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The Hague’s War, 1914–1918: British and American Newspaper References to The Hague During the First World War

Thomas Leslie Munro
Abstract

As with many events that occurred in the decades preceding 1914, the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907 are often viewed through the lens of the Great War. It is because the First World War occurred so soon after the meetings at The Hague that much of the analysis of the conferences is focused on their ‘failure’. Examining the conferences through this simplistic success-failure framework conceals contemporaries’ engagement with them. The proceedings and conventions of the Hague conferences of 1899 and 1907 gave the public conversation about war and peace a coherency that continued throughout the First World War. Historians have not studied the continued relevance of The Hague in the public sphere during the war, and this thesis examines how The Hague was represented in British and American newspapers to reveal contemporary views on issues of war, peace and international organisation. The thesis provides a series of case studies in which British and American newspaper coverage during key periods of the war is examined, and argues that despite the conflict occurring on a scale and in a manner unforeseen by the conferences’ delegates, Britons and Americans turned to the established framework The Hague provided to understand it. Between 1914 and 1918, The Hague determined the way in which contemporaries on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean evaluated the behaviour of belligerents and neutrals, and highlighted ways that war might be avoided in the future. The Hague underpinned ideas of internationalism, which became an important concept in the post-war years for both countries. The Hague also defined the international law of war and shaped perceptions of international justice and civilisation. Above all, I argue that The Hague was utilised as a common framework of reference within the political debate concerning Britain’s and the United States’ future place in the world. Examining British and American newspapers’ references to The Hague allows us to recapture the sophisticated contemporary debates about the war’s meaning and conduct, which have largely been omitted from historians’ accounts of the conflict.
Acknowledgments

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1. Introduction

In May 1999, the American media outlet CNN covered commemorations of the 100th anniversary of the 1899 Hague Conference, which it described as an international meeting called by the Russian Tsar, Nicholas II, in order to thwart German aggression.¹ The Tsar’s fears about German intentions were proved justified, the article claimed, as Germany would eventually launch two incredibly destructive wars within a span of twenty years. In light of these and later conflicts, the article concluded that ‘however noble its intentions, the 1899 conference clearly failed to prevent 20th century violence’.² Ten years after the CNN article was published, prominent American historian James Sheehan made a remarkably similar argument. Sheehan wrote that ‘in the face of the rising tide of violence that would inundate Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, the few weeks at The Hague disappear from view, drowned in the blood of millions’.³

There is no question that the delegates to the 1899 conference, and those of the conference in 1907, would have been startled to learn that they had been entrusted with the task of preventing war for the next century. As with many events that occurred in the decades preceding 1914, the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907 are often viewed through the lens of the Great War. It is because the First World War occurred so soon after the meetings at The Hague that much of the analysis of the conferences is focussed on their ‘failure’. Examining the conferences through this simplistic success-failure framework conceals what contemporaries thought about them.

While discussion of The Hague has been warped by the concept of failure, modern conceptions of the First World War have in their turn been obscured by what David Stevenson calls the ‘encrustations of hindsight’, the myths and misconceptions about the war that have taken hold and been reinforced across generations.⁴ These need to be stripped away if we are to ‘to see the struggle as it appeared to the contemporaries who

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² Ibid.
waged it’. Although the First World War was long perceived to be less ideological than the Second, historians now argue that contemporaries rationalised the conflict as ‘a clash of civilisations’ and in the West it was seen as ‘a crusade to banish autocracy, atrocities, and militarism’. David Reynolds makes a similar argument and claims that the First World War, in Britain especially, has been reduced to ‘a story of trenches and poets’. The distillation of history into poetry through the reduction of a complex conflict into personal tragedies, Reynolds observes, has led to the loss of the big picture and the obscuration of contemporary viewpoints.

References to The Hague in newspapers during the First World War demonstrate that in the eyes of contemporaries the legacy of the conferences was not one of failure, and reveal the British and American public’s sophisticated engagement with the conflict. As is clear from the thousands of references in British and American newspapers during the First World War, The Hague mattered. The work of Maartje Abbenhuis shows just how important The Hague was as a public idea in the pre-war years. This thesis demonstrates how the power of that idea continued through the ensuing world war.

Between 1914 and 1918, The Hague determined the way in which contemporaries on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean evaluated the behavior of belligerents and neutrals, and highlighted ways that war might be avoided in the future. The Hague underpinned ideas of liberal internationalism, which became an important concept in the post-war years for both countries. The Hague also defined the international law of war and shaped perceptions of international justice and civilisation. Above all, I argue that The Hague was utilised as a common framework of reference within the political debates concerning ideas of Britain’s and the United States’ future place in the world. Historians have not studied the continued relevance of The Hague in the public sphere during the war, and this thesis examines how The Hague was represented in British and American newspapers to reveal contemporary views on issues of war, peace and international organisation.

5 Stevenson, p. 600
6 Ibid, p. 595.
8 Reynolds, p. xv.
The origins of the Hague Conferences lie in the Tsar’s Rescript of August 1898, which was a call by Nicholas II for an international conference to be held to discuss the problem of armaments, not to foil German aggression, as CNN claimed. Emanating as it did from one of the most feared and autocratic rulers of the time, the Rescript was met with a mixture of astonishment and skepticism. The motivations behind the call were debated, but few governments wished to publicly offend the Tsar, or risk being perceived as wrecking attempts at peace, so they accepted the invitation. In the process of organising the conference, its remit was expanded to include arbitration and the laws of war, subjects that many considered more likely to bear fruit than disarmament. The Hague was chosen as the venue of the conference and it took place from May to July, 1899. Representatives of 26 nations attended, and the conference was divided into three commissions: armaments, laws of war and arbitration. Although even the delegates themselves expected little to be achieved at the conference, it did produce a number of conventions. These dealt with issues such as the application of the Geneva Convention to naval warfare, restrictions on particular weapons, the treatment of civilians in occupied territory, and the creation of the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

The desire for a second conference was also expressed in 1899, and this would eventually occur in 1907. The delay was caused by the Russo-Japanese war and pre-conference diplomatic maneuvering around whether the issue of armaments would be included. In the end, the discussion of disarmament was largely excluded from the 1907 conference. That conference was divided into four commissions: arbitration, rules of war on land, rules of war at sea, and maritime law. The second conference, at which

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12 Despite the impetus for the conference coming from Russia, there was little appetite for such a politically sensitive meeting to be held in St Petersburg and it was considered more practical for a smaller European nation to host the event. The Hague was chosen as the venue for the conference due to its accessibility and the Tsar’s relationship with the Dutch Queen Wilhelmina, Nicholas II’s niece. For the best accounts of the planning for the 1899 conference see Abbenhuis *The Hague Conferences*, particularly chapter 3, and Eyffinger, *The 1899 Hague Peace Conference*, chapters 2–4.

13 Tuchman, p. 256.
nations were represented and which, therefore, was much larger than the first, refined the conventions agreed to in 1899 and made a significant contribution to the laws of neutrality.\textsuperscript{14} A permanent court of arbitral justice was almost brought to life but failed to materialise when delegates were unable to agree on a process for selecting judges.\textsuperscript{15} A desire for a third conference, and an on-going conference structure, was agreed on in 1907, and plans were made for the event to take place in 1915.

The Tsar’s Rescript in 1898 generated an unprecedented and very public discussion in Britain and the United States of issues related to war and peace. That discussion continued through the ensuing years and ensured that by 1914 ‘The Hague’ had come to mean or represent a number of different ideas in international society. When contemporaries used the words ‘The Hague’ they usually did so in reference to one of the following prominent issues: the debates about disarmament and the reduction of spending on armaments; the development of arbitration for the peaceful settlement of disputes; the value of international organisations for ensuring pacific international relations; the development of international law and its basis on conceptions of international justice; the issues surrounding what was acceptable conduct for states and their armed forces during wartime; and what it meant for a state to be ‘civilised’. The city of The Hague itself had become intertwined with many of these issues, particularly after the completion of the Peace Palace in 1913. Thus to speak of ‘The Hague’ in 1914 could entail reference to a body of thought, a place, or a combination of the two. This dissertation demonstrates how the multitude of international ideas that developed out of The Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907, relating to war, peace, and international organisation, remained relevant throughout the course of the First World War.

**Literature Review**

Historians have largely neglected the legacy of The Hague, despite their recognition of the importance of the conferences for the development of international law.\textsuperscript{16} The outbreak of the First World War and the way in which it was fought has led many

\textsuperscript{16} Francis Boyle, for example, argues that The Hague continues to ‘play an important role today in buttressing the contemporary regime of international law’; Francis Boyle, *Foundations of World Order: The Legalist Approach to International Relations (1898–1922)*, Durham, 1999, p. 72.
historians to dismiss the conferences as cynical and almost irrelevant events on the path to war in 1914. Nigel Brailey has argued that the 1907 conference, much like its predecessor, is often regarded ‘as little more than a footnote en route to the 1914-1918 war’. Similarly, James Sheehan writes that it is easy to dismiss the Hague Conferences ‘as a gathering of knaves and fools, a farcical prelude to the century’s impending tragedies’. Despite acknowledging the widespread public engagement with the ideas of the conferences when they occurred, historians have not studied how the public’s conception of The Hague developed over time. The work done so far on The Hague suggests that there was public engagement with the conferences after 1907, but the forms this took and how it developed over time are questions rarely pursued. My detailed study on how The Hague was discussed in British and American newspapers through the course of the First World War demonstrates their continued relevance, and provides a broader understanding of the conferences’ place in the history of war, peace and international organisation.

The literature on The Hague Peace Conferences reflects just how contested the meaning of the conferences continues to be. The uncertainty around the first conference’s origins has led to difficulty in clearly identifying what the conferences were ‘about’. The confusion is exacerbated by the divergence between what was initially called for and what took place, as the initial Rescript proclaimed the need for a conference on disarmament, but resulted in two conferences that largely focused on the laws of war and on arbitration. Modern scholarship has consequently used an inconsistent framework to evaluate the success or failure of the conferences: the conferences can be regarded as events of major importance or little significance depending on whether one focuses on arbitration, disarmament, the rules of war, or the establishment of lasting peace in a general sense. The conferences could also be seen as representative of changes in the European and international order, or as examples of normal Concert diplomacy. The uncertainty also leaves the conferences without a natural home in a particular historiography: they could be considered to sit within the history of war, of peace, of international law or of diplomacy, and historians in all these fields of study have addressed the conferences to varying extents.

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18 Sheehan, p. 25.
Few studies have been dedicated to the Conferences themselves, which are typically examined as a small part of a broader subject, such as the history of peace. Arthur Eyffinger, who was the librarian of the Peace Palace at The Hague, and Calvin Davis, an American historian, have produced the most extensive studies focused on the conferences. Eyffinger’s work is largely a narrative of the conferences and a collection of primary sources, but he does argue throughout both books that the conferences highlight the confrontation between nationalism and global thinking. Davis, in his first book on the conferences, argues that they achieved little, but in his second book, published 13 years later, the dismissive attitude has disappeared, and he argues that the conferences can be seen as the foundations of the organised world. Neither Eyffinger nor Davis engage with the longer-term public engagement with the conferences.

Maartje Abbenhuis offers the most comprehensive academic study of the conferences and provides an excellent account of the public engagement around the world with the ideas discussed at The Hague. The public interest in The Hague, Abbenhuis states, provided significant momentum to the conferences and even shaped their agenda. Abbenhuis argues that The Hague ‘helped to define international politics’ and was central to how ‘contemporaries considered their world’. This thesis continues Abbenhuis’s analysis of public engagement with The Hague and traces it through the course of the Great War.

Historians studying peace and particular peace movements have produced some of the most extensive work on the conferences, but their engagement with the role of The Hague in the public sphere is sporadic. Their accounts present the conferences as examples of the long-term development of international peace machinery, but they tend to focus on the views of the leaders of peace groups, the disputes between them, and their interaction with government officials. Such accounts do discuss the public reaction to the conferences in Britain and the United States, but they do so in passing and rarely

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engage with public views on The Hague after the 1907 conference, despite claiming it remained relevant to peace leaders. What is of particular value in the work of these historians is the way they place the peace movement in the context of broader political concerns.24 Scholars such as Paul Laity and A.J.A. Morris, for example, demonstrate the way views in Britain on peace in general and on The Hague in particular, sprang from wider social and political commitments and were strongly influenced by domestic politics.25 Historians of the American peace movement like Roland Marchand, David Patterson, and Charles Chatfield evaluate The Hague in the context of the Progressive Era and present peace as another reform movement.26 Similar to Laity and Morris, they argue that views on The Hague were part of broader social and political concerns. Although suggesting that people would have made sense of The Hague within the domestic political context, these historians’ analyses remain focused on a political or social elite. There is some engagement with popular perceptions of The Hague during the conferences themselves, but very little on their public legacy. My thesis rectifies these shortcomings by engaging with the wider discourse surrounding The Hague in the public sphere in the United States and Great Britain, in which the peace movements played an ongoing role, but were not the only actors.

The idea that the conferences were representative of fundamental changes to the framework of international politics has generated some of the most interesting writing on the conferences. Sheila Kaplan, for example, suggests that the first Hague Conference offered an enormous advance in the history of internationalism and signified diplomats’ and politicians’ recognition that ‘the demands of humanity had to take precedence over narrow national concerns’.27 Ian Clark also develops the idea that The Hague

24 The historians demonstrate the claim by Chatfield and van den Dungen that peace movements need to be understood in the context of domestic and international political cultures; Charles Chatfield & Peter van den Dungen, ‘Introduction’, in Charles Chatfield and Peter van den Dungen eds, Peace Movements and Political Culture, Knoxville, 1988, pp. xi–xx.
27 Sheila Kaplan, ‘Great Britain and the First Hague Conference: An Episode in Internationalism’, PhD, City University of New York, 1973, p. 211. Similar views are expressed in Sandi Cooper,
Conferences demonstrate the accountability of the Great Powers, or international society, to global society. Clark’s argument is largely based on the creation of the Martens clause at The Hague in 1899, which dealt with the protection of non-combatants in occupied territory. Clark suggests that the Martens Clause existed first and foremost as an appeal to the laws of humanity and the dictates of public conscience. Clark argues that at the heart of the Martens clause is the idea that what is acceptable within the confines of international society must eventually be answerable to a wider court of opinion. It is there, according to Clark, that international legitimacy is found. This thesis substantiates Kaplan and Clark’s claims by demonstrating how British and American newspaper coverage of the war’s conduct reveals contemporary assumptions that state conduct was answerable to global opinion.

In contrast to such positive representations of The Hague, Mark Mazower and Glenda Sluga demonstrate how notions of race, civilisation, and empire were key subtexts of the conferences. Mazower argues that The Hague’s focus on the use of international law to regulate behaviour between ‘civilized states’ had the effect of removing the ‘protection of the law from everyone else’. Sluga makes a similar argument by suggesting that the international communities whose ideas found expression at The Hague were ‘vulnerable to the civilizational and racial language’ that carried European empires across the world. However, Sluga also argues that the meaning of The Hague, and internationalism more broadly, was contested. My study of British and American newspapers during the First World War helps to demonstrate how contemporaries used The Hague as a vehicle for advancing competing visions of internationalism.

Those writing broad studies of war in European history have largely excluded the conferences from their accounts. Brian Bond’s influential *War and Society in Europe,*

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28 Clark defines international society as ‘the realm of the governmental and the official’, while global society is that of ‘the individual, of the non-official group or movement, and of the transnational network of nongovernmental agents’. Ian Clark, *International Legitimacy and World Society,* Oxford, 2007, p. 6.

29 Ibid, pp. 79–81.


1870–1970 contains a common treatment of the conferences.33 In a discussion of the arms race of the late nineteenth century, Bond states that Count Witte, the Russian Minister of Finance, ‘hit on the ingenious idea of summoning a disarmament conference to approve a ten-year ‘holiday’ in the arms build up’, but that the ‘resulting Hague Conference of 1899 disappointed these expectations’.34 That is the extent of Bond’s engagement with the first conference, and he gives even less attention to the second. Similarly, Michael Howard’s 2009 publication, War in European History, contains a limited engagement with The Hague.35 Howard states that attempts were made during the Nineteenth Century to lay down ground rules that would make war humane, and the creation of the Red Cross and the international conferences at Geneva, in 1864 and 1906, and The Hague, in 1899 and 1907, are evidence of this. It is partly because of such humanitarian activities, Howard argues, that ‘the onset of ‘mass-war’ did not involve a relapse into barbarism’.36 Given that Bond and Howard’s works are grand surveys of war in European history it is understandable that they cannot go into too much depth, but such accounts highlight the tendency of historians studying the fin de siècle to focus on factors pushing towards war at the expense of those trying to prevent it.37

Barbara Tuchman’s chapter on The Hague conferences in her seminal work The Proud Tower, for many years one of the most extensive studies of the conferences, demonstrates the value of the 1899 and 1907 meetings for understanding the origins of the First World War. Tuchman argues that the origins of the First World War cannot be explained by diplomacy alone and that a study of society as a whole is needed, so that ‘underlying causes and deeper forces’ can be identified.38 Tuchman presents a world in which there was a mood for peace and a mood for war. The Hague, for Tuchman, is important because to some extent it forced both sides to articulate their positions, meaning that the conferences provide a window onto contemporary attitudes towards peace and war. Despite Tuchman’s call for an examination of society, her work is largely

34 Ibid, p. 57.
36 Ibid, p. 117.
37 This is particularly evident in the significant attention Howard gives to the widespread militarism of the period. Howard argues that by the end of the nineteenth century militarism was not just a bourgeois phenomenon, as the working class had also embraced it. Howard argues that such attitudes led to the people of Europe marching happily to war in 1914 and remaining enthusiastic about it until 1916; Howard, pp. 110–111.
38 Tuchman, p. xiv.
top-down and focuses on the personalities of delegates to The Hague, government officials and peace advocates.

The Hague conferences also draw the attention of historians seeking to explain the way in which the First World War, and future conflicts, were conducted. Maartje Abbenhuis has demonstrated the importance of The Hague for the codification of the laws of war in general, and of neutrality in particular. Adam Roberts, Geoffrey Best, and Scott Keefer have produced work that examines the legacy of The Hague Conventions and their ability to limit armaments and restrain behaviour during conflicts. Their accounts are focused on engagement with The Hague at a state level and offer very little examination of the public discussion of the conferences.

A number of historians have examined public engagement with international law during the First World War, and many of their accounts reference The Hague. Isabel Hull has recently argued that The Hague was a key part of international law and attempts to demonstrate that the conduct of belligerents with regards to the international laws of war was ‘hugely important to policy makers and to world public opinion’. Still, she provides little evidence to support her claim. Other historians studying the conduct of the First World War, such as Alan Kramer, John Horne, and Larry Zuckerman, also investigate Germany’s violations of international law and discuss what this may have meant to people at the time. They occasionally refer to The Hague, but none draws upon it as a central component of this public understanding. This thesis demonstrates how central The Hague was to contemporary conceptions of international law.

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William Mulligan argues that conceptions of peace and international law were central to the First World War since for many they provided meaning to the conflict.\textsuperscript{43} The discussion of peace and international law in the decades preceding the war, Mulligan argues, had created ‘norms that structured the international order’ and needed to be taken into account in politicians’ policy decisions.\textsuperscript{44} Nicoletta Gullace argues that international legislation came to prominence during the war in response to reports of German atrocities, and ‘the once-scorned Hague Convention’ was soon hailed as a moral bulwark against barbarity and an embodiment of civilisation.\textsuperscript{45} Gullace is more focused on the British government’s construction of the image of barbaric Germany rather than its reception by the public, and there is little evidence of how people in Britain engaged with such messages. Although not directly contradicting Gullace, Adrian Gregory and Catriona Pennell argue that the British public were not easily manipulated by their government and instead made well informed and thoroughly considered judgements about the war and what they hoped it would achieve.\textsuperscript{46} Pennell argues that many Britons considered the defence of international law a commendable reason for British entry into the war and were not ‘brainwashed’ by propaganda into doing so.\textsuperscript{47}

The work of the historians discussed above suggests that there was public engagement in Britain and the United States with The Hague during the First World War, but this is not examined in any depth. This thesis adds to the work of historians like Hull, Kramer, Mulligan and Pennell by demonstrating how important The Hague was to the public discussion of the war in Britain and the United States. In doing so, this thesis adds to our understanding of British and American society during the war by revealing the legacy of The Hague and the nuanced manner in which contemporaries discussed the conflict. Understanding the manner in which Britons and Americans used The Hague to assess the war is also important for making sense of their post-war expectations. The years after the Great War saw a remarkable transformation of international relations, which was shaped by competing visions of the ideal world order and by the calls to

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{47} Pennell, p. 64.
punish wartime crimes. Newspaper discussion of The Hague reveals that the British and American public had been debating the civilised way of conducting war and the benefits of international organisations well before the statesmen gathered at Paris in 1919, and this thesis traces the contours of those debates during the Great War.

Methodology

This thesis focuses on Britain and the United States for a number of reasons. The prominence of Britain and the United States in the field of international law and the important roles they played at the two Hague conferences makes them natural choices for study. In both countries there was vociferous public debate around The Hague with many commonalities; where they differed was usually in terms of nation or region-specific references. The main difference between Britain and the United States during the First World War was the belligerency of one and the initial neutrality of the other. While this sometimes resulted in British and American newspapers utilising The Hague in different ways, in both countries The Hague was a signifier of civilisation. By examining how The Hague was used in the print media in Britain and the United States, this thesis provides insight into the tensions between isolationism and internationalism in two countries that played important roles in international affairs throughout the twentieth century and were key players in the war itself. Indeed, the First World War created a shift in world power from Britain to the United States and studying the messages about The Hague in these two countries allows for comparison between two superpowers: one fading and the other emergent; one belligerent and one neutral.

Newspapers have been chosen as the main source for this project because, as George Robb states, they ‘were the most important source of information’ for people in Britain and the United States during the war and provide the best access to contemporary discussion of the conflict.48 Newspapers during the First World War, and the British press in particular, also occupy a prominent place among the ‘encrustations of hindsight’ that David Stevenson warns of.49 British newspapers have assumed such a prominent and negative role in accounts of the First World War that it has been incredibly difficult to challenge received opinion about them. The various commemorative acts for the

49 Stevenson, p. 600.
centenary of the Great War have exposed the scorn in which British newspapers’ coverage of the conflict continues to be held. On 27 July, 2014, the prominent British newspaper the *Guardian* printed an article entitled ‘First world war: how state and press kept truth off the front page’. The article, written by professor of journalism Roy Greenslade, captures the manner in which many today regard the British press during the war. Greenslade argues:

> On this, the 100th anniversary of the day the first world war began, it is sobering to look back at the way that conflict was so badly reported. The catalogue of journalist misdeeds is a matter of record: the willingness to publish propaganda as fact, the apparently tame acceptance of censorship and the failure to hold power to account.50

In his influential work, *State and Society, A Social History of Britain*, Martin Pugh expresses a similar sentiment by claiming that the British press ‘largely abandoned any responsibility to report truthfully to the public about the war’.51

This negative portrayal of British newspapers’ reporting of the First World War has a long heritage. Almost as soon as the conflict was over, diplomats, politicians and military officials offered their thoughts on the origins of the war and the manner in which it was conducted.52 A focus of these reminiscences were atrocity stories and other supposed falsehoods that were presented as fact in the newspapers, particularly in the British press.53 Robert Graves is a prominent example of the post-war reimagining of the conflict and the role of the British press. In *Good-bye To All That*, a work that helped create the motif of the press and politicians manipulating the British public during the First World War, Graves claimed that prior to the war it had never occurred to him ‘that newspapers and statesmen could lie’.54

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50 [https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/jul/27/first-world-war-state-press-reporting](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/jul/27/first-world-war-state-press-reporting) Greenslade attempts to absolve journalists to some extent by claiming they ‘were prevented from informing the public by three powerful forces – the government, the military and their own proprietors’.


52 Janet Watson argues that it was in the late 1920s ‘that the floodgates opened and books about the war became all the rage’; Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 186.


54 Robert Graves, *Good-Bye To All That, An Autobiography*, London, 1929, p. 94. For an examination of the development of Graves’ views on the war and how they were represented in *Goodbye to All That*, see Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, pp. 221–228.
British experience of the First World War, newspapers are personified and discussed as if they are characters in the great tragedy, alongside other central figures like Wilhelm II, Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson.

Greenslade, Pugh and Graves’ image of pernicious newspapers peddling lies to a public that apparently accepted whatever they were told about the war not only promotes a negative view of the press, but also robs the British public of agency. As other historians demonstrate, the British press was not as sensationalist or misleading as people like Greenslade suggest, and the British public engaged with the war in a more sophisticated manner than is typically presented.55 George Robb, for example, argues that historians’ harsh treatment of the British press obscures the complex nature of wartime reporting. Instead of the newspapers unleashing a coordinated barrage of falsehoods, as Pugh and Greenslade would have us believe, Robb argues that ‘wartime press accounts committed few outright lies’.56 Many miss the important point, made by Colin Lovelace, that ‘the press during the First World War was far too powerful an institution for any government to control or to repress’.57 Throughout the war, the British press ‘retained freedom of opinion and the right to criticise’, and they exercised these rights with alacrity.58

The American press during the First World War has not been vilified in the same manner as the British. Historians have used newspapers in the United States to try and identify the American public’s opinions on the war and related issues. What they have

56 Robb points out that newspapers took diverse approaches to reporting the war, such as the Daily Mirror calling for tolerance of conscientious objectors at the same time as John Bull called for them to be shot. The provincial press also tended to contain more graphic descriptions of battles and life in the trenches than the national newspapers. Despite the lack of flagrant lies in the newspapers, they did contain ‘many significant omissions’. Casualty lists were published but they were not weighed against the ground gained or the damage suffered by the enemy. There was also a tendency to overstate British success and use euphemistic language to describe battles and the squalid conditions at the front. Much of this stemmed not from a sinister desire to mislead, but from the press not being given information to report the battles accurately and it being unwise to do so anyway: Robb, p. 113.
58 Lovelace, p. 314. See also Pennell, p. 7.
revealed is the diversity of reactions to the war, which were often dictated by regional and ethnic identity. For the first years of the war, the majority of major newspapers were sympathetic to the Entente, but their owners and editors remained wary of belligerents’ attempts to manipulate American opinion. The American newspaper market changed radically after the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917. Soon after the declaration of war, Wilson created the Committee on Public Information (CPI), a propaganda organisation that supervised domestic publications and promoted the war to the American public. Pervasive propaganda coupled with wartime anxiety and xenophobia created an emotionally charged and ‘repressive atmosphere’. Studies of the American experience of the First World War often focus on the conflict’s effect on domestic politics and on the development of American elites’ views on the United States’ place in the world. Newspaper references to The Hague reveal that the discussion about the future world order and the United States’ role in it was not solely the preserve of politicians and East Coast elites. The debates about the structure of international relations took place in popular newspapers around the country. The Hague helped facilitate the discussion as it provided a useful framework for imagining an alternative system of international relations.

This thesis demonstrates that the British and American press actually facilitated a vibrant discussion during the war, which included a sophisticated engagement with the way in which it was being conducted and what the international order might look like after the conflict finished. References to The Hague in newspapers in Britain and the United States reveal an extensive engagement with ideas of civilised warfare and the


world order. Historians’ preoccupation with atrocity stories and what was *not* printed in newspapers, such as detailed troop movements and conditions in trenches, has lead them to neglect what did actually appear. This thesis examines newspapers in Britain and the United States without seeking to demonstrate the press’ shortcomings, and by doing so it reveals the sophisticated and nuanced public discussion of the war that took place in those countries.

Historians have long debated the value of newspapers as a source. When historians study newspapers, Simon Potter asks, ‘how representative are the opinions they encounter? Do they reflect popular views or merely those of the paper’s editorial staff?’ The question of whose opinion it is that newspapers present is as old as newspapers themselves. Mark Hampton’s study of the British press from 1850 to 1950 points out that newspaper consumption ‘is not a passive process’ and that despite some press magnates’ desire to shape popular opinion, ‘readers assign diverse meanings to texts’. Many historians, such as Krull and McKercher, argue that newspapers both shaped and reflected ‘the biases of their owners and their readerships’. Jeffrey Verhey relies heavily on newspapers as indicators of public opinion in his excellent study of German attitudes to the outbreak of war in 1914. While accepting that the press both mirrored and formed public opinion, Verhey argues that the examination of a range of newspapers with different political orientations provides ‘a literary seismograph of the different strains of public opinion’. Troy Paddock makes a similar argument, claiming that ‘it is possible to get some insight into the ever-elusive public opinion by examining how various newspapers presented their views on the war to their constituencies’. A detailed examination of the press is crucial, Paddock argues, as it reveals ‘how newspapers framed the issues surrounding the war and the war itself’.

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69 Ibid, p. 10.
Drawing inspiration from historians like Verhey and Paddock, this thesis does not treat newspapers as uncomplicated windows onto public opinion, and instead argues that newspapers reveal the nature of the public discussion about current events. On a number of occasions, the editors of the newspapers examined in this study stated that they had received an enormous number of letters, far more than they could print, and those that appeared in the newspapers were considered to be representative. While we are unable to read the unpublished letters and determine just how representative those selected for publication were, the letters to the editor and ‘questions and answers’ sections are evidence of the newspapers being involved in a genuine dialogue with their readers. Regardless of who was influencing whom, we cannot escape the fact that in Britain and the United States The Hague was a prominent part of newspaper coverage of the war and the language of war, peace and international politics.

This study does not seek to identify a single ‘opinion’ on The Hague, but instead examines the ways in which various publications positioned The Hague in relation to other issues, such as political and social concerns. Such an approach provides insight into the public discourse on The Hague at particular times and allows for the examination of any variations over time and between the United States and Great Britain. Glenda Sluga reminds us in her study of early twentieth century internationalism that the key way of understanding international society is to analyse ‘the historically-specific social and political dimensions’ of its narrative. Sluga’s work offers a useful model for researching the ongoing meanings of The Hague. By examining contemporary representations of The Hague ideas in print media, the thesis pieces together what the public discourse on The Hague was at particular times and frames how the discourse around, about and referencing The Hague changed over time and differed between newspapers and countries.

In order to examine the public discussion of The Hague over the course of the war years, the thesis provides a series of case studies in which British and American

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70 For Example, in May 1915 the editor of the New York Times stated that the newspaper had received an ‘overwhelming number’ of letters about the sinking of the Lusitania and had only been able to print what they considered to be a representative sample. New York Times, ‘Opinion on the Sinking of the Lusitania’, 12 May 1915, p. 12.

71 All the newspapers examined in this study contained Letters to the Editor sections, but the space given to readers’ correspondence varied between publications. Sections dedicated to answering readers’ questions about the war appeared in most of the newspapers at various times, but they were not a permanent feature of any of the publications.

72 Sluga, p. 18.
newspaper coverage during particular periods is examined. To make the enormous amount of source material manageable there are three main sections, each focused on a two- or three-month period during the conflict: July–September 1914; April–May 1915; February–April 1917. The time periods have been selected as they provide snapshots of the public discussion at key moments in the war: the diplomatic crisis and outbreak of the conflict in 1914; the radicalisation of its conduct in 1915; and the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the United States’ declaration of war in 1917. Although some of the most iconic battles of the First World War occurred during 1916, it is not the focus of a section in this thesis because a keyword search of prominent newspapers for this year reveals that the patterns of discussing the war established in the first year of the conflict continued through to early 1917. This thesis also does not include a section on 1918, since a keyword search for this year similarly reveals that changes to the newspapers’ discussion of the war in early 1917, which were the result of Wilson’s rise to international prominence and American entry into the war, continued to the end of the conflict.

Each of the sections has two chapters: one that examines references to The Hague in the discussion of the conduct of the war, and another that looks at its role in the debate about international organisations and the structure of the post-war world. At its heart, the thesis is a comparative study and each chapter brings out both the commonalities and differences between approaches to The Hague in the United States and Britain. The key reason for doing this is to highlight that The Hague was utilised in different ways as a means to advance particular nationalist and internationalist ends.

This study draws heavily from prominent daily newspapers, such as The Times and Daily Mail in Britain, and the New York Times and Chicago Daily Tribune in the United States. It also utilises a number of periodicals, such as the New Statesman and the Woman’s Dreadnought, to analyse the discourses around certain key moments. Finally, the thesis draws on an array of other published material, like pamphlets, books, and propaganda materials of interested and motivated internationalist groups in the United States and Britain. The main focus, however, is British and American daily newspapers, which were the main source of information on the war and played a key role in shaping public discussion of the conflict.

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73 These three main sections follow a preliminary chapter that demonstrates the place of The Hague in British and American newspaper reporting from 1899 to 1914.
The vast array of newspapers in each country makes the task of finding a representative sample incredibly difficult. In order to make the source-base manageable, each of the three sections is based primarily on four prominent daily newspapers, two from each country. While focusing on different publications in each of the sections prevents me examining how a particular newspaper’s coverage may have changed throughout the war, it allows me to get a better sense of the broader press discussion. The examination of a range of prominent newspapers provides a more expansive view of the public discussion of the war than could be achieved by focusing on one or two newspapers’ coverage of the entire conflict. The newspapers selected for this study had high readership figures and provide a variety of political and regional perspectives. While not claiming these newspapers are representative of public opinion in either country, this sample of six daily newspapers from each country does reveal the way in which The Hague was referenced in the public debate about the war. The close reading of a selection of newspapers provides insights into the nature of a public discussion that has been omitted from historical accounts, the restoration of which is the purpose of this thesis.

The newspaper markets in Britain and the United States were vastly different. The British newspaper market was dominated by the national dailies, the newspapers from London or Manchester that were read all over Great Britain. There were a large number of provincial and local newspapers, but they had small readerships and relied heavily on the London dailies for national and international news. Each of the three sections in this thesis focuses on two of the national dailies, which represent – or target – different political groups. Alongside the national dailies, a group of newspapers from other centres around Britain, such as Edinburgh, Cardiff, Birmingham and Liverpool, are also referred to throughout this study. These newspapers allow me to ensure that the messages about The Hague in the main London newspapers were not completely out of step with those in other parts of the country, and are referenced throughout the thesis; however, the main focus of analysis in each section is the two prominent newspapers.

Unlike that of Britain, the United States’ newspaper market was not dominated by national dailies, and the newspaper reading public mainly consumed product created

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Prominent newspapers from the big cities, such as the *New York Times* and *Chicago Daily Tribune*, were beginning to be read throughout the country and provided international news to many of the local newspapers, but they had not achieved the national dominance of the London dailies. Consequently, American engagement with the war took place within distinct regional contexts, and the nature of the newspaper discussion about the underlying issues of the conflict reflected local concerns. Because the United States lacked newspapers with broad national readerships and is too large and diverse to attempt a study representative of the entire country, for each of the sections I have selected two prominent newspapers from different areas of the country as case studies. I do not claim they represent American opinion in its entirety, but together they provide a glimpse into the discussion about the war in the American press.

The majority of the newspapers used in this thesis were examined via online databases and the rest were accessed on microfilm. Regardless of the manner in which I accessed them, for the four main newspapers in each section I have read the entire newspaper including advertisements, sports and humorous sections. I did this in order to see if The Hague, or its associated ideas, was referenced obliquely. Reading the entire newspaper also helped me gain a better sense of the overall tone of the newspapers and to see if The Hague was referenced in unexpected ways. The majority of the newspapers were printed from Monday to Saturday, and for the four main newspapers in each section I have read all the editions that were available during the relevant two- or three-month period. For the other British newspapers and any weekly publications, I read the front pages, leading articles, editorials and letters to the editor. I have largely avoided using

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77 Mott, p. 589.


79 During this period very few newspapers credited articles to particular journalists. Articles were sometimes attributed to a generic staff role, such as ‘political correspondent’, but often they were printed with no authorial information at all. For the sake of consistency, throughout the thesis I only cite article titles.
key word searches of the newspapers in the online databases except to ensure I did not miss any references to The Hague in my close reading.80

Thesis Structure

The first chapter demonstrates the way in which British and American newspapers discussed the 1899 and 1907 conferences and the multitude of meanings that had become attached to The Hague by 1914. The chapter provides an overview of the broader discussion about The Hague in British and American newspapers rather than a case study of particular newspapers during a specific two- or three-month period. In order to cover such an extensive period and make use of a wider range of newspapers, this chapter is based on word searches in digital databases. I searched a number of prominent daily newspapers from both countries for references to The Hague and related topics, such as arbitration, laws of war, disarmament and international law. The variety of newspapers examined provides an insight into the range of tones in which contemporaries discussed The Hague before the First World War.

The first section of the thesis, chapters 3 and 4, examines references to The Hague from July to August 1914. Chapter 3 argues that those hoping to end the escalating conflict looked to The Hague for tools to do so, and discussed ways to strengthen the institutions at The Hague in order to prevent such a conflict occurring again. At the same time, as chapter 4 demonstrates, people used The Hague conventions to assess the manner in which the war was being conducted. The way in which the war was being fought quickly became a key reason for why the war was being fought, particularly in Britain where German forces’ conduct provided retrospective justification for British participation in the conflict, and The Hague was central to this discussion. Despite one nation’s belligerency and the other’s neutrality, newspaper reporting from both countries in July and August 1914 demonstrated a shared perception of The Hague’s importance both for understanding the war and for imagining the post-war world.

The newspapers surveyed in this section, the Manchester Guardian and Daily Mail from Britain, and the Chicago Daily Tribune and Los Angeles Times from the United States, have been selected because they were prominent and well-read newspapers...
but had different readerships in a political and geographic sense. The *Daily Mail* in 1914 was the ‘true titan’ of the daily press in Britain.\(^81\) The newspaper, which espoused a form of populist conservatism, had the largest circulation in Britain and it tended to reflect its proprietor Lord Northcliffe’s negative views on Germany.\(^82\) Although critics liked to bemoan the paper’s sensationalism, the tone of the *Daily Mail*’s writing was actually quite respectable and restrained.\(^83\) The *Manchester Guardian* remained the most important regional newspaper in Britain and was seen as the voice of ‘establishment liberalism’.\(^84\) The *Los Angeles Times* was an influential newspaper on the United States’ West Coast and was used by its Republican stalwart owner, Harry Chandler, as a vehicle for promoting Los Angeles and to push for particular development ventures.\(^85\) The second American newspaper, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, had played a similar role for Joseph Medill who, as publisher of the newspaper in the 1850s, used the newspaper to promote Chicago and the modern Republican Party.\(^86\) By 1914, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* was considered an important newspaper in the Midwest and ‘one of the top Republican papers in the country’.\(^87\) These newspapers all engaged with the war in different ways, and all four referenced The Hague extensively.

The chapters in the second section examine newspaper coverage from April and May 1915. This period saw a number of events that symbolised the radicalisation of combat, such as the first large-scale use of poisonous gas on the Western Front and the sinking of the passenger ship *Lusitania*. These events brought The Hague back to prominence, and chapter 5 discusses the newspapers’ debate about the nature of civilised warfare and whether the conventions should be followed to the letter or obeyed in spirit. This period also saw an international congress of women take place at The Hague and chapter 6 examines the role of The Hague machinery in the women’s vision of the post-war world. I argue that instead of receiving widespread criticism in British newspapers, as

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\(^81\) Gregory, ‘A Clash of Cultures’, p. 16.
\(^83\) Gregory, ‘A Clash of Cultures’, p. 16.
\(^84\) Ibid, pp. 16–18.
historians have suggested, the women’s efforts were presented favourably in significant sections of the press.

The two British newspapers examined in this section, The Times and the Daily News and Leader (hereafter Daily News), were targeted at different sections of British society. The Daily News was the most influential liberal newspaper of the ‘half-penny’ press in Britain, and its circulation climbed to around 750,000 in the first years of the war. The Daily News had argued against British entry into the war in 1914, openly criticised the anti-German feeling generated by certain sections of the press, and was comfortable printing articles that advocated peace. In contrast, The Times (London), the circulation of which was likely around the 200,000 mark in 1915, was still considered the newspaper for the ‘governing classes’. Its pages were filled with ‘serious political comment’, it was influential amongst those in power, both in Britain and overseas, and it was strongly against a “premature peace”. The American newspapers examined in chapters 5 and 6, the New York Times and San Francisco Chronicle, catered to very different local markets. The New York Times re-made itself in the late 1890s in opposition to the sensationalism of the so-called ‘yellow press’. It offered extensive editorials and news coverage, both domestic and international, while limiting the space for entertainment. During the war, the newspaper was conservative and anti-interventionist, but ‘solidly pro-Allies’. The San Francisco Chronicle was ‘highly popular’ in California and the preponderance of sports, gossip and real estate coverage made it much more of a “populist” newspaper than its New York counterpart. It focused on local news and domestic politics more than international affairs, and often presented the war in Europe as a distant and almost irrelevant event. This attitude of disengagement would change after the sinking of the Lusitania.

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89 See Gregory, The Last Great War, p. 16; Haste, p. 114.
91 Haste, p. 29.
92 Mott, p. 550.
93 Ibid.
The final section of the thesis focuses on references to The Hague during the key period of February to April 1917. This period saw the resumption of the German unrestricted submarine campaign, the abdication of the Russian Tsar and the United States declaration of war on Germany. Chapter 7 examines the newspaper discussion of the war at sea and the way The Hague continued to act as a symbol of civilisation and a guide to appropriate conduct. Chapter 8 argues that in early 1917 Wilson came to dominate the discussion of the post-war world, and as he pointedly avoided referencing The Hague or advocating international courts, The Hague began to appear less frequently in newspapers.

The newspapers examined in this section plied their trade in very different market circumstances to that of 1914. In Britain, wartime restrictions on access to materials had forced newspapers to reduce the number of pages or – as was the case for the Daily Mail – to increase their price. Created at the turn of the century as a rival to the Daily Mail, the Daily Express was a halfpenny newspaper that featured news on its front page rather than advertising, and openly supported the Tory Party. In the words of its part-owner Lord Beaverbrook, the newspaper aimed at those who were ‘bent on moving upwards and outward’. Also a halfpenny daily newspaper, the Daily Chronicle was associated with the left-wing of the Liberal Party. The newspaper’s popularity increased during the war until its purchase by Lloyd George in 1918 significantly damaged its reputation.

In 1914, the Daily Chronicle’s national circulation had been approximately 400,000 a day, placing it third behind the Daily Mail and Daily News, and just above the Daily Express, which had a daily circulation of around 300,000. Both newspapers’ circulation increased dramatically during the war, as it did for much of the British press, but the Daily Chronicle also saw its market share increase. In 1917, the Daily Express circulation had risen to about 450,000 a day, while the Daily Chronicle may have been as high as 800,000. Indeed, the New Statesman noted in March 1917 that many people...

99 McEwen, p. 468.
100 McEwen states that circulation figures for the war years are much more conjectural than before 1914; McEwen, pp. 481–2.
101 Ibid, p. 482.
would be surprised to learn that the *Daily Chronicle* had ‘for a long time past had a larger circulation in the London district than the *Daily Mail*.102 Whatever the exact circulation figures, the two newspapers reached a significant number of Britons in 1917.

The operating environment for the two American newspapers examined in this chapter was markedly different from that in Britain, as censorship was yet to be introduced and paper was readily available. The *St Louis Post-Dispatch* had been ‘fading away to nothing’ when it was purchased by Joseph Pulitzer in 1878.103 Pulitzer used the newspaper to promote local crusades such as cleaning and repairing streets and to attack political corruption, and quickly turned the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* into the leading evening newspaper in St Louis.104 It remained dominant in St Louis at the outbreak of the First World War with an average circulation on weekdays of 170,000 and on Sundays of 300,000.105 It had been Pulitzer’s desire to break into the New York newspaper market that led to the creation of the *New York Evening World*. Pulitzer purchased the *New York World* in 1883 and changed the newspaper’s focus to ‘gossip, scandal, and sensation in general’.106 The *New York World*’s circulation increased significantly and led to the creation of the *New York Evening World* in 1887.107 Despite the sensationalism indulged in by the two *World* newspapers, their editorial pages became ‘a leading spokesman for liberal ideas in America’.108 During the war, the *New York Evening World*, like most of the New York press, was ‘solidly pro-Ally’.109 Despite a similar political orientation, the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* and *New York Evening World* catered for local markets that differed in their engagement with and attitude towards the war.

What is evident across the different newspapers and time periods is how ubiquitous references to The Hague were throughout the war. The conferences were not intended to prevent war ever occurring again, nor could they have done so. They did, however, have a significant cultural and political impact on contemporaries. Because of The Hague, debate about war, peace and international law achieved an unprecedented

102 *New Statesman*, ‘Observations’, 24 March 1917, p. 588. The article claimed that the *Daily Mail*’s circulation had dropped as a result of its recent price increase, which meant a Liberal newspaper, the *Daily News*, now had the largest circulation in Britain.

103 Douglas, p. 100.

104 Mott, p. 433.

105 O’Brien, p. 454.

106 Mott, p. 434.


109 Emery and Emery, p. 294.
prominence. The Hague provided structure to the discussion of how international relations could be conducted and the way in which civilised states fought wars. Instead of being cast aside at the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, the journalistic evidence of the time suggests that The Hague remained relevant in the Anglo-American world throughout the course of the war. The British and American public’s use of The Hague not only reveals the ongoing legacy of the conferences, but also demonstrates contemporaries’ more sophisticated engagement with the war than historians typically suggest. When the guns of August tore apart the European peace in 1914, people in Britain and the United States were armed with the tools provided by The Hague to assess the conflict in a variety of ways. How The Hague came to occupy such a prominent place in British and American newspapers’ discussion of war and peace will be examined in the next chapter.
2. The Hague in British and American Newspapers, 1899 to 1914

From the outset, The Hague conferences of 1899 and 1907 received and were shaped by extensive public engagement from around the world. Newspapers were filled with coverage and analysis of the proceedings of the conferences, which, Sandi Cooper argues, created ‘an open forum on international issues’. British and American newspaper reporting on The Hague offers a useful compendium of the public discourses surrounding The Hague in the two countries. What is clear from investigating this public discourse is that by 1914 on both sides of the Atlantic ‘The Hague’ was a signifier of the much-used term ‘civilisation’, a term that underpinned many contemporary responses to the beginning of the First World War. The Hague had distinct meanings at a more basic level as well. The phrase ‘The Hague’ was a direct signifier of the law of war, the law of neutrality and international law more widely. Contemporaries on both sides of the Atlantic also used The Hague to invoke concepts of international organization, disarmament and arbitration. Most significantly, The Hague was not only a signifier of ideas, but the ideas themselves had become intertwined with the physical reality of the city itself. The ‘place’ of The Hague symbolised the space where the ideas of peace, international law, and international organization were realised. When people spoke of ‘The Hague’ in 1914, they could have been referring to the institutions of The Hague, the ideas that underpinned them, the town itself, or a combination of these things.

As the following chapters demonstrate, the ideas of The Hague conferences continued to resonate in the Anglo-American world throughout the course of the First World War. The Hague shaped contemporaries’ assessments of the way in which the war was conducted, and it continued to provide a framework for discussing how conflicts might be avoided in future. The Hague underpinned ideas of internationalism and was frequently cited in relation to potential post-war developments in international law. In other words, conceptions of The Hague, which became established in the British and American public discourse between 1898 and 1914, influenced Anglo-American public

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1 Abbenhuis, *The Hague Conferences, passim*, provides an excellent account of the importance of public agency in shaping the diplomatic negotiations at the Hague conferences.
3 Hynes, p. 4.
engagement with issues of war, peace and international organisation during the First World War. This chapter traces the development of this discourse from 1898 to the outbreak of war.

Instead of conducting case studies of particular newspapers during a two- or three-month period, as the rest of the thesis does, this chapter provides an overview of the broader discussion about The Hague in the British and American press from 1898 to 1914. The chapter demonstrates the extent to and manner in which The Hague during this period became entrenched in British and American newspapers’ discussion of particular issues; such as peace, disarmament, arbitration, international organisation, and the rules of war. By 1914, references to The Hague in relation to such issues appeared in the British and American press without explicatory information; the newspapers simply assumed their readers knew what was meant.

In order to demonstrate the nature and pervasiveness of press references to The Hague in two countries across a period of 15 years, I have utilised a number of newspapers from Britain and the United States, and conducted keyword searches in digital databases. I searched for references to The Hague specifically, but also to terms such as ‘disarmament’, ‘arbitration’, and ‘the rules of war’. There were a staggering number of references to the conferences in the newspapers. For example, a keyword search for ‘The Hague’ from 1 May to 1 August, 1899, returns 288 articles in the New York Times, 232 in the Chicago Daily Tribune, 227 in The Times and 218 in the Manchester Guardian. Some of these articles referenced people with the surname Hague or involved news unrelated to the conference; however, the majority of the search results were about the meeting instigated by the Tsar. Searches for words such as ‘arbitration’ or ‘disarmament’ returned many more articles that discussed the conference but did not specifically contain the term The Hague. Similarly, large numbers were returned in a search of the months during which the 1907 conference took place and when the Peace Palace was opened in 1913.

I searched a number of prominent daily newspapers with different regional and political outlooks, such as the Chicago Daily Tribune, New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times and Atlanta Constitution from the United States, and The Times,

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4 Of course, newspaper discussion of the conferences began well before the proceedings commenced and continued well after they concluded, and I have accordingly searched the months before and after each event.
Manchester Guardian and Daily Mail from Britain.\(^5\) To make the number of articles manageable, I focused on editorials, leading articles and letters to the editor; however, I also examined references to The Hague that appeared in unexpected places, such as sports and humorous sections. Off-hand references to the conferences in articles about American sports demonstrate the normalisation of The Hague and the range of voices that discussed it in the press. Newspaper databases often display articles that contain the selected keywords in a way that is ‘detached from the issues in which they appeared’.\(^6\) To combat this detachment, I viewed the full-page image of all the articles I examined before conducting a detailed reading.

Anglo-American press coverage of The Hague cannot be reduced to a single editorial view, and individual newspapers obviously reported on the conferences and related issues in a variety of ways during the period from 1899 to 1914. Scholarship has recognised that using keyword searches in digital databases can present a misleading sense of uniformity across countries and newspapers.\(^7\) However, in the huge corpus of newspaper coverage it is possible to identify a broad framework within which discussion of The Hague and debates about its meaning took place. Rather than an exhaustive study of specific newspapers’ coverage of the conferences, the purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the wider discussion of The Hague that took place in the British and American press. The newspapers demonstrate the vast public interest in the ideas discussed at The Hague, and the articles referenced in this chapter have been chosen to illustrate the contours of that coverage. In order to make the huge number of newspaper references manageable, this chapter is thematic and structured around the main ideas that came to be associated with The Hague.

**Disarmament**

One of the ideas most commonly associated with The Hague conferences was disarmament. The first conference was initially presented as a disarmament conference

\(^5\) I recognise the absence of a popular (half-penny) Liberal daily newspaper, such as the Daily News or Daily Chronicle, but these were unavailable on a digital database, and it is unlikely their coverage of the conferences was significantly different from the Manchester Guardian.


\(^7\) Putnam, passim; Mussell, p. 82.
and the issues of arbitration, the codification of the laws of war and the development of international organisations came to prominence later. That the Tsar intended the proposed conference to focus on armaments was clear from the opening sentence of his Rescript. It claimed that ‘a possible reduction of the excessive armaments which weigh upon all nations’ was ‘an ideal towards which the endeavors of all Governments should be directed’. The financial, intellectual, and physical resources of nations were being wasted on armaments, stated the Rescript, and the peoples of the world were struggling to bear this ‘crushing burden’. While concerns about armaments preceded The Hague conferences, they entered public discourse in a new way in the wake of the Tsar’s Rescript.

Many of the people of whom the Tsar spoke in his Rescript seemed to agree with the need to alleviate the burden of armaments, as his call for an international conference sparked a significant public response. In Britain, groups from all sections of society sent hundreds of resolutions to the Foreign Office urging the government to exert its influence in order to ensure the success of the conference. Petitions with tens of thousands of signatures were collected and sent to the British government. While public opinion in Britain spoke ‘with no uncertain voice’ in favour of the proposed conference, claimed the law scholar T. J. Lawrence in late 1898, the people of the United States were preoccupied with the war with Spain. This preoccupation was coupled with the belief that armaments were largely a European problem and, according to a New York Times article, that the influence of the United States at the conference would be limited as they would ‘not be called upon to act as to the main purpose of the Czar, the reduction of armaments’. The American peace movement at this time was more interested in arbitration and international tribunals than in disarmament, and the conference lacked a public champion

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9 Ibid.
10 A keyword search of a number of newspapers reveals the extent to which disarmament permeated British and American press coverage during this period. In the year following the Tsar’s Rescript in August 1898, the Chicago Daily Tribune printed 241 articles that referenced disarmament, the New York Times 230 and the Manchester Guardian 187.
12 Higgins, passim; Tuchman, The Proud Tower, p. 245.
in the United States like it had in Britain with William Stead.\textsuperscript{15} Despite this, the American public did engage with the Tsar’s idea of a disarmament conference and they largely ‘pronounced in its favor’.\textsuperscript{16} One month before the conference, the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} ran an article which reprinted the Rescript and the Second Circular in full.\textsuperscript{17} Although the article thought it unlikely the conference would achieve anything concrete in regard to disarmament, it was presented as the central issue of the conference and something that the people of the world should be striving to attain.\textsuperscript{18}

The positive public response to the idea of disarmament generated a reaction from statesmen and officials, many of whom felt the need to rein in public enthusiasm by clarifying what the Tsar hoped to achieve. In September 1898, \textit{The Times}’ correspondent in St Petersburg wrote that a ‘tendency is now setting in here in the direction of minimizing as much as possible the scope of the extraordinary circular issued from the Russian Foreign Office. The voluminous criticism which it has met with all over the world seems to have had a cooling effect’.\textsuperscript{19} The \textit{New York Times} published an article in which Ethan Hitchcock, soon to be head of the Interior Department, ‘corrected what he said was a popular wrong impression regarding the Czar’s so-called disarmament proposal’.\textsuperscript{20} The proposal is ‘not for a disarmament, but for the calling of a conference for the purpose of reaching an agreement not to increase armaments’.\textsuperscript{21} The discussion of disarmament and the attempt to limit armaments soon became tangled on practical and political issues and these shaped the discussions at The Hague. How to define armaments,

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  \item \textsuperscript{15} Davis, \textit{The United States and the First Hague Peace Conference}, p. 55. Merze Tate, \textit{The Disarmament Illusion: The Movement for a Limitation of Armaments to 1907}, New York, 1942, p. 238. William Stead had been the editor of the \textit{Pall Mall Gazette} in the 1880s, founded the \textit{Review of Reviews} and became a prominent proponent of arbitration. In response to the 1898 Rescript, Stead embarked on an international tour to generate support for the Tsar’s proposed conference and set up a new weekly publication called \textit{War Against War}; Abbenhuis, \textit{The Hague Conferences}, chapter 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Lawrence, ‘The Tsar’s Rescript’, p. 139.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} The Second Circular was a letter sent out by Russia’s Foreign Minister, Count Mouraviev, in January 1899, with an expanded agenda for the proposed conference, on which see Abbenhuis, \textit{The Hague Conferences}, chapter 3; Eyffinger, \textit{The 1899 Hague Peace Conference}, pp. 37–38.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, ‘May Chain the War Dogs’, 5 March 1899, p. 46. A week later an article in the same newspaper reiterated the belief that little would be achieved at the conference and claimed that ‘only after a great European war will the several powers be in a proper frame of mind to go about a reasonable degree of disarmament’; \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, ‘The Czar’s Peace Congress’, 11 March 1899, p. 12.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{The Times}, ‘The Tsar’s Proposal’, 14 September 1898, p. 3. The Second Circular dropped the term disarmament and used non-augmentation. Eyffinger, \textit{The 1899 Hague Peace Conference}, p. 439.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} \textit{New York Times}, ‘Czar’s Disarmament Plan’, 20 February 1899, p.3.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
how to compare the value of different military units and how to ensure that restrictions would be adhered to were practical issues that could not be surmounted even by the delegates at The Hague who earnestly hoped for progress.²²

The political and practical concerns about disarmament and arms limitation prevented any progress in the 1899 conference and threatened to prevent the second from even taking place. The first conference only produced a wish for future study of the issue, while the diplomatic manoeuvring before the second ensured that ‘even before the final invitation had been issued, the proposal for a limitation of armaments was moribund’.²³ In her scathing critique of the international community’s failure to limit armaments, Merze Tate argues that public opinion at this time only exerted a limited influence upon governments: it was beginning to affect what statesmen said, not what they did. Tate claims this was evident at the 1907 conference, where the British government felt the need to show that they tried to discuss disarmament but did not feel compelled to achieve anything tangible.²⁴ The British government may have equivocated on the issue of arms limitation, but the newspapers reveal how The Hague conferences had thrust disarmament and its associated technical issues into the public limelight. An article in the Observer prior to the 1907 conference claimed that the problem of armaments would ‘prove the most attractive subject with which the Conference will deal’, and that all nations are ‘agreed in theory’ as to the desirability of reducing armaments.²⁵ The newspaper argued that it was in ‘the formulation of a really practical scheme’ where the difficulties lay.²⁶ Although the conferences failed to achieve tangible results in regard to disarmament, this issue became closely associated with The Hague.

International Arbitration

Many of those who celebrated the Tsar’s call to address the problem of armaments also saw The Hague conferences as an opportunity to create some sort of permanent international arbitration tribunal as the first step in international organisation. Plans for international courts or tribunals of arbitration had been discussed at Inter-Parliamentary

²³ Tate, p. 327.
²⁴ Ibid, p. 162.
²⁶ Ibid.
Union meetings throughout the 1890s, and numerous detailed plans had been created by a variety of groups in the United States and Europe. The two most prominent advocates of arbitration in the decades before The Hague conferences were Britain and the United States, and they provided a successful, and high-profile, example of arbitration with the Alabama dispute that was resolved in Geneva in 1871. By the time of the first Hague conference, the two nations had acquired significant knowledge and experience of arbitration, and the general public in each country had been exposed to extensive news coverage of it.

Partly because of the extant arbitration treaties and the number of successful arbitral cases in the preceding half-century, more tangible results were achieved in regard to arbitration at the two conferences than anything else. A month before the first conference took place, an article in The Washington Post expressed hope that the American delegates to the upcoming conference would advocate the ‘establishment of a permanent international tribunal of arbitration whose relations to the nations of the world would be similar to those of the United States Supreme Court and the States of the American Union’. While the creation of such a tribunal was beyond the scope of the 1899 conference, the establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) was a considerable achievement. Despite being little more than a list of judges’ names from whom nations wishing to have a dispute arbitrated could choose, ‘it augured well for the future’. Within a few years of the first conference the tribunal had been tentatively brought to life, partly in response to pressure put on President Roosevelt by Hague enthusiast Baron d’Estournelles.

The PCA had been used a number of times before 1907 and had been discussed prominently as a potential means of settling the dispute between the British government

28 Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals*, pp. 115–120. Built in a British shipyard, the Alabama was a highly successful Confederate Navy commerce raider during the Civil War. Following the conflict’s conclusion, the United States government sought damages from Britain. An international arbitration tribunal considered both sides’ claims, and the matter was settled peacefully.
31 Tuchman, p. 273. Baron d’Estournelles was a prominent diplomat, lawyer and politician who represented France at both Hague conferences, and encouraged Roosevelt to utilise the PCA in order to set a precedent. Roosevelt did so by submitting a dispute between the Mexican and United States governments to the PCA in 1902. The dispute, known as the *Pious Fund of the Californias*, became the first case submitted to the PCA.
and the Boers.\textsuperscript{32} The second conference generated hope for further development of the court. In early 1907, a \textit{Manchester Guardian} article claimed that the ‘great international event of this year will be the Second Peace Conference at the Hague’,\textsuperscript{33} and provided a detailed discussion of the changes that could be made to the PCA to make it more effective. An article in the \textit{Los Angeles Times} also offered advice on how to develop the arbitration machinery, but noted that The Hague had already done much for the abolition of war.\textsuperscript{34} The \textit{New York Times} expressed a similar sentiment in a full page article, complete with photographs of prominent peace activists, that claimed the tribunal at The Hague was ‘largely responsible for the present popular movement’ for arbitration.\textsuperscript{35} The newspapers reveal that the conferences were becoming as closely associated with arbitration as they were disarmament, partly due to the inability to achieve much progress on the latter. Ultimately, there were few changes of any significance to The Hague’s arbitral machinery at the second conference, but the PCA continued to have cases put before it up to 1914.

Two fundamental challenges to the development of the PCA, and the idea of international organisation in general, were whether states would be forced to use arbitration and whether an arbitration tribunal should consider issues that dealt with matters of national interest. To achieve the fairly limited convention that they did in 1899, the advocates of arbitration had to submit to the reality that ‘national sovereignty was to remain inalienable and inviable’, and ‘the adhesion of Governments to the court was to be optional’.\textsuperscript{36} Such a situation obviously left the PCA open to criticism, as it was easy to question how the tribunal could be effective when it was not dealing with matters of national interest and states were not required to use it at all. In 1913, an article in \textit{The Times} captured the contemporary debates about arbitration. The article claimed that the common man ‘likes to indulge in dreams of universal peace and he likes to have his statesmen negotiate arbitration treaties’,\textsuperscript{37} but the moment things do not go the way of his nation ‘out whips his sword’.\textsuperscript{38} The common man, the article continued, ‘never really

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\item[32] For the debate about the Boer conflict being sent to the PCA, and for information on the cases sent to the court prior to 1914, see Abbenhuis, \textit{Hague Conferences}, chapter 5.
\item[33] \textit{Manchester Guardian}, ‘Editorial’, 2 January 1907, p. 4.
\item[34] \textit{Los Angeles Times}, ‘For Universal Peace’, 10 January 1907, p. 4.
\item[36] Beales, p. 227.
\item[37] \textit{The Times}, ‘Pacifists and Peace’, 25 August 1913, p. 7.
\item[38] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
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intends to settle any absolutely vital question by arbitration’. Despite the occasional criticism in *The Times*, most newspaper coverage from the time demonstrated the ‘enthusiasm with which individuals before the First World War could talk of arbitration, international courts, and related ideas’. Regardless of its limitations, and the public criticism it sometimes received, arbitration was still in the public mind in 1914 as a potential means for stopping war and was prominently associated with The Hague.

**International Law and Justice**

A particularly contentious aspect of The Hague conferences was the idea of international law and its relation to international justice. What constituted international law and what an international court might look like had been discussed for centuries, and various peace societies had plans for such institutions well before The Hague conferences. Ideas about the importance of law and justice were part of the national identity of Britain and America, so arguments about the need to create a body of laws to ensure order in the international community, in a similar manner to the way the law operated in their individual societies, often found a receptive audience.

While disarmament and arbitration were the more prominent ideas of the first conference, contemporaries’ desire for The Hague to develop international law was evident in the British and American press. A letter to the editor of the *New York Times* presented international law as necessary for establishing order in international relations. ‘Everything depends upon order’, the letter stated, and without it there can be ‘neither liberty nor justice, nor peace, nor security’. An article in *The Times* expressed a similar sentiment and claimed that of all the ideas the Tsar’s Rescript raised, ‘the chief one’ was the ‘establishment of an institute of international law under the form of certain existing institutions, such as an international legislative assembly or international tribunal of justice’. Such an organization would be able to preserve peace much more effectively than ‘is done by the present antiquated forms of diplomatic intercourse’. The 1899 conference did not attempt to establish an international court of justice, but Kaplan claims

41 Beales, p. 303.
44 Ibid.
that the conventions it did generate can be seen as the first steps in nations’ ceding sovereignty and bowing to the demands of ‘corporate humanity’.\textsuperscript{45} Some of the American delegates to The Hague expressed similar sentiments to the press, and Frederic Holls, for example, claimed that the conference was ‘undoubtedly a great step forward in international law’.\textsuperscript{46}

The creation of the PCA at the 1899 conference, and its use in the years before 1907 gave people hope that the refinement of arbitration could also lead to the development of international law in a broader sense. An article in the \textit{Atlanta Constitution} claimed that international law in 1907 was ‘a very incomplete and uncertain code’ – if it could be considered a code at all – as it was ‘little more than a bundle of contradictory precedents supplemented by compacts and adorned by the moral precepts of jurisconsuls’.\textsuperscript{47} While some general principles were clear enough, and ‘by the consensus of mankind’ had the ‘force of law’, the question of which principles of ‘natural justice’ should govern an international tribunal remained.\textsuperscript{48} On 3 August, 1907, an article in \textit{The Times} argued that the court should come first and it would develop the code. Such a court would ‘evolve a real international law, would have a judicial tradition of its own, would accumulate precedents and authorities like other Courts, and would, in short, become an international entity independent of the interests or prejudices of any nation’.\textsuperscript{49} How to ensure its independence, in particular how to separate its judges from the nations they represented, was a key problem for any plans for an international court. An article in the \textit{New York Times} suggested that the judges should be paid for by the ‘community of states’ and should be permanently part of the court, not just advanced for each dispute as they were in the PCA.\textsuperscript{50} Even then, the article was pessimistic about the ability of any international court to achieve independence.\textsuperscript{51} Mirroring the concerns expressed in the newspapers, a permanent court of justice was discussed extensively at the second

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Los Angeles Times}, ‘Great Step Forward’, 7 September 1899, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, ‘Will World-Arbitration Ever Prove Practicable?’, 2 June 1907, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{The Times}, ‘An International Court’, 3 August 1907, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
conference, but the problem of the selection of judges prevented agreement and the court failed to materialise.⁵²

Despite the inability of the 1907 conference to bring an international judicial court to life, the calls for such an institution continued up to 1914, and it was assumed that the natural home for such a court would be The Hague. In 1913 the Manchester Guardian mused over what could be discussed at the next Hague conference and claimed that the most fruitful subjects are ‘legal or on the border line between law and politics’.⁵³ The ‘emotional methods’ of the peace societies were ‘past and gone’ and what was needed was the ‘elaboration of a constructive legal system in international affairs’.⁵⁴ The article claimed that a court of international justice could work in a similar way to the Supreme Court in the United States, but that there were still many gaps in the code of international law and these would need to be filled.⁵⁵ The place to do this, and for the international court to be created, was assumed to be The Hague. In the same year, an article in the Washington Post presented a similar argument that doubted the ability of international law to prevent war, but clearly saw the next Hague conference as the suitable place for the development of international law to be discussed.⁵⁶ The newspapers in Britain and the United States substantiate the claim from Calvin Davis, that people believed the conferences were ‘turning into a permanent institution for the entire world’, and William Langer, that after the second conference ‘the realization gradually spread that in 1899 the first step had been taken in the direction of international organization’.⁵⁷

An article in the Los Angeles Times in September 1913 demonstrated the extent to which The Hague had come to be associated with international law. The newspaper covered a court case that involved defeated Mexican Federalists who had fled across the border into the United States where they voluntarily surrendered to American forces.⁵⁸ Concerns were raised that the detainment of the Mexicans violated the United States Constitution, but the American government argued the soldiers were being treated according to ‘Article Eleven of the treaty of The Hague’, which laid out the rights and

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⁵² Eyffinger, 1907 Hague Conference, p. 122.
⁵⁴ Ibid.
⁵⁵ Ibid.
duties of neutrals. In presenting the government’s case, the District Attorney argued that ‘the tribunal of The Hague was made up of the greatest authorities in international law in the world, and the convention cited was not hastily or carelessly prepared’. The newspaper article noted that the case rested on the question of whether the United States’ Constitution or The Hague was the ‘higher law’. Given the importance of the Constitution for American identity, that such a question could even be posed demonstrates the extent to which The Hague had permeated the discussion of law in the United States.

Laws of War

Alongside attempts to create mechanisms for preventing international disputes degenerating into war, the delegates at both Hague conferences gave a significant amount of time to the codification of the laws that determined acceptable conduct during warfare. Ideas on how to regulate the behaviour of belligerents and neutrals during times of war had developed during the nineteenth century with the second half of the century witnessing a more enthusiastic discussion of the law of war ‘than ever before’. In part, this was driven by the realisation that global interdependence meant that ‘any war, however small or remote’ could have ‘a decisive impact on global economic and diplomatic affairs’. It was in each state’s interest to clearly determine the responsibilities of those not directly involved with the war but affected by it. The desire to regulate war was also a response to concerns about the welfare of soldiers in light of the increasingly destructive power of modern technology, which had been demonstrated during the wars of the second half of the nineteenth century. The international meetings at Geneva in 1864, which saw the formation of the Red Cross, and at Brussels in 1874, which attempted to codify the laws of war, were initial attempts to regulate war and make it more humane. The ideas underpinning the Geneva Convention were not necessarily new, but the signing of a convention that gave neutral status to those caring for wounded soldiers entailed ‘the supremacy of the humanitarian ideal and purpose above immediate

60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Best, Humanity in Warfare, p. 128.
military considerations’.65 This was a significant step in the development of the international law of war, and one that not all states fully embraced. The tension between humanitarianism and military necessity would continue to shape debates about the law of war, as was demonstrated at Brussels in 1874, when it became clear that ‘on some fundamental matters Germany’s military favoured a tougher line than did its colleagues’.66

The Brussels draft of 1874, which was never ratified, was the basis for discussions at The Hague in 1899, and many of the same arguments were reprised.67 The Second Commission was tasked with codifying the law of war, and they discussed a remarkably wide array of topics. These included the status of civilians in occupied territory, the acceptability of new weapons (such as asphyxiating gas and aircraft) and the issues of blockade, contraband and continuous voyage in maritime war. While the arbitration and disarmament commissions of the 1899 conference received more publicity, ‘the laws of war and neutrality regulated by the Second Commission’ could be considered the conference’s ‘quiet success’.68 Despite their initial scepticism, the ‘hard and conscientious’ work of the delegates produced the world’s ‘first comprehensive war code’.69 The second conference demonstrated how important the nations involved considered the laws of war and neutrality, as they were the focus of three of the four commissions. The 1907 conference refined of the laws of war, and its codification of neutrality ‘did much to stabilise the conditions of neutrality in wartime’.70

The press in the United States and Great Britain engaged extensively with the debates about the law of war and neutrality during both conferences, and they did so in a different tone to the other issues discussed at the conferences. Disarmament and arbitration were more easily derided as ‘utopian’ since their main aim was the prevention of war. However, theories on the law of war and neutrality originated in the idea that if war were to occur, it should be carried out in a particular way, which many believed to be a more reasonable expectation than preventing war completely. Often a fierce critic of the idea of disarmament, The Times considered the law of war a worthy subject of international discussion. An article in The Times in May 1899 stated that the application

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65 Best, *Humanity in Warfare*, p. 150.
66 Hull, p. 67.
67 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid, p. 217.
of the Geneva Convention to naval warfare and the revision of the Brussels declarations of 1874 would ‘constitute a notable progress in the civilization of warfare’.

Despite newspapers promoting the benefits of the laws of war’s development, there were still concerns about certain states not adhering to them. The Observer provides an example of this tension: the newspaper published an article before the 1907 conference listing international law as the most promising issue to be discussed. Four months later, the same newspaper published a scathing critique of the conference and its conventions, which it claimed were meaningless because Germany would not abide by any of them. The American newspapers seemed less concerned with Germany and more interested in the potential benefits to the United States of the laws on maritime war and neutrality, which they discussed extensively in 1899 and 1907.

A more significant difference between the United States and British newspapers’ coverage of the conferences was Americans’ identification with The Hague and their claim to moral authority. The newspaper discussion of The Hague in the United States drew on the discourse of American exceptionalism; the belief of ‘most Americans that their nation was exceptional, in its moral purpose and destiny as much as in its power and success’. This belief was evident in the newspaper reporting on The Hague’s discussion of armaments and the threat of war, problems the American press presented as distinctly European. American newspapers incorporated The Hague into the national narrative, and underpinned their coverage of the conferences with the idea that the United States was fundamentally different, and – to a degree – more civilised than Europe.

The American press suggested that The Hague conventions symbolised the victory of civilisation over barbarity, and that the United States was largely responsible for this. The Los Angeles Times claimed that when the 1907 conference concluded, it would ‘show...
in its final results a great triumph of the United States of America struggling unselfishly for the cause of civilization and humanity’.77 This article went on to claim that this was not the first such victory for the United States, as ‘nearly every great forward movement for the purpose of eliminating in part the horrors of war has been of American initiation’.78 The United States had attempted to ‘eliminate all private property from the ravages of war’ and if this rule was to be made part of the laws of war, it would be ‘one of the most magnanimous deeds a nation has ever done in the cause of civilization and of humanity’.79 Seven years later, on the eve of the Great War, the New York Times made a similar argument when it claimed that a war between the great powers would not ‘visit its atrocities’ upon their inhabitants, as they, and their property, were protected ‘by the rules of modern warfare’.80 It was to the United States that the ‘honor of codifying the rules that protect the non-combatant majorities of civilized nations’ belonged.81

The American press attempted to link American values with those expressed in the Hague Conventions on the laws of war; this was not the case in Britain. While the British press presented the laws of war and neutrality as positive developments, their praise of The Hague’s achievements was hedged with concern about the likelihood of certain nations adhering to the conventions. The newspapers give the impression that Americans looked at The Hague conventions on the law of war and neutrality and saw themselves, but the British looked at the same conventions and saw Germans. Regardless of how the conferences were accommodated within national narratives, the British and American newspaper-reading public had been exposed to detailed accounts of the conventions on the laws of war and neutrality, and by 1914, The Hague had become the main point of reference for discussing such issues: when practical and theoretical problems with the laws of war and neutrality arose, it was a revision or addition to The Hague conventions that was presented as being the solution; when people did not like particular aspects of the conventions they wanted them changed at the next conference rather than being repealed or ignored. Even The Times, which had criticised the

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
81 Ibid. The article claimed that the Hague Conventions on the law of war can trace their lineage back through the Brussels conference of 1874 to the Lieber Code in 1862. General Order No. 100, known as the Lieber Code, was a set of instructions created during the American Civil War that regulated the conduct of soldiers. See Best, Humanity in Warfare, pp. 155–156; Theodor Meron, ‘Francis Lieber’s Code and Principles of Humanity’, Columbia Journal of Transnational Law, Vol. 36, Issue 1 (1998), pp. 269–282.
conferences and their achievements, stated in 1913 that further refinement of neutrality law should be done at the next Hague conference. The assumption that there would be more conferences demonstrates the extent to which The Hague had come to be seen as a permanent institution and the appropriate venue for transnational elaboration of the laws of war.

Peace

The attempts at the Hague conferences to prevent and regulate warfare took place within broader debates about civilisation and the meaning of war. Contemporaries debated whether permanent peace was achievable, utopian, or even if war bestowed some benefit to the nations involved. The conferences provided the opportunity for these ideas to be debated in a very public manner, and this continued up to and throughout the First World War. The nineteenth century had seen the steady development of ‘writings, projects and organisations concerned with the elimination of war’ and the creation of a permanent peace. The motivations for those advocating peace were varied; the origins of the more prominent peace societies in Britain and the United States demonstrate how the desire for peace was often part of broader religious convictions. The rise of internationalism over the course of the century also saw the development of economic arguments against war, as well as the increased fear that war would cause social and political disintegration. Despite the diverse motivations of those advocating peace, a vast number of people and organisations had developed theories on how to achieve permanent peace and worked towards implementing them well before The Hague conferences occurred. However, Cooper argues it was The Hague Conferences that ‘created the moment for unofficial

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82 *The Times*, ‘International Law’, 4 August 1913, p. 5.
83 There is an extensive historiography on the development of these attitudes in the late-nineteenth century, the essence of which is captured in Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?*, chapters 1–2.
86 Cooper, ‘Peace and Internationalism’, p. 3; Mazower, pp. 46–47.
87 Beales, p. 222.
internationalist groups and spokesmen to step forth and present the products of their
reflection on a world platform’.\(^{88}\)

The publicity The Hague Conferences gave to the idea of peace, and how best to
achieve it, generated a critical response from those who disagreed with peace in principle
or believed it was an unrealistic goal. The second half of the nineteenth century had seen
the burgeoning of the ‘war movement’, and it felt threatened enough by the success of the
peace movement to aggressively advance its own point of view.\(^{89}\) The idea of perpetual
peace challenged a number of assumptions about civilisation, and stood in stark contrast
to those who argued that war was inherent in human nature and advanced mankind. It was
along such lines that an editorial about The Hague and the peace movement in *The Times*
in 1913 asked whether a world without war would be:

> a world not only without strength, but predestined to anaemia and decay? Is war
more much more costly in misery and degradation than modern industrialism? Could
anything else, could a diversion and concentration of men’s thoughts and energies
in some other direction, evoke the qualities or bequeath the fortifying memories
that spring from war and seem half to redeem its brutalities?\(^{90}\)

The *Daily Mail* made a similar argument in an article that was critical of The Hague
Peace Palace and claimed that ‘above all, man follows the inexorable law of nature; he is
a fighting animal’.\(^{91}\) Combat, the article continued, was ‘the highest level of human
courage and human excellence’ and despite warfare today being complicated by science,
it ‘is still obedient to the customs of chivalry’.\(^{92}\) The article concluded that war ‘is the
beneficent mother of the virtues, now as always. Selflessness, devotion, patriotism,
braelery – these are the qualities cherished and enhanced by war’ and upon which
civilisation depends.\(^{93}\)

Demonstrating Cooper’s point that The Hague conferences played the ‘important
role of publicizing a cause and creating an open forum on international issues’,\(^{94}\) this
*Daily Mail* article had within a week generated responses from Norman Angell and the

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\(^{89}\) Best, *Humanity in Warfare*, p. 136.


\(^{92}\) Ibid.

\(^{93}\) Ibid.

\(^{94}\) Cooper, ‘Peace and Internationalism’, p. 291.
acclaimed poet Alfred Noyes.\textsuperscript{95} The challenge to the peace idea, Noyes wrote, was a challenge to ‘the movement from the desultory warfare of wandering tribes to the highly organised body of modern civilisation; the movement from chaos to order; from lawlessness to those laws on whose service our freedom and all that is implied in “civilisation” depend’.\textsuperscript{96} It is wrong to glorify war, Noyes claimed, as ‘even the virtues we think we discern in it are those of the struggle against war’.\textsuperscript{97} The Hague had come to be seen as representative of a particular vision of civilisation, one that promoted the development of international law and the circumvention of war, but the vigorous debates in the British press reveal how contested this idea remained.

The American newspapers, the \textit{New York Times} in particular, also used The Hague as a signifier of civilisation. In 1913, a \textit{New York Times} article that gave a description of the Peace Palace also offered a brief history of the conferences and noted that the second conference was much larger than the first, as all the ‘civilised nations’ of the world were represented.\textsuperscript{98} The newspaper also published an article by Professor Hart of Harvard University, in which he described the development of the Balkans states as lagging well behind the rest of Europe to the extent that they could still be described as feudal societies. He presented the Balkans as not being civilised enough for The Hague to help them, as ‘no mortal man or Hague tribunal’ could have divided them into viable national groups.\textsuperscript{99} The \textit{New York Times} presented a similar perspective on the Balkans in an article about the ways in which the laws of modern warfare, as codified by The Hague, would protect non-combatants and regulate combat itself. These rules were ruthlessly violated during the Balkan wars, the article claimed, but that was because the Balkan States were not ‘fully civilised’.\textsuperscript{100} In contrast, the article claimed that a war involving the great Powers would be fought with restraint due to their attainment of civilisation.\textsuperscript{101}

The association of The Hague with the notion of civilisation was often evident in articles that did not directly discuss the issue. Those involved in the Peace Palace’s

\textsuperscript{95} Norman Angell’s book \textit{The Great Illusion} argued that war was economically irrational and had sold over two million copies between 1910 and 1913; Howard Weinroth, ‘Norman Angell and The Great Illusion: An Episode in Pre-1914 Pacifism’, \textit{The Historical Journal}, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Sep. 1974), p. 551.


\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{100} \textit{New York Times}, ‘Modern War Limited’, 1 August 1914, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
opening ceremonies at The Hague frequently made reference to civilisation in their speeches, which were then replicated in the newspapers. In a speech at the opening of the Peace Palace, Jonkheer van Swinderen, the Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs, said it was on behalf of the civilised powers of the world that he offered thanks to Andrew Carnegie. In his own speech at the opening of the Peace Palace, Carnegie claimed that the ‘civilised world had at last realized that the greatest of all blessings was world peace’. He referred to the end of war as civilisation supplanting barbarism and suggested that if the German Kaiser asked the ‘civilised nations’ to convene for another conference, they surely would. The newspapers demonstrate how the symbolic flexibility of The Hague allowed it to be utilised in different ways in various discourses of civilisation; a concept that would shape Anglo-American reactions to the First World War.

The public discussion of the benefits of peace, and potential ways to maintain it, continued right up to the outbreak of war. Even on 2 August, 1914, a *New York Times* article, desperately clinging to the hope that war could still be avoided, claimed that ‘most persons will admit the normal state of civilized man is peace. In peace he reaches his fullest development, enjoys his greatest material and spiritual happiness’. It is clear from the newspapers that by 1914 peace had entered the political mainstream. Beales argues that it was because the conventions produced by The Hague conferences had been the work of diplomats rather than peace activists that peace had become ‘an integral part of the creed of statesmen’. Similarly, Clark argues that Russia’s act of calling the second conference demonstrated that peace and a humanitarian agenda were now seen as ‘a proper set of issues to be discussed at an inter-state conference’. Although by 1914 it had found a place in the mainstream political discourse, peace—or at least the attempt to

102 This speech was printed in the *Los Angeles Times*, ‘Dedicated to Peace’, 29 August 1913, p. 11; *The Times*, ‘The Palace of Peace’, 29 August 1913, p. 4. An endowment from Andrew Carnegie, a Scottish-American steel magnate who became a prominent donor to peace organisations, largely funded the construction of the palace: Abbenhuis, *The Hague Conferences*, chapter 8.


104 Ibid.


106 Ceadel claims there was ‘an enormous interest’ in the peace question during the period 1898–1914; Ceadel, p. 186.

107 Beales, p. 237.

108 Clark, *International Legitimacy and World Society*, p. 79.
pursue it—was still a controversial idea, and The Hague by association symbolised different things to different people within this debate. To some, The Hague was symbolic of the peace movement’s utopianism. For such people, war was seen as something positive or, if not positive, at least something that could not be removed just ‘with a touch of the pen, a few lectures, and the gift of a building’. For others, peace was the primary goal of international relations, and The Hague symbolised international efforts to achieve that through ‘the substitution of humanity for barbarity and the rule of right and reason for the rule of brute strength’.

The Hague as Place of Peace

The period from 1899 to 1914 also saw the development of the idea that The Hague was itself a physical site of peace and international law. Despite the conventions created in 1899, there were surprisingly few tangible links between the institutions created at the conferences and the city of The Hague itself. While the desire for another conference had been expressed in 1899 and the Permanent Court of Arbitration had been created, a sense of permanence was still lacking since many people regarded The Hague tribunal as ‘a paper body only’. A New York Times article in 1902 felt the need to remind people, especially ‘those who are inclined to make fun of The Hague court’, that it took two and a half years for the Supreme Court of the United States to see its first case. A few months after this article was published, the first case did appear before the PCA, and by 1907 The Hague machinery had been utilised a number of times. The occurrence of the second conference and the further development of various conventions reinforced the idea of The Hague as the place where issues of peace and internationalism were discussed. That The Hague would be the natural home for any permanent peace congress to be created in the future was assumed in a New York Times article published in early 1907. In his 1913

111 Beales, p. 236.
account of the two conferences, Joseph Choate wrote that The Hague had ‘long been known as the place where contending nations could peacefully settle their differences’.115

The completion of the Peace Palace in 1913 cemented the connection between the city of The Hague and the conventions created at the two conferences.116 The opening of the Peace Palace on 28 August 1913 generated significant media coverage, and contemporaries saw the building as representative of the work of the two Hague conferences. The British press clearly associated the Peace Palace with the conferences and their perceived success or failure. An article in the Daily Mail captured the arguments of those critical of The Hague and its Palace of Peace: it claimed with considerable cynicism that the Palace would only allow ‘solemn-faced committee-men’ to ‘expound the blessings of peace’ and ‘cement their friendship over a cigar in Mr. Carnegie’s garden’, and would not be able to prevent war.117 A letter to the Daily Mail written in response to such criticism claimed that the Peace Palace was ‘destined to serve as the focus of effort for those who are working towards the abolition of war’.118 This more positive assessment was also found in two articles in The Times, one of which claimed that the palace would be an ‘outward and visible sign of the beneficent purpose of the Tribunal which is to sit within its walls’.119 The other article claimed that the first conference achieved more than the second because it took place in the tranquil setting of the House in the Woods, and that the Peace Palace would provide an equally good influence upon future conferences.120 Clearly the British press was using the palace, in a variety of ways, as a means of debating the value of The Hague machinery and peace projects in general.121

Although the palace did not spark a similar debate in the American newspapers, their journalists clearly considered the event newsworthy, and they paid extensive

115 Joseph Choate, The Two Hague Conferences, Princeton, 1913, p. 89. Joseph Choate was a prominent lawyer and one of the United States’ representatives at the 1907 Hague Conference.
116 For the origins of the Peace Palace and the debates about its design and funding see Abbenhuis, The Hague Conferences, chapter 8.
117 Daily Mail, ‘Futile Palace of Peace’, 30 August 1913, p. 4. This may be directed at an article in The Times published a few days earlier which stated that the opportunity ‘to smoke a long cigar in the garden’ would be greatly appreciated by those involved in conferences or arbitration proceedings; The Times, ‘The Palace of Peace’, 28 August 1913, p. 4.
121 An article in The Times argued that there was a direct connection between the Peace Palace and the mid-nineteenth century Internationalist movement; The Times, ‘The Growth of Internationalism’, 29 August 1913, p. 5.
attention to the various ceremonies associated with its opening. Extensive accounts of the opening ceremony appeared on the first few pages of the *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. The newspapers also printed a number of photographs and very detailed descriptions of the palace. Not all of the coverage was serious; as a story about an American woman accidentally sitting in the Dutch Queen’s chair at the opening ceremony appeared in the *New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times* ‘Pen Points’ section joked that the Peace Palace was open for business but the nations were not rushing to use it. The *Washington Post* also made fun of a new ‘peace flag’ being presented to the Peace Palace. The flag had seven different colored stripes, and the newspaper claimed that each one represented a current ‘first-class’ conflict. Although the majority of the American newspaper coverage presented the opening of the Peace Palace as an important and beneficial event, doubts about the practicality of The Hague project clearly remained. However, the jokes reveal just how normalised discussion of The Hague had become.

By 1914, the newspaper evidence suggests that ideas of peace and international organisation were becoming part of the identity of the city itself. Newspapers in Britain and the United States marketed the opening of the Peace Palace as a tourist attraction, and the building was presented as one of the main stops on vacations to Belgium and the Netherlands. Even if it was the architecture that was attracting people to the Palace, the advertisements in the newspapers demonstrate the pervasiveness of messages about The Hague at the time and can be seen as an early instance of the commercialization of peace. The Hague was also chosen as the home for the proposed Academy of International Law,

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124 *New York Times*, ‘Took the Queen’s Chair’, 29 August 1913, p. 4; *Los Angeles Times*, ‘Pen Points: By the Staff’, 9 September 1913, p. 4.
126 There is a vast literature on the societal function and significance of jokes, but for an examination of satire in the press; see Charles Knight, *The Literature of Satire*, Cambridge, 2004, chapters 7 and 8.
which was due to start classes in October 1914. Given the frequent reference to The Hague when matters of peace and international organisation were discussed, it would have been difficult for people not to associate the two. Davis claims that in the twentieth century The Hague ‘has been more than the location of the Dutch government; it has been the seat of the judicial institutions of the society of nations’. Much of the development of the judicial institutions at The Hague took place after the First World War, but it is possible to see in the newspaper coverage from the period before 1914 a powerful indication that the British and American public were already involved in vigorous, multifaceted discussion of the unique position The Hague was beginning to claim in international affairs.

Conclusion

The newspapers leave no doubt that on the eve of the First World War The Hague was part of the common understanding of world affairs in Britain and the United States. By 1914, The Hague had come to mean or represent a number of different things. The most prominent ideas associated with The Hague were peace, disarmament, laws of war and neutrality, arbitration and international organisation, and international law and justice. The city of The Hague itself had become intertwined with some of these ideas, particularly after the completion of the Peace Palace in 1913, and to speak of ‘The Hague’ could entail reference to a body of thought, a place, or a combination of the two. By 1914, newspapers could make reference to The Hague Machinery, The Hague System, and the Hague Idea. The first two tended to refer to the PCA, the Commissions of Enquiry, and the conferences themselves, while the latter was a reference to the ideas the conferences, and the institutions they created, represented. The use of these terms could also be positive or pejorative, since all of the ideas associated with The Hague were contested. The desire for permanent peace could still be called ‘utopian’, and the attempts to place legal restraints on states’ behaviour could still be seen as an infringement of national sovereignty. Regardless of whether people associated particular ideas with The Hague more than others, or if they supported or were critical of such ideas, the British and American public had been exposed to extensive coverage of these ideas in the years before 1914.

129 Davis, The United States and the Second Hague Peace Conference, p. 3.
The Hague also meant different things to journalists and their readers in Britain and the United States. Most strikingly, the American press consistently discussed the various ideas attached to The Hague in more positive terms than their British counterparts. The American newspapers emphasised the role of the United States during the conferences and often presented The Hague as representative of American values. Such a view was expressed by Joseph Choate’s claim that the idea of war being a natural part of the world was being superseded by a new doctrine that saw peace as the normal condition for mankind, and that ‘this could be called the American Doctrine’.130 American positivity towards The Hague can also be explained by the central role they played in both conferences, particularly in the calling of the second, and the belief that through the conferences the United States had assumed a more important place in the international community. However, tension did remain between the entrenched idea of American isolationism and this increased involvement in international affairs.131 The ideas of The Hague were not associated with national values to the same extent in Britain, and there was more cynicism about the conventions. Often this did not indicate a dislike of the conventions or the ideas underpinning them, but was due mainly to fears of other countries, Germany in particular, not adhering to them. The continued tension in Europe meant that the British press was more likely to be overtly critical of the conferences, and even the positive coverage was often tinged with pessimism.

Despite the differences between the two nations and the contested nature of particular ideas, by 1914 newspapers clearly communicate a sense of permanence about The Hague institutions and a universal assumption that there would be more conferences. Attempts had been made at the 1899 and 1907 conferences to create machinery that could prevent international disputes degenerating into war, but it was the conferences themselves that were at times presented as the best means of maintaining peace. The *New York Times* saw the second conference as part of a longer process to establish peace and claimed that ‘the first evinced a world-wide demand’ and that ‘the third, or the fourth, or some succeeding Conference, will at last return a satisfying response’.132 The building of the Peace Palace added to the sense of permanence and made the PCA more tangible. By 1914, The Hague had emerged as a fixed and enduring entity in the political landscape,

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130 Choate, p. 33.
131 Isolationism is a problematic term, but here it simply refers to the desire, broadly speaking, to avoid entanglement in European politics.
and journalists and their publics increasingly viewed it as the natural site for the development of the ideas discussed in this chapter.

The 15 years after the delegates assembled for the first conference had seen The Hague become an accepted and even expected part of British and American newspaper discourse. By 1914, newspapers in both countries made references to The Hague in a variety of contexts with the assumption their readers understood what they meant. The Hague was referenced frequently because it had become a touchstone for debates on certain issues: if an article in the British or American press advocated changes to international law, neutrality, or the laws of war, the newspaper invariably suggested that the matter should be discussed at The Hague. This continued right up to the outbreak of the First World War, as can be seen in an article in *The Times* about the House of Commons discussing the British delegation to help plan for the third Hague conference.\footnote{133 *The Times*, ‘House of Commons’, 15 July 1914, p. 13.} Just over two weeks after the article was published, the Great War began.
In the summer of 1914, people in the United States and Britain watched with horror as massive European armies shattered the peace much of the continent had known for almost a century. From the end of July, when the diplomatic crisis in the Balkans threatened to erupt into war, a breathlessness marked the public discussion on both sides of the Atlantic as people struggled to keep up with events and predict what might happen next. Significantly, they reacted to these events by referencing The Hague. As people voraciously consumed news of the war, they also sought out information on international law and the mechanisms established at The Hague to try to stop conflicts. The use of The Hague as a framework to interpret events demonstrates a more sophisticated public engagement with the war than historians – who have been blinded by their focus on the diplomatic momentum for war – acknowledge.

The idea of The Hague permeated newspaper coverage in the opening months of the war in both Britain and the United States. Front-page articles, editorials, published official statements and letters to the editor all made reference to The Hague in a wide range of contexts. The Hague’s legal mechanisms for arbitration and mediation were presented as a possible means of ending the conflict, and a number of people in Britain and the United States suggested that a third Hague peace conference should be held to bring the war to a swift conclusion. The newspapers also printed material from peace organisations’ meetings and pamphlets that advocated the development of The Hague’s institutions, demonstrating the circulation of ideas between activists and the mainstream press.

This chapter traces the British and American newspaper references to The Hague during the pivotal period from July to September 1914, and argues that people in Britain and the United States did not react passively to the outbreak of war. The vibrant engagement with how The Hague could be used to stop the horrific conflict and what role it should – or could – play in international relations, demonstrates the sophisticated public

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discussion of the war in Britain and the United States. The main newspapers examined in this chapter, the *Manchester Guardian* and *Daily Mail* from Britain, and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times* from the United States, demonstrate how discussions of The Hague reflected specific national and regional responses to the outbreak of war.

The outbreak of war generated a multitude of reactions in the United States, but the desire to avoid involvement and remain neutral were common features of the American newspaper reporting. The war was also an exciting news event, and the causes of the conflict and its conduct were discussed with great enthusiasm. The public response to the war was complicated by the vast number of Americans who had significant ties to one or more of the belligerent nations. Being born in, or having relatives from, one of the belligerents did not, however, necessarily entail support for that nation’s war effort. Indeed, many Americans looked at Europe’s ‘descent into barbarism’ with disdain, with Progressives in particular fearing that the conflict would bring to a halt the preceding half-century’s social reforms. American concerns about modern war’s destructiveness were coupled with awareness of the conflict’s economic opportunities and how neutrality could be used to exploit them.

From the outset of war, the United States became an important target of belligerent propaganda, with Britain and Germany attempting to win American sympathy. Germany immediately began a propaganda campaign in the United States, coordinated by their Ambassador Count Johann von Bernstorff. He created a German Information Service in New York, which was tasked with achieving ‘favourable publicity’ for the German cause. Britain also created a specific team to coordinate

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2 Zieger notes that while it is likely that more sympathy for the Central Powers would be found in the German-American community, broad national and ethnic categorisations ‘masked powerful crosscurrents of difference, dissent, and perspective’; Robert Zieger, *America’s Great War: World War I and the American Experience*. Oxford, 2000, p. 15.

3 Zieger, p. 15. Ford argues that some progressives supported the Allies’ war effort, but that many others began to define themselves as pacifists and sought an early end to the war; Ford, p. 52.


propaganda for the United States run out of Wellington House by Sir Gilbert Parker.\(^7\) Parker and his team were greatly concerned with the American press and read about 60 newspapers a day to try and get a sense of public opinion.\(^8\) American newspaper editors were well aware of the belligerents’ attempts to win sympathy in the United States, particularly after Germany’s clumsy initial efforts, but their reliance on Britain for news of the war made reporting in an impartial manner difficult.\(^9\) On 5 August, the Royal Navy cut the Atlantic cable between the United States and Germany, so all official news from Europe to the United States had to pass through London after clearing British military censors.\(^10\) The Germans were forced to rely on smuggling information into the United States, or getting it into South American newspapers and hoping it would be reprinted in North America.\(^11\) Such actions made it more difficult for American newspapers to present the Central Powers’ perspective, and conveying a pro-Allied bias was a concern for many editors who had significant German- and Irish-American readerships.\(^12\) American journalists were able to exploit their neutrality and gain access to the European battle fronts, however, such access still had its restrictions, since the British military censored the journalists’ reports in transmission to the United States, and the Americans were typically shown only what the German Army wished them to see.\(^13\)

In Britain, the newspapers sought to understand how the political crisis on the continent had degenerated into war. In the weeks leading up to the British declaration of war, newspapers had largely split down party lines, with the conservative papers stressing the need for Britain to stand by France, and the liberal and provincial press opposing any British involvement on the continent.\(^14\) Yet, once Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, even those newspapers that had promoted British neutrality begrudgingly offered their support.\(^15\) A prominent example of such acquiescence was the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, C. P. Scott, who hated the war but thought the only course of action once British involvement had been confirmed ‘was to fight the war vigorously and

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7 The British War Propaganda Bureau was located at Wellington House, London, and was typically referred to by its location; Robb, p. 97.
8 Messinger, p. 59.
9 Sanders and Taylor, p. 168.
10 Emery and Emery, p. 293.
11 Messinger, p. 59.
12 Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 1914, p. 253. Horne and Kramer argue that the majority of those editors were pro-Ally.
13 Horne and Kramer, pp. 251–252.
to plan the peace boldly’.¹⁶ Scott’s belief that the role of his newspaper was to support the war effort was shared by most newspaper owners and editors in Britain.¹⁷ Indeed, the belief of many in the press that their ability to support the war effort was inhibited by restrictions on information from the front would emerge as a key source of tension between the press and the government throughout the war.

The British Government moved quickly to restrict the flow of information about the war, enacting the Defence of the Realm Act on 8 August and establishing the Press Bureau the same month.¹⁸ The Defence of the Realm Act was intended to prevent valuable information reaching the enemy, but it also allowed the British Government to control the British public’s access to information from the front.¹⁹ British journalists were prevented from accessing the front, and the Press Bureau delayed the publication of combat reports to such an extent that Americans were often first to read about British battles.²⁰ The Press Bureau functioned as the focal point for press censorship by controlling the information the newspapers received from the front and advising newspaper editors on what could be discussed and how.²¹ Despite these significant restrictions on access to information about the war, the newspapers did not have to submit every article to the censor, and throughout the war censorship was applied ‘with a remarkably light touch’.²² In part this was due to the practicalities of censoring such a vast number of publications, but also because the press had become too powerful an institution for the government to repress or fully control.²³ The newspaper was the main source of information on the war for the British public, and the American public too for that matter, and newspaper sales soared on both sides of the Atlantic. Six million newspapers were sold on average each day in Britain during the First World War, a phenomenal figure for a population of just over 40 million.²⁴ Newspapers provided

¹⁷ Robb, p. 111.
¹⁹ Ibid.
²⁰ Ibid. British journalists were not allowed to visit the front until May 1915; on which see Haste, p. 32; Lovelace, p. 310; Sanders and Taylor, p. 23.
²¹ Haste, p. 30.
²³ Lovelace, p. 307.
²⁴ Robb, p. 112.
information about the war as well as editorial opinion, and in both endeavours they regularly used The Hague as a framework to make sense of the war.

**The July Crisis**

In the months before the guns of August shattered the peace of the European summer, there was little indication that The Hague’s machinery for the pacific settlement of disputes might soon be called upon. As the previous chapter demonstrated, The Hague had become a permanent feature of the public discussion about international affairs. In June 1914, Robert Root, Pacific Coast Director of the American Peace Society, published a pamphlet that provided a course outline for those wishing to teach about world peace. The pamphlet provided a plan of the topics that should be covered and gave a list of books and pamphlets to read. An entire section of the course was on the value of The Hague for developing and maintaining peaceful relations, and books on the conferences featured heavily in the recommended reading list. The pamphlet illustrates how important peace activists considered The Hague to be for the peaceful conduct of international relations on the eve of war.

The planning for the next Hague conference, due to be held in 1915, further demonstrated the sense of permanency of The Hague. Between 10 and 14 July, 1914, Sir Edward Grey was asked a number of questions in the House of Commons about the planning for the third Hague Peace Conference, and his responses were printed in the British press. Grey stated that the Dutch Government had invited Britain to send a representative to join an international committee tasked with drawing up the conference’s programme. Britain, Grey declared, would ‘of course’ accept the invitation, and he disclosed that he and the Attorney-General were already discussing who would preside over Britain’s own inter-departmental committee for planning the conference. Grey contended that Britain’s key concern was the unwieldy size of the proposed international planning committee. As a result, his government proposed a smaller body ‘which would draw up the programme more expeditiously’. Of the issues that would be discussed at the next Hague Conference, Grey claimed that the problem of expenditure on armaments

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27 Ibid.
was of great importance and needed addressing. Despite the previous Hague Conferences failing to make any progress on the issue, Grey claimed that the British Government would encourage anything that might lead to a reduction in spending on armaments and would do their best to promote good relations with other Powers.28 Four days after he made these comments, and only three weeks before the outbreak of war, Grey explained to the House of Commons that the inter-departmental Committee that would coordinate Britain’s approach to the next Hague Peace Conference had been settled and would ‘commence its labours very shortly’.29

In the numerous studies of the First World War, historians invariably cite Grey’s remark about the lamps ‘going out all over Europe’, yet none engage with his comments in Parliament a few weeks earlier about Britain’s commitment to a third Hague peace conference.30 The British government’s careful attention to the planning for the Hague conference, scheduled for 1915, clearly demonstrates that the July ‘crisis’ in 1914 did not at the time hamper Britain’s plans for ongoing peace or peacetime diplomacy. The United States was also actively planning for the next conference in this decisive month and, as the crisis worsened, the Los Angeles Times printed a comment in their humorous ‘Pen Points’ section: ‘Something to worry about – the third Hague peace conference will meet in 1915, unless the nations are too busy making war on each other to elect delegates’.31 However, demonstrating the widespread contemporary belief that little would come of the crisis in the Balkans, the same newspaper section added that ‘the European war-cloud, like the full of the moon, comes around ever so often’.32

The ‘war-cloud’ failed to dissipate, and on 25 July the Serbian response to the Austrian ultimatum, issued two days earlier, brought The Hague and arbitration to prominence in the newspapers. As discussed in chapter 2, arbitration had come to be closely associated with The Hague in the years since 1899. A cartoon in John Bull on 1 August demonstrates how The Hague and arbitration had permeated popular culture. The cartoon depicted Russia and Germany preparing to fight with the accompanying text:

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30 Samuel Hynes argues that Grey’s comment is the ‘best-known and most often quoted response to the beginning of the First World War’; Hynes, p. 3.
31 Los Angeles Times, ‘Pen Points: By the Staff’, 26 July 1914, p. 6.
32 Ibid.
‘Should Hague talk all be forgot, may “peace with honour” be our lot’.\(^{33}\) Similarly, a joke in the *Los Angeles Times* referenced The Hague without needing to explain it; this one-liner in the Pen Points section said ‘if the case of George W. Perkins vs. the Pinchot brothers can be settled in no other way, there is The Hague’\(^ {34}\). George Perkins and the Pinchot brothers, Amos and Gifford, had been involved in a dispute about the leadership and direction of the Progressive party in the United States.\(^ {35}\) The joke demonstrates that The Hague was seen as the highest court of arbitration, which is why the idea of sending a relatively minor political dispute to it was funny. The cartoon in *John Bull* and the joke in the *Los Angeles Times* illustrate how The Hague could be referenced in Britain and the United States on the eve of the war without the need to elaborate on what it meant.

The Serbian response to the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum suggested The Hague was the appropriate place to deal with their dispute. The ultimatum delivered to Belgrade had been drafted in such a way that, in the words of the key Austrian Foreign Ministry official Alexander von Hoyos, no state, ‘which was self-confident and had dignity’,\(^ {36}\) could accept its terms. The ultimatum demanded that Serbia cede sovereignty over internal matters to Austria, specifically calling for the dissolution of nationalist groups that might incite hatred against the Habsburgs, and a revision of the laws governing the Serbian press.\(^ {37}\) The Serbian response, which Christopher Clark describes as ‘a masterpiece of diplomatic equivocation’, accepted the majority of the terms of Austria-Hungary’s ultimatum except for the demand for Austrian officials to conduct an investigation on Serbian territory, and suggested the matter be sent to The Hague if this was not satisfactory to Austria-Hungary.\(^ {38}\) The Serbian refusal to accept all the conditions was exactly what the Austrian-Hungarian officials had hoped for, as it gave them a pretext to declare war on Serbia, which the Habsburg Empire duly did on 28 July.\(^ {39}\)

\(^{33}\) *John Bull*, ‘Cartoon’, 1 August 1914.

\(^{34}\) *Los Angeles Times*, ‘Pen Points: By the Staff’, 19 July 1914, p. 6.


The diplomatic row in the Balkans moved onto the front pages of newspapers in Europe and the United States as the press dissected and discussed the Serbian response to the ultimatum and their proposal to send the dispute to The Hague.\(^{40}\) The four main newspapers presented Serbia favourably, and suggested their acceptance of almost all of Austria-Hungary’s demands was more than could be expected of ‘the proud little nation’.\(^{41}\) The ‘imperious demands’ of the ultimatum were presented as proof that Austria was ‘fully determined to make war on Serbia’.\(^{42}\) However, Serbia’s response, the \textit{Daily Mail} argued, thankfully gave Europe some ‘breathing space’ to try and forge a peaceful resolution to the dispute.\(^{43}\) The Serbian response to the ultimatum, and their suggestion of sending the dispute to The Hague, was also discussed in similar terms in the \textit{Birmingham Daily Post}, \textit{Edinburgh Evening News} and \textit{Liverpool Echo}.\(^{44}\) The Serbian request for the matter to be sent to The Hague was presented as the appropriate course of action, even if the newspapers expressed little optimism of it being successful. An article in the \textit{Manchester Guardian} argued that arbitration in the current crisis was not possible until all the facts had been ascertained, and that a commission of inquiry should be formed, composed of an Austrian, a Serbian and three foreigners, to do so. The article claimed that such an approach was ‘perfectly feasible’, as it was ‘in accordance with precedent, and is specifically provided for in the Hague Convention for the pacific settlement of international disputes’.\(^{45}\) That newspapers immediately turned to The Hague as a potential means of defusing the escalating crisis in the Balkans illustrates the extent to which it had become established as a legitimate means of dispute resolution.

There were, however, concerns about the inherent weakness of The Hague’s arbitration mechanisms, as was expressed in a letter to the editor of the \textit{Los Angeles Times}. The correspondent stated that the ‘ends of justice should be reached through the channels of honorable arbitration’ but that a court of arbitration ‘must have means in


\(^{41}\) \textit{Los Angeles Times}, ‘Armies May be Rushing to Strike Servia First’, 27 July 1914, p. 11.


\(^{45}\) \textit{Manchester Guardian}, ‘How Europe Might Escape War’, 28 July 1914, p. 16.
which to enforce its decisions’. The lack of ‘executive force’ was the fundamental weakness of The Hague, as states whose demands were not satisfactorily met would use the sword as final ‘arbiter’. The letter claimed that the only way to ensure states made use of The Hague and adhered to its decisions was to have a coalition of armed forces at its disposal. Such criticism of The Hague’s ability to enforce decisions had been expressed since the creation of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, and it seemed particularly pertinent in light of Austria-Hungary’s aggressive behaviour towards Serbia.

The Austrian response to the criticism of their refusal to send the dispute to The Hague was an early indication of the key role The Hague would play in the upcoming propaganda war. The Los Angeles Times printed an article in which the Austrian Ambassador to the United States warned American newspaper readers not to be misled by Serbian press releases, stating that the Serbian ‘proposal to refer to The Hague tribunal the question of a joint investigation could only produce procrastination, and would have left the situation unchanged’. Austria clearly felt the need to justify its decision not to send the dispute to The Hague. Despite lacking the ability to enforce its decisions, the mere existence of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague had created an expectation that it would be used to solve disputes, and those who refused to utilise the court felt the need to justify this decision.

In late July, as war in the Balkans became more likely, the newspapers started to discuss other aspects of The Hague, such as how the conventions regulated the declaration of war and the treatment of neutrals. The Manchester Guardian published an article discussing The Hague’s regulations for declaring war. The newspaper said that as a signatory of The Hague, Austria would be ‘obliged formally to declare war’, but that such a declaration might not be necessary because Serbia had not signed the convention. A similar discussion of Austria’s obligations to Serbia according to The Hague also appeared in a number of regional newspapers. Across the Atlantic, the Chicago Daily Tribune printed an article discussing how a war in Europe might affect the United States, in particular American foreign trade. The article said it was the opinion of ‘officials of the

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47 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
State Department’ that American businesses would be able to continue to trade with belligerents even with a ‘European blockade and the seizure of contraband of war by belligerents’. The article claimed that the question of how to define contraband had not been settled by the great powers but that ‘The Hague conventions contain some general provisions regarding the shipment of contraband by neutrals’. As the discussion in the newspapers came to present war as the likely outcome of the Balkan crisis, The Hague was used in Britain and the United States as a tool to predict how it might be declared and conducted.

Although The Hague had featured in the public discussion during the July Crisis, it is reasonable to ask why the calls for its machinery for the pacific settlement of disputes to be used were not more prominent. In part, it was because the diplomatic crisis escalated too quickly. As Michael Neiberg argues, the minor dispute in the Balkans turned into a continental war with ‘truly dizzying speed’. It was not until the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum and the Serbian reply that the newspapers even discussed war as a likelihood. While the newspapers engaged with the Serbian offer to send the dispute to The Hague, they also correctly perceived that Habsburg officials had no intention of settling the dispute through arbitration. The newspapers’ focus quickly shifted from how to prevent a war in the Balkans to what the ramifications of a war between Serbia and Austria-Hungary might be. An editorial in the Daily Mail, for example, argued that if the war in the Balkans could not be kept localised, Europe would be ‘face to face with the greatest catastrophe in human history’. Speculation on how the dominoes of the alliance system would fall occupied the newspapers’ attention, as it did that of the statesmen from the European powers. While it was not clear what action particular states would take, it was readily apparent that arbitrating or mediating such a dynamic situation was unlikely. Sir Edward Grey’s failed attempt to organise a ‘four-power mediation’ seemed to prove as much. Since Austria-Hungary, one of the protagonists in the dispute at the centre of the crisis, had explicitly ruled out the use of the PCA, The Hague never gained significant traction in the newspapers as a likely means of preventing war.

52 Chicago Daily Tribune, ‘Hope to Escape Export Losses’, 1 August 1914, p. 7.
53 Ibid.
56 Clark, The Sleepwalkers, p. 559.
Stopping the Escalating Conflict

It was, perhaps perversely, once war had begun that the possibility of The Hague being used to achieve peace was discussed more prominently in the newspapers. In the first weeks of August 1914, the Hague Conventions gained extensive coverage in Britain and the United States as newspapers discussed their potential to stop the escalating conflict. On 5 August, the Manchester Guardian reprinted the Arbitration Society’s suggestion that Britain should stay out of the conflict and use ‘the machinery of the Hague Conventions’ to bring about peace.\(^{57}\) On the same day, President Wilson offered his services as a mediator under Article 8 of the 1899 Pacific Settlement Convention.\(^{58}\) All four newspapers reported extensively on Wilson’s proposal. They discussed in great detail how the offer was valid under the convention’s terms, exactly what the relevant articles entailed, and also speculated on the likelihood that any of the belligerents would take up Wilson’s offer.\(^{59}\)

Wilson’s evocation of The Hague in his proposal to mediate offered a point of reference in the discussion of stopping the conflict, and the American newspapers reported extensively on Wilson’s peace initiative, with a front page article in the Los Angeles Times and an editorial in the Chicago Daily Tribune.\(^{60}\) While these newspapers did not convey a sense of optimism about mediation being successful—an article in the Los Angeles Times even described Wilson’s offer as useless at that particular time—they did present it as the appropriate course of action for the United States as a neutral state.\(^{61}\) The front page of the Los Angeles Times on 6 August noted that under The Hague convention ‘a neutral nation is permitted, even specifically urged, in time of international conflict to tender her good offices to contending powers’, and it was ‘under the terms of The Hague

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\(^{57}\) Manchester Guardian, ‘International Arbitration League: Statement as to Neutrality’, 5 August 1914, p. 3.

\(^{58}\) M. Ryan Floyd, Abandoning American Neutrality: Woodrow Wilson and the Beginning of the Great War, August 1914–December 1915, New York, 2013, p. 11. The convention made it clear that the offer of mediation could not be regarded as an unfriendly act, and Article 8 stated that the warring parties were tasked with taking advantage of any opportunities to restore peace.

\(^{59}\) Manchester Guardian, ‘United States and Mediation’, 6 August 1914, p. 4; ‘President Wilson’s Offer of Mediation’, 10 August 1914, p. 6; Daily Mail, ‘President Wilson’, 6 August 1914, p. 6; Chicago Daily Tribune, ‘The President’s Offer’, 6 August 1914, p. 6; Los Angeles Times, ‘German Ultimatum to Italy is Reported: First Step For Peace is Taken’, 6 August 1914, p. 11.

\(^{60}\) Chicago Daily Tribune, ‘The President’s Offer’, 6 August 1914, p. 6; Los Angeles Times, ‘German Ultimatum to Italy is Reported: First Step For Peace is Taken’, 6 August 1914, p. 11.

convention’ that Wilson offered his services to the belligerents. The editorial in the Chicago Daily Tribune called Wilson’s offer of mediation under The Hague convention fitting, since for the United States to not do anything in the crisis would discredit the country’s ‘persistent propaganda of peace’ and their ‘sincere efforts’ to develop the machinery of international arbitration. The American Peace and Arbitration League expressed a similar sentiment in a pamphlet which applauded Wilson’s attempts to utilise The Hague and suggested that the war in Europe offered an opportunity for Americans to promote world peace by setting an example of international justice and good will to all peoples. The Hague, therefore, was not just a resource for neutrals to utilise in their attempt to diffuse conflicts, but also something that was appropriated as a symbol of American exceptionalism.

In the bloody first months of the conflict, pamphlets and newspapers continued to reference The Hague when hopes of a negotiated settlement were discussed. William McDowell of the League of Peace produced a pamphlet in September that called the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague one of the ‘great international organizations’, and urged President Wilson to follow up on his offer of mediation. McDowell argued that Wilson needed to call a meeting of world leaders in Washington D.C. in order to work towards peace. Coverage of Wilson’s offer of mediation continued in the newspapers through August and September, gaining front page coverage in the Chicago Daily Tribune on 13 and 17 September, and in the Los Angeles Times on 11 September. The Chicago Daily Tribune, for example, discussed Wilson’s offer of mediation to the leaders of the belligerent nations and suggested that, ‘while maintaining an attitude of strict impartiality toward the warring nations’, the president had also ‘referred by inference to the Hague conventions governing the conduct of warfare’ and conveyed ‘a hint of the consequences of the violation of the recognized rules of’

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62 Los Angeles Times, ‘German Ultimatum to Italy is Reported: First Step For Peace is Taken’, 6 August 1914, p. 11.
warfare’. The Manchester Guardian printed a letter to the editor claiming that a possibility of achieving peace through The Hague’s mediation process remained. In a similar manner to the Chicago Daily Tribune article, the correspondent stated that there were consequences for violating The Hague and ‘that article 3 of Convention IV of the Conference of 1907 provided a definite sanction for those regulations’. The correspondent suggested that ensuring Germany was aware that they would not escape liability for violating the conventions might encourage them to use The Hague’s mediation process. The newspaper coverage in August and September 1914 shows that The Hague remained an important source of hope, as it continued to be seen as a viable means of stopping the conflict, and that people in Britain and the United States believed there would be a financial and political cost to those who violated its conventions.

The newspapers also discussed the possibility of the third Hague peace conference, scheduled to take place in 1915, convening earlier in an attempt to stop the conflict. On 2 September, for example, the Manchester Guardian published a letter to the editor which highlighted that the present conflict was the first general European war since the Hague peace conferences took place. The letter suggested that it was incumbent on those non-belligerent signatories to the Hague conventions to call for another conference in a bid to stop the hostilities. The idea that neutrals should take the initiative to bring about an end to the war was expressed in articles in both the Manchester Guardian and the Chicago Daily Tribune. The Manchester Guardian article called for a conference of neutrals to be convened at The Hague ‘without a moment’s delay’, while the Chicago Daily Tribune article suggested that the third peace conference should be held in Washington ‘as soon as possible’. Instead of demonstrating the failure of The Hague conferences, for some contemporaries the outbreak of war reinforced the need for more to take place.

A remarkable letter to the editor of the Los Angeles Times provides an example of the way The Hague provided a vehicle for imagining future peace during the bleak first

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69 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
months of the war. The letter argued that another Hague conference was the best way of achieving peace and that the conference should form the basis of the re-organisation of the post-war world. According to the correspondent, if all nations contributed armed forces to ‘the conference’, it would be able to enforce its decisions in the interests of peace. The best way to achieve lasting peace, the letter continued, was to make every man ‘take an oath to serve the Hague conference in the interests of justice’. Although the letter’s suggestions were extreme by comparison with most newspaper contributions, they demonstrate the way that in the eyes of some readers The Hague had come to be associated with justice and international organisation. The letter also reveals the profound impact The Hague conferences had on people’s perception of international cooperation. The conferences had provided the precedent of nations working together—even if somewhat reluctantly—in the interest of peace, and people assumed it could be done again.

The centrality of another Hague conference to the hopes of peace activists was evident in an American Peace Society’s pamphlet titled Our Future Peace Program. The pamphlet, written by Robert Root, called for ‘a new campaign’ for world peace that involved education and activism; the ‘triumphs of the Hague Court of Arbitration’ needed to be told anew, and ‘a Third Hague Conference must be called as early as possible’. The next conference would have to be free from the interference of ‘men in uniform or with dangling swords’, as they had prevented The Hague achieving even more than it already had. Despite politicians and militarists undermining the development of The Hague, for people like Root The Hague remained a powerful symbol of international cooperation and the development of international law.

The calls to commence the next Hague conference early in order to stop the conflict also met with some derision. The ultra-nationalist British periodical John Bull claimed in early August that at that moment there was ‘no more futile or more fatuous thing in all the world than that magnificent Palace of Peace at The Hague’. The journal argued that the origins of the palace were to be found in the 1899 conference at The

73 Los Angeles Times, ‘Unique World-Peace Plan’, 19 September 1914, p. II5
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
Hague, which was a meeting that had utterly failed to prevent subsequent conflicts. The article further claimed that Britain’s ‘pacifist cranks’ needed to learn that peace meetings such as those at The Hague were opportunities for orators to pour out ‘torrents of words smooth as butter and sweet as sugar’, but had no ability to prevent war.79 *John Bull* tended to provide extreme views, as was evident when, three pages after their dismissal of peace meetings, the newspaper expressed sympathy for Austria-Hungary and the hope that Habsburg forces would remove Serbia ‘from the map of Europe’.80 However, this publication reveals the way The Hague could be used as a symbol of pacifism and its utility questioned because of its inability to prevent the outbreak of war.

British and American newspapers in the first months of the war regularly presented The Hague’s mechanisms and conventions as tools that could prevent conflicts. Articles in newspapers from across the political spectrum in both countries, therefore, criticised European rulers for not using the conventions when the threat of conflict arose, and even for intentionally undermining the development of the conventions prior to 1914. In its scathing criticism of the war and the ‘miserable tribe of Chancellors, Field Marshals and diplomatists’ who had caused it, the Scottish socialist newspaper *Forward* argued that Austria had been ‘determined from the first to force a bloody issue’.81 Similarly, the *Birmingham Daily Post* printed a statement from the International Peace Bureau protesting the manner in which Austria had shown ‘contempt for the engagements entered into at The Hague to resort to pacific means of the solution of conflict with other nations’.82 An article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* discussed The Hague’s potential for preventing war, but claimed that Germany and the ‘war party’ that led the country had undermined attempts at disarmament and the use of arbitration.83 An article in the *Los Angeles Times* attributed blame more broadly and argued that many of those involved at The Hague had been disingenuous because they had talked about peace and restraints on conflict whilst continuing to develop instruments of war.84

Two articles in the *Los Angeles Times* exemplify contemporary criticism of politicians’ apparent disregard for The Hague; the first of which imagined what a historian in the future might think of the current crisis. The article claimed the historian

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80 *John Bull*, ‘To Hell With Servia!’, 8 August 1914, p. 6.  
81 *Forward*, ‘Untitled’, 8 August 1914, p. 4.  
83 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, ‘Win or Perish, Allies’ Resolve’, 9 September 1914, p. 3.  
would ‘read with gladness the records of the Hague Conference’ and the international
court it established ‘to settle all differences without resort to arms’.85 However, the
historian would also note that ‘as soon as the legal machinery was created by means of
which the swords could be dispensed with there was a fresh fury to perfect at once all the
instruments of destruction’.86 The expenditure on armaments, the article continued, had
‘crushed the poorest of the nations and crippled the richest of them, but the burden was
gladly borne because it was a sacrifice for the cause of peace’.87 The second Los Angeles
Times article expressed a similar sentiment when it asked:

What now mean all the avowals of peace and the professions of friendship at the
Hague Tribunal when even those who were foremost in initiating this court of
mediation are the first to disregard and refuse its kindly behests? The world is
appalled, now, because while with their lips monarchs were praising and
endorsing peace measures and preventives of war, with their hands they were
building up the most monstrous fighting machines which the world has ever
seen.88

The newspaper coverage from both countries suggests that many saw the Hague
conferences as a missed opportunity; disarmament, the Permanent Court of Arbitration
and the commissions of inquiry were ideas and mechanisms which could have prevented
war, but were undermined at the time by duplicitous leaders. Articles in the Daily Mail
and Manchester Guardian suggested that it was the failure of the international community
to place armed forces at The Hague’s disposal, so that states could be forced to use the
Permanent Court of Arbitration and accept its decisions, which had undermined its ability
to prevent war.89 An editorial in the Edinburgh Evening News claimed that it was
‘impossible to doubt that Austria wanted war and did not want a settlement’, as Serbia
accepted most of the ultimatum’s demands and offered to send the others ‘before the
Hague Tribunal’.90 The editorial argued that Austria’s refusal to send the dispute to The
Hague demonstrated that arbitration was great in theory, but in practice it was ‘brushed
aside as a spider’s web’ whenever disputes touched on national honour or vital interests.91
Even sections of the German press, as discussed in the Liverpool Echo, expressed the

86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
89 Daily Mail, ‘Over 2,000 Casualties’, 26 August 1914, p.5; Manchester Guardian, ‘Mr
Roosevelt’s View’, 25 September 1914, p. 10.
91 Ibid.
view that The Hague conferences had just been insincere posturing when it claimed that Nicholas II may have ‘erected a palace of peace at The Hague’, but ‘the weakling in blood-stained purple’ had now eschewed peace for the cause of pan-Slavism and was almost solely responsible for starting the war.92

Criticism of political leaders’ attitudes towards The Hague dated back to 1898. Even before the first conference took place, public campaigns and petitions to demand those in power take the proposed conference seriously revealed the doubt many had about the motivations of their leaders.93 A narrative emerged during the conferences, largely due to prominent peace activists and some of the delegates themselves, that what was achieved at The Hague was done in spite of political leaders rather than because of them. The conferences were presented as events that the public had forced into being, almost against the will of their own political leaders. When war broke out in 1914, particularly after the Habsburg rejection of the Serbian proposal to send the dispute to The Hague, people in Britain and the United States were able to find an extant narrative of international goodwill being undermined by warmongering leaders.

Peace organisations had criticised self-interested and belligerent European leaders for The Hague Conferences’ inability to reduce armaments, and they now expressed fears that the United States might catch ‘the armaments fever’.94 The New York Peace Society produced a pamphlet in August 1914 that applauded the ‘various important matters’ The Hague Conferences attended to, but bemoaned the fact that they left armaments untouched. The pamphlet argued—in a similar manner to the newspapers—that armaments actually increased after each of the Hague conferences and this was the result of international affairs being ‘in the hands of militarists’.95 The pamphlet warned that the militarists of the ‘old world’ had undermined The Hague and created tensions in Europe through their promotion of expenditure on armaments, and that the United States would go down the same path as the old world unless it kept militarists in check.96 A statement from the World Peace Foundation offered a similar warning, noting that ‘military

92 *Liverpool Echo*, ‘More German “News”’, 14 August 1914, p. 3.
93 See Tuchman, pp. 229–51; Abbenhuis, The Hague Conferences, particularly chapters 2 and 3; Higgins, *passim*.
95 ‘The Nemesis of Armaments’.
96 Ibid.
passions in America’ were already ‘becoming threatening’ after only two months of war in Europe. The appropriate course of action for the United States, the pamphlet argued, was to remain neutral and work to achieve peace.

The various peace and international law societies’ plans for peaceful relations in the future, and their warnings about militarism, were reprinted in the mainstream press, demonstrating the circulation of ideas between different types of media. On 13 September, the Los Angeles Times and Chicago Daily Tribune both printed extensive extracts from an American Peace Society publication that blamed the outbreak of war on ‘the enormous armaments of European nations, compulsory military service extracted from the people and the insatiable ambition of certain rulers’. The Peace Society’s pronouncement called for the United States to exert its influence to bring about peace in Europe, and warned that the accumulation of armaments ‘inevitably stimulated a warlike spirit’. The Chicago Daily Tribune also printed a report from the first meeting of the German-American Woman’s club in Chicago, at which the principal speaker was Louis Lochner, the secretary of the Chicago Peace Society and the Western American Peace Society. Lochner argued that many people were unfairly blaming peace societies for not preventing the war and that the achievements of such groups had been ignored. Governments in Europe had obstructed the efforts of peace groups, Lochner claimed, and the work of The Hague had been a failure ‘because military men always had been sent to the peace conferences instead of representatives of the common people’.

A similar exchange of ideas between activists and the press was evident in Britain. The Manchester Guardian printed a letter to the editor from some of the founders of the Union of Democratic Control (UDC). The letter argued that the principals of a final settlement to end the conflict had ‘been widely discussed since the beginning of the war’ and they would be a crucial part of the creation of ‘a better and more secure Europe’.

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99 Ibid.
100 Chicago Daily Tribune, ‘War is Blamed on Inactivity of Peace Advocates’, 24 September 1914, p. 4.
Union thought necessary for a stable peace. On the same page, the newspaper printed an editorial discussing the UDC’s programme for achieving and maintaining peace, which stated that the aspects of the plan that should be ‘pretty generally accepted’ included calls to end the Balance of Power that kept two rival groups of states in a ‘permanently hostile and menacing array’, a reduction of armaments and an end to secret diplomacy.\textsuperscript{102} The discourses found in publications of various peace societies and activists did not exist independently of those in the mainstream press, but were interconnected and discussed in public in the United States and Britain.

The ideas of the peace organisations did not go unchallenged in the newspapers, however. The \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} printed an article that claimed there were very few militarists in the United States, and the term was only prominent because of its use by ‘members of the extreme doctrinaire pacifists’.\textsuperscript{103} This group of pacifists had ‘taken charge of the policy of the American peace societies’ and applied the term “militarist” to anyone who favoured any expenditure on the navy or army.\textsuperscript{104} The article claimed that such pacifists must believe that the United States would never have to resort to arms and would ‘rely on treaties of arbitration, on resorts to The Hague, on world opinion, on the considerations that war is unprofitable and inhumane’.\textsuperscript{105} Despite its engagement with the peace societies, the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} was particularly concerned about the United States’ apparent military unpreparedness, and printed an editorial that began with the assertion that the United States was ‘unprepared to defend itself from the militant aggression of any first class power’.\textsuperscript{106} The editorial hoped that the European war would ‘impress upon the American people the meaning of military preparedness’ and the need for an adequate navy, an understanding ‘the glib doctrinaires of the peace societies’ had so far prevented.\textsuperscript{107}

While the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}’s concerns about military preparedness framed their reaction to peace propaganda, in Britain the \textit{Daily Mail} tended to view any group promoting peace with suspicion. An editorial in the \textit{Daily Mail} (in September) argued that there should be no talk of peace terms ‘until the Prussian system is smashed’, and only ‘weak-kneed myopic individuals’ who did not understand the issues at stake would

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Manchester Guardian}, ‘When Peace Shall Come’, 18 September 1914, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
disagree. Obviously, the political orientation of particular newspapers shaped their coverage of proposals to end the war and create a stable peace. Despite this, such proposals were a common feature of newspaper reporting in the first months of the war, and The Hague featured prominently among them.

While there were widespread calls in the first months of the war for the United States to use The Hague to pursue a peaceful resolution to the conflict, there were also calls for Americans to take advantage of the European calamity. The dissonance that could be found in the American discourse about the war is best illustrated by the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. On 10 September, the newspaper printed an article about calls for the third Hague conference to be held in Washington D.C. as soon as possible in order to achieve peace. Directly beneath this article appeared an advertisement with the headline, in bold lettering, ‘Make Money Out of This War’. The advertisement encouraged people to invest $100 and earn profits from the production of foodstuffs for the world. Phillips O’Brien argues that newspapers in the Midwest, like the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, enthusiastically promoted the greater opportunities for trade created by the war without the same level of moral concern about the consequences of the conflict as were found in East Coast newspapers. Clearly, American responses to the war in Europe were as varied as the population of the United States, but for those wanting to achieve peace The Hague remained important.

Those seeking to stop the bloodshed looked to The Hague for tools to end the conflict, and interest in The Hague’s machinery for the pacific settlement of disputes continued through the rest of the year. The American Association for International Conciliation noted in September 1914 that the demand for their pamphlets since the war began was the heaviest they had experienced in their history. Similarly, the law library in Chicago noted the increased demand for books on the Permanent Court of Arbitration and The Hague conventions. In November 1914, the World Peace Foundation printed a list of publications about war and peace that they were currently distributing, a large

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108 *Daily Mail*, ‘The End We Seek’, 19 September 1914, p. 4.
number of which were about The Hague and the Permanent Court of Arbitration. In the same month, the American School Peace League produced a pamphlet that asserted that the war needed to be discussed in the classroom, as the children were often from one of the warring nations and they ‘like their elders, eagerly watch the newspapers, scan the war maps, listen to heated discussions, and form what may or may not be correct opinion’. The pamphlet argued that children needed to be taught that war was not the natural condition of international affairs and that The Hague Conferences were the first step towards international federation. The pamphlet assumed there would be more conferences at The Hague and they could be seen as ‘the forerunners of an international parliament’.

Newspaper coverage of calls to use The Hague to stop the conflict reveal an aspect of the British and American reaction to the war that historians rarely discuss. Michael Neiberg argues that ‘the overwhelming response of the people of Europe was not enthusiasm or joy but sadness and resignation’. Similarly, Catriona Pennell argues that the British public ‘greeted the outbreak of war with a multitude of reactions, including anxiety, excitement, fear, enthusiasm, panic, uncertainty and criticism’. Neiberg and Pennell demonstrate that the war was not universally celebrated, but I believe it needs to be emphasised that the conflict was not passively accepted either. As the vigorous and wide-ranging conversation unfolding in the newspapers and other print media show, people on both sides of the Atlantic immediately began to think of and circulate ways to stop the war escalating, and offer ideas and recommendations about how to restructure international relations in order to prevent such a conflict occurring again. For newspapers and their reading publics, The Hague provided the tools to work for peace and the framework to imagine a transformed post-war world.

116 Ibid.
117 Neiberg, Dance of the Furies, p. 234.
118 Pennell, p. 227.
119 Two other key works that have questioned the existence and nature of public enthusiasm at the outbreak of the war are Hew Strachan, The First World War, Volume I: To Arms, Oxford, 2001; and Verhey, The Spirit of 1914.
Despite the horrific casualties of the first months of the war and the inability of neutral nations to make any progress with mediation, The Hague continued to offer hope. The calls to use the conventions established in 1899 and 1907 to achieve peace, and the plans to expand The Hague in order to reform international relations, were discussed in newspapers in Britain and the United States throughout the July crisis and the first months of the war. The persistent hope that The Hague might be used to bring about peace was coupled, as will be discussed in the next chapter, with the widespread use of The Hague for assessing the way in which the war was conducted.
4. Civilised Warfare: The Hague and the Conduct of War in 1914

In August 1914, the pages of the prominent Midwest American newspaper the Chicago Daily Tribune were filled with news of the war in Europe. The newspaper attempted to make sense of the events in Europe and assess their impact on the United States. Among the articles published on 15 August discussing responsibility for the war, the German advance in Belgium and the conflict’s economic impact on the United States, was an interview with the librarian of the local Chicago County Law Library, who had noticed a decided increase in demand for books on international law and the proceedings of the Hague conferences of 1899 and 1907. Among the volumes in greatest demand, the librarian explained, was William Hull’s overview history, The Two Hague Conferences that had been published the previous year. This anecdote suggests that Chicago’s citizens sought out information about the Hague conferences and conventions to help them make sense of the war. Across the Atlantic Ocean, in Great Britain, a similar public desire for information on The Hague was evident in the Manchester Guardian’s ‘Questions and Answers on the War’ section. On nine separate occasions in August and September 1914, readers asked specific questions about the Hague conventions and how they applied to the war in which Britain was involved. Such interactions offer a glimpse into the extensive dialogue between newspapers and their readers in the opening months of the war, and reveal the prominent role of The Hague in those exchanges.

From the first days of the war, newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic used The Hague to assess the legality of a wide array of belligerent conduct. References to The Hague in the opening months of the war were so numerous that a Daily Mail editorial on 18 December declared that the ‘debating habit of flinging articles of The Hague

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3 Ibid.
4 Manchester Guardian, 11 August 1914, p. 4; 17 August 1914, p. 3; 21 August 1914, p. 3; 22 August 1914, p. 8; 25 August 1914, p. 10; 26 August 1914, p. 3; 19 September 1914, p. 5; 25 September 1914, p. 3. There were two separate questions in relation to The Hague on 25 August 1914.
convention at the enemy should cease’. The newspapers examined in this chapter—the *Manchester Guardian* and *Daily Mail* from Britain, and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times* from the United States—show how The Hague was part of a multi-genre global conversation about the conduct of the war. Newspaper editorials and articles utilised The Hague as a means to assess the conduct of the war at sea, on land and in the air, and the readerships of those newspapers seem to have responded in a variety of ways. The Hague was presented as determining how neutrals, prisoners of war and civilians should be treated by and behave towards belligerents. The Hague was referenced so extensively not only because newspaper readers in Britain and the United States assessed the war in legal terms from the outset, but also because The Hague had come to embody key precepts and expectations for how belligerents should conduct themselves. That the newspapers broadcast such views about The Hague so frequently reveals the extent to which they assumed the public understood and accepted them.

Well before 1914, conceptions of ‘The Hague’ offered a powerful framework to discuss the conduct of warfare. The outbreak of the war cemented the importance of the Hague conventions, providing Britons and Americans with a means to compare the conduct of belligerent nations and assess the war’s impact. Furthermore, people in both nations used The Hague as a means of articulating and strengthening the legitimacy and legality of each country’s position—one neutral, the other belligerent—in the conflict. While the British government certainly used The Hague for official propaganda purposes in the battle for global opinion, the British press, largely independent of official pressure, also used the Hague conventions to assess belligerent and neutral conduct. This was equally true in the neutral United States, where it had become difficult to discuss the war without referencing the Hague conventions. Isabel Hull’s contention that, from the war’s opening days, ‘world public opinion’ focussed on belligerent violations of the laws of war is borne out by the newspaper reporting in Britain and the United States. To that end, the belligerents’ official and reciprocal accusations of their enemy’s illegal actions added to an already existing discussion about the conduct of the war. The Hague was central to these debates.

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7 Hull, p. 51. One of Hull’s key arguments is that German officials completely misread the global public’s attitude towards international law, as was evident in the reaction to Bethmann-Hollweg’s notorious ‘scrap of paper’ comment.
This chapter argues that newspaper coverage of the war’s first months demonstrated a greater degree of public engagement with the laws of war than historians typically acknowledge. John Horne and Alan Kramer argue that during the war the British governmental, military and intellectual establishment placed more importance on violations of The Hague conventions than did ‘ordinary opinion’. However, Hull suggests that The Hague was important to both ‘leaders and public opinion’ in Britain—and that both immediately viewed the First World War as a struggle over law. Despite this claim, Hull’s work largely focusses on elite opinion and does not clearly demonstrate or substantiate the British public’s engagement with The Hague. Similarly, Gullace argues that the British government used German violations of The Hague as part of their attempt to ‘market the war’. Gullace claims that ‘the gendered representation of German atrocities provided British propagandists with a vivid and evocative set of images that could be used to explain the arcane language of international law’. Gullace certainly demonstrates the importance British propagandists placed on The Hague, but she does not show how the British public reacted to such messages and she assumes that a public engagement with international law was absent at the start of the war. Pennell’s monograph on British reactions to the outbreak of war argues that the public regarded international law as an important cause well before they were told to do so by propagandists, but does not present this in relation to The Hague. Larry Zuckerman’s The Rape of Belgium, suggests The Hague was part of the legal framework within which people made sense of the war, but does not attempt to demonstrate this explicitly.

The historiography shows the extent to which historians have come to assume that there was public interest in and engagement with The Hague, without attempting to prove it empirically. The examination of references to The Hague in newspapers from Britain and the United States allows me to substantiate Pennell and Hull’s claims about the importance of international law for the British public in the first months of the war, while also demonstrating that a similar sentiment existed in the neutral United States. The common denominator was a broad acceptance of the frameworks provided by The Hague rather than a state of active belligerency.

9 Hull, p. 2.
11 Ibid., p. 716.
12 Pennell, A Kingdom United.
13 Zuckerman, pp. 120–123, 192.
Despite The Hague’s inability to prevent the outbreak of European war, it is clear from newspaper reporting that people in Britain and the United States believed that its rules continued to represent the civilised way of conducting war. The Hague conferences had attempted to establish not only a means of preventing war, but also of humanising war should it occur. The resulting conventions, particularly the 1907 conference’s Convention IV, Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, sought to regulate military violence and confine it to combatants. Historians have debated the extent to which belligerents adhered to The Hague’s rules between 1914 and 1918, particularly in regard to the treatment of prisoners of war. Alan Kramer argues that prisoners of war were not treated in accordance with the Hague Conventions by their captors, but that this was usually due to a lack of resources and organisation rather than systematic and deliberate mistreatment. Annette Becker argues that The Hague was not a ‘dead letter’ during the conflict and that its conventions did offer protection to the wounded and prisoners of war. However, Becker points out that The Hague did not offer the same level of protection to interned civilians. Geoffrey Best makes a similar argument and notes that civilian prisoners or internees had not been envisaged by the Geneva or Hague conventions, and, therefore, were not covered by international law. While the work of these historians provides useful insight into official attitudes towards, and the actual treatment of, prisoners of war and interned civilians, it does not examine the public discussion about the issues or the framing of The Hague as the war progressed, and demonstrates that objects of historiographical focus may not overlap with—and may even obscure—the issues that resonated most powerfully in contemporary media.

The Treatment of Prisoners of War and the Regulation of Aircraft

All four newspapers discussed the Hague conventions that determined the manner in which civilised states treated prisoners of war. Indeed, Convention IV contained 17

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14 Kramer, p. 25.
15 Ibid., p. 62.
17 Ibid.
18 Best, Humanity in Warfare, p. 232.
articles relating to the treatment of prisoners of war, the most important of which, Article 4, stated that they must be treated humanely. Referencing these articles, the *Manchester Guardian* claimed that the:

lot of a prisoner of war, whether he be a captured foe or a detained reservist, need not be altogether an unhappy one [as] a number of chivalrous rules have been made at the Hague for relieving the anxieties of this position, and by these rules all civilised nations are bound.\(^{20}\)

Two days later, in response to a reader’s question, the newspaper explained how belligerents’ employment of prisoners of war was determined by the Hague rules.\(^{21}\) However, the difficulties of interpreting the Hague conventions became apparent in late September when the Dutch government decided to return British sailors rescued after their cruisers had been sunk.\(^{22}\) The *Manchester Guardian* and the *Los Angeles Times* both printed detailed articles discussing the Dutch government’s responsibility with regard to the rescued British sailors.\(^{23}\) The articles demonstrated that there was some doubt about how the Hague’s rules should be interpreted in particular situations, but no question of their being the authority on the treatment of prisoners of war or other issues regarding neutrality.

The difficulty of interpreting the Hague’s rules was also evident in the British and American newspapers’ coverage of the aerial bombardment of cities. Aeronautical science was still in its infancy during the two Hague conferences, which made attempts to regulate its military application particularly difficult. However, the conference delegates were aware of the potential for aviation to be used against civilians and attempted to prevent this by prohibiting the discharge of projectiles and explosives from balloons. Article 25 of the 1907 conference’s Convention IV prohibited the bombardment of undefended towns ‘by whatever means’.\(^{24}\) While contemporaries interpreted ‘by whatever means’ to include aircraft, defining an undefended town was more problematic. If a town contained a single soldier, was it considered defended? For a town to be a legitimate

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\(^{20}\) *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Miscellany’, 19 August 1914, p. 3.

\(^{21}\) *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Questions and Answers on the War’, 21 August 1914, p. 3.

\(^{22}\) The rules relating to neutral internment of belligerent sailors were particularly difficult to apply in practice. See Maartje Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral: The Netherlands in the First World War, 1914–1918*, Amsterdam, 2006, pp. 103–112.


target for aerial bombardment it not only needed to be defended but, according to Convention IV’s Article 26, also required the commanding officer of the attacking forces to ‘do all in his power’ to warn the town’s authorities before a bombardment commenced. When belligerents used aircraft to attack towns in August and September 1914, the newspapers in Britain and the United States engaged with the ambiguous phrasing of the Hague conventions and debated the legality of aerial bombardment.25

The Zeppelin raids on Antwerp in late August and the aeroplane raids on Paris in early September inspired several articles in all four newspapers.26 A number of these articles included official statements by the Belgian Legation in Britain and the American Committee in Paris that the raids constituted a violation of The Hague.27 The protests provided extensive discussion of The Hague conventions, and these were also printed in the smaller regional British newspapers. The Birmingham Daily Post, for example, printed the protest from the French government to the ‘Powers signatory to The Hague Convention’ about the German bombardment of the French town Pont-a-Mousson. The protest gave details of the bombardment, and then said:

> The Hague Conventions have thus been violated in the following respects:
> (1) The bombardment was effected against an open and undefended town. (Article 25 of the regulation annexed to the fourth Hague Convention.)
> (2) The bombardment took place without preliminary notice. (Article 27.)
> (3) It was specially directed against the hospital and historic monuments. (Article 27.)28

Very little was printed in the newspapers to contradict the assertion that the German raids were a violation of The Hague, apart from in the Los Angeles Times.

Between 27 August and 9 September, the Los Angeles Times printed four articles in

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25 A German zeppelin raided Liege on 6 August, killing nine civilians and making the town the first in Europe to suffer an aerial attack. The larger cities of Paris and Antwerp would soon share the same fate; Strachan, p. 211.


which it was claimed that the raids were not a violation of The Hague. The reasons for this varied: one article claimed the German leaders adhered to The Hague by giving notice of their intention to bomb Antwerp by airship; two claimed that Germany did not sign the Hague convention about this form of bombardment with one of these articles adding that the requirements of The Hague were met anyway as Antwerp was a defended town; and one that the bombing was not against The Hague because the prohibition period had ended. However, it appears that the Los Angeles Times did not wish to be seen as condoning the dropping of bombs on cities, as two of these articles claimed that the actions of the German aircraft were ‘indefensible’ and ‘still a barbarous act’, despite meeting the requirements of The Hague. The extensive engagement with the exact wording of the conventions reveals how important contemporaries considered The Hague to be; they were not just using it symbolically, but also to carefully assess the use of weapons not seen before. The desire to understand the rules that were created to restrain the destructive forces of war also suggests an unease with how the conflict was developing.

Even before the raids on Paris and Antwerp occurred, the Los Angeles Times published an extensive article that detailed belligerent air force strengths and how the Hague conventions determined how aircraft could be utilised in war. Printed on 16 August, 1914, the article noted that there ‘was no precedent governing the use of aircraft in advancing the cause of a belligerent’ and that the delegates at The Hague conferences had resorted to regulating aircraft attacks on towns in the same manner as naval bombardments of coastal areas. A week after this article, and two days before the Zeppelin raid on Antwerp, the newspaper also published a paragraph in their ‘Pen Points’ section concerning what the Hague laws allowed in terms of explosives discharged from aircraft. The Manchester Guardian and the Chicago Daily Tribune also gave aviation and its regulation by the Hague conventions prominent coverage. The Manchester

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32 Ibid.
Guardian printed an editorial discussing The Hague’s provisions for warfare in the air and used them to assess the legalities of Germany’s Zeppelin raid on Antwerp:

Article 25 of the Hague Convention prohibits “the attack or bombardment, by whatever means, of towns, villages, dwellings, or buildings which are undefended”. Antwerp is, it is true, a strongly fortified town, but that fact does not give a besieger the right to destroy buildings within it which are not defended.34

Such detailed examination of the Hague conventions was also found in an editorial in the Chicago Daily Tribune. The editorial claimed that the relevant convention for assessing German Zeppelin raids was Article 27 of the rules of land warfare adopted at the 1907 conference, which stated that steps must be taken during sieges and bombardments to spare hospitals, historic monuments and buildings dedicated to religion and art.35 The editorial argued that ‘an airship operating at night at a considerable distance above a city cannot discern the marks which should give protection to such buildings’.36 Reports on the use of aircraft in August and September implied that they had captured peoples’ imagination and that there was widespread discussion about how they could be used in war. Crucially, all of these discussions used The Hague as a framework for understanding the legality of attacks from the air on both military and civilian targets.

The Rights and Duties of Neutrals

As the war in Europe escalated, the Chicago Daily Tribune and Los Angeles Times debated how the conflict might affect the United States, and their discussions used The Hague as a framework for predicting how belligerents might treat American shipping.37 The United States’ recent industrial expansion was heavily reliant on exports to Europe in general and to Britain and Germany in particular.38 In the first week of August, even before all of the European powers had made formal declarations of war, the Chicago Daily Tribune published articles noting the protection the Hague conventions afforded to neutral shipping.39 One such article, for example, stated that ‘The Hague conference

36 Ibid.
37 Of greatest relevance to American shipping was 1907 Hague Convention XIII, Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War.
38 Floyd, p. 15.
39 Chicago Daily Tribune, ‘Hope To Escape Export Losses’, 1 August 1914, p. 7; ‘Awaits Ruling on Contraband’, 3 August 1914, p. 10; ‘Foreign Ships to Come Under American Flag’, 5 August 1914, p. 5; ‘U.S. Proclaims Neutrality in European War’, 5 August 1914, p. 7; ‘Senate Divided on
approves the following acts by neutrals’, and then provided a list of neutral rights to provide supplies and loans to belligerents.\textsuperscript{40} The article did not need to point out that The Hague was the most important body of rules for neutral conduct, and it was clearly assumed that it needed to be adhered to.

The articles published in early August demonstrated an assumption that belligerents would likely use blockades, but avoid other wartime measures against neutral trade. The newspaper discussion, therefore, focused on freedom of passage for neutral vessels and the likelihood of American ships being stopped and searched for contraband. The articles clearly stated that the Hague conventions determined the rules governing such behaviour, and the newspapers provided significant description and analysis of the relevant conventions and the 1909 Declaration of London’s attempts to refine them.\textsuperscript{41} That The Hague’s language left room for interpretation created concern in the United States over what exactly belligerents would consider contraband and how they would deal with murky issues such as merchant ship conversion and foreign crew registration.\textsuperscript{42} Despite these concerns, the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}’s coverage demonstrated a belief that The Hague would offer protection to American shipping.

While the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} focussed on the issues related to a potential blockade, the \textit{Los Angeles Times} focussed on naval mines as the bigger threat to American shipping and published a number of articles analysing their legality under the Hague rules. The articles demonstrated an assumption that The Hague governed what types of mines were legal and how they could be used.\textsuperscript{43} Belligerents laid mines in an attempt to control the shipping lines to Europe, and their use became a prominent issue on

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, ‘Awaits Ruling on Contraband’, 3 August 1914, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, ‘Foreign Ships to Come Under American Flag’, 5 August 1914, p. 5; ‘Senate Divided on Question of Ships’ Registry’, 6 August 1914, p. 3. There were concerns in the United States about how British authorities would treat American ships with German crew and German vessels that were now registered and sailed by Americans.
\textsuperscript{43} The Hague conferences created a convention specifically for the use of mines: 1907 Convention VIII, Laying of Automatic Submarine Contact Mines. This convention regulated what type of mines were acceptable in civilised warfare and how they could be used. For example, the convention outlawed unanchored submarine mines unless they were constructed to become harmless within an hour of being deployed. Of particular relevance to neutral nations like the United States was Article 3 of the convention, which specified that ‘every possible precaution must be taken for the security of peaceful shipping’.

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\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, ‘Awaits Ruling on Contraband’, 3 August 1914, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, ‘Foreign Ships to Come Under American Flag’, 5 August 1914, p. 5; ‘Senate Divided on Question of Ships’ Registry’, 6 August 1914, p. 3. There were concerns in the United States about how British authorities would treat American ships with German crew and German vessels that were now registered and sailed by Americans.
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\end{quote}
9 August 1914 when the *Los Angeles Times* and *Chicago Daily Tribune* printed reports concerning a mine sinking the Norwegian ship *Tysla*. Both newspapers considered the legality of using mines in great detail. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* noted how ‘momentous’ the problem of agreeing on the issue of mines had been at the Hague conferences, and claimed that using the mine in this case was legal. Three days after *Tysla* sank, the *Los Angeles Times* published an extensive article about mines being used in the North Sea, the legality of their use under the Hague’s laws, and how this affected neutral American shipping. The newspapers thus acknowledged that The Hague was the appropriate venue for regulating the use of mines, but also anger that it had failed to effectively do so and could not provide adequate protection for neutral trade. A subsequent *Los Angeles Times* article called for ‘the next Hague conference’ to do something about mines since their current use meant that war ruled the seas, and that they posed heightened risks to legitimate civilian commercial activity.

The rules of neutrality and the desire for the United States to remain neutral were common themes in all of the aforementioned articles. The codification of the laws of neutrality at the 1907 Hague conference had created ‘a much clearer set of expectations of neutrals’ in wartime, and the newspapers made clear that neutrality’s rules should be treated with respect and care by all nations. Such a view was reinforced in President Wilson’s declaration of neutrality, which highlighted the need for Americans to be ‘impartial in thought, as well as action’. Fearing that belligerents, if given the excuse, might flout the Hague conventions which protected neutral shipping in times of war, American newspapers stressed the importance of the United States adhering strictly to international law to prevent this possibility. On 8 August, an article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* emphasised the need for the United States to be perceived as closely following The Hague’s rules. The article discussed the Department of Commerce’s orders

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44 *Los Angeles Times*, ‘Rule For Mines is Disregarded’, 9 August 1914, p. IV10; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, ‘Sinking of Neutral Ships by Mines Within War Rules’, 9 August 1914, p. 3. Both started with the Associated Press article giving the basic information regarding the sinking but then provided separate analysis.


46 *Los Angeles Times*, ‘Ships To Avoid the North Sea’, 12 August 1914, p. 12.


49 Neiberg, *The Path To War*, p. 37.

50 1907 Hague Convention V codified the rights and duties of neutrals in war on land, while Convention XIII did so for war at sea.
to port authorities setting out revised rules for them to follow in light of the war in Europe. These rules were quickly withdrawn and corrected when it became clear that they were inconsistent with the neutrality regulations embedded in the Hague conventions. A series of articles in the Los Angeles Times concerning belligerent use of cable and wireless networks in the United States also demonstrated concern about meeting the obligations of neutrality. The articles all referenced The Hague in their discussion of the United States’ responsibilities to the belligerents with regard to neutral communication networks. An article on 12 August argued that ‘The Hague convention expressly states that it is not obligatory upon a neutral power to exercise censorship over either wireless of cable communications’. The newspapers suggest an awareness within the United States that The Hague determined neutrals’ rights and duties, which Americans needed to keep in mind as the war progressed.

British newspapers also discussed the need for neutral shipping to be treated in accordance with the Hague regulations. That they did so became particularly important for Britain as it came to define its role in the war, and its overwhelming naval might, as the protector of international law. The Manchester Guardian published a number of articles on the protections the Hague rules offered for merchant shipping. These articles, one of which was a response to a reader’s question, discussed the relevant Hague convention and its relationship with the Declaration of London (1909) in detail. Prize courts in particular drew British newspapers’ attention and elicited discussions in relation to the courts’ historical development, current legality and use by the Royal Navy. The Western Mail, for example, printed an article on the proceedings of the Prize Court, during which the Attorney-General stated that it was ‘the desire of the Crown carefully to

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observe the word and spirit of the obligations entered into at The Hague’. The Hague was also referred to in the discussion of British freight that had been on German ships, which had then been interned in various ports at the outbreak of war. The Birmingham Daily Post expressed hope that ‘steps may be devised, within the limits of The Hague Convention, to release these goods’.57

Mirroring American concerns about the legality of using naval mines, British newspapers discussed the attempts made at The Hague to regulate the use of such weapons. Two days after Britain declared war, the Manchester Guardian printed an extensive article about mines and their legal-standing as determined by The Hague.58 The article described mines as ‘one of the greatest horrors of war’ and argued that they were still being used because the Hague conventions were ‘singularly inconclusive’ and had failed to effectively ban them.59 Articles in the Liverpool Echo and Western Mail both reprinted the Admiralty’s argument that Britain had always opposed the laying of mines in commercial waters, but that Germany had frustrated efforts to ban the tactic at the Hague Conferences.60 A similar sentiment was expressed in a letter to the Daily Mail’s editor, which claimed that using mines was legal under the Hague rules but should not be as they could damage ‘harmless neutrals’.61

The Hague in the Battle for World Opinion

The issue of legality had become a central feature of the conflict, and Britain attempted to discredit Germany’s conduct in the war in the eyes of the international community.62 The American newspapers’ concern that belligerents might not adhere to the Hague conventions was echoed in the British newspapers, but with particular reference to Germany.63 The British newspapers printed numerous accusations that Germany had violated the Hague conventions by indiscriminately sowing mines in the North Sea, which helped to shape the image of Germany as a rogue state operating outside the

56 Western Mail, ‘After 60 Years’, 5 September 1914, p. 4.
59 Ibid.
60 Liverpool Echo, ‘Sinking of Mine-Layer’, 6 August 1914, p. 4; