frontier in a special train furnished by the Dutch government. Bryan expressed his deep appreciation for the courtesy shown to Breckinridge by the Dutch government.<sup>111</sup>

## 1.5 Conclusion 1914

In this conclusion of the first chapter, I try to answer the question whether the Dutch profited from U.S. neutrality. For the U.S., neutrality during the early stages of World War I was a matter of *realpolitik*, an expediency that served the country’s foreign policies and domestic politics. Nevertheless, the Dutch government seemed to benefit to some extent from the complex power relationship between the U.S., Great Britain and Germany, though once the Americans committed to the Allies in 1917 it was inevitable that the war would affect the Netherlands in ways that the Dutch had hoped would be forestalled by the political patronage of the United States.

But how did The Netherlands profit from U.S. neutrality? In the years before the war, several international peace treaties were founded, such as The Hague Peace Treaty of 1907, Jennings’ Advancement for Peace and the Permanent Court of Arbitration of 1911. The Dutch seemed like they at least had nothing to lose by adhering to the peace treaties of the U.S., although there was skepticism about the effectivity of these efforts. The U.S. made its neutrality clear by sending out neutrality declarations after each declaration of war, even to neutral nations as The Netherlands. The diplomatic contacts I was able to find by studying my primary sources mainly come down to shared worries about the situation of Japan, which was also described by Hubert van Tuyll in *Four centuries of Dutch-American relations*. The relationship between the U.S. and the Netherlands was mainly complicated by the War’s prime belligerents: Britain and Germany. This is also represented in the views of Ernst Heldring, who mainly deals with the maneuvering of Dutch ship-owners between the demands of Germany and Britain.

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<sup>110</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 931 1914: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 3021.

<sup>111</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 931 1914: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 2961.

Dutch correspondence from this period reflects a determination to protect the country's neutrality through legal action in the court of international law. Ultimately, this course of action could not hold up against the military aggressiveness of the war's main belligerents and the determination of Imperial Germany to achieve its objectives in Europe despite the presence of neutral countries. The Germans' willingness to violate Belgium's neutrality presented the Netherlands with a potentially fatal threat to its sovereignty, in which the support of the world's strongest neutral country, the United States, was thought to have been indispensable. However, as Van Tuyll notes, an increasingly complex international political mix would undermine the relationship between the two countries: "The Netherlands and the United States entered and left the World War I era with similar views in international affairs but experienced frictions that temporarily weakened their relationship".<sup>112</sup> The findings indicate that there was relatively minimal correspondence between the U.S. and the Netherlands addressing a 'patron/client state' relationship between the two. Nevertheless, this research project sheds light on an important period of geopolitical maneuvering involving the two countries, as well as Germany and Britain, in which the idea of national neutrality was alternately promoted as an ideological conviction, and used for political leverage amid an increasingly charged international landscape.

In answer to my question, based on the scarcity of information in my resources for this period, it seems that the interaction between the U.S. and the Netherlands was minimal. This does however not mean that the Dutch did not profit from the neutrality of the U.S. Albeit not outspoken, the influence of a large neutral player such as the U.S. determined the Allied and Central Powers to adapt a relatively respectful approach towards smaller neutrals, such as the Netherlands. This thought is strengthened by the notion that when American neutrality came to an end, Dutch hopes for protection from the war's destructiveness were also ended. I will discuss this in the second chapter of this thesis.

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<sup>112</sup> Van Tuyll, 'Dutch-American relations during World War', 420.

## Chapter 2: 1917

In this second chapter I will take a look at the first hundred days after the entry of the United States into the war. I try to answer the question for this chapter, which is: What meant the belligerency of the United States mean for the position of the Netherlands as a neutral country?

In the first section, I will take a brief look at the events during the war, and the events that led to the belligerency of the US. What did it mean for the World War that the United States joined the Entente? In section two, I will describe the role of the U.S. in the war from 6 April until 14 July 1917. After that, I will describe the position of the Netherlands in the same period. In the fourth section I will do the same for the bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the U.S. I will conclude this chapter looking back at the events and bilateral communications between 6 April and 14 July 1917 and formulate an answer to the central question in this chapter.

### 2.1 Two years of World War – An overview

By 1917, the war's great powers were stalemated along the Western front; mass slaughter had become commonplace, a devil's bargain in which each side sacrificed millions of troops in order to achieve marginal territorial gains. British supremacy on the high seas was challenged by a devastating German U-boat campaign. In Europe, the British, French and their allies had blunted the Germany army at the Somme in 1916, forestalling a German threat to Paris itself. Along the way, the Germans had earned international enmity by ignoring Belgium's neutrality and subjecting that country's population to atrocities. From 1917 onward, the War developed itself into "a total war",<sup>113</sup> wherein the belligerents focused their economies entirely on the war effort. The strength of the economy and the ability to produce goods became of essential importance to winning the war. Bringing damage to the enemies' economy therefore became central in waging war.<sup>114</sup>

At the war's outset Wilson declared the U.S. to be neutral. Floyd pints out that most historians agree that Wilson sincerely wanted to avoid getting involved in the war. There is, however, a debate among scholars about Wilson's management of American neutrality. The view of revisionists, which first appeared in the 1920s, focused on the role of economics in Wilson's decision making between 1914 and 1917. Revisionists state that the U.S. was pressed into the war by financial and weapons firms that wanted to make huge profits. Later, revisionists found this argument a bit extreme, but agreed that the growing

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<sup>113</sup> Hein Klemann, 'Ontwikkeling door isolement. De Nederlandse economie 1914-1918' in M. Kraaijesteijn and Paul Schulten (red.), *Wankel evenwicht. Neutraal Nederland en de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Soesterberg 2007) 272.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

trade between the U.S. and Britain made it very difficult not to favor the British above the Germans. In the 1950s, most historians did not pay much attention to economic factors, instead emphasizing Wilson's interest in global security and the spreading of democracy throughout the world. Others argue that national security was the most important factor in Wilson's decision making. Floyd states that these more recent interpretations address a lot of important issues that have been largely ignored, but argues that to fully understand Wilson's approach to diplomacy, the importance of the U.S. economy has to be reevaluated. He therefore focuses on "the paradox created by Wilson's idealistic claim to bring the belligerents to the peace table and his pragmatic goal of buttressing the U.S. economy [...]".<sup>115</sup>

