

Europe, the Peace of Westphalia and the Dutch Army

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'Europe, the Peace of Westphalia and the Dutch Army'. Aldus de titel van het in het Engels gegeven betoog van professor dr. Jonathan I. Israel, bij de opening van de tentoonstelling Van Maurits naar Munster: tactiek en triomf van het Staatse leger, op zaterdag 14 maart 1998. De hoofdconservator J.P. Puype, initiator van deze tentoonstelling en coauteur van de tegelijkertijd verschenen catalogus, heeft hieronder professor Israels voordracht voor de lezers van *Armamentaria* in het Nederlands samengevat.

De Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden was in 1648, toen de Tachtigjarige Oorlog werd afgesloten met de Vrede van Munster, de eerste nieuwe natie en bovendien het eerste wereldrijk dat in het Europa van de Nieuwe Tijd ontstond: een natie geboren uit een volksofstand tegen een heersende macht. De eerstvolgende keer dat dit gebeurde was bij het ontstaan van de Verenigde Staten van Amerika, die zich in de jaren 1780-1790 definitief aan het Engelse gezag onttrokken. Het traditionele en aristocratische Spanje en de nieuwe republiek onderhielden al binnen enkele jaren na de vrede min of meer normale betrekkingen en in 1673 was de politieke constellatie van Europa zelfs zodanig gewijzigd, dat beide landen een militair bondgenootschap tegen Frankrijk sloten.

De Vrede van Munster bracht ook universeel het besef teweeg dat religieuze conflicten niet langer met wapengeweld konden worden beslecht. Katholieken en Protestanten wisten dat geen van beide kampen in staat was de tegenstander te elimineren. De typisch Nederlandse tolerantiegedachte dringt zich hier op. Het jaar 1648 kan ook daarom beschouwd worden als het triomfjaar van het begrip vrede zelf, zo treffend uitgebeeld in het plechtige schilderij van Ter Borch van de ondertekening, alsof het een Europees congres betrof. De Vrede van Munster tenslotte was de eerste in Europa die geheel tot stand kwam door onderhandelingen tussen gelijkwaardige partners.

Het Staatse leger heeft een cruciale rol gespeeld in de totstandkoming van de vrede, vooral sinds het tijdperk van prins Maurits. In de periode 1580-1600 vormde deze dit leger om tot een permanente en zeer gedisciplineerde strijdmacht, die er niet alleen in slaagde de vijand van het centrale grondgebied der Republiek te verdrijven, maar die ook grote delen van de oostelijke provincies wist te heroveren. Toen de oorlog na het Twaalfjarig Bestand in 1621 werd hervat, was het Staatse leger aanzienlijk groter dan voorheen, en had het een navenant grotere en ingewikkelde taakstelling. Belangrijke steden als 's-Hertogenbosch, Maastricht en Breda werden ingenomen na de grootste en meest gecompliceerde belegeringen van de 17e eeuw.

Het verbazingwekkende van het Staatse leger was niet eens zijn internationale samenstelling. In de Nederlanden werkte, evenals trouwens in Spanje, het grootste deel van de mannelijke bevolking in de zeevaart. Het echt vernieuwende was de grote en onophoudelijke nadruk op discipline, bereikt door het aanhoudend drillen van de soldaten en door de organisatie van de samenwerking tussen de afzonderlijke legeronderdelen. Discipline was onontbeerlijk om de tactische vernieuwingen zoals contramars, salvovuur, gevechtsofstellingen in frontlinies, en dergelijke, met succes uit te voeren. Deze door prins Maurits sinds de jaren 1590-1600 geïntroduceerde vernieuwingen werden door zijn jongere broer Frederik Hendrik in de periode van diens stadhouderschap, 1625-1647, tot een toppunt van doelmatigheid geperfectioneerd. Een belangrijk element dat tot de discipline bijdroeg was de regelmatige uitbetaling van de soldaten. De Duitse staten, voor wie de Vrede van Munster in 1648 het einde betekende van de verschrikkelijke Dertigjarige Oorlog, konden zich slechts moeizaam daarvan herstellen omdat zij financieel, bestuurlijk en politiek op een veel lager peil stonden dan de Republiek. Ironisch genoeg heeft juist het herstel van de vrede in deze landen geleid tot militaire en organisatorische lessen die leidden tot staande, goed gedisciplineerde en betaalde legers, zoals dat van Brandenburg-Pruisen. Aan het einde van de 17e eeuw hadden meerdere Europese landen hun legers op deze voet geschoeid.

Als de historische kwaliteit van het Staatse leger, tenslotte, mag gelden dat het geen instrument was van macht en imperialisme, in tegenstelling tot de legers van landen waar monarchieën en aristocratieën de dienst uitmaakten. Het Staatse leger was de eerste westerse strijdmacht die dichtbij het moderne ideaal kwam van een leger dat tot taak heeft voor veiligheid en welzijn van zijn burgers te waken, en het territorium van de staat steeds te verdedigen met een minimum aan ontwrichting en schade aan de maatschappij en de handel. Het denkbeeld van het leger als verdediger van vrijheid en veiligheid was een van de grootste innovaties en belangrijkste triomfen van het republikeins denken en de prioriteitenstelling in de Gouden Eeuw.

Hierna volgt de volledige tekst van de voordracht zoals die professor J. Israel is uitgesproken.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Peace of April 1648 between the Dutch Republic and Spain, ratified in the Munster Town Hall, a scene recorded by Gerard ter Borch in one of the most brilliant narrative paintings of the Dutch Golden Age, painted in Munster from sketches made at the impressive ceremony, was certainly one of the most decisive landmark events in Dutch national history. This was the peace which ended the Eighty Years War, the final settlement of a conflict which, though centred in the Low Country ranged from the East Indies to the Caribbean, a final settlement in which the Spanish crown finally came to recognise the full, sovereign independence of the Dutch state, and the colonial possessions which it had acquired in Asia, Africa and the Americas. The Dutch Republic was the first new nation, and the first empire, created in modern times in Europe by popular revolt against a ruling power, there being no other example of a new nation being formed in this way until the American revolutionaries created the United States of America in defiance of British power in the 1780s.

Although the Dutch Republic was in many ways an entirely new kind of state - a federal republic dominated by an urban mercantile elite instead of the usual landed aristocracy - relations between the Dutch and Spain, a much more traditional society dominated by monarchical and aristocratic values - became within a few years more or less normal. There was a Spanish

ambassador residing in The Hague and a Dutch ambassador in Madrid. By 1673, things had changed so much that, a mere quarter of a century after the Peace of Westphalia there was a formal military alliance between Spain, one of the most resolutely Catholic Powers in Europe, and the United Provinces, the leading Calvinist state of the time, against France.

Yet however decisive the Peace of Westphalia was in Dutch national history (*vaderlandsche geschiedenis*) as it was traditionally called, for us today the significance of the Peace of Munster is much more that of a great European event. For while it can not be said the treaties signed at Munster and Osnabrück in 1648 entirely put an end to the warfare raging in Europe since the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War in 1618, given that one set of negotiations, that between Spain and France, collapsed and the Franco-Spanish war continued to rage until the Peace of the Pyrenees in 1659, it is nevertheless true that the horrifying conflict in Germany and the Czech lands thirty years of slaughter, devastation, pillage, plague, unspeakable cruelty and horrendous suffering finally ended in 1648 with the coinciding treaties (also signed in the Munster or else the Osnabrück town hall) between France and the Habsburg Emperor, between the Emperor and Sweden, and numerous lesser settlements.

Furthermore, not only did most of the fighting stop but the whole ideological context of the conflict - the Catholic Counter-Reformation and Habsburg imperialism versus Lutheranism, Calvinism and a view of the Holy Roman, or German, empire which stripped the Habsburg Emperor of most of his power - began from 1648 onwards to recede rapidly into the background. The armed confrontation intensifying from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards down to 1648 between the chief religious blocs in Europe was a relentless and spiritual and cultural struggle and at the same time a political, military and propaganda conflict in which the bulk of the literate population of Europe, and many of those who were illiterate, felt involved, believing that their faith was the true faith and that other religions could, should and would be destroyed and eliminated by the combined action of armies, churches, and states. By contrast, after 1648, ideas of toleration on the Dutch model began to advance. No one believed any longer, after so much suffering that the religious conflict and the rivalry of the churches could be settled by force. Like it or not, one had to accept that there were Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed and that any one bloc was simply not powerful enough to eliminate its rivals. This was indeed an immense change in the development of European civilisation and not least in the Low Countries. For ever since the Spanish army of Flanders, under the duke of Parma, had reconquered Flanders and most of Brabant in the early 1580s, culminating in the fall of Antwerp in 1585, the Low Countries had consisted of two warring, antagonistic cultures based on rival confessions, cultures which now had to learn to coexist without war, or conflict, which meant that, in one way or another, had each to be reconciled to the existence of the other. Thus the Peace of Westphalia deserves to be celebrated by us today in gatherings, and at exhibitions such as this, as a triumph of peace - the engraving which was published of Ter Borch's great painting of the ratification ceremony of the Dutch-Spanish peace in what is now called *Der Friedenssaal* in the Munster town hall carried the adage *Pax Optima Rerum* (Peace is the best of all things) - as the moment of reconciliation between groups with different religious beliefs, and finally as the triumph of the idea that the dreadful conflicts, contradictions, and tensions bedevilling Europe could be resolved in a general negotiated settlement if all the parties could be brought together to negotiate and compromise, face to face, in one huge European congress. The Peace of Westphalia was in fact the first time a general European settlement had ever been negotiated in this way.

As for the armies involved in the war these of course played a crucial part not only in fighting but also in shaping the final outcome and settlement, which ended the conflict. In this context the Dutch army, from the time of Prince Maurits onwards, had played a remarkable and exceptional

role. Ever since the late 1580s and 1590s when a permanently organised, highly disciplined army was built up in the Netherlands, the army of the United Provinces had not only conducted the tenacious and ultimately successful defence of the ring of fortresses protecting the small territory of the Republic but made possible the recapture of large parts of the eastern provinces which at that time were in Spanish hands - including Zutphen, Deventer and finally after a twomonth siege in which the Dutch army bombarded it with 10,000 canon balls the proudly pro-Spanish city of Groningen which at that time had no wish to be part of the emerging Dutch state. After the Twelve Years Truce (1609-21) and the resumption of the war in 1621, the Dutch army was considerably larger than before and had still larger and more complex tasks to perform. If, after a long siege, the Spanish succeeded in recapturing Breda in 1625, the Dutch army successfully defended most of the great ring of fortresses which circled the Republic from Delfzyl on the mouth of the Ems to Sluis, and the Cadzand district, Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Furthermore, it carried out successfully several of the largest and most complex sieges seen anywhere in Europe in the seventeenth century, most notably these of 's-Hertogenbosch in 1629, Maastricht in 1632, and the recapture of Breda in 1637.

There can be no doubt that the Dutch army of the Thirty Years' War period was remarkable and innovative in various respects. What was exceptional about it was not its extremely mixed national composition for at that time this was by no means unusual, as we see from the examples of the Spanish army of Flanders and the Swedish army in the Thirty Years' War. For a small country such as the Dutch Republic with so many demands on its limited manpower to man the fisheries, the merchant fleet, agriculture, and all kinds of specialised industries it was impossible that more than a relatively small percentage of the army should be Dutch and that a large part of the army should consist of foreigners, at that time particularly Germans, English and Scots. What was chiefly remarkable about the Dutch army was the new kind of military culture which it represented, with a heavy emphasis on discipline, drill and organised co-ordination. The new military techniques, including line formations, countermarch, and volley firing, introduced by Maurits and brought to a peak of effectiveness by Frederik Hendrik, Stadholder from 1625 to 1647, soon proved their value and were to be widely imitated in northern Europe not least by Gustavus Adolphus who reformed the Swedish army along Dutch lines and, in Brandenburg-Prussia, by the Great Elector. However, the most important features of Maurits' military reforms could only be effectively imitated by states which, like the Dutch Republic, had a highly developed financial apparatus and resources and could maintain a system of regular military pay. For a key element in the Dutch army reforms was the idea of regular monthly payment of the troops instead of the time-honoured system of paying large amounts of what was owed, irregularly, at a late stage and sometimes never which, for example, was how Alva's army in the Netherlands was paid between 1567 and the collapse of Spanish authority in most of the Low Countries in 1576. For if the state is not yet sufficiently developed organisationally and financially to pay its soldiery at frequent, regular intervals then, when on campaign the troops are forced to seize what they need from the local population, more or less by force, in order to live. Maurits and Frederik Hendrik, backed by a state apparatus which ensured that the army was adequately supplied, fed and paid, were able to impose a whole new concept of military discipline, severely punishing soldiers who pilfered, molested or raped. Of course, Germany was rather behind the Netherlands in financial, administrative and political development at that time and most German states were not capable, and with the increasing devastation of war, less and less capable, of following the Dutch example. But here again, the Peace of Westphalia can be seen as a rather crucial turning point. The recovery, which followed the restoration of peace ironically, provided the opportunity to learn and implement the military and organisational

lessons taught by the war. The appearance in the 1650s and subsequently of new highly disciplined standing armies such as that of the Great Elector in Brandenburg-Prussia led to a situation by the late seventeenth century where, throughout western and central Europe, the whole new paraphernalia of standardised infantry and cavalry weaponry, uniforms, drill, exercises in complex manoeuvres and a published military code of conduct as well, as the new formations, countermarch and system of volley-firing for the infantry had been adopted. Yet there was also a crucial difference between the army of the United Provinces and the other new, organised, disciplined armies of the seventeenth century. For the other armies - those of France, Brandenburg-Prussia, and Sweden served monarchs and aristocracies bent on aggrandisement and conquest and ultimately war - they were instruments of power. It was because it was a republic, and no royal dynasty could control its statecraft, that the Dutch army was the first army in the west to approximate to the modern ideal of an army whose task is to ensure the security and well-being of the citizenry, to protect the territory of the state, and to accomplish its essentially defensive tasks conscious of the need to cause a minimum of disruption and damage to civilian life and the economy. The idea of the army as the defender of liberty and security was indeed one of the greatest innovations and one of the greatest triumphs of the republican thinking and priorities of the Dutch Golden Age. But it became reality only because it came largely, and at times entirely, under the control of a mercantile political elite absolutely determined to subordinate the military to the needs of society and the service of the community.