

# Legitimate or illegitimate

Public opinion concerning the seizure of Dutch merchant vessels in  
American ports in 1918

Elise Burggraaf

410449

MA History of Society

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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**Supervisor:** M.R.M. Straver MA MSc LLM

**Second reader:** prof. dr. H.A.M. Klemann

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## Introduction

In 1914 most of Europe was at war. Austria-Hungary and Germany formed the Central Powers, while Britain, France, and Russia formed the Triple Entente. Later, the United States joined the Entente after which it became the Associated powers. At the start of this conflict, the Netherlands and the United States both proclaimed their neutrality. As a neutral state surrounded by warring neighbors, the Netherlands was put in a difficult position between 1914 and 1918. This position became even more difficult when the US entered the war in 1917. Until then the US was important for securing the rights of neutral countries, like the Netherlands, which were not powerful enough to do so themselves. Hence, with the US no longer on the neutral side, the Dutch government had to ensure its own rights. Furthermore, the Dutch government now had to worry about restrictions on Dutch shipping by the US government as well as the other belligerents. The US government put restrictions on the transport of grain, fodder, and artificial fertilizer to other countries in July 1917. Those goods were important for the domestic economy of the US, and the US government did not want them to fall into the hands of the enemy. From August of that year, the US government no longer allowed Dutch ships to transport those goods to the Netherlands. The Dutch merchant ships made no profit if they left the US empty handed. Furthermore, the route back to the Netherlands was dangerous since the German government had proclaimed unrestricted submarine warfare. As a result, most Dutch merchant ships lay idle in American ports. However, the final blow to Dutch merchant shipping came in October. The US government forbade all transport of bunker coal to neutral countries adjacent to Germany. This resulted in even more Dutch ships without goods that would have made it worthwhile to take the dangerous route back home.<sup>1</sup>

These restrictions were building up to the decision of the US government to seize neutral ships. In November 1917, the US government and the British government decided they needed to use neutral ships to transport troops and military goods to the battlefield, because they did not have enough ships of their own to move a sufficient amount of troops and goods to the European mainland. After unsuccessful negotiations with first the Netherlands Overseas Trust (NOT) and later the Dutch government, ninety Dutch merchant ships were seized in American ports on March 20, 1918. The American president Woodrow Wilson proclaimed that ‘the imperative military needs of the United States require the immediate utilization of vessels of Netherlands registry, now lying idle within the territorial waters of the United States.’<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> C. Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1899-1919). Derde Deel: 1917-1919* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1973), v.

<sup>2</sup> Woodrow Wilson cited in: Smit, 72.

British Ambassador to the Netherlands, Sir Walter Townley, advised against seizing Dutch ships by saying that ‘Holland will be driven by hunger into the arms of Germany who will make superhuman efforts to help her.’<sup>3</sup> However, the British government paid no mind to his warning and the following day another 45 Dutch merchant ships were seized in British ports.<sup>4</sup>

‘We (the Dutch people) now have to choose between starvation and coal on one side, or food and loaning our ships on the other side.’<sup>5</sup> was how *De Telegraaf*, a Dutch newspaper, summarized the state of affairs during the negotiations between the Dutch government and the US and British governments about using cargo space in Dutch merchant vessels in 1918. The Dutch government was trying to get the US government to agree to transport grain to the Netherlands. In turn the US government made clear that the response to this request would be negative if the Dutch government did not voluntarily hand over part of the Dutch fleet. The Dutch government was willing to let the US and British governments use some of the Dutch cargo space, but not for military means. *De Telegraaf* did not see eye to eye with the government on this. The article of March 20 made clear that the newspaper would rather have the Dutch people suffer from a shortage of food than be dragged into the war on the Associated side, something which would happen according to the article if a form of agreement was reached with the Associated governments. At the same time the newspaper article criticized the Dutch government for not even considering the German proposal to help with the Dutch food shortage. The negotiations dragged on and the US government started to lose its patience, which became clear when the US and British governments issued the Dutch government an ultimatum. In March 1918, the US government decided to seize the Dutch vessels without permission of the Dutch government. In the Netherlands this became known as the ‘schepenroof’, or ‘ships robbery’.

The *New York Times* reported the delay of the Dutch government’s decision on March 20, 1918. The article stated that action should be expected ‘in a few hours.’<sup>6</sup> A few days later, an article written by George Renwick, a correspondent of the *New York Times* in Amsterdam, appeared in the newspaper. He wrote that the ‘fairly violent’ opinion expressed in the Dutch newspapers did not reflect the opinion of the Dutch people.<sup>7</sup> According to Renwick, the ‘Dutch

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<sup>3</sup> Sir W.B. Townley cited in M. Frey, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Niederlande: Ein neutrales Land im politischen und wirtschaftlichen Kalkül der Kriegsgegner*, Reprint 2014 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998), 271.

<sup>4</sup> Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1899-1919). Derde Deel: 1917-1919*, v–vi.

<sup>5</sup> Own translation: ‘Nu staan wij voor de keuze tusschen uithongering en steenkool eenerzijds of voedsel en in bruikleen afstaan van onze scheepsruimte anderzijds’, ‘De Onderhandelingen Met de Geassocieerden.’ *De Telegraaf*, March 20, 1918, 5.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Grand Brief Delay in Seizing Ships,’ *New York Times*, March 20, 1918, 1.

<sup>7</sup> G. Renwick, ‘Dutch Press Angry over Ship Seizure,’ *New York Times*, March 23, 1918, 3.

papers are led astray by fear of Germany and an exaggerated idea of the benefits which should accrue to neutrality.’<sup>8</sup> This conforms with what President Wilson said: that the Dutch government was incapable of making its decision because it feared Germany would take action.<sup>9</sup> The article following the President’s proclamation, describes the Netherlands as a helpless country incapable of making any decision without Germany threatening or forcing the Dutch government in a direction that was beneficial to the Central Powers.<sup>10</sup>

These two examples show the contrasting perspectives in the American and Dutch press on the seizure of Dutch merchant vessels in American and British ports. Both newspapers argued that pressure on the Dutch government was the cause behind the lack of decision making on the Dutch side. The *New York Times* stated that the pressure came from Germany, while *De Telegraaf* blamed Germany, the US, and the food shortage in the Netherlands. Studies have described the seizure and the events surrounding it and concentrated on the political and economic causes and consequences.<sup>11</sup> However, no research has been done on the public opinion concerning the seizure and the position of the press in it. Studies concerning the Dutch press during the First World War exist but have reached conflicting conclusions. Whilst, Moeyes and Wolf say that the Dutch press, with the exception of *De Telegraaf*, remained neutral throughout the war, Brugmans claimed that there was a clear division between pro- and anti-German newspapers in the Netherlands.<sup>12</sup> No other study has provided a clear picture of the Dutch press during the First World War, and the existing studies only provide superficial information. Therefore, it is useful to examine the newspaper coverage of the seizure and the events surrounding it in comparison to the arguments of the US and Dutch governments in order to determine if they were neutral or biased.

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<sup>8</sup> Renwick, 3.

<sup>9</sup> “Wilson Orders Dutch Ships Seized; Declares Further Parley Is Useless, as Holland Cannot Exert Free Will: Vessels Fly Our Flag Today,” *New York Times*, March 21, 1918, 1.

<sup>10</sup> “Wilson Orders Dutch Ships Seized,” 2.

<sup>11</sup> H. Brugmans, *Geschiedenis van Den Wereldoorlog, 1914-1918*, Gedigitaliseerde reproductie (Amsterdam: Scheltens & Giltay, 1920); Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1899-1919). Derde Deel: 1917-1919*; Frey, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Niederlande*; P. Moeyes, *Buiten schot. Nederland tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog 1914 - 1918*, 3rd ed. (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Brugmans, *Geschiedenis van Den Wereldoorlog, 1914-1918*, 198; M. Wolf, *Het Geheim van De Telegraaf. Geschiedenis van Een Krant* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2009), 124; Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 266.

## **Research question**

The aim of this research is to find out which factors caused American and Dutch newspapers to agree or disagree with their respective governments on the legitimacy of the seizure of Dutch merchant vessels in American ports in March 1918. This will provide a clear statement on the position of the Dutch and American press concerning the seizure and their respective governments, as well as the public opinion on the matter.

## **Sub-questions**

The first question that needs to be answered is what the arguments of the US and Dutch governments regarding the legitimacy of the seizure of Dutch merchant vessels in American ports were. In order to find out which factors caused newspapers to agree or disagree with their respective governments it is necessary to know the specific arguments of the governments. These arguments will thus form a reference point to assess how, and to what extent, the newspapers' arguments differed or coincided with those of their respective government. As will be shown in the historiography, the existing studies on the seizure have shown that the US government saw the decision to seize Dutch merchant vessels in its ports as legitimate. Existing studies also show that the Dutch government disagreed with this and deemed the seizure of Dutch merchant vessels illegitimate. The arguments of both governments will be explained, so they can be used in the analysis of the newspaper articles.

The second sub-question is what the backgrounds of the chosen newspapers and their sources were, because the target audience and staff of a newspaper influence its content.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the backgrounds of the newspapers can provide reasons for the newspapers to have agreed or disagreed with the government, and to what extent they agreed or disagreed. It will make clear why a newspaper emphasizes certain arguments, while leaving others uncovered. The backgrounds will be presented and explained, which provides hypotheses for the outcome of the analysis of the articles.

Next is the question of how the seizure was covered in the newspapers. This section is the main area of the thesis, because it will provide the opinions of the chosen newspapers. The analysis of the articles is necessary in order to conclude if the newspapers agreed or disagreed with their respective governments and to what extent, which leads to the final sub-question: to what extent did the arguments and opinions presented in the newspapers coincide with those of

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<sup>13</sup> T. Paddock, "Introduction: Newspapers, Public Opinion, and Propoganda," in *A Call to Arms: Propoganda, Public Opinion, and Newspapers in the Great War* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2004), 9.

their respective governments? This final question will show exactly to what extent the newspapers agreed or disagreed with their respective governments, which is necessary to find out which factors caused them to do so.

## Theoretical concepts

First of all, the concept of the newspaper itself needs to be visited. In his study on the daily newspaper in the US, the American sociologist McClung Lee describes newspapers as ‘a publication which is printed and distributed at stated intervals, usually weekly or more frequently, and which contains news, opinions, and other matter.’<sup>14</sup> He also defines it as a periodical which was called a newspaper by other published sources from that time.<sup>15</sup> Lee admits that these definitions are vague, but considers it impossible to give a static definition of a newspaper since it is a concept that has changed over time. In my opinion, his definition is not complete. Schneider and Hemels, in their book on the development of Dutch newspapers between 1618 and 1978, characterize a newspaper by its topicality, frequency, coverage of news from different places and different nature, and – in principle – availability for everyone.<sup>16</sup> Both Lee and Schneider and Hemels agree on the characteristic of frequency and coverage of news, but Schneider and Hemels build further on this. Schneider and Hemels’ characteristics will be used for my research, since these are less vague than those of Lee and still applicable over time. The characteristics are more useful since they cover more than just frequency and can be used in every period. The use of this definition limits my sources to widely available, frequent publications that do not just cover local news.

Another concept that requires explanation is public opinion. The 1920s saw the birth of public opinion as a source for scholarly research, but a clear definition remains difficult. American author and political commentator Lippmann stated that public opinion ‘is primarily a moralized and codified version of the facts’ and that patterns of stereotypes largely determine which facts people see and how they will view them.<sup>17</sup> According to Lippmann, people have to deal with aspects of the world they cannot see or experience themselves. Those aspects that have to be dealt with because they influence people’s environments or simply interest them are called public affairs. The thoughts people have about these public affairs are their public opinions.<sup>18</sup> Malcolm Carroll was one of the first historians to address public opinion and its difficulties. According to him, influential leaders both shape and express the opinions of the public, which he defined as the reactions of the general public. As historian Paddock explains,

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<sup>14</sup> A. McClung Lee, *The Daily Newspaper in America : The Evolution of a Social Instrument*, vol. 1 (New York: The Macmillan company, 1937), 13.

<sup>15</sup> Lee, 1:14.

<sup>16</sup> M. Schneider and J. Hemels, *De Nederlandse Krant 1618-1978. Van “nieuwstydninghe” Tot Dagblad*, 4th ed. (Baarn: Het Wereldvenster, 1979), 36.

<sup>17</sup> W. Lippmann cited in Lee, *The Daily Newspaper in America : The Evolution of a Social Instrument*, 1:4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), 29.



however, it is not a given that influential leaders shape or express public opinion, especially not in authoritarian nations.<sup>19</sup> Building on Lippmann's concept of public opinion, this research will consider public opinion to be the thoughts of a group of people on a certain event. Lippmann's public opinions are namely individual thoughts on a multitude of public affairs, while the thoughts that can be derived from newspapers concern a group of people with a similar interest or background. Furthermore, this research will concern one event instead of a multitude of public affairs.

By using newspapers to determine public opinion, another problem occurs. As Paddock states there is a difference between, what he calls, 'published opinion' and 'public opinion.'<sup>20</sup> This is, however, not an insurmountable problem. Newspapers are products of private enterprises that need to make profit. To make profit they need to maintain or enlarge their readership, because businesses will not advertise in a newspaper with low readership. If readers disagree with the information a newspaper publishes they will stop reading it. Therefore, newspapers will deliver news in a way that the readers will understand and from a perspective that the readers are sympathetic to.<sup>21</sup> The dependence of the newspapers on readership means that readers influence what is written, but it also works the other way around. At the beginning of the twentieth century, newspapers were the only way for people to find out what was happening in other parts of the country and of the world. There was no way for people to check the information in the newspapers.<sup>22</sup> This means that newspapers were not just influenced by public opinion, they influenced it as well. Therefore, newspapers are very useful in researching public opinion, especially in a time when they were the only source of information on affairs people could not witness themselves.

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<sup>19</sup> Paddock, "Introduction," 2–3.

<sup>20</sup> Paddock, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Paddock, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Paddock, 5.

## Historiography

In 1997, the Dutch historian Brands pointed out that Dutch neutrality in the period 1914-1918 meant that the First World War had no place in the Dutch collective memory.<sup>23</sup> This is true for the second half of the twentieth century. Compared to the Second World War, the years between 1914 and 1918 lacked scholarly interest for the past seventy years. However, between 1914 and 1940 many studies about the First World War were published. The great traumas caused by the Second World War meant that Dutch historical research was no longer aimed at the First World War. In the late 1990s, when there was sufficient distance to the Second World War, however, historians started to publish about the First World War again.

Studies published between 1914 and 1918 mostly concerned developments in the belligerent countries and why it was important for the Netherlands to remain neutral. In the 1920s and 1930s, studies started to concentrate on the developments in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies during the First World War. In this period, the Netherlands was described as the only house that was still standing in the middle of a city on fire. It took the Dutch government a lot of effort to keep the fire of the war from spreading to the Netherlands.<sup>24</sup> Studies between 1914 and 1940 make it very clear that the Dutch government found itself in a difficult position. The Dutch government constantly needed to work to maintain neutral. Taking part in the war was – according to historian Smit – equal to the destruction of the country.<sup>25</sup> The consensus in this period, concerning the position of the Dutch government, was that maintaining neutrality took a lot of effort.

After a period of silence in the Dutch historiography concerning the First World War the description of the Netherlands between 1914 and 1918 was very different in the 1990s. Brands wrote that the Dutch had missed a crucial part of modern history by staying neutral and the Dutch author Mak compared the Netherlands to children who were on vacation when a disaster struck their family.<sup>26</sup> However, these descriptions paint an inaccurate picture of the country during the war. The Dutch historian Moeyes says that remarks like the ones made by Mak and Brands make you wonder how high the Dutch dikes must have been, that the country was able to fully close itself off from the war while it was placed in the middle of warring

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<sup>23</sup> M. C. Brands, “The Great War Die Aan Ons Voorbij Ging. De Blinde Vlek in Het Historische Bewustzijn van Nederland,” 1997, 17, <https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=dd3e6053-ebc0-4182-9ad9-37b8564eeca7>.

<sup>24</sup> H. Brugmans, *Geschiedenis van Den Wereldoorlog, 1914-1918*, Gedigitaliseerde reproductie (Amsterdam: Scheltens & Giltay, 1920), 195.

<sup>25</sup> Brugmans, 195.

<sup>26</sup> G. Mak cited by P. Moeyes in: Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 8.

neighbors for four years.<sup>27</sup> Among many other events, the seizure of Dutch merchant vessels in American and British ports in 1918 showed that the Dutch dikes were not that high. The following paragraphs will deal with the published studies concerning the seizure, the events surrounding it and the American and Dutch press during the First World War.