## 2.2 The United States and its involvement in the war

In 1914, the U.S. was seen as the world's leading neutral nation, and it had become an American tradition not to become entangled in European affairs. Commitment to neutrality was popular in the U.S. and President Wilson was officially devoted to it.<sup>116</sup> According to Benjamin Coates, the U.S. was already effectively un-neutral by mid-1915, (although the U.S. did not enter the war until April 1917) because almost all American exports of munitions and crucial goods, such as food and raw materials, went to the Entente, while comparatively little went to the Central Powers. Coates also states that the U.S. government did little to resist the illegal British blockade that enforced this imbalance. According to Coates, every historian agrees that the American policy disproportionately benefited the Entente, but some deny that this was illegal, or that there was even an alternative.<sup>117</sup>

After his election in 1912, Wilson said that the government had to be involved in regulating and promoting business. He believed that in order for the U.S. economy to expand, businesses had to look overseas for new markets. According to Wilson, domestic markets were no longer sufficient, and he assumed that trade and economic prosperity were directly related to international harmony. Wilson made a sincere effort to remain neutral during the first year of the war. At the heart of American neutrality was a genuine sympathy for mankind, as the president declared. By applying higher principles and staying neutral, he hoped to convince the belligerents to end the war and militarism, quite an idealistic view. The Wilson administration took steps that went beyond neutrality, such as encouraging British and German diplomats to meet each other, and sending officials to both London and Berlin.

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<sup>115</sup> Floyd, *Abandoning American neutrality*, 3.

<sup>116</sup> Benjamin Coates, 'Upon the neutral rests the trusteeship of international law. Legal advisers and American unneutrality' in Johan den Hertog and Samuel Kruizinga (eds.), *Caught in the middle. Neutrals, neutrality and the First World War* (Amsterdam 2011) 35.

<sup>117</sup> *Idem*, 36.



The combination of the British fleet and German submarines greatly hindered neutral trade and led to tremendous international uproar over U.S. commercial rights and Britain's ability to prevent Germany from obtaining American goods. This situation led both Britain and the U.S. to appeal for decisions regarding the shipping rights of neutrals, based on international law.

In 1911, Britain rejected the Declaration of London and, in 1914, British Prime Minister Henry Asquith's (1852 – 1928) administration made clear that it would not sign any international accord that interfered with its war objectives. However, when progress at the front ground to a halt, British officials realized they needed more materiel to win the war. It was determined that the answer was to trade with the U.S. With the British Order in Council of 20 August 1914, Great Britain sought to protect its own interests without alienating the US.<sup>118</sup> The British strategy challenged the American belief that neutral merchants were free to trade without interference, but a primary objective of U.S. policy was to defend its commercial rights.

Woodrow Wilson sought to keep the United States on the path of neutrality during the First World War for many reasons. For one, Wilson saw himself cast in the role of peacemaker, the leader of a rising global commercial power in an ideal position to broker peace among older nations that were constantly at odds. As such, he believed his administration could bring the warring parties together and mediate an end to the European conflict. However, Wilson was not above playing both ends against the middle if it meant bringing profit to American companies. He believed U.S. companies could make a tremendous profit by increasing their exports to combatant countries. To do that meant remaining neutral, a position that offered the best means of achieving these goals.<sup>119</sup> The sheer weight of American troops thrown into the conflict would have proven a heavy burden for whomever that power was thrown against, and it was for this reason that American neutrality proved to be such a delicate matter, both for the U.S. and for the combatants. As the war dragged on, the Germans pushed harder and harder for a breakthrough, some devastating blow that might decide the issue before U.S. forces could be introduced into the conflict. In March 1918, the Germans launched Operation Kaiserschlacht, and, despite its initial success, the German advance was stemmed and the two sides resumed their entrenched deadlock along the Western Front.

The Germans largely undermined their own position *vis a vis* the U.S. The Kaiser's government virtually ensured America's alliance with the Entente through its backing of untimely and ill-advised operations, such as the torpedoing of the *Lusitania*, the bombing of U.S. military facilities on the East Coast, and the infamous Zimmermann telegram, the discovery of which revealed German attempts to

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<sup>118</sup> M. Ryan Floyd, *Abandoning American neutrality. Woodrow Wilson and the beginning of the Great War, August 1914 – December 1915* (New York 2013) 34.

<sup>119</sup> *Idem*, 189.

convince Mexico to enter the war against the U.S. Based on a *Washington Post* report that there was a substantial weapons cache on the *Lusitania*, it is perhaps understandable that the Germans adopted an aggressive stance, though in the long run it was a questionable move given German concerns over American military manpower and materiel being added to their enemies' forces (German general Erich Ludendorff (1865 – 1937) himself had expressed concern that Germany must somehow force an end to the war by military means before such a thing came to pass).<sup>120</sup>

Wilson's fears over alienating his country's large German-American population proved unnecessary; the German government and its espionage operatives and military forces decided the issue for him, virtually forcing the U.S. to enter the war on the side of the British and French. The German Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Arthur Zimmermann, was angry that the U.S. had sold munitions to the British, and he went so far as to submit a list of weapons the Allies had placed with the Americans to prove his point.<sup>121</sup> Because of this, and German suspicions of Anglo-American collusion, Germany began taking a more assertive stance.

By late 1915, it had become evident to Wilson that the U.S. could not continue playing such a delicately balanced diplomatic/political game, since Germany had forced the issue. Upon entering the war, the United States adopted the same course of action as the Royal Navy, interdicting any ship suspected of posing a military or commercial threat. This posed a complicated scenario for the Dutch, who could no longer rely on American support for neutrality. Indeed, the Dutch found that legal arguments held little influence over other nations, particularly after the Americans entered the war. Still worse was the fact that the Americans joined the British blockade. "Indeed, the American embargo against the neutrals was much more strict than the one the British instituted in September 1917 in order to demonstrate Allied solidarity."<sup>122</sup> The British convinced the Americans to shoulder the responsibility of overseeing the blockade and managing the Netherlands' economic activity, which worsened a bad situation because, at that time, the Dutch government had little experience negotiating with the Americans.<sup>123</sup>

When the United States joined the war, Wilson's administration immediately commenced economic warfare. The British made a lot of recommendations for using American naval power to help blockade Germany. Lester H. Woolsey, Wilson's legal advisor, established the policy of the U.S. towards neutrals. According to him, the United States had a sovereign right to control its own exports. In June 1917, Wilson signed the Trading with the Enemy Act and created the Exports Council, the U.S. counterpart to the British ministry of blockade. The Exports Council was renamed the War Trade Board a

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<sup>120</sup> Randal Gray. *Kaiserschlacht 1918: The Final German Offensive*. (Oxford 1991) 29.

<sup>121</sup> Floyd, *Abandoning American neutrality*, 95.

<sup>122</sup> Frey, 'Trade, ships, and the neutrality of the Netherlands in the First World War', 547.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

short time later. The Americans were alarmed by the amount of American food that was bought by neutrals. On 9 July, Wilson agreed to impose an embargo on food exports. Three weeks later, Herbert Hoover, soon to be the head of the food administration, notified Van Rappard that U.S. exports to the Netherlands would be prohibited until the Netherlands stopped agricultural exports to Germany.<sup>124</sup> Hoover demanded information as to the amount of food available in the Netherlands and recommended a rationing system. A full-scale trade embargo had started, and it would last until the end of the war in November 1918.

At a conference held in London in November 1917, the Dutch government had attempted to convince the Wilson administration to alter its policy toward the Netherlands. After long negotiations, this led to the Basis of Agreement in January 1918, the terms of which held that the Netherlands would charter its ships in U.S. waters to the Allies for two months and, in return, Britain and the U.S. would give the Netherlands 400,000 tons of food and a monthly ration of coal. Also, the Dutch agricultural export quotas of 1916 were curtailed in order to reduce the export of home grown food to Germany. Germany responded by declaring that any Dutch ships carrying American food would be torpedoed. The Dutch saw that submarine warfare had been unsuccessful in cutting Britain off from the rest of the world. There was a steady decline in German submarine attacks during 1917, while the number of ships built in the U.S. and Britain increased. Clearly, the Allies' superior production capabilities and mastery of the open seas had worn heavily on the German navy, which had relied almost exclusively on U-boat warfare to offset a substantial British superiority in surface vessels. Great Britain had been the world's greatest naval power for more than 250 years, a fact that still bore significant meaning and prestige in world affairs in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

That prestige had significantly complicated American attempts to establish some form of commercial shipping protocol based on international law. Back in October 1914, there had been much communication between the British and American governments about Britain's change of policy concerning the Declaration of London. On 20 October, Lansing wrote a letter to Wilson stating that he did not believe that an agreement with the British government would be reached concerning this matter.<sup>125</sup> Lansing thought that the belligerents would try to gain all rights over neutral commerce in enemy territory, without declaring war on the neutral country. According to Lansing, the U.S. had to be strict in enforcing existing international law. "If the British Government seeks belligerent rights they must bear the burden of belligerency. They cannot declare a nation to be neutral and treat it as an enemy, and expect other neutral nations to submit to having their commerce subjected to rules which only apply to

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<sup>124</sup> Frey, 'Trade, ships, and the neutrality of the Netherlands in the First World War', 553.

<sup>125</sup> *Lansing papers vol. 1: The World War: period of American Neutrality*, 255.

commerce with a belligerent.”<sup>126</sup> He believed that if trade between a neutral country and a belligerent was un-neutral, other belligerents should not be allowed to restrict the trade of the neutral, but could only present an ultimatum.

In a letter to Lansing dated 20 April 1917, Woodrow Wilson enumerated a list of contraband, although Lansing had already suggested a list the day before.<sup>127</sup> This list included arms and ammunition and machines for the manufacture of these; the means of transportation on land, water and air or components to manufacture these; foods and clothing destined for Germany; all instruments and papers for carrying hostile operations; coins, currency and machines to produce coins, metals, etc.: all were on this list.<sup>128</sup> Consequently, America’s entry into the war and change of policy regarding the contents of commercial shipping had complicated its relations with the Netherlands. To make matters worse, the American press adopted an increasingly negative tone concerning Dutch neutrality. In November 1917, many letters were sent by American-Dutch citizens to Dutch legislators, informing them of the increasingly negative image of the Netherlands portrayed in the American press. Some of those letters were anonymous. Van Rappard send a couple of these articles to Loudon.<sup>129</sup> At the beginning of the war, the American press had not been positive about the Netherlands, and the increase in negative press coincided with a convention in London that Wilson and a representation of the Dutch government attended.<sup>130</sup>

Ultimately, the American public came to support the war effort and the Wilson administration’s decision to come down on the side of Britain and France. A wildly successful propaganda campaign helped swing public opinion. It portrayed German soldiers as vicious, bloodthirsty “Huns”<sup>131</sup>, unreasoning enemies of civilization who had to be stopped at all costs.<sup>132</sup> Here again, German atrocities, many committed during the war’s early stages, conspired against Germany’s image on the international stage, making it easy for the American government, and the press, to paint Germany and its warmongering Kaiser and General Staff as the quintessential enemy. When American citizen-soldiers were sent overseas to give their lives on the fields of France and Belgium, fine legal points of international commerce and neutrality were largely forgotten.

America’s entry into the war, though it helped bring the conflict to an end, made matters difficult for the Dutch government and for American perceptions of the Netherlands in general. American

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<sup>126</sup> *Lansing papers vol. 1: The World War: period of American Neutrality*, 255.

<sup>127</sup> *Lansing papers vol. 2: The World War: participation of the United States*, 12.

<sup>128</sup> *Idem*, 11.

<sup>129</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 846: Persberichten over Nederland

<sup>130</sup> Frey, ‘Trade, ships, and the neutrality of the Netherlands in the First World War’, 556.

<sup>131</sup> *Idem*, 558.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

involvement in the war proved beneficial to the Netherlands though, as Van Tuyll points out, it was damaging in the short run. “Had Germany won, it would have completely surrounded and probably dominated its smaller neighbor”.<sup>133</sup> From a Dutch perspective, the importance of America’s emergence onto the world scene was not fully appreciated after the war given that the Germans did not invade and occupy their country, as had happened in Belgium.<sup>134</sup>

And yet the United States retained a vestige of its independence concerning its relationship with, and responsibilities to, its allies. An important part of the original agreement between the Entente powers was a general agreement as to what a post-war Europe would look like and how the victors would redraw international boundaries. The Americans, on the other hand, were philosophically opposed to such a pre-existing condition and refused to be bound by it. Consequently, there were frequent disagreements between the U.S. and its allies as to strategy and long-term objectives. It should be remembered that it was Wilson’s continued intention to reorder the existing power structure according to his own concept, which included a conference of nations that would work together to try and avoid future cataclysmic wars. His allies had far more punitive designs in store for a defeated Germany and Austro-Hungary.

America’s first 100 days in the great European conflict was also marked by internal dissension, misunderstandings and conflicting tactical intentions among the allies. To their French and British comrades, the raw American troops were little more than a new military asset to be used as the two older combatants, who had far more experience of trench warfare, saw fit. Marshal Joseph Joffre proposed that newly arrived American troops be trained by French instructors, but insisted that the Americans would eventually operate as an independent force. However, this notion was not universally held. “The British had their own solution to use American manpower. General Bridges, a distinguished divisional commander, proposed the rapid mobilization of 500,000 Americans to ship to England, where they would be trained, equipped, and incorporated into the British Army. This proposal would be the first of many schemes to integrate American battalions and regiments into one of the Allied armies”.<sup>135</sup>

This and other such plans were strenuously objected to by the American commander, General Pershing, and presented the Wilson administration with yet another political challenge *vis a vis* its French and British allies. Thus, America’s first hundred days as an active combatant were as filled with uncertainty, as was the case in the Netherlands, where the government scrambled to achieve a measure of stability, both domestically and internationally, without the backing of the nation whose neutrality had relied upon.

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<sup>133</sup> Van Tuyll, ‘Dutch-American relations during World War’, 423.

<sup>134</sup> Doeko Bosscher, ‘American Studies in the Netherlands.’ *European Journal of American Studies*, vol. 1 no. 1 (2006)

<sup>135</sup> ‘The U.S. Army in World War I, 1917-1918.’ *American World History*, United States Army Center of Military History, 9.

## 2.3 The Netherlands in the first hundred days after America's entry into the war

The First World War meant the end of the regional north-west European economy the Netherlands had been a part of. The Allied blockade and the German submarine warfare were not only a hindrance for imports and exports, but undermined the entire Dutch economy.<sup>136</sup> The role and importance of the Netherlands Oversea Trust only grew in importance. It secretly bargained with both the British and Germans. A crucial part of the Dutch foreign politics was entirely under the influence of entrepreneurs, but the government did not seem to be worried.<sup>137</sup>

Since 1916, the economic restrictions forced upon the Netherlands by Germany and Great Britain made its position very difficult. When the United States entered the war in April 1917, this became impossible. To protect its neutral status, the Netherlands had to give up much of its independence and its domestic economy suffered.<sup>138</sup> Thus, economics and commercial shipping, which constituted the bulk of the Dutch economy, lay at the heart of the problem, and created a problem that could only be resolved by a cessation of hostilities. American entry into the war meant a radical shift in economic policy and diplomacy; without its influential American patron advocating on its behalf, the Netherlands found itself in a difficult position, one that required it to placate the Germans, somehow allay their suspicions and find a way to carry on commercial relations with its far-flung clientele. While the entry of American resources into the war helped defeat Imperial Germany, the Dutch found themselves in an increasingly impossible situation, in which appeals to international law were rendered meaningless by the exigencies of full-scale war.<sup>139</sup>

International trade became gradually more difficult during the war. Britain had control of the seas and refused to let neutral traders pass who sought to export their goods to Germany. Furthermore, German submarine attacks caused the British to further tighten their hold on the sea lanes. Dutch producers profited from rising demand for their goods in Germany. It however became more difficult to acquire raw materials. The Netherlands needed German imports, such as coal and chemicals, and the Germans demanded Dutch exports in exchange. When the U.S. joined the war in July 1917, they announced a total trade embargo that prohibited American exports to the Netherlands. This contributed significantly to the privation and shortages in a resource-poor country under a constantly imminent threat from Germany. At

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<sup>136</sup> Klemann, 'Ontwikkeling door isolement', 305.

<sup>137</sup> Joh. de Vries, *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Bank V, De Nederlandsche Bank van 1914-1948* (Amsterdam 1989) 73.

<sup>138</sup> M. Abbenhuis, *The art of staying neutral. The Netherlands in the First World War 1914-1918* (Amsterdam 2006) 35-36.

<sup>139</sup> *Idem*, 37.

the beginning of 1918, the Entente forbade 132 Dutch ships from leaving U.S. and British ports. Consequently, in the last two years of the war, shortages of food and raw materials became a major problem in the Netherlands.

The Imperial Council of Germany decided on 9 January 1917 to declare unrestricted submarine warfare. Small channels in the ocean would be left open for neutral trade with the U.S., but all ships in the waters around Britain would be attacked. A few days after the announcement, the U.S. severed its diplomatic contacts with Germany. Several American ships were sunk by German submarines. Wilson remained dedicated to neutrality, but American response to escalating German depredations showed that the American president was resolute when it came to protecting his country's interests. "In 1915 (Wilson) had brought Germany's campaign of 'unrestricted' submarine warfare to a close by a threat to use American naval power to preserve the freedom of the seas [...]"<sup>140</sup> Matters were brought to a head in early 1917 when Arthur Zimmermann, the German foreign secretary, tried to involve Mexico in the war by sending a telegram which, however, was intercepted and translated by the British and presented to the U.S. This provided a direct reason for the United States to join the war on 6 April 1917.

This watershed event was preceded by a sequence of events in Dutch waters that helped lead to the Americans' fateful decision. On 5 March 1917, the British trading vessel *Princess Melita* tried to enter the Nieuwe Waterweg. This ship was, however, armed with a cannon. Because of this, Dutch authorities forced the ship to sail away. The next day the *Melita* returned, asking if it could send a sick sailor ashore, and get some fresh drinking water. This was allowed, but the *Melita* was forced to leave immediately after that, because she was still armed. On the seventh of March the ship returned without the cannon, and was allowed to sail on to Rotterdam. This situation led to a minor political disturbance that illustrated the difficult position the Dutch government found itself in. The *Melita* was undoubtedly sent by British authorities to check how the Dutch would react to armed merchant ships.<sup>141</sup> The British government protested against the fact that an armed merchant ship was forbidden to enter Dutch waters. Other neutral countries like the U.S. and Norway made use of this right, and used officials to determine whether a ship was offensively or defensively armed. The Germans protested vigorously because the Dutch refused to let the *Melita* enter since it was armed, thus classifying it as a warship. It therefore should have been interned by the Dutch, as was done with the German submarine U-30 that was stranded on Dutch shores just a short time before.<sup>142</sup>

Later in March 1917, the United States government wanted to know if the Dutch restrictions were also applicable to neutral armed American ships and, if so, whether there was a difference if the ship was

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<sup>140</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 255.

<sup>141</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>142</sup> Keegan, *The First World War*, 121.

armed on the initiative of the government or of the ship owner. The Dutch secretary of foreign affairs, Loudon, defended himself by stating that the Dutch government made a distinction between a warship, like a submarine, and an armed merchant ship but that this made no difference to the Dutch admission policy. In the Dutch Declaration of Neutrality of 1914, it was clearly stated that all armed ships were forbidden to enter Dutch ports. Loudon warned that changing this policy in the third year of the war would definitely weaken the neutrality of the Netherlands.<sup>143</sup> Consequently, Dutch insistence on adhering to the letter of its declaration, which the Dutch government regarded as important to avoiding the appearance of un-neutrality, helped convince the Americans that neutrality, neither theirs or the Netherlands' was no longer in its best interests.

Dutch fears that America's entry into the war would hamper its commercial position, which was after all an important factor in its neutrality, were realized by the end of 1917. One of the Netherlands' most important colonial outposts, the Dutch East Indies, was materially affected. The annual change in exports from 1916 to 1917 was striking. "Although [...] ninety freighters had reached Holland from Java in 1916, in 1917 only five vessels made the trip. Sixteen ships set out from Holland to the Netherlands Indies in 1917 [...] The cargo space available for exports of the Netherlands Indies to Europe and the East Coast of the United States decreased from 455.200 tons in 1916 to 156.500 tons in 1917".<sup>144</sup> This situation was typical of the financial challenges that confronted the Netherlands in the months following the entry of the United States into the war. This event not only made neutrality all but untenable from a political standpoint, it also made commerce between nations, and between nations and overseas colonies (an important factor in Dutch commercial life), very difficult. For the Netherlands, the reality of life in the wake of America's entry into the war significantly complicated an already fragile political balancing act.

## 2.4 Relations between the Netherlands and the U.S. after 1917

The starkness of the Dutch-American relationship was highlighted during the three-month period following the United States' declaration of war. On 12 April 1917, William Jennings Bryan sent a letter to foreign diplomats in the United States, including a proclamation that the United States was at war with Germany.<sup>145</sup> On 2 May 1917, Robert Lansing sent a letter to Ambassador Van Rappard, in which he confirmed that he had received the Dutch proclamation of neutrality concerning war between the United

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<sup>143</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 261.

<sup>144</sup> Kees van Dijk. *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Leiden, 2007) 438.

<sup>145</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 934 1917: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 1651.



States and Germany.<sup>146</sup> The Netherlands' legislature then received a number of executive orders by Woodrow Wilson, which outlined American plans for protecting the Dutch coastline.<sup>147</sup> This exchange, which took place over a very consequential three-month period, marked a breaking point in Dutch-American relations. The United States, by declaring its allegiance to the Entente powers, abrogated the role of chief international proponent of neutrality, a role that the Netherlands had long relied upon to bolster its own neutral position. For the Dutch, it marked the beginning of a difficult period, in which it would suffer a curtailment of economic activity and have to navigate the difficult waters of neutrality between the neighboring Germans, and Entente powers that were determined to halt all international commerce that could potentially have benefited Germany. There was no further communication to be found between the U.S. and Dutch governments in this period in 1917.

Though there is minimal archival material concerning Dutch-American relations during this period, it is clear that the issue of neutrality dominated what was a difficult, often strained relationship throughout the war years. For the Dutch, neutrality was a means of preserving its economic integrity and national sovereignty. For the United States, neutrality was a matter of political philosophy and domestic expediency. John Coogan argues that it was the failure of the world's leading neutral country, the United States, to more vigorously defend its maritime rights against Great Britain that was the most important factor. As a neutral country, the U.S. could well have stood on its rights *vis a vis* British search and seizure, and blockade, but President Wilson was too worried about maintaining amicable relations between Britain and the U.S. to take legal action. "Britain violated what its leaders privately acknowledged to be established international law for reasons of military expediency [...]"<sup>148</sup> Wilson's deferential, British-friendly position caused the U.S. to operate without a coherent maritime policy and, of course, when in 1915 the United States' neutral status changed, the relationship between the U.S. and Britain changed significantly. By 1917, America's relationship with the Netherlands would also be significantly altered.

The Dutch also saw neutrality as a conviction that they had to maintain in the interest of European political and territorial integrity. Their ability to pursue that mission depended greatly on the support of the world's leading neutral country, the United States. Maartje Abbenhuis quotes the Netherlands' Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.A. van Karnebeek who, though speaking in the 1930s, sums up the Netherlands' national conviction about neutrality. Van Karnebeek said "we (Dutch) are caretakers of a territorial integrity that is very important for the political balance in Europe and for peace. We are trustees! We are in charge of ensuring that this integrity is not endangered and is not complicated. Our position rests on trust that can be

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<sup>146</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 934 1917: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 2676.

<sup>147</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 934 1917: Stukken betreffende aangelegenheden met betrekking tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 2597.

<sup>148</sup> Coogan, *The end of neutrality*, 254.

placed (by others) in us”.<sup>149</sup> Thus, neutrality was more than a means of self-preservation during the Great War; it was a concept that the Dutch believed needed to be protected. But for them to protect it, they needed the backing of the United States, with its growing economic and political clout on the international landscape.

The correspondence between the Dutch legislature and American officials is sparse, yet it offers both an interesting window into the historic link between the Netherlands and the United States, but also some interesting insights into the way both countries viewed their relationship. An example of this is the Koningin Wilhelmina-lectoraat (Queen Wilhelmina lectureship). It concerned a lectureship position for a Dutch academic, Lennard van Noppen, at Columbia University in New York. This lectureship, which was paid for in part by the Dutch government, was aimed at teaching Dutch literature and culture.

My findings about this lectureship started with a handwritten letter on 19 August 1914 from Van Noppen to De Beaufort, Chargé d’Affaires of the legislature of the Netherlands in Washington. It concerned the delivery of the bust portrait of Petrus Stuyvesant to St. Mark’s Church in New York, which was to be opened soon. Stuyvesant was the last Dutch director-general of the colony of Nieuw Amsterdam before it was handed over to the British and renamed New York in 1664. Van Noppen states in his letter to De Beaufort that he hopes the war will not interfere with the delivery of the bust. As a Dutch citizen in the United States, he talks about his fears that the Netherlands will become involved in the war. “If the worst comes to Holland, like Belgium, (Holland) will prove worthy of her ancestors. Let us all hope for the best”.<sup>150</sup> He seems very patriotic in the letter, because he ends it with “Oranje boven!”<sup>151</sup> (Orange high!), a statement praising the Dutch royals. He also mentions the unpopularity of the “German cause” in the U.S.<sup>152</sup>

On 31 August 1914, Van Noppen sent another letter, this time to Murray Butler, president of Columbia University. Van Noppen writes to the president of the university because the Dutch government did not pay the agreed amount of money, consequently he will not receive his monthly check. He actually tries to excuse the delay to Butler. “Holland is, at present, so preoccupied with the preservation of her neutrality that all other matters are made subordinate or forgotten. [...] I am sure that you will hear concerning this matter as soon as the Country is considered out of danger. It now seems extremely unlikely that Holland will be drawn in. The next month or two will tell”<sup>153</sup>. He points out that the funds for the lectureship were guaranteed for ten years. Further, Van Noppen addresses his concerns about the

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<sup>149</sup> Abbenhuis, *The art of staying neutral*, 19-20.

<sup>150</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 704: Stukken betreffende de vervulling van het Koningin Wilhelmina-lectoraat 1913-1916, nr. 1788.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 704: Stukken betreffende de vervulling van het Koningin Wilhelmina-lectoraat 1913-1916, nr. 2033.

war. “[...] the lack of International Mind which has precipitated this world-war. [...] Is there no respect left for treaties and for international obligations?”<sup>154</sup> In spite of this, Van Noppen has a plan. He says he would join with President Butler in advocating for an International Parliament, a court that would be independent of governments, “to be composed, not of diplomats, politicians and statesmen, but of the greatest educators, jurists, artists and authors, men who are less likely to be swayed by prejudice for the national against the interests of the international, men who represent the world at large.” This court is meant as a place wherein nations and peoples have equal representation.<sup>155</sup>

The correspondence concerning the lectureship returns to more pragmatic grounds, when Frank D. Fackenthal, secretary of Columbia University, writes a letter to Loudon on 9 September, which states that the university has not yet received the half yearly payment of \$875 for the lectureship.<sup>156</sup> He states that it is an embarrassing situation for the university and Van Noppen, and hopes Van Noppen would not suffer because of this. In his letter to Butler, Van Noppen did not ask him to contact the Dutch government. His letter consisted mainly of talk about an international court, probably to hide his embarrassment over the situation.

This exchange indicates a sometimes difficult relationship but one that both sides seemed determined to maintain on good terms. There were many factors impacting Dutch-American relations during this period. One very consequential factor was the heavy presence of the British on the political scene. When it came to war, Britain had no compunctions about manipulating allies, enemies and neutrals, and it was this willingness to protect its own interests that placed pressure not only on its relationship with the Dutch, but on the extended relationship between the Americans, who would join the British in the war against Germany, and the Netherlands.

Nevertheless, the Dutch sought to try and make their situation work in ways that benefited both belligerents. In 1917, with food riots and dwindling supplies causing a crisis throughout the country, the Dutch government sent a special emissary to London to meet with Allied officials. A.M. Snouck Hurgronje (1882 - 1951), Secretary General of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and British representatives struck a deal in which the Netherlands agreed to reduce Dutch agricultural exports to Germany and to make a loan to Britain; at the same time, Snouck Hurgronje agreed to send hundreds of thousands of tons of food supplies ostensibly to relieve Belgium, though he knew this would provide the Germans with indirect aid, a situation that would certainly satisfy the government in Berlin.<sup>157</sup> When the Allies determined they could not afford to permit supplies to come within reach of the enemy, they seized

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> NA 2.05.13, Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, 1814-1940 (1946), 704: Stukken betreffende de vervulling van het Koningin Wilhelmina-lectoraat 1913-1916, nr. 3090

<sup>157</sup> Frey, ‘Trade, ships, and the neutrality of the Netherlands in the First World War’, 559.

Dutch supplies and ships. This political/diplomatic entanglement made it virtually impossible for the Netherlands to exist as an independent economic entity.

Anglo-Dutch relations took a turn for the worse in 1917 when the British began adopting measures designed to weaken the Netherlands in the event that Germany should become allied with the Dutch. On 1 October 1917, the British government decided to impose a cable embargo on the Netherlands and Dutch communications with its colonies in Southeast Asia were cut off. The British did so because they noticed that there was a decrease in construction material being sent from Germany and the Netherlands to the Western front (the British were also colonial competitors with the Dutch in Southeast Asia). An escalation of activity along the Dutch/German border involved Dutch boats and building materials, a suspicious state of affairs given that the Germans had for several years maintained a series of fortifications and forts in northern France and occupied Belgium. The British responded punitively, seeing this as a forerunner of further Dutch/German cooperation. The consequent severing of communication between the Netherlands and its overseas colonies led to an erosion in Dutch-British relations.<sup>158</sup>

Dutch overseas trade found itself more restricted the war went on. When the Germans declared the unlimited submarine warfare, Dutch vessels were forced to make a stop in a British port during inward and outward journeys.<sup>159</sup> The net tonnage entering Dutch harbors in 1913 was 18.197.783, while in 1917 it was only 1.858.951. The number of ships went from almost 17.000 to just over 2.100 in the same period.<sup>160</sup> In 1916, the amount of ships and tonnage entering Dutch harbors was more than twice as much as it was as in 1917, which displays the effect of the measures taken by the allied governments.

Ernst Heldring's diary notes in 1917 are once more not plentiful on the role of the United States. On 10 July 1917 he mentions the difficulties Van Aalst had with the negotiations between the NOT and the British government.<sup>161</sup> The British agreed to search Dutch vessels returning from the U.S. in zones that were safe from German submarines. At the same time, the British declared to plant mines in the passage route to show their disapproval of the ongoing Dutch-German trade. In his entry of 19 July 1917, Heldring reads in the newspaper *Handelsblad* that the free passage is kept open. He complains about the Dutch government that decided to forbid 25 vessels to leave the harbors until a final declaration was made by the British government. He issues that the Dutch government does not value the necessity of optimal

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<sup>158</sup> *Idem*, 556.

<sup>159</sup> Samuël Kruizinga, Paul Moeyes and Wim Klinkert, 'The Netherlands' in *International Encyclopedia of the First World War 1914-1918* [http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/the\\_netherlands](http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/the_netherlands) (visited 8-7-2015)

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Heldring, *Herinneringen*, (10 juli 1917), 206.

use of shipping space – “[...] wordt met de scheepsruime omgesprongen alsof er geen nood in het land en geen gebrek aan schepen bestaat”.<sup>162</sup>

U.S. president Wilson issued his first embargo on 9 July 1917. About sixty Dutch cargo vessels were forbidden to transport their on board foodstuffs to the Netherlands. Just as the British, the U.S. was concerned with the Dutch transit trade to Germany.<sup>163</sup> The U.S. needed ships to transport their soldiers to Europe and the German submarines sunk many of these. Loudon did not understand the attitude of the War Trade Board. C. Cecil (1865 - 1958), British under-secretary of foreign affairs, understood that the longer the American embargo was in effect, the more the Netherlands would become dependent on German coal and steel. In October 1917, a German-Dutch commercial treaty was established, which offered German deliveries of coal in exchange for agricultural products in large quantities. This provocative action was regarded with suspicion by the British. In his entry of 27 August 1917, Heldring mentions that the ship *Billiton* set sail to New York in order to bring the ‘Commissie’ to the United States.<sup>164</sup> This government committee was led by the politician and businessman Joost van Vollenhoven (1866 – 1923). Heldring states that the Dutch in general did not expect much of success, because America reasons regarding its deliverance to neutrals: “first us, then the allies, and finally the neutrals”.<sup>165</sup> Despite of this, he is happy that the commission has been sent to the U.S, because Dutch ships, waiting to be loaded with grain, were stopped for two months by the American government.<sup>166</sup> Despite of his skepticism, he does not see another option to get the vessels from departing from the American harbors.

The government committee, led by Van Vollenhoven, to the U.S. government was much wished for by the NOT. One of the goals of this committee was to create an awareness at the American government, its surrounding bodies and the general American population about the situation in the Netherlands. The main goal was to secure the Dutch-American exports and imports. One of the tasks of the committee was to negotiate the angary laws, which concerned the seizing of neutral ships during wartime.<sup>167</sup>

In the meantime, Heldring deals with the issue of tonnage of neutral ships that was forced to be ceded by the Allied governments. The NOT therefore decided to spare five ships for the Anglo-French coal trade, while the British government refused to approve the vessel *Zeelandia* to leave from Buenos Aires to return to the Netherlands. The NOT, tired of the British arbitrariness (“Engelsche willekeur”)<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Heldring, *Herinneringen* (19 juli 1917), 212.

<sup>163</sup> Vandenbosch, *Dutch foreign policy since 1815*, 116-117.

<sup>164</sup> Heldring, *Herinneringen* (19 juli 1917), 213.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> Frey, ‘Trade, ships, and the neutrality of the Netherlands in the First World War’, 559.

<sup>168</sup> Heldring, *Herinneringen* (19 juli 1917), 214.

decided to quit the negotiations with the British legation at the end of July 1917.<sup>169</sup> On 25 January 1918 the Dutch agreed to provide 500.000 tons of Dutch shipping space to the Allies.<sup>170</sup> This was an enormous number, compared to the total of 1,663,093 tons that entered Dutch ports through 1.179 ships in 1918.<sup>171</sup>

Thus, as the war wore on, the Netherlands found itself in an increasingly difficult position between two powerful warring parties that were becoming more and more demanding as the war dragged on and the stakes grew higher. In order to maintain its neutrality, the Dutch had worked ceaselessly trying to satisfy each side without offending the other. But by March 1918, the Netherlands' sovereignty and ability to act independently had been reduced to almost nothing. This late in the war, both the Germans and the British saw compromise as nothing less than gain for the other party. Consequently, negotiations between the Dutch foreign ministry and the belligerents became very difficult.<sup>172</sup>

Ultimately, the United States found alliance with the British, its most natural ally, unavoidable. Though it initially supported Dutch neutrality, and did what it could to help strengthen that neutrality, the U.S. and the Netherlands had nowhere near as strong a relationship as did the Americans and British. The resultant embargo proved difficult for the Dutch, who were compelled to institute a food rationing system. In the Netherlands, officials never expected that the demands of the U.S. might be even more severe than Britain's. Fifty Dutch ships were tied up in American ports, waiting to be loaded with grain. The Dutch government and the NOT decided to send a commission to the U.S. to negotiate over further exports. The leader of this commission, Joost van Vollenhoven, rightly suspected that the U.S. was interested in requisitioning the ships.

The tightening relationship between the United States and Britain presented the Netherlands with an imposing no-win situation, the Germans threatening invasion on one side and the Entente powers controlling Dutch commerce on the other. On 4 March 1918, C. Cecil gave the Dutch an ultimatum: unless the Dutch would charter their ships to the Allies and stop their exports to Germany, the ships would be requisitioned on 18 March. The Dutch government stated that it did not want responsibility in this, and left the decision to the Allies. An appeal for compromise by the Allied Naval Council was overruled by Wilson and the war cabinet. On 20 March 1918, the Allies requisitioned 132 Dutch ships; 87 in U.S. ports and 45 in British ports. Queen Wilhelmina condemned this as an act of robbery, but the futility of such protests only served to underscore the vulnerability of Dutch neutrality where the war and the objectives of the belligerents were concerned.

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<sup>169</sup> Heldring, *Herinneringen* (19 juli 1917), 214.

<sup>170</sup> Vandenbosch, *Dutch foreign policy since 1815*, 118.

<sup>171</sup> Samuël Kruizinga, Paul Moeyes and Wim Klinkert, 'The Netherlands' in *International Encyclopedia of the First World War 1914-1918* [http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/the\\_netherlands](http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/the_netherlands) (visited 8-7-2015)

<sup>172</sup> Frey, 'Trade, ships, and the neutrality of the Netherlands in the First World War', 558.

Consequently, relations between the Allies and the Netherlands cooled until the summer of 1918. Ludendorff intended to force a crisis in the relations between the Entente and the Netherlands. The requisition of the ships was a triumph for Germany. Although German diplomats were certain the Dutch could have done nothing to prevent the requisition of their ships, they still demanded free railway passage from Germany through the southern Netherlands in order to move materiel and troops for Germany's last major offensive on the Western Front, an attack that started on 21 March 1918. If the Dutch had accepted this, it would have led to war with the Allies because the transport of war material through a neutral country was forbidden by international law. The Dutch cabinet rejected Ludendorff's demands on 16 April. Ludendorff moved two divisions to the Dutch frontier, but Kaiser Wilhelm II gave orders to the high command not to provoke a break with Holland.<sup>173</sup>

One of the positive aspects of Dutch-American relations was the cordial relations that existed between the like-minded officials on both sides, much of which could be traced to the familiarity that existed between them. "Loudon had enjoyed a successful stint as envoy in Washington, and he developed a close relationship with Henry Van Dyke, American envoy in The Hague. His relationship with the notoriously anti-German Van Dyke was significant because the American had close ties to President Woodrow Wilson [...]"<sup>174</sup> However, the sinking of the *Lusitania* rendered all such familiarity meaningless. Despite the significance of this event, there remained a disconnect between American and Dutch understandings of the situation. When Wilson responded with a promise that he would protect American citizens and shipping, "The Dutch assumed that Wilson did so in order to protect the rights of neutrals, especially since the president was viewed as an idealist. [...] None of this mattered, however, in the short run. Once the United States entered World War I, Wilson ceased to champion the rights of neutrals. After, April 6, 1917, not a single great power remained neutral"<sup>175</sup>

America's willingness to compromise Dutch claims to neutrality during the war was, like the British, largely a matter of expediency. Once the war had been won, and the U.S. emerged in a uniquely important post-war role, the United States' position on the composition of post-war Europe once again approximated that of the Netherlands. Ultimately, Washington held many of the same beliefs and plans that the Dutch did. For one thing, the Dutch were fearful that their southern provinces might be annexed by a reconstituted Belgium, a possibility that the Americans were also against. "Wilson's call for a new international order resonated with the Dutch, and their sympathy played well with the president. The Dutch used this to great effect during the struggle at Versailles over the Scheldt river, Antwerp's lifeline, which runs through Dutch territory."<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Frey, 'Trade, ships, and the neutrality of the Netherlands in the First World War', 560.

<sup>174</sup> Van Tuyll, 'Dutch-American relations during World War', 423.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Van Tuyll. 'Dutch-American relations during World War', 427.

## 2.5 Conclusion 1917

In the conclusion of this second chapter, I try to answer the question what the U.S.' entry into the war meant for the Netherlands as a neutral nation. The already uncertain relationship between the United States and the Netherlands became quite difficult after the U.S. joined the Allies' war effort. The American government began playing political hardball almost immediately, declaring that the Netherlands would be placed under a trade embargo until it ceased sending agricultural supplies to Germany. The fear of ship requisitioning forced the Netherlands to send a delegation to Washington to discuss the angry laws. This government committee was led by a politician who had business interests himself. This is typical for the Dutch position during the First World War: the interest of businessmen and politicians were so intertwined that it was impossible to keep track of the difference. The NOT was often seen as an extension of the Dutch ministry of foreign affairs, with at his highpoint almost 1.000 clerics, while the ministry only had a couple of dozen employees working in The Hague. As stated, Heldring was hopeful but skeptical about the impact of this committee.

It is clear that as the war went on, the Dutch position became more difficult. When the U.S. joined the allies in 1917, the position soon became even worse. American belligerency made it possible for the British to become even stricter, and the American government started to put its own restrictions on neutral trade. The number of ships entering Dutch harbors halved between 1916 en 1917. This led to outrage of Dutch ship-owners, because the lack of use of shipping space. The effects were also felt in the entire Dutch society, because the government was forced to start rationing supplies. Throughout 1917, the Netherlands continued to stress the importance of international law to protect their neutrality. The United States, which was practically seen as un-neutral since 1915, partly left its position of protector of international law when it joined the Entente.



### 3. Conclusion: Dutch-U.S. relations during the First World War

In this conclusion of my thesis, I try to answer the question: What were the effects of neutrality on the relations between the Netherlands and the United States at the outset of the First World War, and after the entry of the U.S. into the war in April 1917? My proposed hypothesis was: At the start of the war, the Netherlands profited from U.S. neutrality, but America's entry into the war in April 1917 left the Netherlands vulnerable to belligerents on both sides and undermined the Dutch government's attempts to remain neutral based on international law. I tried to portray the change in the relationship between both nations by focusing on two specific periods: the start of the conflict wherein both were neutral, and the moment when the US became a belligerent. During the entire war, the Netherlands found itself in a difficult position. It was a small neutral nation, stuck in between belligerents, which was also economically largely dependent on overseas trade. The United States had a different position, as the world's strongest neutral nation, which focused on isolationism during the start of the war. A position that gradually changed towards the U.S. joining the Entente in April 1917.

The findings from this thesis are based on correspondence from a variety of sources, including U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing and the Dutch embassy in Washington, D.C. These papers reflect the hopes and concerns of a period that saw the end of a high-minded yet naïve ideal, and chronicle the relationship between the United States and the Netherlands. The Americans cherished neutrality as a pathway to peace and isolation, while for the Dutch it was a matter of maintaining national sovereignty. This was not a symbiotic relationship; the Netherlands had considerably more to gain from this relationship than did the Americans, whose economic power, resources and geography protected them in ways that did not apply to the Netherlands. For the Dutch, who had extensive commercial ties throughout the world, the U.S. represented a kind of patron whose commitment to neutrality lent credibility to the Netherlands' position.

In 1914, relations between the Netherlands and the United States were friendly and benign but of relatively low importance in Washington. After all, America was much more closely tied, politically and economically, to Great Britain and Germany and America's diplomatic emphasis reflected that geopolitical reality. When the great European powers went to war in 1914, America was committed to isolationism, and that conviction created common cause with the Netherlands, which likewise sought to remain neutral. Correspondence between the U.S. and the Netherlands reflected this situation, which was manifested in the fact that the U.S. government took care to keep the Dutch government apprised of the treaties it signed with foreign countries, indications of America's commitment to remain neutral. As the Americans were gradually pulled into the conflict, and into league with Britain and France, the Dutch-U.S. relationship was complicated. Having surrendered their neutrality, the Americans were no longer in a

position to advocate for Dutch shipping interests in London. Without the precedent of a leading global power remaining neutral, Dutch efforts to use the international courts to affirm and protect their neutrality rang hollow.

International cooperation, which had existed in 1914, fell victim to military and diplomatic expediency as the U.S. was forced to fall into line with British maritime policy, which was increasingly at odds with Dutch commercial and shipping interests. As Dutch ships were seized by the Royal Navy, the Americans were not in a position to use their influence against their own ally. Thus, correspondence between Washington and The Hague changed both in tone and frequency, with minimal contact marked by a considerably harder American position. An example of this is the requisitioning of Dutch vessels in July 1917. There had never been a particularly robust political relationship between the two countries, so there was no real traditional channel of communication to fall back on when the Netherlands' position became precarious after April 1917. In previous studies it has already been stipulated that the belligerency of the U.S. made the position of the Netherlands more difficult. After the U.S. belligerency, Heldring does mention its role more often in his diary entries, but mainly during 1918, when the Dutch position became more and more difficult. On the subject of the Dutch ships that were forbidden from leaving American ports, Frey has already conducted research. Apart from such main Dutch issues in the First World War, there seems not to have been much more diplomatic contact between the Netherlands and the U.S. The personal archives of Van Rappard and Loudon did not provide an insight in the U.S.- Dutch diplomatic relations.

My research was restricted by a relative scarcity of correspondence between the United States and the Netherlands. In addition to this, some parts of the archives of the Netherlands' embassy to the U.S. in Washington are still not open to the public. Communication from the U.S. State Department, with its high-minded assurances of American non-aggression from William Jennings Bryan, came to an end in 1917 when the U.S. committed to the war against Germany and its allies. There is a certain quixotic nobility (and naiveté) to the Netherlands' continuing efforts to preserve its neutrality in international courts of law. However, this ongoing and ultimately doomed effort may offer a path to new research, which could shed new light on the troubled history and continuing difficulty of establishing a viable international system of justice. My recommendations for further research on this subject would be to further look into the correspondence of the U.S. embassy in The Hague, and to expand the period of research. The issue of the requisitioning of Dutch vessels in July 1917, for example, is outside of this time period. On the other hand, I doubt further research on this subject will shed a new light on Dutch-American relations during the First World War, since it has already been researched by different scholars.

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