### **Restrictions and negotiations**

The reality of the war meant that the rights that states believed to have – for example their right to trade with whichever other state they wanted – were only retained when a state was strong enough to force their adversary to accept them.<sup>28</sup> According to historians Den Hertog and Kruizinga, the Dutch government lacked the power to enforce its rights. The country was not strong enough and was aware that it could easily be invaded by one of the belligerents. The Dutch economy depended on overseas trade and access to the German market, which were both restricted during the war. Meanwhile, international law, which the Dutch government had depended on before, proved to be unreliable, especially now that the US was no longer neutral.<sup>29</sup> Until the US entered the war, it had been the leader and spokesman of the neutral nations. As the only major neutral power the US government had been the only nation strong enough to enforce neutral rights. When the US entered the war, the small neutral nations, like the Netherlands, were on their own, and the loss of the US was felt heavily. The smaller neutrals were now fully at the mercy of the belligerents and without the US they had no real power to negotiate for better terms.<sup>30</sup> The proximity to Germany and the lack of military power of the Netherlands, however, meant that the Dutch government still clung onto its ideal of neutrality.

Already in 1914, the British government started an economic blockade of Germany, which meant that all ships coming from German ports or from ports of Germany's neighboring nations would be stopped. German ships would be seized and neutral ships would be checked for cargo that was directly or indirectly meant for the war effort. If a neutral ship carried goods that the British considered beneficial for their enemy, they would seize the cargo and sometimes the ship. The British government made a list of what cargo was considered to be meant for the war effort. This made trade very difficult for Dutch merchants, especially because the British constantly added new items to the list of contraband. The Dutch government protested against

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<sup>27</sup> Moeyes, 8.

<sup>28</sup> J. Den Hertog and S. Kruizinga, eds., *Caught in the Middle: Neutrals, Neutrality and the First World War* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 1–2.

<sup>29</sup> Hertog and Kruizinga, 9.

<sup>30</sup> H. Tuyll Van Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I: Espionage, Diplomacy and Survival* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2001), 203–4.

the British measure and asked the US government for support. The US government was not willing to stand by the Dutch government and the British government carried on as it had. The British government said Dutch ships would be allowed through the blockade if the Dutch government guaranteed the goods would not be transported to Germany. However, the Dutch government could not guarantee this because it would mean the end of Dutch neutrality. Working with one of the belligerent parties did not fit in the neutral policy of the Netherlands. The Dutch government recognized the need for a separate organ that could negotiate with the governments of the belligerents without putting the Dutch neutrality in danger. For this purpose, the organ should not be directly tied to the Dutch government. Therefore, the *Nederlandsche Overzeese Trustmaatschappij*, or Netherlands Overseas Trust (NOT), was founded in November 1914. Officially the NOT had no direct ties to the Dutch government but the organization had close contact with the Dutch Minister of Trade.<sup>31</sup>

After declaring war on Germany and its allies in 1917, the US government quickly prepared to bring goods and troops to Europe. To do this they needed a large amount of cargo space. For the purpose of gaining this space, and to make sure no American resources would reach Germany, the US government put restrictions on neutral shipping. Detainment of Dutch merchant vessels in American ports meant that there was no connection to the Dutch East Indies.<sup>32</sup> Moeyes and Smit both describe the growing amount of restrictions on Dutch shipping as an elaborate plan eventually leading to the seizure of all Dutch merchant vessels in American and British ports.<sup>33</sup> Already in May 1917, the British government seized Dutch-owned ships sailing under the British flag and a month later British-owned ships sailing under the Dutch flag. Historian Van Tuyll van Serooskerken writes that these actions led to speculation in the Netherlands about further seizures. By October, newspapers wrote about the prospect of Dutch merchant vessels in Associated ports being seized.<sup>34</sup>

In his study on the Netherlands during the First World War, Smit describes the negotiations leading up to the seizure in March 1918 in great detail. The Dutch government and the NOT had separate negotiations with the US government and the British government. This changed in December 1917 when a Dutch delegation met with a joint delegation of the US and British governments in London. The negotiations concerned the delivery of goods, like bunker coal and grain, to the Netherlands and the use of Dutch cargo space by the US and British

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<sup>31</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 210–16.

<sup>32</sup> Moeyes, 370–71.

<sup>33</sup> Moeyes, 371; Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1899-1919). Derde Deel: 1917-1919*, 73.

<sup>34</sup> Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I*, 204–5.

governments. The American-British delegation accused the Dutch government of bending the law to fit its own interests, while the Dutch delegation claimed it was the other way around.<sup>35</sup> The delegations came to an agreement that would be brought to their respective governments. While waiting for the agreement to be approved by the Dutch government, Dutch merchant ships were allowed to leave American ports with goods for the Netherlands. On the condition that in return for every ship that left the US, a Dutch ship had to leave the Netherlands for an American port.<sup>36</sup> This agreement brought difficulties for the Dutch government, since the German government strongly opposed it.<sup>37</sup> In the spring of 1918, the Netherlands needed more grain, which the US would only supply if Dutch ships started to sail through the “danger-zones” where they were vulnerable to German submarines. The Dutch government agreed but still refused to transport troops or ammunition. This was seen by the US government as a refusal, because the negotiations had dragged on for months and the US government did not think an agreement could be reached with the Dutch government.<sup>38</sup> Both Smit and Serooskerken describe the opinions of Dutch Foreign Minister John Loudon and British Ambassador to the Netherlands Sir Walter Townley opinions but, aside from a short mention of Dutch newspapers by Serooskerken, pay no attention to the opinion of the Dutch public and press.

## **Protest**

The Dutch government received a lot of critique on its actions, or rather lack of actions, even from the Dutch queen. However, if the Dutch government had wanted to protest against the actions of the US and Great-Britain, it would not have been able to enforce its rights. The country was simply not powerful enough to stand up against the Associated powers.<sup>39</sup> The reason why the Dutch government did not make a formal protest was that, though the seizure was deemed illegitimate, it was not much worse than the other difficulties the belligerents had caused for the Netherlands. The blockade had already prevented many Dutch ships from leaving or entering Dutch ports, and the restrictions put on neutral shipping kept most ships out of business anyway. Therefore, the seizure of the ships did not have immediate negative effects. The Dutch government also realized that an ultimatum would just be ignored by the US and

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<sup>35</sup> Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1899-1919). Derde Deel: 1917-1919*, 62–63.

<sup>36</sup> Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I*, 205.

<sup>37</sup> Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1899-1919). Derde Deel: 1917-1919*, 67.

<sup>38</sup> Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I*, 205.

<sup>39</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 375–77.

Great-Britain. That would in turn lead to the Netherlands joining the war on the German side, which the government wanted to avoid at all costs.<sup>40</sup>

At the start of the twentieth century, the Dutch merchant fleet had been modernized and enlarged. Almost all sailing ships had disappeared from the merchant fleet, which now consisted of around five hundred steamships. These steamships carried an average weight of seventeen thousand tons, while the sailing ships only used to carry four to five thousand tons. The modernization and enlargement had increased the importance of the merchant fleet. At the start of the war, old ships were sold to Germany for high prices and the loss of cargo space was easily compensated by building new ships. However, this became difficult as the war dragged on and not enough steel could be imported from Germany anymore.<sup>41</sup> Overseas trade was incredibly important for the Netherlands. The country relied on overseas supplies of food.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the Dutch economy depended on raw materials from other countries to produce products and on foreign markets to sell the products. The importance of Dutch shipping meant that the government tried to make sure overseas trade could continue during the war.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to economic motives, John Loudon, Foreign Minister of the Netherlands during the First World War, had other reasons to consider the seizure illegitimate. On March 8, 1918, the decision was made that a break with the US and British governments should be avoided at all costs, because US grain and bunker coal was needed in the Netherlands and entering the war on the German side was to be avoided. This, however, did not stop Dutch politicians from expressing their displeasure with the situation in the press and in an open letter meant for the US government and published in the Dutch state newspaper. However, they did not officially protest against the action. Smit and historian Frey both think that one of the reasons to put out a public protest was to let the German leaders know that the seizure was in no way an agreement between the Dutch government and the US and British governments.<sup>44</sup> The protest, however, was also aimed at the Dutch people to show the Dutch people that the government did not agree with the seizure. The Dutch Queen Wilhelmina felt personally offended and was the first person to call the seizure the ‘ships robbery’.<sup>45</sup> The Dutch government remained silent after discourse between the Dutch Foreign Minister and British and American representatives about the legitimacy of the action.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1899-1919). Derde Deel: 1917-1919*, 73.

<sup>41</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 201.

<sup>42</sup> Moeyes, 210.

<sup>43</sup> Frey, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Niederlande*, 46.

<sup>44</sup> Frey, 273.

<sup>45</sup> Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1899-1919). Derde Deel: 1917-1919*, 75.

<sup>46</sup> Smit, 76.

According to Serooskerken, the official Dutch protest came to be after a lot of consideration. It had to find middle ground between two extremes: siding with the Allied powers or going to war on the German side. Calling the seizure a violation of Dutch sovereignty would have meant that the Dutch government had to issue an ultimatum. An ultimatum, as discussed above, would be ignored and the Netherlands would have to go to war. Therefore, the Dutch government eventually settled for calling the measure *rechtsverkrachting*, which can be translated to ‘rape of the law.’ The US government thought the protest was too strong, since it acted according to the Right of Angary. According to the US government, this meant that their action was legitimate and, though they expected the Dutch government to protest, they did not appreciate the tone of the protest.<sup>47</sup>

In the Middle Ages the Right of Angary gave a belligerent nation the right to seize neutral assets within its local jurisdiction and use these ships and their crews to transport food, goods, troops, and munition. It was custom to pay the neutral nation for the use of its ships and to return them after the war. Both of these customs were put to practice when it came to the seizure of Dutch ships in 1918. Dutch ship owners were generally quite pleased with the fee they were paid while their ship was being used, and the compensation they were paid when a ship was lost was considered quite generous. The legitimacy of this practice was generally recognized until neutral countries started to protest against it in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Several treaties were made to abolish the Right of Angary. This included a treaty between the US and Prussia, which stated that no ships of the other nation would be seized.<sup>48</sup> However, the practice was still widely recognized as legitimate. In the nineteenth century, this changed as the rights of neutrals became more generally recognized by European seafaring nations, but also by the US. Therefore, rules were made that made sure neutral crews could no longer be forced to participate in the war effort. However, the seizure and use of neutral ships in times of war was never fully abolished and, as long as the neutral nation received appropriate payment, was still deemed legitimate during the First World War.<sup>49</sup>

The seizure of Dutch merchant ships in American and British ports is briefly discussed by Smit. The main purpose of his study was to give an overview of the state of affairs of the Netherlands right after the war. Concerning the seizure of ships, the main point of concern is the payment the American and British governments offered. They paid a generous amount for the use of the ships, and even more when they were sunk. After the war, the remaining ships

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<sup>47</sup> Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I*, 207.

<sup>48</sup> C. D. Allin, “Right of Angary,” *Minn. L. Rev.* 2 (1917): 415–16.

<sup>49</sup> Allin, 417–20.

were returned to their owners. The Dutch ship owners received payment from the US government in November of 1918.<sup>50</sup> This conforms with the customs that came with using the right of angary as explained above.

### **American and Dutch press between 1914 and 1918**

Studies concerning the Dutch press between 1914 and 1918 show that the Dutch newspapers largely followed the example of the Dutch government. At the start of the war, the Dutch government decided not to put the press under censorship, but it did ask all chief editors to be careful in reporting events concerning the war. The Dutch government asked the press not to give any of the belligerent countries a reason to be offended. There were no repercussions for newspapers that did not follow this request because the Dutch government assumed the press would be considerate enough to do so. However, editors of newspapers that ignored the request were approached by the Dutch government and were told to change their attitude or consequences would follow. Furthermore, there was a law that allowed the Dutch government to arrest people, who endangered the Dutch neutrality. Overall, the Dutch newspapers remained neutral in reporting events concerning the war, according to historian Wolf at least. According to her there was, however, one clear exception: *De Telegraaf*.<sup>51</sup> Wolf wrote an expansive study about *De Telegraaf*, and describes the newspaper as one that ‘rather adds fuel to the flames than water.’<sup>52</sup> During the First World War, *De Telegraaf* chose the French side, and for entirety of the war it supported the Associated powers in its articles.<sup>53</sup> Wolf only focused on *De Telegraaf* in her study and has not done much research on other newspapers in this period. Therefore, her statement on the neutrality of the Dutch press does not stand on solid ground. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* is described by her as a more neutral newspaper that occasionally shows German sympathies in its articles during the First World War.<sup>54</sup> This statement, however, is only based on the articles of the *Algemeen Dagblad* that mentioned or were mentioned by *De Telegraaf*. Moeyes also describes the Dutch press as overall neutral, with *De Telegraaf* as an exception.<sup>55</sup> The goal of Moeyes’ book was to provide a general study of the situation of the Netherlands during the war. Therefore, he does not go into detail about his methods in researching

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<sup>50</sup> E.C. van Dorp, “Handel En Nijverheid,” in *Nederland in Den Oorlogstijd: De Geschiedenis van Nederland En van Nederlandsch-Indië Tijdens Den Oorlog van 1914 Tot 1919, Voor Zoover Zij Met Dien Oorlog Verband Houdt*, ed. C. Smit (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1920), 215–16.

<sup>51</sup> Wolf, *Het Geheim van De Telegraaf*, 124.

<sup>52</sup> Own translation: ‘liever olie dan bluswater op het vuur gooit’, Wolf, 126.

<sup>53</sup> Wolf, 124.

<sup>54</sup> Wolf, 132.

<sup>55</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 266.



newspaper articles and the reasons for their expressed opinion, or lack thereof. This makes it difficult to consider his statement completely accurate. Brugmans writes that there was a clear division between pro- and anti-German press in the Netherlands between 1914 and 1918.<sup>56</sup> Brugmans, however, only dedicates one sentence to the Dutch press and gives no ground for his statement. The lack of argumentation and method of the existing studies makes it difficult to draw a clear conclusion of the position of the Dutch press between 1914 and 1918.

American newspapers were dependent on news that came in through the transatlantic cables that connected the US to Europe, since it was not customary yet to have a reporter on the spot at all times. Reporters were only sent to places when something was happening there. At the start of the war, the British cut the transatlantic cable that connected Germany to the US. As a consequence, British officials controlled all information that was sent to the US. As the war progressed the British started to make propaganda aimed at the US to make the nation sympathize with the British.<sup>57</sup> Daily newspapers gained momentum in the US during the war. Development of transportation facilities made distribution to a large audience easier.<sup>58</sup> This was also a time when more and more people could read, and newspapers were the only way people could find out what was happening in different parts of the nation and the world. The combination of this caused newspapers to reach their peak between 1880 and 1918.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, more and more newspapers declared themselves politically independent between 1899 and 1929. American sociologist McClung Lee explains this rapid rise of politically independent newspapers (the amount doubled between 1899 and 1929) by saying the political violence had steadily died away in the US since the political upheaval of the Civil War.<sup>60</sup> The beginning of the twentieth century also saw the rapid growth of the *New York Times* since Adolph Ochs took over the newspaper in 1896.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, the *Washington Post* lost its influence under Ned McLean between 1916 and 1933.<sup>62</sup>

Paddock studied how newspapers helped gain and maintain support for the war between 1914 and 1918. His research concerned propaganda in newspapers in Britain, Germany, France, Russia, and Austria-Hungary during the First World War. These nations were selected because of their involvement in the war and the forms and amounts of censorship their governments

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<sup>56</sup> Brugmans, *Geschiedenis van Den Wereldoorlog, 1914-1918*, 198; Wolf, *Het Geheim van De Telegraaf*, 124.

<sup>57</sup> Paddock, "Introduction," 8–9.

<sup>58</sup> Lee, *The Daily Newspaper in America : The Evolution of a Social Instrument*, 1:67.

<sup>59</sup> Paddock, "Introduction," 5.

<sup>60</sup> Lee, *The Daily Newspaper in America : The Evolution of a Social Instrument*, 1:182.

<sup>61</sup> Lee, 1:67.

<sup>62</sup> D. Kindred, *Morning Miracle: Inside the Washington Post: A Great Newspaper Fights for Its Life* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011), 43–44.

applied on the press. Certain newspapers had clear connections with the government and would print the official information supplied by the government. There were, however, newspapers that operated without government connections, but they were still restricted by the person or institute they received information from.<sup>63</sup> Even sending reporters from the newspaper to the front did not mean they got an overall look at the situation. Especially the Belgian front was under strict military censorship, and the neutral reporters were only allowed to see certain parts of the battlefield under guidance of an official of one of the belligerents.<sup>64</sup> This meant that the coverage of the front was always beneficial to the party that took on the neutral journalists. Since this research does not focus on the coverage of the front this will not implicate my research.

### **Innovative aspects**

The brief overview of what is known about the seizure of Dutch merchant vessels in American ports in March 1918 and the American and Dutch press during the First World War, shows that an analysis of contemporary newspapers will add new information. The opinions of politicians have been researched and so has the process of the negotiations, but the public opinion is not mentioned. Newspapers can add a new perspective by supplying the opinion of the broader public instead of just the opinions of the politicians. Studies that discuss the position of newspapers during the war give a brief overview and do not concentrate on a specific case. Furthermore, the historiography shows that there is some debate around the neutrality of the Dutch press during the First World War. Brugmans states that there was a clear division between pro and anti-German press, while Wolf and Moeyes say the Dutch press was neutral in general with *De Telegraaf* as an exception. However, none of them has done extensive research of newspapers to come to their conclusion and they give no explanation of how they reached their conclusion. My thesis will add to this debate by analyzing the opinions and arguments expressed in several newspapers regarding the seizure of Dutch merchant vessels in American ports in March 1918. This will provide a conclusion on the attitude of *De Telegraaf* and the *Algemeen Handelsblad* which will add to the debate on the neutrality of the Dutch press. Examining these American and Dutch newspapers will also provide insight in nations that formally let the press publish freely. Backgrounds of the newspapers and arguments used in newspaper articles will be able to determine how free the press really was.

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<sup>63</sup> T. Paddock, ed., *A Call to Arms: Propaganda, Public Opinion, and Newspapers in the Great War* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2004), 4–5.

<sup>64</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 270–71.

## Method

Public opinion on the seizure will be researched by analyzing the coverage of the event in a selection of Dutch and American newspapers. As explained above newspapers both reflect and influence the opinions of their readers and are, therefore, useful in mapping the opinion of the public.<sup>65</sup> Analyzing the opinions expressed in the newspapers could be a useful addition to the existing research. It could give new insights on how the seizure was perceived by the general public and on how the press positioned itself in the war. My research will be limited to March and April 1918, because the negotiations reached a critical point at that time and the newspapers printed the highest number of articles on the matter during these months. The merchant vessels were seized on March 20, and the informal protest of the Dutch government was published on March 30. Therefore, most articles concerning the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the seizure were published in this period. The negotiations about seizing Dutch ships already started in November 1917 – according to the *New York Times* even earlier – but, unfortunately, this thesis does not provide enough space to follow the entire process.<sup>66</sup> The process can even be followed until after the First World War since the remaining ships were returned to the Dutch owners after the war. Limiting the research to March and April 1918 means only a small part of the events surrounding the seizure will be examined. Coverage of the negotiations leading up to the seizure had already shaped the attitude of the journalists and readers towards the Dutch and American governments. Earlier articles about the negotiations had already formed people's opinion on a possible seizure of the ships. Therefore, this analysis will not give an overall conclusion on public opinion concerning the seizure and the events surrounding it. However, it will show the opinion expressed at the critical moments in the negotiations and during the actual seizure.

After searching the newspapers on specific keywords, it became clear that this method requires a very careful selection of keywords. Certain keywords can give biased results. Take for example the term '*schepenroof*' that was mentioned in the introduction. This keyword limits the result to newspaper articles, which regard the seizure of the ships as illegitimate. Keywords cause another problem as well. Not all digitalized newspapers are of the same quality, which sometimes means keywords cannot be found while the newspaper does contain an article about the topic you are searching for. However, methods for finding keywords have been vastly

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<sup>65</sup> J. Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2006 edition (Basingstoke England ; New York: Palgrave, 2007), 7.

<sup>66</sup> "Wilson Orders Dutch Ships Seized," 2.

improved over the past few years.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB), the national library of the Netherlands, considers the quality of the newspaper in their selection for the online database. ProQuest, the company that provides access to digitalized American newspapers, supports full text searches in its historical newspapers. This means that the newspaper articles that can be found in the databases of the KB and ProQuest are of such quality that keywords can be found.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the trust in the system is sufficient to use this method for finding relevant articles. The keywords used to search the Dutch newspapers were ‘Amerika’, ‘Vereenigde Staten’, ‘schip’, and ‘schepen’. The keywords used to search the American newspapers were ‘Netherlands’, ‘Holland’, and ‘ship’. These keywords were chosen because they are neutral words that do not filter out specific opinions and focus on the relevant topic. This research will be focused on two American and two Dutch newspapers and search all their issues of March and April 1918 for articles concerning the seizure of Dutch merchant vessels. The articles will be selected with the use of keywords. The chosen keywords resulted in 156 newspaper articles.

The qualitative analysis of the articles will be based on close reading. The articles were analyzed in chronological order to determine if there was a change of opinion or importance over time. The selected newspapers articles have been analyzed in five steps. First the number of articles and the date they were published were analyzed. It was thus examined if the date when the highest, or lowest, number of articles were published was tied to a certain event or not. The newspapers were also compared to one another to see if there was a difference in the importance of some events over others. This means that the number of articles of the newspapers from the same country and the peaks in the numbers of articles were compared. Then the position of the article in the newspaper was taken into consideration. If an article was printed on the front page it was obviously deemed very important, and the further on in the newspaper the article was published the less important it was deemed.

Thirdly, the articles were searched for the arguments mentioned by their respective governments. For the American newspapers these arguments were international law, the Act of Congress, and the absence of free will of the Dutch government. If the Right of Angary was specifically mentioned this was noted separately. This choice was made since the analysis

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<sup>67</sup> R. B. Allen and R. Siczekiewicz, “How Historians Use Historical Newspapers,” *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 47, no. 1 (2010): 2.

<sup>68</sup> “Selectieproces | Koninklijke Bibliotheek,” accessed July 20, 2018, <https://www.kb.nl/organisatie/onderzoek-expertise/digitaliseringsprojecten-in-de-kb/project-databank-digitale-dagbladen/geselecteerde-titels-en-selectieprocedure/selectieproces>; “Historical News Resources Catalog | ProQuest,” 17, 21–22, accessed July 20, 2018, <https://media2.proquest.com/documents/historicalnewsresources-catalog.pdf>.

showed that not all articles that mentioned international law, also mentioned the Right of Angary. Therefore, international law and the Right of Angary cannot be seen as one argument and should be noted separately in the analysis. For the Dutch newspapers the government's arguments were that the force of power used by the US government could not be defended by international law, since the Right of Angary was obsolete and not applicable, and the US government used inaccurate facts to justify the seizure. For each government argument used the articles were given a point, and in some cases half a point if not the entire argument was put forward. This happened for example when an article did mention the threats of the German government but did not necessarily link this to the inability of the Dutch government to carry out an agreement.

The fourth part of the analysis consisted of documenting the original arguments the articles discussed. These are arguments that were not mentioned by either government. The number of original arguments of the newspapers were compared. Aside from the differences and similarities in arguments, this also shows the difference in the number of original arguments. A newspaper that presented a low number of original arguments either agreed more with its government's arguments or considered the legitimacy to be of little importance. Finally, arguments that were emphasized were noted. An argument was considered emphasized if it was mentioned more than once or if it was explicitly deemed more important than other arguments in the article. The US and Dutch governments had emphasized arguments as well. For the US government this was the lack of free will of the Dutch government. The Dutch government emphasized the argument of incorrect facts. This will also be taken into consideration.

The selection of Dutch newspapers will consist of *De Telegraaf* and the *Algemeen Handelsblad*. Both newspapers were published and distributed daily and nationwide. Both newspapers had a large readership, and both have a fully available collection of March and April 1918 on Delpher. The number of subscribers of *De Telegraaf* grew rapidly during the war to thirty thousand in 1918.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, the *Algemeen Handelsblad* maintained its high number of subscribers throughout the war, which makes both newspapers useful in researching public opinion.<sup>70</sup> The selected American newspapers are the *New York Times*, because this was a very influential newspaper in the state New York where eighty-eight Dutch merchant vessels were seized, and the *Los Angeles Times*, because it was regarded as a high quality newspaper and had a large readership. Both the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* have a fully available collection of March and April 1918 in ProQuest's database. These four newspapers

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<sup>69</sup> Wolf, *Het Geheim van De Telegraaf*, 168.

<sup>70</sup> Schneider and Hemels, *De Nederlandse Krant 1618-1978*, 152–54.

cover: topical events; appear every day; cover regional, national, and international news about politics, economy, and culture; and are in principle available to anyone within their distributive area. The backgrounds of the newspapers will also be taken into account. The newspapers' backgrounds consist of the publishers, chief editors and journalists the newspapers had. However, the newspapers cannot simply be seen as platforms for the opinions of these people. As was explained when discussing the theoretical concepts, newspapers need readers to survive, which means they will publish news in a way that attracts their readers. This means that if a newspaper has many readers in a certain field of work, for example ship owners, it will publish more articles or more elaborate articles on a subject that affects these readers. The newspapers will emphasize what its readers think is important. Furthermore, during the First World War newspapers were the only way for people to find out about international affairs. This means newspapers shape public opinion as well as they are shaped by it. Therefore, opinions expressed in the newspapers can be considered to portray public opinion. Different newspapers might have different views, so it is not certain that one answer can be given for the American newspapers and one for the Dutch newspapers. As has been shown in the historiography, *De Telegraaf* had an outspoken preference for the Associated powers, while the *Algemeen Dagblad* leaned more towards the German side.

## **The governments and the seizure**

This chapter will describe and explain the arguments of the US and Dutch governments concerning the legitimacy of the seizure. This is done by discussing the official statements that were sent out and other documents of the Dutch and US governments concerning the seizure. An outline of the events followed by the views of the two governments will show a few problematic points in the arguments of both the US and the Dutch government.

### **Sequence of events**

From the beginning of the war, the US as a great neutral power, had been a protector of the rights of small neutral nations. The importance of the trade between the Netherlands and the US meant that the British government could not entirely cut the Netherlands off when they started their economic blockade of Germany. If the British government had included the Netherlands in the blockade, the US government would most likely have protested.<sup>71</sup> The entrance of the US into the war in April 1917, therefore, meant that the Dutch government lost a powerful ally. This became evident when, soon after declaring war on Germany, the US government started to put restrictions on export. These restrictions first concerned limiting the export of grain and fodder, as well as limiting the availability of bunker coal. The limited amounts that were exported or made available by the US were meant for other Associated powers. This, in combination with the dangerous route back to the Netherlands because of the German submarines, resulted in Dutch merchant vessels being unable to leave American ports.<sup>72</sup>

In November 1917, the British and US governments decided that Dutch merchant vessels within their jurisdiction would be seized unless the Dutch government agreed to voluntarily give up part of its merchant fleet. Meanwhile, the Dutch government tried to find a way to receive grain to hold off the impending shortage of food in the country. The Dutch government and the US and British governments, therefore, started negotiations.<sup>73</sup> Early January 1918, representatives of the governments came to a tentative agreement, which was sent to their governments for approval. The basis of this agreement stated that the US government would facilitate the import into the Netherlands of food, while the Dutch

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<sup>71</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 312.

<sup>72</sup> Brugmans, *Geschiedenis van Den Wereldoorlog, 1914-1918*, 207.

<sup>73</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 371.

government would make sure that Dutch merchant vessels would start sailing for the Associated governments outside the danger-zones.

However, the negotiations dragged on after that as both governments could not fully agree with the tentative agreement. This led to a proposal of the Dutch delegates later in January to get the Dutch vessels, which had been lying idle in American ports for months, out on sea again. It was proposed that Dutch vessels in American waters could be chartered to the US government for periods of no more than ninety days. The chartered ships would not be armed and would not sail in the danger-zones. This was meant as a temporary solution, so the Dutch vessels could sail out while the negotiations to come to a final agreement continued. The US government agreed and on January 25, 1918, the Dutch Minister in Washington handed a note containing the agreement and the approval of the Dutch government to the Secretary of State of the US. 150 thousand tons of Dutch shipping would be used for to supply Belgium and Switzerland at the discretion of the US. The US would make sure the Dutch ships would not be seized or sunk as they sailed to Cette, a French port, from where the supplies would be transported to Switzerland. For each ship sent to the Netherlands in service of Belgian Relief a corresponding vessel would have to leave the Netherlands for an American port. Meanwhile, two Dutch ships in American ports would be sent to the Netherlands with food supplies, while similar tonnage would be exchanged to be chartered to the US government as well as the other ships in American ports. The agreement was explicitly temporary and would have to be put to action immediately.<sup>74</sup>

The US government started to charter Dutch ships to supply Switzerland and Belgium, when the Dutch government suddenly enclosed that the German government threatened to sink all Dutch ships that set out for an American port or were chartered by the US government. These threats were put forward in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* and the Wolff press agency, both unofficial mouthpieces of the German government. The Dutch government was, therefore, unable to carry out a part of the agreement and the US government stopped the chartered ships that had sailed out before they left American waters. Nearly two months passed with continued negotiations and little action on the temporary agreement, which lead to a final proposal, or ultimatum, that was sent to the Dutch government on March 8. This ultimatum stated that the Dutch government had to let the Associated governments use Dutch ships to transport supplies to the front. Unlike any previous attempts to come to an agreement, this time

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<sup>74</sup> Public Statement by President Wilson Regarding the Taking Over of Dutch Ships by the United States, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Supplement 1, The World War, Volume II, 1918*, 1418.



the Dutch ships would have to transport war material and sail in the danger-zones. The ultimatum expired on March 18 and the Dutch government replied at the last moment with a counterproposal. In this counterproposal the Dutch government made clear it would not be able to transport war material, but that it was willing to let the Dutch ships sail in the danger-zone. The Dutch government thought making a concession could lead to further negotiations. The US government, however, saw this as a rejection and on March 20, 1918, Dutch merchant vessels in American ports were seized. A day later the British government followed by seizing all Dutch vessels in British ports as well.<sup>75</sup>

### **US government**

As explained above, in January of 1918 a temporary agreement was made to charter Dutch ships to the US government. However, the US government claimed that before the temporary agreement was put to action the Dutch government disclosed that it was not able to carry it out. Though it was never openly expressed by the Dutch government, the US government assumed that threats from the German government stopped the Dutch government from following up the agreement, because the German government had made clear that it would prevent any Dutch ship with an American port as its destination from leaving. Two months passed and according to the US government the Dutch government did not follow up on the agreement. Meanwhile, German threats became more violent. This affected the trust that the negotiations would lead to a permanent settlement and, according to the US government, prevented the Dutch government from fulfilling any temporary agreement. Wilson said that the German threats meant that the ‘essential basis for an agreement, namely, the meeting of free wills, is absent.’<sup>76</sup> According to his public statement that was issued on March 20, the Dutch government lacked the power of independent action, which made any future agreement worthless.

The lack of independent power of the Dutch government was the first argument of the US government that legitimized the seizure in its eyes. This meant that the counterproposal the Dutch government made when it was issued the ultimatum was also considered a waste of time in the eyes of the US government. According to the US government the counterproposal would have led to continued negotiations if the circumstances had been different. However, the temporary agreement had shown that the Dutch government lacked power to undertake any

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<sup>75</sup> Public Statement by President Wilson Regarding the Taking Over of Dutch Ships by the United States, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1418–19.

<sup>76</sup> Public Statement by President Wilson Regarding the Taking Over of Dutch Ships by the United States, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1419.

independent action, so the US government said there was no other option but to seize the Dutch merchant vessels.<sup>77</sup>

The lack of independent power of the Dutch government was not the only argument the US government used to legitimize the seizure. It also based the legitimacy of the seizure on international law and the sovereign rights of the US government. In his proclamation of March 20, 1918, President Wilson stated that ‘the law and practice of nations accords to a belligerent power the right in time of military exigency and for purposes essential to the prosecution of war, to take over and utilize neutral vessels lying within its jurisdiction.’<sup>78</sup> This specifically referred to the Right of Angary, which gave a belligerent the right to take over and use neutral vessels in case of military exigency. It was custom to pay the owners of the vessels some kind of compensation. The Right of Angary was used at this point in time because the delay of the negotiations had altered the circumstances. The previous condition that the Dutch vessels would not be used in the danger-zones could no longer be upheld, especially not since the German government was expected to extend these zones.<sup>79</sup> The military exigency was caused by the peace between Germany and Russia in the beginning of March. This newfound peace meant that the German army no longer had to fight the Russian army in the east of Europe and its troops could be moved to the western front, where the war with the Associated governments was being fought. The US government wanted to get its troops on European land as soon as possible since the German government would intensify the war on the western front. This could mean a victory for Germany if the US government was not able to get enough troops and supplies to the front on time.<sup>80</sup>

Wilson also used the Act of Congress of June 15, 1917. This Act accords the power to the President of the US to take over any vessels within the jurisdiction of the US for use by the US government. The US government considered this its sovereign right and saw no reason why the seizure could be seen as illegitimate. Meanwhile, the US government did everything it could to make the seizure as little burdensome for the Dutch government and the ship owners. It was made clear that any ships that would arrive in an American port after March 21 would not be seized, that the ships would be returned to their owners at the end of the war, and a

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<sup>77</sup> Public Statement by President Wilson Regarding the Taking Over of Dutch Ships by the United States, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1419.

<sup>78</sup> Proclamation No. 1436, March 20, 1918, with Regard to the Possession and Utilization of Vessels of the Netherlands, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1416.

<sup>79</sup> Public Statement by President Wilson Regarding the Taking Over of Dutch Ships by the United States, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1421.

<sup>80</sup> Jerald A. Combs, *The History of American Foreign Policy from 1895* (Routledge, 2015), 97.

compensation would be paid for any losses and for the use of the ships.<sup>81</sup> The Associated governments would make 50 thousand tons of grain available in a North-American port and 50 thousand tons in a South-American port, since they were aware that the Netherlands was likely to have a shortage of grain halfway through 1918. The Dutch government would have to send ships to collect these cargoes. These ships would be free of any delay and would receive every facility for bunkering, as far as this was within the power of the Associated governments. This effectively put the blame on the German government if the Dutch people would still suffer from food shortage. Any ships that would be lost in the danger-zones would be replaced as soon after the war as possible and the US government would make it possible for Dutch crews to be returned to the Netherlands as soon as possible, if they wished to return, and to treat them with every courtesy and consideration until they could return.<sup>82</sup>

### **Dutch government**

The official response of the Dutch government was not made public until March 30, but before then the Dutch Prime Minister and the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs already expressed their opinion in several debates. The Dutch government deemed the seizure illegitimate, because it was indefensible on grounds of international law and the decision was based on incorrect facts. The Dutch government also stated that the seizure broke with the traditional friendship between the US and the Netherlands. According to the Dutch government the US government seized the vessels, because it was more powerful and knew the Dutch government would not be able to do anything to stop it.<sup>83</sup>

The Right of Angary was not recognized by the Dutch government. It was seen as an obsolete right, that had long been out of use. During the two conventions in The Hague before the war the right had been discussed, since it was used by the German government during the Franco-Prussian war. At this conference, delegates of several states spoke out against the Right of Angary. One of those was the delegate of the US, which is why the Dutch government found it difficult to understand why the US government used the right now. Furthermore, even if the Right of Angary was recognized, the Dutch government stated it was still not applicable to the current situation. According to the Dutch government the circumstances had not changed in

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<sup>81</sup> Public Statement by President Wilson Regarding the Taking Over of Dutch Ships by the United States, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1420–21.

<sup>82</sup> Communication to be made by the British Minister in the Netherlands (Townley) to the Netherland Minister of Foreign Affairs (Loudon), *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1422.

<sup>83</sup> C. van der Linden and J. Loudon, “Verklaring van de Nederlandsche Regeering Naar Aanleiding van de Proclamatie Met Bijgevoegde Verklaring van de President Der Vereenigde Staten Dd. 20 Maart Jl.,” *Staatscourant*, March 30, 1918, 1–2.

such a way that it became essential for the US government to seize the Dutch merchant vessels. The newfound peace between Germany and Russia was not seen as sufficient reason to cause military exigency.<sup>84</sup>

The official response of the Dutch government also stated that the description of the negotiations and the events surrounding the temporary charter agreement in the statement of the US government were incorrect. The Dutch government fully intended to act on the temporary agreement, and actually did so. Several ships were chartered to the US government and sailed out. Not long after these ships sailed out, the Dutch government heard about plans of the German government to sink Dutch vessels sailing for American purposes. The Dutch government immediately notified the US government so the ships that sailed out could change their route and the cargo, ships, and men would remain safe. These German threats were aimed at the ships that were meant to supply Belgium. This was a service that was agreed upon by both belligerent parties and that the Dutch government had no say in. Therefore, the Dutch government argued that the Associated and Central governments would have to come to an agreement on this and it was not the fault of the Dutch government.<sup>85</sup>

The Dutch ships that were chartered by the US government to sail to France in order to deliver supplies for Switzerland, were not threatened in the same way since there was no need to send ships with a corresponding amount of tonnage from the Netherlands in return. These ships, however, did encounter difficulty with their telegrams. These telegrams were delayed and were sometimes not received at all, which meant that the service was often delayed. However, these ships were chartered to the US government and they did sail. The Dutch government, therefore, deemed the accusation that the temporary agreement had not been put to action false. Furthermore, the Dutch government did not own the ships in American ports and could not force the ship owners to charter their ship.<sup>86</sup>

The Dutch government also stated that there was no pressure from the German government and even if the German government had made threats the Dutch government would not have yielded to them.<sup>87</sup> The Dutch government was also not aware that the proposal of March 8 had been an ultimatum. It was received in the Netherlands as another proposal in the negotiations and, therefore, the reply was a counterproposal. The entire decision of the US

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<sup>84</sup> van der Linden and Loudon, 1–2.

<sup>85</sup> van der Linden and Loudon, 1–2.

<sup>86</sup> “Nederland En de Oorlog. Nederland En de Geassocieerden,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 24, 1918, morning edition, 5.

<sup>87</sup> van der Linden and Loudon, “Verklaring van de Nederlandsche Regeering,” 2.

government to seize the Dutch vessels was, thus, based on incorrect facts according to the Dutch government.<sup>88</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The US government deemed the seizure legitimate, because it claimed the seizure was based on international law and an Act of Congress. The Right of Angary and the Act of Congress of June 15, 1917, allowed the US government to take over and utilize any neutral vessel within its jurisdiction in case of military exigency if the owners were compensated. Furthermore, the US government did not see a possibility to come to an agreement with the Dutch government, because the Dutch government lacked independent power of action. This was caused by threats from the German government. The US government claimed this was proven by the inability of the Dutch government to carry out the temporary charter agreement.

The Dutch government deemed the seizure illegitimate, because it was indefensible on the grounds of international law and the decision was based on incorrect facts. The Right of Angary was seen as obsolete and even that was not the case, it was still not applicable to the situation, because there was no military exigency in the eyes of the Dutch government. According to the Dutch government there were no threats of the German government and if there were the Dutch government would not have yielded to them. The Dutch government did not own the ships in question and could thus not force them to sail out. Therefore, it would not have mattered if the Dutch government would or would not yield to German threats. The Dutch government also claimed that the temporary charter agreement was at least partly carried out, since several Dutch ships had set sail to France.

However, the Dutch government contradicts itself in its statement. At first, it states that there were no threats from the German government, while later on it is said that the Dutch government warned the US government about German threats concerning the chartered ships. It is certain that there were threats from the German government to sink all Dutch ships that sailed under an agreement between the Dutch government and the US government, but this did not prevent the entire agreement from being carried out. It was put forward in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* and the Wolff press agency. The US government on its turn, did not mention the ships that sailed to France on the terms of the temporary charter agreement. It only mentioned the Dutch ships that were supposed to sail to the Netherlands with supplies for

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<sup>88</sup> The Minister in the Netherlands (Garrett) to the Secretary of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1429–30.

Belgium. Therefore, it neither confirmed nor denied that the Dutch government did deliver on part of the temporary agreement.

## The newspapers

The next subject that needs to be covered are the backgrounds of the newspapers used for my research. Their audience, political ties or preferences, their owners, and chief editors influenced what was published. What was published also depended on the attitude of the government towards the press and the information that was available. Background information of the newspapers, their political environment and their sources are, therefore, incredibly valuable to determine the reasons behind expressed opinions.

### American press

At the outbreak of the war the US remained neutral, but public opinion leaned towards the side of the Entente as urban daily newspapers showed clear preference for the British and French. Reports on the behavior of the German army in Belgium and Northern France added to the already existing ideas about Prussian militarism and pushed public opinion even further into the corner of the Entente. American journalists were allowed access to the Western front by France and Great-Britain as part of the propaganda aim of the British to get the American public on its side. Reuters, a British press agency, received payment from the British government to provide propaganda material to neutral countries. This had a large impact on newspapers, which were not able to send their own reporters to Europe.<sup>89</sup> Particularly the unrestricted submarine warfare declared by the German government on February 1, 1917, caused many American journalists to morally judge the Central Powers. Furthermore, the British government controlled the Atlantic Cables, making it nearly impossible for the American press to receive uncensored reports unless American reporters travelled back and forth, which was a dangerous and long route. The reports on the submarine warfare helped to get the American public in line with the idea of going to war. The American press adopted a patriotic stance on the subject as the US government declared war on Germany.<sup>90</sup>

George Creel, an investigative journalist, was appointed by Wilson to head the United States Committee on Public Information (CPI) in April of 1917. He considered his job the most adventures one in advertising and tried to convince the American public that entering the war was in line with the tradition of American foreign policy. The CPI placed advertisements in magazines and newspapers, distributed pamphlets, rented billboard signs on the side of the road

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<sup>89</sup> Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb, *The International Distribution of News: The Associated Press, Press Association, and Reuters, 1848–1947* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 129, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139522489>.

<sup>90</sup> A. Miller, "Press/Journalism (USA)," *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, 2017, 2–3.

and electric signs in the cities, encouraged filmmakers to shoot patriotic films, and worked closely with journalists to supply them with propaganda.<sup>91</sup>

Newspapers took up a uniform position and reinforced positive viewpoints of the war by promoting its economic opportunities as well as the humanitarian side Wilson promoted. This was partly caused by the close cultural affinity with the Entente powers, partly by what the public wanted to read, and partly by the available information as many newspapers started to copy one another. Censorship took place in different forms. The Espionage Act of 1917, followed by the Sedition Act of 1918, discouraged any public statement against the war. Self-censorship was also present. From the start of the war in 1914, American newspapers had promoted the economic opportunities of the war and they could not easily turn back on years of positivity now that the US had entered the war.<sup>92</sup>

Though the war was used to make ethnic and geographic differences smaller, they were still apparent in the American press. Doubt was expressed concerning the competence of immigrant soldiers and African-American soldiers received little to no attention in the mainstream press. Japanese- and German-Americans found themselves in increasingly difficult situations as the press encouraged the public to keep a close eye on every possible spy. Irish-Americans felt a lot of hostility towards the British, because of the actions of the British government in Ireland. Four Irish newspapers were shut down after the US entered the war and the mainstream press published stories about Irish-German plots against the Associated governments. The newspapers in the South called concerns on export of cotton to the attention, while East Coast newspapers were primarily concerned with naval warfare and attacks on the merchant fleet, and Midwestern newspapers printed articles about opportunities to sell grain abroad.<sup>93</sup> This shows that the location, primary audience, staff, and ethnic background of the newspapers determined what the newspaper focused on.

## **New York Times**

Adolph Ochs bought the *New York Times* in 1896 and his goal was “to give the news impartially, without fear or favor, regardless of party, sect or interests involved.”<sup>94</sup> When Ochs took over the newspaper, it was on the verge of going bankrupt and he reorganized both the look of the paper and its content. He wanted to attract merchants and tradesmen by emphasizing

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<sup>91</sup> Miller, 3.

<sup>92</sup> Miller, 4–5.

<sup>93</sup> Miller, 6–7.

<sup>94</sup> Susan E. Tift and Alex S. Jones, *The Trust. The Private and Powerful Family behind the New York Times*, 1st ed. (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), 43.



financial news, since this suited his conservative taste as well as his business interests. Within a few years, the *New York Times* was the leading newspaper when it came to financial news. Ochs also added a books and art review, which attracted a lot of women to the newspaper.<sup>95</sup>

During the war, the circulation of the *New York Times* rose and the newspaper was unrivaled in its coverage of the war. Its managing editor, Carr Van Anda, studied military maps and movements, so he could anticipate far enough in advance to send reporters to the location before any other newspaper. The newspaper was also renowned for publishing official speeches and reports from all parties involved. For its reports on the war the *New York Times* received the Pulitzer Prize for disinterested and meritorious public service in June 1918, and in spite of the high cost of wartime cables the newspaper soared financially.<sup>96</sup>

The newspaper encountered some trouble towards the end of the war when the Austrian government offered a discussion of peace terms. The US government immediately refused the offer and both the Austrian offer and the American refusal were printed on the front page of the *New York Times*. Ochs and Van Anda were hopeful that peace was at hand since they both had family fighting in Europe and agreed that they had to be cautious with the editorial piece on the matter. Charles R. Miller, editor and writer of war editorials, wrote the editorial piece from his summer home. He wrote that the Austrian offer could not be refused, since it could end the bloodshed in Europe. His absence at the office meant that he was not aware that the US government had already refused the offer and many sponsors, advertisers and subscribers denounced the newspaper.<sup>97</sup>

The rise in subscribers during the war, meant that the *New York Times* was popular among the public and that its articles and editorials must have resonated with many Americans. This makes the newspaper valuable for research of this period. Furthermore, the newspaper's goal to provide impartial news leads to a hypothesis about the outcome of the research. Based on this goal, the newspaper's articles concerning the seizure should provide space for both the US and Dutch governments arguments and an objective discussion on the legitimacy. However, the general attitude of American newspapers during the war suggests that the *New York Times* most likely followed the opinion of the US government.

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<sup>95</sup> Tift and Jones, 43–44.

<sup>96</sup> Tift and Jones, 118.

<sup>97</sup> Tift and Jones, 118–20.

## Los Angeles Times

Harrison Gray Otis was the owner and editor of the *Los Angeles Times* until 1917, and a devoted Republican. When he became editor of the newspaper in 1882, his goal was to increase his share of ownership of the newspaper, impose his own views and standards on what was published, heighten the quality and prestige of the newspaper, and enlarge its size, circulation and influence.<sup>98</sup> Otis promoted Los Angeles and its region extensively and thought he had a political duty, not just in Los Angeles and its region but nationwide. He used the newspaper to promote politicians of his choice. This meant that his newspaper was not considered to have a lower credibility than the *New York Times*.<sup>99</sup>

In 1917, the *Los Angeles Times* was taken over by Harry Chandler, Otis' son in law, who turned it into the leading newspaper of the West. Chandler was a successful businessman, who held a lot of influence in the newspaper from around 1900. He devoted a lot of time to the growth of Los Angeles and the West of the US. Chandler bought a lot of land and real estate, which caused the *Los Angeles Times* to gain a lot of real estate advertisements.<sup>100</sup> He was involved in establishing a steady water supply for Los Angeles and tried to do whatever he could to attract new industries to the city. One of these new industries was that of making airplanes, which showed great potential during the First World War. Many of the tests that had to be conducted on planes had to be done outside and Los Angeles provided the right conditions.<sup>101</sup>

Chandler usually read the editorials after they went to print and did not really get involved until the newspaper received complaints.<sup>102</sup> The writers and editors of the newspaper did not shy away from a one-sided approach and often judged individuals or events if they were in any way conflictual with the main goal of the newspaper, which was to promote Los Angeles and its region.<sup>103</sup>

The main focus of the *Los Angeles Times* on its own city and region meant that national and international news was not considered as important as local news. Therefore, it can be expected that the seizure did not receive a lot of attention in the newspaper and the number of articles will be lower than that of the *New York Times*. The substantial number of subscribers makes the *Los Angeles Times* valuable for the research, but its tendency to present one-sided

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<sup>98</sup> M. Berges, *The Life and Times of Los Angeles: A Newspaper, a Family, and a City*, 1st edition (New York: Atheneum, 1984), 12.

<sup>99</sup> Berges, 25–27.

<sup>100</sup> Berges, 32–34.

<sup>101</sup> Berges, 41–43.

<sup>102</sup> Berges, 45.

<sup>103</sup> Berges, 52–53.

news means that the articles concerning the seizure can be expected to be one-sided as well. Considering the tendency of American newspapers to side with the US government during the war, the *Los Angeles Times* will have most likely agreed with the US government and only printed the arguments the US government used.

### **Associated Press**

The Associated Press (AP) was an American press agency, which provided news reports to almost every big newspaper in the US during the First World War. Since most of the analyzed articles in the *Los Angeles Times* originate from the AP, it is useful to take a closer look at this agency. Before the First World War cooperation between the AP and the three main press agencies in Europe, Reuter, Havas and Wolff, increased. The war and, especially, the amount of propaganda the European agencies distributed to neutral countries disrupted cooperation and made it difficult to obtain impartial news from the fronts. Furthermore, the British government had cut the Atlantic cables between Germany and the US, so the American newspapers mostly received Entente propaganda.<sup>104</sup>

By 1897, the AP had eliminated its rivals and held full control over American newsgathering. The AP charter entitled the agency to ‘buy, gather and accumulate information and news; to vend, supply, distribute and publish the same.’<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, the AP sold, leased and purchased telegraph and telephone lines and other means to transmit news and to publish and deal in newspapers.<sup>106</sup> In 1914, 895 out of about 2500 newspapers in the US were members of the AP, this included the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*. The AP was an exclusive agency, which meant not every newspaper could become a member. For example, if a newspaper that was already a member felt threatened by a newspaper applying for membership this newspaper would not be allowed to become a member. This exclusivity meant that newspapers with AP membership were worth more, but it also made it difficult for the AP to expand any further. The AP did not develop a significant staff of its own until the 1930s. This meant that before then the quality of its reports was dependent on its members, since members contributed local news.<sup>107</sup>

During the First World War, the AP encountered difficulty in reporting European news. The agency’s reporters lacked connections with the local press and European press agencies

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<sup>104</sup> Silberstein-Loeb, *The International Distribution of News*, 204.

<sup>105</sup> Silberstein-Loeb, 46.

<sup>106</sup> Silberstein-Loeb, 46.

<sup>107</sup> Silberstein-Loeb, 69–72.

provided little help. Belligerent countries were willing to provide censored or propaganda pieces, but it proved to be difficult to receive unbiased reports. American newspapers could, therefore, not rely on the AP for war reports and had to send their own reporters to Europe.<sup>108</sup>

### **Dutch press**

Immediately after the start of the war in 1914, the Dutch government asked the Dutch press to be reserved in reports on the war. This request was made to protect the neutrality, which could be damaged if the Dutch press openly supported a belligerent. The Dutch government did not think it was necessary to put the Dutch press under any form of official censorship. In general, the Dutch press tried to give neutral reports of what was happening at the front, which was not always easy.<sup>109</sup> Though most large papers sent their own reporters to the front, a large part of the news on the war came from foreign press agencies. These press agencies were often under censorship of their government and therefore did not always provide objective reports. It was, however, possible for Dutch newspaper editors to receive reports on the same event from different press agencies and balance out the article that eventually appeared in the Dutch newspaper.<sup>110</sup>

Most of the Dutch reporters that were sent to the front at the beginning of the war, were called back when the initial excitement wore off. Furthermore, journalists were not always allowed near the front. At the front in France they were carefully selected and only allowed to see empty fields where battles had taken place. At the front in Russia and in Austria-Hungary there was less supervision on journalists and it was easier to gain access. The trenches in Belgium and northern France could only be visited with a guide. This limited objective reports, because the journalists only saw and heard one side of the story.<sup>111</sup>

The German side of the front in western Europe could be visited by going to the *Neutrales Kriegs-Pressquartier* in Berlin. The *Pressquartier* supplied information on the situation on the battlefields and organized trips for the journalists to the front. Journalists noted that the information was clearly one-sided and that the German authorities closely watched the neutral reporters. Journalists were only allowed to join the trips of the *Pressquartier* under certain conditions. They were not allowed to write about the mood of the soldiers, the mentality of the civilians of the occupied areas, the food supplies, and the exact locations of the trenches,

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<sup>108</sup> Silberstein-Loeb, 208.

<sup>109</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 265.

<sup>110</sup> Moeyes, 266.

<sup>111</sup> Moeyes, 270–71.

troops and weaponry. All articles then had to be translated to German and given to a censor before they could be sent to the redaction of the newspaper the journalist worked for. The Allied side of the front in France and Belgium was more difficult to reach. The Dutch journalists had to go to Great Britain first, and the trip across the channel was very dangerous. German submarines could sink the ships the journalists traveled on. Furthermore, the information the Dutch journalists would then receive at the front in France and Belgium was still biased.<sup>112</sup> This made it difficult, if not impossible, to write impartially.

### **Algemeen Handelsblad**

The *Algemeen Handelsblad* was a liberal and protestant newspaper during the First World War.<sup>113</sup> Unlike many other newspapers at that time, the *Algemeen Handelsblad* had no formal link to any political party. Its liberal roots meant that the newspaper stood for freedom of press and opinion. Since no political party directed the course of the newspaper, its course was determined by the opinion of its chief editor, which was Alfred Boissevain during the war. During his father's and his reign at the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, the newspaper was characterized as conservative.<sup>114</sup> At the start of the twentieth century, the newspaper had the largest number of reporters, but this position was slowly taken over by *De Telegraaf* in the first two decades.<sup>115</sup>

The newspaper had slight German sympathies during the war, since Germany was very important for the Dutch economy. However, most of the time the *Algemeen Handelsblad* conformed to the guidelines set out by the Dutch government and published neutral reports. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* relied on war reports from Max Blokzijl, a company commander. In 1917 he was sent to Berlin by the newspaper to the *Pressequartier*.<sup>116</sup> It is to be expected that most of the articles in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* concerning the seizure would have followed the opinion of the Dutch government. Since this fit with its general tendency to stick to the government's guidelines. Furthermore, the Dutch government was very critical of the

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<sup>112</sup> Moeyes, 272.

<sup>113</sup> Cordula Rooijendijk, *That City Is Mine!: Urban Ideal Images in Public Debates and City Plans, Amsterdam & Rotterdam 1945-1995* (Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 23; R. van der Hoeven, *Twee kranten, twee paleizen. Over de oorsprong van NRC Handelsblad* (NRC Boeken, 2010), 16, [https://www.rug.nl/research/portal/publications/twee-kranten-twee-paleizen-over-de-oorsprong-van-nrc-handelsblad\(70e1f402-45c1-49c6-8c8e-a33193aab639\).html](https://www.rug.nl/research/portal/publications/twee-kranten-twee-paleizen-over-de-oorsprong-van-nrc-handelsblad(70e1f402-45c1-49c6-8c8e-a33193aab639).html).

<sup>114</sup> Hoeven, *Twee kranten, twee paleizen. Over de oorsprong van NRC Handelsblad*, 16–18.

<sup>115</sup> Hoeven, 25.

<sup>116</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten schot*, 272.

actions of the Associated governments, which must have resonated with the slight German preference of the newspaper.

## **De Telegraaf**

On August 1, 1914, H.M.C. Holdert, the owner of *De Telegraaf*, openly stated that his newspaper would be pro-French for the duration of the war. The editors, writers and illustrators of *De Telegraaf* did everything to put the Central powers in a bad light and support the Allies. Holdert thus ignored the request of the Dutch government to remain cautious and not to provoke any of the belligerents. In the years before the war, the owner had already shown that he did not conform to any rules when it came to journalism and the war would be no different.<sup>117</sup>

The anti-German sentiment carried out by Holdert, found resonance with the people who worked for the newspaper. The correspondent in Paris, Alexander Cohen, was clearly pro-French and, therefore, relieved to hear Holdert's statement in August since he was afraid he might have to leave the newspaper otherwise. Cartoonist Louis Raemaekers, who had Belgian connections, and John van der Veer, the correspondent in London, were also clearly anti-German. At first the chief editor J.C. Schröder tried to limit the anti-German contributions to the paper in order to maintain a semblance of neutrality. However, Holdert soon took more control of the newspaper and allowed his employees to be as supportive of the Associated powers as they wished.<sup>118</sup>

Before the war, *De Telegraaf* was seen by the German Foreign Office as very German friendly, though even then Cohen and Raemaekers were already anti-German. This was caused by the German correspondent L.W.F.J. Grapperhaus and his successor G. Simons. Both had close connections to the German Foreign Office and reportedly made deals with German companies and officials to create goodwill for their cause in the Netherlands. As a correspondent in Berlin, Simons had lost his value during the war and was called back to the Netherlands in 1915.<sup>119</sup>

During the war, employees of *De Telegraaf* were reprimanded more than once by the Dutch government. Endangering the neutrality of the Netherlands was punishable by law, which shows that the press was not as free as the Dutch government claimed. The Dutch government was, however, very careful in putting this law to action since it did not wish to be accused of censorship. The Minister of Justice, Ort, thought it was better to try to persuade

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<sup>117</sup> Wolf, *Het Geheim van De Telegraaf*, 124–26.

<sup>118</sup> Wolf, 126.

<sup>119</sup> Wolf, 127.

Holdert to be more careful. Loudon, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, had several meetings with Holdert and some of his employees on the subject and tried to solve the problem without bringing it to court.<sup>120</sup> These tactics had no effect and at the end of 1915 Schröder was charged and arrested for endangering the neutrality. This caused a lot of commotion among the Dutch people and other press, especially when the court acquitted Schröder. Holdert did not want his employees to be charged for something like this again and fired Schröder as chief editor. Schröder maintained a position at the newspaper, but Holdert now took full responsibility for anything that was published.<sup>121</sup> This shows that officially there might not have been censorship, but the government did try to interfere in what the press wrote.

*De Telegraaf* was thus not afraid to openly disagree with the Dutch government and write one-sided reports on the war. It is to be expected that the articles of this newspaper on the seizure, did not follow the argumentation of the Dutch government. This argumentation was critical of the Associated governments, while *De Telegraaf* did everything it could to promote these governments. The newspaper often disagreed with how the Dutch government conducted itself. Therefore, the articles on the seizure will most likely be critical of the position of the Dutch government and, since the newspaper was anti-German, will have highlighted the role of the German government in the seizure.

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<sup>120</sup> Wolf, 136–38.

<sup>121</sup> Wolf, 142–46.

## **Newspaper analysis**

In this chapter the analysis of the newspapers will be discussed. As explained in the methodology, the articles were analyzed in five steps. The order of those steps will be followed in this chapter. Meaning that first the number of articles a day, then the dates on which these articles were published, the placement of the articles in the newspaper, the government's arguments that were used, the scores of the newspapers when it came to those arguments, and lastly the original arguments that were used, will be discussed. The final step of the emphasized arguments will be dealt with in combination with the government's and original arguments. First both American newspapers will be discussed and compared, followed by the Dutch newspapers.

### **American newspapers**

The graph below shows the number of articles published each day in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* in March and April 1918. The first observation is that there is a clear difference in the number of articles in the two newspapers. The *Los Angeles Times* published seventeen articles concerning the seizure and the *New York Times* forty-five. A second observation is that in March the peaks in the number of articles in both newspapers, though differing in height, largely correspond. The only exception to this in March is that the *New York Times* published its first article a lot earlier, namely on March 8, than the *Los Angeles Times*, which published its first article on March 15. The *New York Times* reached the highest peak in articles on March 15 and 16 with four articles on both days. The *Los Angeles Times* reached its highest peak in articles on March 21. In April the peaks appear at completely different times and the dates of the last published articles are quite far apart. The *Los Angeles Times* published the last article on April 28, while the *New York Times* stopped reporting on the issue on April 23. The newspapers, thus, saw a different start and end to the subject.



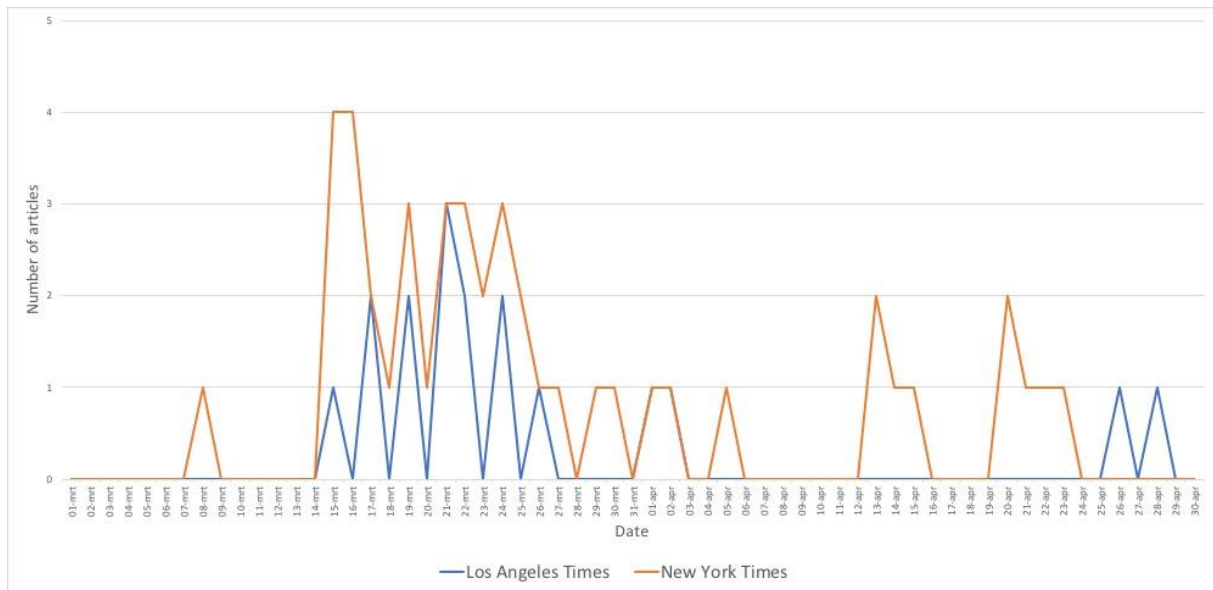


Figure 1: Number of articles published in the Los Angeles Times and New York Times during March and April 1918.

The first article in the *Los Angeles Times*, stated that the Associated governments would seize Dutch ships if the Dutch government did not accept the ultimatum.<sup>122</sup> The first article in the *New York Times*, concerned the chartered Dutch ships and threat the German government posed to Dutch shipping. Furthermore, it compared the situation of the Netherlands to that of other neutral states.<sup>123</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* did not report on the threats of the German government to the charter agreement until after the US government made public that those threats prevented the Dutch government from acting on the agreement. Meanwhile, the *New York Times* already reported on the threats on March 8. The US government made the ultimatum and the impact of the threats public on the same day. However, the ultimatum is not mentioned in the article, so it can be concluded that the article was printed before the ultimatum became public. The *New York Times* thus found the threats worth reporting on without the US government’s mention of them. This already put the *Los Angeles Times* more in line with the US government than the *New York Times*, since it did not speculate about the importance of the German threats before the US government made the ultimatum public.

In the *New York Times* the first article was followed by a period of silence on the subject until four articles were published on March 15. This is the highest number of articles the *New York Times* published on the subject in one day. Two of the articles disclosed that the Associated governments no longer wanted to negotiate with the Dutch government and planned to seize the Dutch ships in Associated ports on the following Monday. This is the first time the

<sup>122</sup> “Allies Will Seize Holland’s Shipping,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1918, morning edition, 1.

<sup>123</sup> “The Chartered Neutral Ships,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1918, 10.

ultimatum was mentioned.<sup>124</sup> The third article mentioned the number of Dutch ships in American ports, their tonnage and condition.<sup>125</sup> The final article of that day was about the German government's intention to starve the people of all neutral states.<sup>126</sup> The peak in the number of articles continued on March 16, in which the negotiations were discussed as well as the changing circumstances, the ultimatum issued to the Dutch government, and the reaction of the German government to the rumored seizure.<sup>127</sup> The reason behind the peak can be found in the ultimatum and the fact that it was close to expiring. Therefore, the seizure became more likely to happen, which was considered important enough to publish such a large number of articles on.

The number of articles published in one day in the *Los Angeles Times*, reached its peak on March 21, a day after the seizure. These three articles contained the proclamation of Wilson, the debate of Dutch politicians on the possibility of the seizure and a report on how the seizure was carried out and how the Dutch crews were treated.<sup>128</sup> In the storyline of the negotiations, the temporary agreement, the actual seizure, and the protest of the Dutch government following it, the seizure itself was clearly deemed the most important by the newspaper. The *New York Times* also published three articles on March 21. This was one article less than on March 15 and 16, which means it was still a significant peak. The same number of articles was published a day later. The articles printed on March 21 and 22, respectively one and two days after the seizure, concerned practical matters like the proclamation and public statement of Wilson, a report of the seizure itself, the inventory of the seized ships, and the response in Dutch parliament.<sup>129</sup> The seizure itself and the official procedures surrounding it were thus considered almost as important as the ultimatum by the *New York Times*.

The *Los Angeles Times* followed up its first article with two articles on March 17 and two on March 19. The first two articles concerned the likelihood of the Dutch government

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<sup>124</sup> "Allies Tired of Delay," *New York Times*, March 15, 1918, 2; "Dutch Ships to Be Seized next Monday," *New York Times*, March 15, 1918, 1-2.

<sup>125</sup> "Eighty Ships Involved Here," *New York Times*, March 15, 1918, 2.

<sup>126</sup> "Germany Striking at All Neutrals," *New York Times*, March 15, 1918, 1, 7.

<sup>127</sup> "America's Task Grimmer," *New York Times*, March 16, 1918, 1, 3; "Holland's Plight Fault of Germany," *New York Times*, March 16, 1918, 4; "Seizure Enrages Teutons," *New York Times*, March 16, 1918, 4; "The Dutch Ships," *New York Times*, March 16, 1918, 12.

<sup>128</sup> "Holland Is Defiant - Allies Seize Her Shipping," *Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 1918, morning edition, 1-2; "Hollanders Embittered by Seizure of Vessels," *Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 1918, morning edition, 1-2; "Naval Reserve to Man Holland's Ships Seized - American Flag Raised over Dutch Ships," *Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 1918, morning edition, 2.

<sup>129</sup> "Dutch Cabinet Shaken by Ship Controversy," *New York Times*, March 21, 1918, 2; "Navy Officers Here Get Seizure Order," *New York Times*, March 21, 1918, 2; "Wilson Orders Dutch Ships Seized," 1-2; "Dutch Ships to Rush Cereals to Allies," *New York Times*, March 22, 1918, 5; "Holland's Attitude Forced Ship Seizures," *New York Times*, March 22, 1918, 5; "Invoice Property Aboard Dutch Ships," *New York Times*, March 22, 1918, 5.

agreeing to the terms set out in the ultimatum and the possible response of the German government if the seizure were to happen.<sup>130</sup> The two on March 19, reported the reaction on the stock market to a possible seizure and an overview of the preparations of the seizure.<sup>131</sup> The legitimacy of the seizure was then covered in the two articles on March 22, the arguments of which will be discussed in the third step of the analysis.<sup>132</sup> The other articles that appeared in March discussed the position of the Netherlands and its government in the war, a report of the first Dutch ships that entered American service, and the US government's assurance to the Dutch ship owners that their ships would not be lost.<sup>133</sup> In April, only four articles concerning the seizure or the seized ships appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. The two at the beginning of the month concerned the official response of the Dutch government.<sup>134</sup> The last two reported on the short negotiations concerning the compensation the Dutch ship owners would get for the use, and possible loss, of their ships.<sup>135</sup> The German government did not receive a lot of attention in the articles and the number of articles on the actions and words of the US government and the Dutch government were even.

At least one article a day on the seizure, or rumored seizure, was printed in the *New York Times* from March 15 to March 30. March 24 saw the appearance of a more elaborate article on the response of Dutch politicians to the seizure, an article which described how neutral shipping had earned a lot of money during the war, and the plans the US government had for the seized ships.<sup>136</sup> In April, reports on the seizure were not as frequent. Small peaks appeared on April 13 and April 20. All four of these articles discussed the fear of the Dutch government and Dutch ship owners to lose their ships permanently and the assurances the US government made to them.<sup>137</sup> This shows that the main concern of the *New York Times* was the actions and

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<sup>130</sup> "Holland Now Inclined to Lend Allies Ships," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1918, morning edition, 1; "The German Angle," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1918, morning edition, 1.

<sup>131</sup> "Foreign News Weakens Market; Selling Heavy," *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1918, morning edition, 16; "Sixty-Eight Dutch Vessels to Be Seized Today by America," *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1918, morning edition, 1, 3.

<sup>132</sup> "No Alternative," *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1918, morning edition, 1; "Right of Belligerent to Seize Neutral Ships," *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1918, morning edition, 14.

<sup>133</sup> H. Carr, "Checkerboard of War on Faith of Holland," *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1918, morning edition, 3; "Dutch Ships Sailed by American Crews," *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1918, morning edition, 3; "Dutch Decline Offered Food," *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1918, morning edition, 4.

<sup>134</sup> "Threat Is Made by Holland; Wants Back Her Seized Ships," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1918, 1-2; "Formal Orders Issued Regarding Dutch Ships," *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1918, 5.

<sup>135</sup> "Holland's Crisis with Germany Most Serious," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1918, 6; "Holland Accepts Offer of Payment for Ships," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1918, 1.

<sup>136</sup> "Dutch Parliament Resents Seizures," *New York Times*, March 24, 1918, 21; "First Dutch Ship Put in Commission," *New York Times*, March 24, 1918, 21; "Sees Great Future for Neutral Ships," *New York Times*, March 24, 1918, 7.

<sup>137</sup> "Dutch Ship Owners Worry," *New York Times*, April 13, 1918, 6; "Lansing Explains Dutch Ship Issue," *New York Times*, April 13, 1918, 6; "Dutch Fear New Seizures," *New York Times*, April 20, 1918, 6; "Germans Courting Favor of Holland," *New York Times*, April 20, 1918, 6.

words of the US government and the German government. The official response of the Dutch government, discussed in one article on April 1, received a lot less attention.

Next the placement of the articles will be taken into account. Five of the articles in the *Los Angeles Times* appeared in full on the front page and four articles partly. Of the latter four, three continued on the second page and one on the third. The first three articles on the seizure all appeared on the front page. As mentioned above these articles concerned the Associated governments' intention to seize the ships and the responses of the Dutch government and the German government to a possible seizure.<sup>138</sup> The first article on March 19 was printed on the front page with a continuation on the third and the second was printed on the sixteenth page. This last article concerned the response of the stock market to the rumors about the seizure and was printed the furthest back in the newspaper of all articles.<sup>139</sup> The difference in placement is easily explained, since the financial news was always printed on page sixteen. Until March 22, the articles mostly appeared at the front of the paper, after that date the articles disappeared to the third page and further back. One of the two exceptions to this was the article on April 1, which appeared on the front page with a continuation on the second page. This article discussed the official response of the Dutch government.<sup>140</sup> The second exception was the article published on April 28, which reported that the Dutch government and ship owners accepted the compensation the US government offered for the use of the Dutch ships.<sup>141</sup> This article was also printed on the front page. All articles that appeared on the front page, both fully and in part, appeared soon after an event happened or an official government document or debate, either Dutch or American, was made public.

In the *New York Times*, three articles appeared on the front page in full and six in part. Of those six only two continued on the second page, while the other four continued on the third page or further back.<sup>142</sup> After March 21, there was only one article on the subject, which appeared on the front page. This exception was an article on April 14, which concerned food riots in the Netherlands. According to the newspaper the US government could regain Dutch support it had lost with the seizure by solving the food shortage in the Netherlands.<sup>143</sup> Though the articles that appeared after March 21 are printed further back, the majority of the articles is

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<sup>138</sup> "Allies Will Seize Holland's Shipping," 1; "Holland Now Inclined to Lend Allies Ships," 1; "The German Angle," 1.

<sup>139</sup> "Foreign News Weakens Market; Selling Heavy," 16.

<sup>140</sup> "Threat Is Made by Holland; Wants Back Her Seized Ships," 1-2.

<sup>141</sup> "Holland Accepts Offer of Payment for Ships," 1.

<sup>142</sup> "Dutch Ships to Be Seized next Monday," 1-2; "Germany Striking at All Neutrals," 1, 7; "America's Task Grimmer," 1, 3; "Dutch Refuse Ship Transfer on Allied Terms," *New York Times*, March 19, 1918, 1, 5; "Grand Brief Delay in Seizing Ships," 1, 6; "Wilson Orders Dutch Ships Seized," 1-2.

<sup>143</sup> "Fatal Food Riots in Dutch Capital," *New York Times*, April 14, 1918, 1.

published after this date, namely twenty-five out of forty-five. The subject was still important enough to write about, but it was no longer important enough to appear at the front of the newspaper. Here the difference between the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* was, once again, evident. The *New York Times* did not deem the response of the Dutch government important enough to appear at the front of the newspaper.<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile, the *Los Angeles Times* printed the official response of the Dutch government on the front page. This underlines the conclusion that was made in the first part of the analysis: the *New York Times* deemed the official documents and responses of the Dutch government less important than the *Los Angeles Times*.

The third step of the analysis concerns the arguments used in the articles to deem the seizure legitimate or illegitimate. Six of the seventeen articles printed in the *Los Angeles Times* contained arguments used by the US government. All six used the argument of international law, but only one explicitly mentioned the Right of Angary. This was the article of March 22, which solely dealt with the Right of Angary.<sup>145</sup> The fact that not each article that mentioned international law mentioned the Right of Angary, shows that the *Los Angeles Times* did not fully agree with this argument of the US government. The Act of Congress of June 15, 1917, was not mentioned in any of the articles and the government's argument that the Dutch government lacked free will was partly used in three articles. These articles mentioned the threats the German government made but did not explicitly say this prevented the Dutch government from coming to an agreement with the Associated governments.<sup>146</sup> Not a single article claimed that the seizure was illegitimate, but the *Los Angeles Times* did not fully agree with the US government's arguments and the Act of Congress used by Wilson was not seen as a reason to consider the seizure legitimate. If each article had mentioned each of the government arguments the articles in the *Los Angeles Times* could have reached 51 points, which would have meant an average of three points for each article. In total the articles reached seven and a half points, which results in a little less than half a point for each article. This shows that the *Los Angeles Times* did not consider the government's arguments the most important part in covering the seizure.

Fourteen of the forty-five articles in the *New York Times* used arguments of the US government. Eleven of these used the argument of international law, but only four explicitly

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<sup>144</sup> "Dutch Officially Resent Seizure," *New York Times*, April 1, 1918, 6.

<sup>145</sup> "Right of Belligerent to Seize Neutral Ships," 14.

<sup>146</sup> "Allies Will Seize Holland's Shipping," 1; "Holland Is Defiant - Allies Seize Her Shipping," 1-2; "Threat Is Made by Holland; Wants Back Her Seized Ships," 1-2.

mentioned the Right of Angary. The Act of Congress of June 15, 1917, was not mentioned in any of the articles and the argument of the Dutch government lacking free will was mentioned fully in two articles, and partly in eight articles. The four articles that used the full argument of the government, mentioned both the threats the German government made and how these prevented the Dutch government from coming to an agreement with the Associated governments.<sup>147</sup> The eight articles that partially mentioned this argument, only referred to the German threats but did not claim this was enough reason for the Associated governments to state an agreement could not be made.<sup>148</sup> If each article mentioned the government's arguments the articles in the *New York Times* could have a total of 135, once again with a score of three for each article. The total of the articles amounted to seventeen, which meant an average of a little less than 0,4 for each article. This is a lower average score than the *Los Angeles Times*, which means the *New York Times* considered the government's arguments to be even less important.

So, the argument of international law was the most used government argument by both American newspapers. Both newspapers saw the Right of Angary as something separate of the broader argument of international law. Neither newspaper deemed the Act of Congress used by Wilson a valid argument to legitimize the seizure. Furthermore, threats made by the German government were not necessarily seen as a large enough obstacle in the negotiations between the Dutch and the Associated governments to prevent an agreement. However, in a small number of articles the *New York Times* did draw that conclusion.

There were six articles in the *Los Angeles Times* that contain original arguments. Four of these articles were the same as the ones with government arguments. There were eight original arguments, some of which were used multiple times. Three of the arguments were used twice and the others once. The first of these arguments was that the German government exercised the Right of Angary as well. It was used during the Franco-Prussian war to sink several British ships to block a passage for French ships.<sup>149</sup> The second argument was the German duress on the Netherlands. This can also be part of the US government's argument concerning the lack of free will of the Dutch government, but here it referred to the mission of the US to protect the rights of small states.<sup>150</sup> The third argument that was used twice was that

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<sup>147</sup> "Wilson Orders Dutch Ships Seized," 1-2; "Holland's Attitude Forced Ship Seizures," 5.

<sup>148</sup> "Allies Tired of Delay," 2; "Dutch Ships to Be Seized next Monday," 1-2; "Holland's Plight Fault of Germany," 4; "The Dutch Ships," 12; "Dutch Vessels to Fly Our Flag at Noon Today," *New York Times*, March 18, 1918, 1; "Hears Dutch Refuse Grain from America," *New York Times*, March 26, 1918, 7; "Dutch Officially Resent Seizure," 6; "Holland and Her Ships," *New York Times*, April 15, 1918, 14.

<sup>149</sup> "Allies Will Seize Holland's Shipping," 1; "Right of Belligerent to Seize Neutral Ships," 14.

<sup>150</sup> "Allies Will Seize Holland's Shipping," 1; "Holland Is Defiant - Allies Seize Her Shipping," 1-2.

the Dutch government had rejected the ultimatum that was sent to them.<sup>151</sup> One of the other arguments claimed that the ultimatum expired without a reply, which was contradictory with the previous argument that the Dutch government rejected the ultimatum.<sup>152</sup> The newspaper also stated that the Right of Angary was not just practiced by Germany, but by all nations at some point in time.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, the US Naval Code was said to allow the seizure of neutral ships in case of war and it had been agreed upon at The Hague Conventions.<sup>154</sup> There was also one article which claimed the seizure could be used to bring the Netherlands into war on the side of the Associated governments.<sup>155</sup>

Fourteen articles in the *New York Times* contained original arguments. In eleven of these articles both original and government arguments were mentioned. There were eight original arguments, four of which were used multiple times. The most common argument was that the Right of Angary was also practiced by Germany.<sup>156</sup> This argument was used six times and referred to the use of the right during the Franco-Prussian war, which was also put forward in the *Los Angeles Times*. An argument that appeared twice was that the Right of Angary was used by all nations at some point in time.<sup>157</sup> Another argument that appeared twice was that the Dutch response to the ultimatum was unacceptable.<sup>158</sup> The *New York Times*, unlike the *Los Angeles Times*, did not state that the Dutch government rejected the ultimatum. The final argument that appeared twice concerned the delay that was caused by the prolongation of the negotiations. This delay had led to changed circumstances and the Dutch government could, therefore, not expect that the condition that were put forward in January would still be the same in March.<sup>159</sup> The remaining arguments all appeared once and included the argument that the US was fighting for the rights of the small neutral states, which was also mentioned in the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>160</sup> Another argument that was used by both newspapers was the Naval War Code and that the Right of Angary was internationally agreed upon in 1899 and 1907 at The Hague Conventions.<sup>161</sup> An argument the *New York Times* used that was not put forward in the *Los*

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<sup>151</sup> "Holland Is Defiant - Allies Seize Her Shipping," 1-2; "No Alternative," 1.

<sup>152</sup> "Holland Is Defiant - Allies Seize Her Shipping," 1-2.

<sup>153</sup> "Holland Is Defiant - Allies Seize Her Shipping," 1-2.

<sup>154</sup> "Right of Belligerent to Seize Neutral Ships," 14.

<sup>155</sup> Carr, "Checkerboard of War on Faith of Holland," 3.

<sup>156</sup> "Allies Tired of Delay," 2; "America's Task Grimmer," 1-3; "The Dutch Ships," 12; "Hears Dutch Refuse Grain from America," 7; "Ship Seizure Legal in '71," *New York Times*, April 21, 1918, 58; "Defended by Bismarck," *New York Times*, April 22, 1918, 10.

<sup>157</sup> "Dutch Ships to Be Seized next Monday," 1-2; "'Jus Angaria' Covers Seizure of Dutch Ships," *New York Times*, March 17, 1918, 64.

<sup>158</sup> "Dutch Refuse Ship Transfer on Allied Terms," 1, 5; "Wilson Orders Dutch Ships Seized," 1-2.

<sup>159</sup> "Holland's Attitude Forced Ship Seizures," 5; "Dutch Officially Resent Seizure," 6.

<sup>160</sup> "America's Task Grimmer," 1, 3.

<sup>161</sup> "The Dutch Ships," 12; "'Jus Angaria' Covers Seizure of Dutch Ships," 64.

*Angeles Times* was that the US government had already made a lot of concessions to the Dutch government and it could no longer continue to do so if it wanted to win the war.<sup>162</sup>

An additional comment that needs to be made on the articles that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* is that fifteen of the seventeen articles were reports from the AP. This shows that the newspaper did not feel the need to send its own reporters to New York to write about the seizure or even to assign the task of writing about it to one of its own reporters. Instead the reports provided by the AP were printed.

It can be said that the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* agreed with the US government on the legitimacy of the seizure. There was not one article that questioned this legitimacy. Furthermore, both the *Los Angeles Times* and the US government deemed the argument of international law very important. The US government mentioned international law before it mentioned any other reason and mentioned the Right of Angary in particular. However, neither international law in general nor the Right of Angary received the most attention in the argumentation of the US government. The *Los Angeles Times* based its argument of international law on a wider range of rules and rights than the US government. It mentioned the US Naval Code and The Hague Convention, which were left untouched by the US government. The *New York Times* mentioned the argument of international law multiple times. However, the emphasis was not on this argument. The newspaper put the emphasis on the other nations that practiced the Right of Angary in the past, with special attention for the use by the German government. The *New York Times*, like the *Los Angeles Times*, mentioned the US Naval Code and The Hague Conventions. It is remarkable that the US government did not mention either of those arguments. Both newspapers scored low when it came to the representation of the government's arguments. The articles in the *Los Angeles Times* amounted to an average of a little less than half a point for each article and the articles in the *New York Times* to a little less than 0,4. To conclude, both newspapers agreed on the legitimacy of the seizure, but their argumentation did not correspond with that of the US government. The US government's argumentation emphasized the course of the negotiations with the Dutch government and the role the German government played in them. Meanwhile, both newspapers emphasized several international rules and the previous use of the Right of Angary by the German government.

A second conclusion is that the number of articles that concerned the legitimacy of the seizure suggests that the legitimacy was considered more important by the *Los Angeles Times*

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<sup>162</sup> "Expecting a Dutch Note," *New York Times*, March 23, 1918, 3.



than by the *New York Times*. The *Los Angeles Times* commented on the legitimacy of the seizure in eight of its seventeen articles, this is a little over forty-seven percent. The *New York Times* commented on the legitimacy in seventeen of its forty-five articles, which is almost thirty-eight percent. However, both newspapers defended the Right of Angary after it was deemed obsolete by the Dutch government, while the US government did not consider this necessary. Overall it seemed that the newspapers thought the seizure needed more reasons to be considered legitimate than the US government gave. This conclusion is based on the number of arguments both the newspapers and the US government used, and on the fact that the newspaper continued to defend the seizure long after the US government made the last comment on its legitimacy. The US government did not discuss the legitimacy after the initial proclamation and public statement, while the newspapers continued to publish articles on the legitimacy of the seizure long after that.

### **Dutch newspapers**

The graph below shows the number of articles published in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* and *De Telegraaf* in March and April 1918. There was, as with the American newspapers, a clear difference in the number of published articles. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* published more articles on the seizure, namely, a total of sixty-two over the course of the two months. *De Telegraaf* only published thirty-one during the same period. A second observation is that the newspapers started and ended their reports on the seizure at different moments in time. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* published the first article regarding the seizure, or at that point in time a possible seizure, on March 2, 1918. *De Telegraaf* did not publish the first article on the subject until March 12. The last article published within the chosen period was on April 25 by *De Telegraaf*. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* already published the last article on April 18. A third, and final, observation is the different dates when the newspapers reach the highest number of articles. The number of articles in *De Telegraaf* reached its peak of four articles on one day on March 13. The *Algemeen Handelsblad*, on the other hand, reached its peak of six articles in one day on March 21. Both newspapers reached a second, slightly lower, peak later on in the period. For the *Algemeen Handelsblad* this was five articles in one day on April 14, and for *De Telegraaf* three articles in one day on March 31.

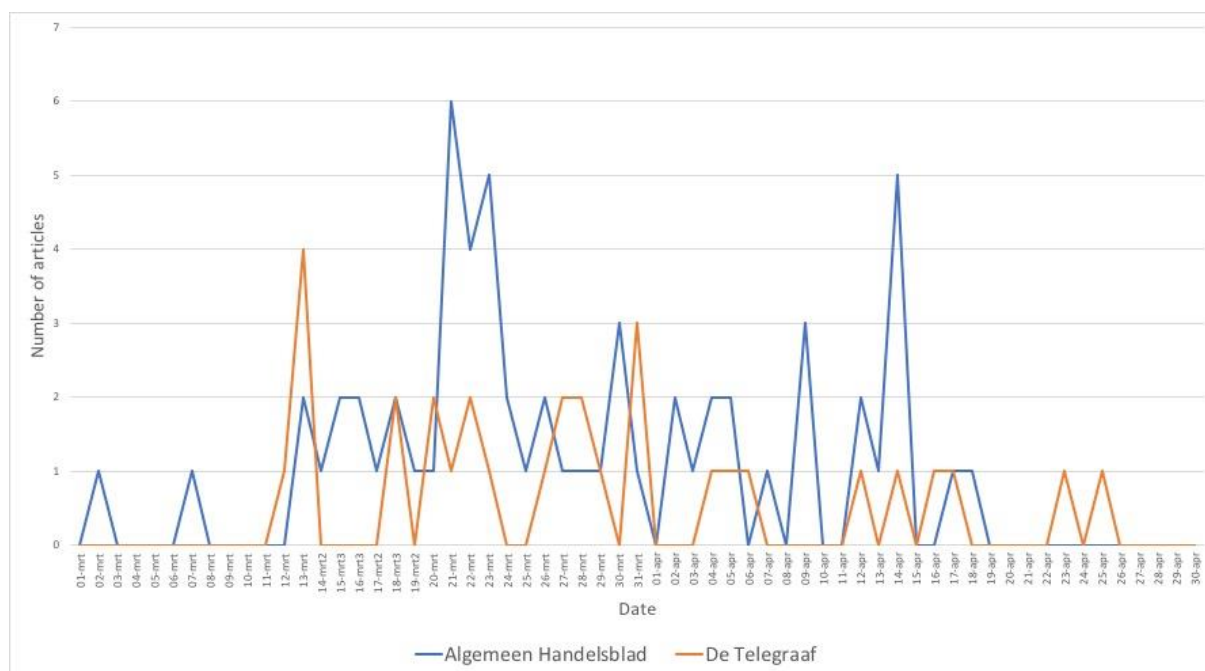


Figure 2: Number of articles published in Algemeen Handelsblad and De Telegraaf during March and April 1918.

The graph shows that the *Algemeen Handelsblad* published two articles before *De Telegraaf* first mentioned the Dutch ships in American ports. These two articles were printed on March 2 and March 7, and concerned an overview of the opinions expressed in the German press on agreements between neutral states and belligerents, and a report on the Dutch ships that sailed out under the temporary charter agreement between the Dutch government and the US government.<sup>163</sup> The first article in *De Telegraaf* appeared on March 12, and was a short and descriptive article of a few lines, which reported that the chartered ships would sail to France to deliver supplies to Switzerland.<sup>164</sup> Neither of the newspapers gave much attention to the temporary agreement being put to action, and *De Telegraaf* did not print opinions of other newspapers or governments on the agreement between the Dutch government and the Associated governments.

Between March 13 and March 31, the *Algemeen Handelsblad* printed at least one article every day. This started with an article on a report of Dutch Foreign Minister Loudon on the negotiations between the Dutch and US government. This report appeared after the Associated governments issued the Dutch government an ultimatum, but the ultimatum was not mentioned in the article.<sup>165</sup> The second article of that day concerned, what the *Algemeen Handelsblad*

<sup>163</sup> “Onze Schepen in Amerika,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, February 3, 1918, morning edition, 6; “De Pers,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, July 3, 1918, evening edition, 6.

<sup>164</sup> “Onze Schepen in Amerika. De Voorziening van Zwitserland,” *De Telegraaf*, December 3, 1918, evening edition, 5.

<sup>165</sup> “Nota Nopends Den Stand Der Onderhandelingen over Eene Schikking Met de ‘Geassocieerde Regeeringen,’” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 13, 1918, morning edition, 5–6.

called, the hypocrisy of the US government. This referred to the US government's, and Wilson's specifically, self-proclaimed mission to protect the right of neutral nations, which was abandoned when it no longer suited the US government. The result of which could be seen as the US government joined the British blockade and refused to supply Dutch ships with bunker coal.<sup>166</sup> This article did not mention the ultimatum either, which is interesting since it was issued on March 8 and, therefore, long enough ago to be written about. The most plausible explanation would be that what was stated in the official response of the Dutch government at the end of March, was also considered true by the *Algemeen Handelsblad*. The ultimatum was not considered to be an ultimatum by the Dutch government, at least that is what the Dutch government made public. It was seen as another proposal in the negotiations. This explanation was correct until March 15, when Reuter made public that the proposal was an ultimatum. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* published the statement from Reuter, opinions expressed in the Austrian, Danish, Dutch and German press, and the debate in the Dutch parliament on the matter but refrained from expressing an opinion of its own.<sup>167</sup>

After March 13, the number of articles varied from one to three a day until it reached a peak of six on March 21. This was one day after the seizure and the first day it could be printed in the Dutch press. The event that was anticipated, happened and the newspaper had to provide a reaction. Since the seizure was anticipated, journalists had time to consider what they would write concerning the seizure even before it happened. It seems logical that the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, with its slight German preference, would take this as an opportunity to criticize the Associated governments. Therefore, it does not seem like a surprise that the largest number of articles was published on this date. However, only two of the six articles published on March 21 were opinionated, but this will be discussed later when the arguments are discussed. From March 25 till March 31, the number of articles once again varied from one to three a day. In April the number of articles varied from zero to a second peak, this time of five articles in a day. While most of March saw an article every day, in April articles only appeared when something actually happened. From April 2 until April 5, the articles concerned the official response of the Dutch government and the debates in parliament.<sup>168</sup> The article on April 9,

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<sup>166</sup> "De Vrijheid Der Zee," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 13, 1918, evening edition, 5.

<sup>167</sup> "De Geassocieerden En Nederland," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 15, 1918, morning edition, 5; "Nederland En de Oorlog. De Entente En Nederland," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 15, 1918, morning edition, 6.

<sup>168</sup> "De Pers," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 2, 1918, morning edition, 5; "De Regeeringsverklaring," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 2, 1918, evening edition, 5; "Nederland En de Oorlog. Het Amerikaansche Graan," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 3, 1918, morning edition, 5; "Eene Verklaring van de Amerikaansche Regeering Inzake de Scheepvaartquaestie," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 4, 1918, evening edition, 5; "Ned. Schepen in Amerika," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 4, 1918, evening edition, 5; "Tweede Kamer. Inbeslagneming Onzer Schepen," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 5, 1918, evening edition, 5.

discussed the assurances of the Associated governments concerning the seized ships and on April 12, the *Nieuw-Amsterdam*, the only ship that was in an American port on March 20 that was not seized, arrived in Rotterdam with most of the crews from the seized ships.<sup>169</sup> The second peak appeared on April 14, which was shortly after several US officials had reassured the Dutch government and the Dutch ship owners that compensation would be paid for use and loss of the ships, and that any ships arriving in ports of one of the Associated governments at that point in time would not risk being seized. The articles concerned the messages received from US officials and emphasize the fact that none of these assurances were made in the form of official documents, which conformed with the concern of the Dutch government.<sup>170</sup> In April, the *Algemeen Handelsblad* was mostly concerned with the compensation of the ship owners and shared the worry of the Dutch government concerning the unofficial assurances of the Associated governments.

A day after the first article on the matter was published in *De Telegraaf*, the peak of four articles in a day appeared, two of which contained a list with the Dutch ships in American ports at that moment in time.<sup>171</sup> One of the others contained a report of a debate in the Dutch parliament, which made clear that the ultimatum stated that the Associated governments wanted the Dutch ships to sail in the danger-zones.<sup>172</sup> The final article of that day was a comment on an address made by Loudon. *De Telegraaf* focused on the pressure of the German government on the Dutch government and the role this played in the negotiations with the Associated governments.<sup>173</sup> The second peak did not appear until March 31. Two of the articles on that day concerned the official response of the Dutch government. The first article was the official response itself, and the second article was an editorial piece on the government's response. *De Telegraaf* thought it was unnecessary to respond this long after the actual event. According to the editorial piece the government was 'tearing open old wounds' without taking any action.<sup>174</sup> The remaining article of that day concerned the release of two Dutch ships that had been kept

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<sup>169</sup> "Binnenland. De 'Nieuw Amsterdam,'" *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 12, 1918, morning edition, 6; "Terug Uit Amerika," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 12, 1918, evening edition, 5; "Wetenschap. Koninklijke Akademien van Wetenschappen," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 9, 1918, morning edition, 6.

<sup>170</sup> "Een Amerikaansche Nota," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 14, 1918, morning edition, 5; "Nederl. Scheepsladingen in Amerika," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 14, 1918, morning edition, 5; "Toezeggingen van Eenige Scheepsladingen Graan," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 14, 1918, morning edition, 5; "Nederland En de Oorlog. Vergoeding Voor Gerequireerde Schepen," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 14, 1918, morning edition, 6.

<sup>171</sup> "Nederlandsche Schepen in Amerika," *De Telegraaf*, March 13, 1918, morning edition, 5; "Nederlandsche Schepen in Amerika. De Officieele Lijst," *De Telegraaf*, March 13, 1918, evening edition, 5.

<sup>172</sup> "De Onderhandelingen Met de Geassocieerden," *De Telegraaf*, March 13, 1918, morning edition, 5.

<sup>173</sup> "De Nota van Minister Loudon," *De Telegraaf*, March 13, 1918, evening edition, 6.

<sup>174</sup> Own translation: 'oude wonden weer open rijten', "Brood of Hongersnood," *De Telegraaf*, March 31, 1918, 5; "Verklaring van de Nederlandsche Regeering Naar Aanleiding van de Proclamatie Met Bijgevoegde Verklaringen van 20 Maart j.l. van Den President van de Vereenigde Staten," *De Telegraaf*, March 31, 1918, 5.

in Singapore and the seizure of two more ships in Washington.<sup>175</sup> This was one of the five short and descriptive articles published within the chosen period.<sup>176</sup> Most of the attention in the articles was on the Dutch government. This differed from the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, which mostly focused on the events itself and the lack of official documents assuring compensation for the ship owners.

*De Telegraaf* printed the last article on the matter on April 25. This article concerned the possibility of getting grain from the US government. However, the Dutch government was still looking for assurance from the US government that none of the ships would be seized.<sup>177</sup> The final article the *Algemeen Handelsblad* published on the matter, reported that action was being taken to receive grain, and possibly flour, from the US and a port in South America. This article was printed three days after the last article in *De Telegraaf*.<sup>178</sup> This shows that both newspapers saw a similar end to the subject, namely, the possibility of receiving supplies from the US.

The second step of the analysis concerns the placement of the articles in the newspaper. Before March 14, none of the articles in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* appeared before page five. Page five was the page where the news on the war was printed and six was the page where domestic news appeared. Thirty-eight of the sixty-four articles were published on these two pages. Another four appeared on page nine. These articles all concerned opinions of other newspapers and of several press agencies. It is evident why these articles were printed here, since page nine was the page where opinions and news that was taken from other newspapers, both domestic and foreign, were printed. Only two articles were printed on the front page of the *Algemeen Handelsblad*. On March 21, an article that stated that the Dutch ships had been seized could be found on the front page, the rest of the articles of that day appeared on the second and fifth page.<sup>179</sup> On March 22, an article with the proclamation and official statement of Wilson was printed on the first page.<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, there was one article that appeared partly on the

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<sup>175</sup> “De Requisitie Onzer Schepen,” *De Telegraaf*, March 31, 1918, 5.

<sup>176</sup> “Onze Schepen in Amerika,” December 3, 1918, 5; “Onze Schepen in Amerika,” *De Telegraaf*, March 20, 1918, morning edition, 1; “Onze Schepen in Amerika,” *De Telegraaf*, March 20, 1918, evening edition, 5; “Het Vertrek van de ‘Nieuw-Amsterdam,’” *De Telegraaf*, March 29, 1918, 13; “De Requisitie Onzer Schepen,” 5.

<sup>177</sup> “Het Graanaanbod. De Waarborgen,” *De Telegraaf*, April 25, 1918, evening edition, 6.

<sup>178</sup> “Nederland En de Oorlog. Graan En (of) Meel Uit Amerika,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 28, 1918, morning edition, 5.

<sup>179</sup> J. I. Keyser, “Onze Positie Tegenover de Geassocieerden,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 21, 1918, evening edition, 2; “Binnenland. De Roof Voltrokken,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 21, 1918, evening edition, 5; “De Oorlog. Amerika Neemt Onze Schepen in Beslag,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 21, 1918, evening edition, 1; “Een Uittaling van Admiraal Koch,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 21, 1918, morning edition, 2; “Nederland En de Geassocieerden,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 21, 1918, evening edition, 5; “Onze Internationale Positie,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 21, 1918, morning edition, 2.

<sup>180</sup> “Nederland En de Oorlog,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 22, 1918, morning edition, 1.

second and partly on the first page. This article reported that the ship owners in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, that had chartered their ships to the US government under the temporary agreement, had received payment for the use of their ships and that the procedure would likely be the same for the owners of the seized ships.<sup>181</sup> The articles that appeared on the front page, all report on events that directly influence the Dutch ship owners. First the seizure itself, which was of course important news for the ship owners, then the proclamation and statement of Wilson, which was important because the ship owners wanted to know on what ground their ships had been seized and what would happen to their ships now they were under American control, and lastly the payment the ship owners received. The articles on the negotiations leading up to the seizure and any events that occurred afterwards, like the return of the *Nieuw-Amsterdam*, the official response of the Dutch government and the unofficial assurances of the Associated governments, were all deemed less important because they had no direct impact on the ship owners. If the importance was determined by what the Dutch public directly experienced, the arrival of the *Nieuw-Amsterdam* would have had a more prominent place in the newspaper. This event drew hordes of people to the Wilhelminakade in Rotterdam, that all wanted to see the arrival. Though this event was elaborately reported on, both articles took up almost an entire page, they appeared on page five and six.<sup>182</sup> They were apparently not deemed important enough to make the front page.

There was only one article that appeared on the front page of *De Telegraaf*. This was a short and descriptive article on March 20, which reported that the seizure would not occur until a response to the ultimatum would arrive in Washington.<sup>183</sup> The other articles did not appear before page five. As was the case in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, page five was the page where the news on the war was elaborately discussed. Therefore, it is to be expected that most articles appeared on this page. Twenty-one of the thirty-one articles concerning the seizure appeared on page five. The remaining articles appeared on page six, seven and sixteen. Even the article that announced the actual seizure did not make it to the front page. *De Telegraaf* did not deem the seizure and the events surrounding it more important than any other news on the war.

The next step is to see how often the arguments put forward by the Dutch government appeared in the articles. This did not happen often in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*. Only nine articles contained opinions on the seizure that did not appear in the form of copying official documents or using quotes from other newspapers or press agencies. The government argument

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<sup>181</sup> "Schepen in Amerika," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 27, 1918, morning edition, 1–2.

<sup>182</sup> "Binnenland. De 'Nieuw Amsterdam,'" 6; "Terug Uit Amerika," 5.

<sup>183</sup> "Onze Schepen in Amerika," March 20, 1918, 1.

that the seizure was indefensible on the basis of international law was mentioned five times. The first time in an article on March 21, where the seizure itself was reported on and then again the next two days when Wilson's proclamation and official statement were discussed.<sup>184</sup> The fourth time the argument appeared was when it became clear that the US government wanted to receive more cargo space than they had acquired with the seizure, and the final time was when the official response of the Dutch government was printed and discussed.<sup>185</sup> The *Algemeen Handelsblad* only used the government's argument of the incorrect facts once. This was put forward in the article that discussed the official response of the Dutch government. This was the same article that mentioned the first government argument.<sup>186</sup> The obsolescence of the Right of Angary was mentioned once on March 23, in the same article that stated the seizure was not defensible by international law.<sup>187</sup> The claim of the Dutch government that the seizure broke with the traditional friendship between the US and the Netherlands, was mentioned once as well. This was mentioned in the article discussing the official response of the Dutch government, the same article that mentioned both the first and second government arguments.<sup>188</sup> There are no articles that deemed the seizure legitimate. In the parliament debates and the official response of the Dutch government it became clear that the illegitimacy of the seizure was very important to the Dutch government. However, the number of opinionated articles in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, nine out of the sixty-four, shows that it was not as important to the newspaper. The arguments used in the opinionated articles show that the argument of international law was the most important according to the newspaper. The Dutch government mentioned that argument first but emphasized the incorrect facts the seizure was based on, which was only mentioned once in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*. The newspaper could have reached a total of 128 point, which meant an average of two points for each article. However, the total of the articles only amounted to five and a half points, which meant an average of 0,09 for each article. Therefore, it can be concluded that the newspaper did not deem the question of legitimacy as important as the Dutch government did and that it differed in opinion on what argument was more important.

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<sup>184</sup> "Binnenland. De Roof Voltrokken," 5; "Binnenland. Amerika's Roof En Het Volkenrecht," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 22, 1918, evening edition, 5; "Amerika's Roof En Het Volkenrecht," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 23, 1918, evening edition, 6.

<sup>185</sup> "Nederland En de Oorlog. De Geassocieerden En Nederland," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 28, 1918, morning edition, 2; "De Regeeringsverklaring," 5.

<sup>186</sup> "De Regeeringsverklaring," 5.

<sup>187</sup> "Amerika's Roof En Het Volkenrecht," 6.

<sup>188</sup> "De Regeeringsverklaring," 5.

The first government argument, that of international law, was mentioned in four articles in *De Telegraaf*. On March 26, it was mentioned in an article that discussed the vulnerable position of the Netherlands with a belligerent close by.<sup>189</sup> A day after that, the argument was used again in an article that claimed the seizure was unjust, since it was not defensible by international law, but it was the most desirable solution.<sup>190</sup> The third time the argument was put forward was on March 31. This article was mostly concerned with the attitude of the Dutch government, but briefly mentioned the illegitimacy of the seizure.<sup>191</sup> The final time the argument was used was on April 5, which discussed the offer of the US government to provide grain for the Netherlands.<sup>192</sup> The government argument that the seizure was based on incorrect facts only appeared once. This happened in an article on March 21, which reported the seizure that happened the day before.<sup>193</sup> The final statement of the Dutch government was that the seizure broke with the traditional friendship between the two countries. *De Telegraaf* did not mention this once. The arguments used by the Dutch government did not appear often in the articles of *De Telegraaf*. Though the newspapers stated that the seizure was illegitimate since it could not be defended by international law, it did not call the Right of Angary obsolete and even allowed room for Taft to explain what the right entailed. If the newspaper had mentioned all government arguments in each of its articles, the total amount of points would have been 62 with an average of 2 for each article. *De Telegraaf* reached a total of four and a half points, which results in an average of 0,15 for each article. It can be concluded that the newspaper did not deem the government's arguments important. However, its score is higher than that of the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, which means that the *Algemeen Handelsblad* deemed these arguments even less important.

The number of original arguments the *Algemeen Handelsblad* put forward was not high either. Five original arguments were put forward by the newspaper, one of which was used twice. The argument that was used twice was that there was no imperative necessity for shipping space.<sup>194</sup> This argued against the use of the Right of Angary by the US government, since this was only applicable if there was imperative necessity on the side of the belligerent. The second original argument was that the Dutch government was not aware that it had been issued an

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<sup>189</sup> "Vivent Les Gueux," *De Telegraaf*, March 26, 1918, evening edition, 5.

<sup>190</sup> "Is Er Troost?," *De Telegraaf*, March 27, 1918, evening edition, 5.

<sup>191</sup> "Brood of Hongersnood," 5.

<sup>192</sup> "Het Graanaanbod," *De Telegraaf*, April 5, 1918, evening edition, 5.

<sup>193</sup> "Amerika Neemt Onze Schepen in Beslag Nog Geen Officieel Antwoord Ontvangen," *De Telegraaf*, March 21, 1918, morning edition, 7.

<sup>194</sup> "Binnenland. Amerika's Roof En Het Volkenrecht," 5; "Amerika's Roof En Het Volkenrecht," 6.



ultimatum.<sup>195</sup> This argument can, however, not be considered valid when looking at the other articles published on the seizure. As mentioned above, Reuter made public that the Associated governments had indeed issued the Dutch government an ultimatum. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* also claimed that the US government meddled in the sovereignty of the Dutch state by seizing Dutch ships. This was used to show the hypocrisy of the US government, who claimed that it was exercising its own sovereign right by seizing the ships.<sup>196</sup> The last argument was that the sudden change in conditions put forward by the Associated governments, was in conflict with the Dutch neutrality and could, therefore, not be accepted.<sup>197</sup> This also appeared in the article discussing the official response of the Dutch government.

*De Telegraaf* only used one original argument on the illegitimacy of the seizure. This argument was that the Dutch government went as far as neutrality allowed. It was used on March 21, in the same article that used the government's argument of international law.<sup>198</sup> The newspaper was more focused on explaining why the seizure occurred in the first place. According to *De Telegraaf* this was because of the pressure the threats of the German government put on the Dutch government. This explanation was used in an article that featured an explanation of the Right of Angary by former US President Taft.<sup>199</sup> It is important to note that *De Telegraaf* did not outright say the Right of Angary was obsolete. The newspaper only called the right questionable in one of its articles.<sup>200</sup>

Neither of the newspapers deemed the illegitimacy of the seizure as important as the Dutch government did. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* printed few opinionated articles and *De Telegraaf* focused on the reason the seizure occurred rather than its legitimacy. The government's argument that the seizure was based on incorrect facts, did not receive much attention in either newspaper. A clear difference between the newspapers can be found when the Right of Angary is taken into consideration. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* deemed the right obsolete, as did the Dutch government, but *De Telegraaf* only called it questionable. When it came to the representation of the government's arguments, both newspapers scored low. The articles in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* amounted to an average of 0,09 points for each article and the articles in *De Telegraaf* averaged on 0,15. So, neither newspaper openly disagreed with the Dutch government on the illegitimacy of the seizure. However, *De Telegraaf* did not agree

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<sup>195</sup> "Binnenland. De Roof Voltrokken," 5.

<sup>196</sup> "Nederland En de Oorlog. De Geassocieerden En Nederland," 2.

<sup>197</sup> "De Regeeringsverklaring," 5.

<sup>198</sup> "Amerika Neemt Onze Schepen in Beslag," 7.

<sup>199</sup> "Olie Op de Golven," *De Telegraaf*, March 22, 1918, morning edition, 7.

<sup>200</sup> "Brood of Hongersnood," 5.

with the argument concerning the Right of Angary, while the *Algemeen Handelsblad* did not agree with the emphasis the Dutch government put on the incorrect facts.

## Conclusion

The US government deemed the seizure legitimate based on three arguments. The first argument was that the seizure was based on international law. This concerned the Right of Angary in particular, which allowed a belligerent to take over and utilize neutral vessels in case of military exigency. The second argument was the Act of Congress of June 15, 1917. This Act gave the President of the US the right to take over and use all vessels within the jurisdiction of the US. Finally, the US government claimed that the Dutch government lacked free will. This was caused by threats of the German government and meant that it would be impossible to come to an agreement with the Dutch government. Furthermore, according to the US government, the Dutch government would not be able to carry out an agreement. This was proved by the inability of the Dutch government to act on the temporary charter agreement that was made in January of 1918.

The Dutch government deemed the seizure illegitimate based on two arguments. The first argument was that the seizure was indefensible by international law. According to the Dutch government, the Right of Angary was obsolete. Furthermore, even if the Right of Angary was recognized by the Dutch government, it was still not applicable to the situation. The Dutch government claimed that there was not military exigency, which was necessary for the Right of Angary to be put to practice. The second argument of the Dutch government was that the seizure was based on incorrect facts. There were not threats from the German government, and if there were the Dutch government would not yield to them. Another thing the US government misrepresented in their argumentation was the case of the temporary charter agreement. The Dutch government stated that part of the temporary agreement had been acted on. Several Dutch ships had been sent to France to deliver supplies for Switzerland.

In general, American newspapers sided with their government during the war. However, each newspaper still had its own background and target audience, which was the cause for differences in reporting war news. The *Los Angeles Times* was a republican newspaper, that wanted to promote the city and region, and increase the importance of its owner. This meant that international news was considered less important than local news, unless it affected Los Angeles or its environment. Therefore, the newspaper was not afraid to print one-sided articles and its credibility was lower than that of the *New York Times*. The *New York Times* was namely known for its impartial presentation of news. The newspaper was well-known for its financial news as well and had many readers and subscribers among merchants and tradesmen. The *New York Times* had a high credibility because of its impartial reports.

Dutch newspapers generally followed the guidelines of the Dutch government. This meant that they tried to report on the events as impartially as possible, so they did not endanger the Dutch neutrality. The Dutch government did not officially put the Dutch press under censorship, but owners and editors of newspapers were pressured to remain neutral. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* mostly followed the Dutch government in this but had a slight preference for Germany during the war. However, most of its reports were as impartial as possible, which could be difficult since information of what happened at the fronts was usually provided by one of the belligerents. *De Telegraaf* completely disregarded the request of the Dutch government. The newspaper had a strong preference for France and thus for the Associated governments. It held on to this preference even after its editor was arrested and put in prison by the Dutch government as he was accused of endangering the neutrality.

It has become clear that the newspapers generally agreed with their respective governments on the legitimacy of the seizure. However, not all of them agreed with the arguments its government brought to the table and not all newspapers thought the government arguments to be the most important. *De Telegraaf* disagreed with one of the arguments of the Dutch government and the *New York Times* deemed its own arguments more important than those of the US government. The scores show that the analyzed newspapers did not deem their government's arguments to be the most important feature of the seizure. The American newspapers both scored lower than an average of half a point per article, while the maximum score would have been three points for each article. Meanwhile, both Dutch newspapers averaged below 0,2 per article, while maximum score could have been two. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the seizure was less important to the US government than it was to the American newspapers. This could be seen in the continuation of articles on the legitimacy of the seizure after the US government stopped commenting on it. In the case of the Dutch government and the Dutch newspapers the opposite was true. The Dutch government spent more time discussing the legitimacy of the seizure than the Dutch newspapers did. Therefore, it can be concluded that, though the newspapers did not disagree with their respective governments on the legitimacy of the seizure, they did not agree with the way their governments defended their opinion.

The reason behind the different approaches of the newspapers can partially be found in their backgrounds and individual attitudes during the war. The *Los Angeles Times* was mainly focused on its own region, where the seizure did not have significant influence. This explains why the newspaper printed such a small number of articles and did not put its own writers on the subject. The *New York Times* was known for its financial news, international scope and

impartial reports. The seizure influenced the stock market and was, therefore, important for the newspapers financial section. This makes clear why the newspaper payed more attention to the seizure than the *Los Angeles Times*. Furthermore, the newspaper's tradition of reporting impartially explains why the *New York Times* printed opinions of several Dutch newspapers and the response of the Dutch government, which was not printed by the *Los Angeles Times*. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* generally printed neutral articles but showed a slight preference for Germany during the war. This could be seen in the articles concerning the seizure as well. Most of the articles printed in the newspaper were not opinionated. However, the few that were opinionated criticized the Associated governments. *De Telegraaf* had more trouble fitting the discussion on the legitimacy of the seizure with its anti-German attitude during the war. Most of its articles, therefore, did not concern the legitimacy of, but the reason for the seizure. That reason was the pressure the German government put on the Dutch government. This way of reporting on the event conformed with the general attitude of *De Telegraaf* during the war.

Another reason for the approaches of some of the newspapers can be found in the general attitude of the press in both countries during the war. The American press tended to go along with the US government when it came to matters concerning the war. In general, American newspapers tried to present the war in a positive light. They wrote about economic opportunities and the idealistic goals of Wilson. In case of the seizure this can primarily be seen in the *Los Angeles Times*. The newspaper printed articles that presented the arguments of the US government and had few original arguments to add. The *New York Times* also agreed with the arguments of the US government but deemed other arguments more important and left room for arguments of the Dutch government and newspapers as well. This is a slight deviation from the usual behavior of American newspapers during the war but, as mentioned above, can be explained by looking at the background of the newspaper. Overall the reports on the war that appeared in the Dutch press were neutral, which could be seen in the reports on the seizure by the *Algemeen Handelsblad*. This is, however, not the case for *De Telegraaf* but, as explained before, its behavior differed from that of most Dutch newspapers during the war.

These explanations still leave something uncovered. *De Telegraaf* did not follow its usual path when discussing the legitimacy of the seizure. The newspaper shifted the focus from the discussion on the legitimacy, to the reason behind the action of the US government but did call the seizure illegitimate. As shown before, *De Telegraaf* was not afraid to disagree with the Dutch government. Not even when it led to possible arrests and imprisonment. However, on this occasion the newspaper deemed it necessary to judge the seizure and put the Associated governments in a somewhat bad light, which differed from its usual approach. The Dutch

government, other politicians, and several newspapers stated that the Dutch public fully supported its government in the protest against the seizure and was offended by the action of the US government in particular. The public opinion in the Netherlands concerning this event, thus, seemed to be in line with the opinion of the Dutch government. Since public opinion and newspapers both influence each other, this explains why *De Telegraaf* felt obligated to report on the illegitimacy of the seizure, though it did not fit within its usual approach of covering events concerning the war.

It is important to realize that the seizure and the negotiations leading up to it had already been a topic in the newspapers before the chosen period of this research. The reports on the events leading up to the seizure had already shown the opinions of the newspapers and had shaped public opinion on the subject. Other events during the period also shaped the public opinion on the parties involved. Existing opinions of the US and Dutch governments in both countries must have played a part in the opinions expressed on the seizure. Furthermore, there were many more newspapers that covered the seizure. This research only analyzed articles of four newspapers, which only gives a limited insight in the public opinion on the seizure. This leaves room for further research in the future.

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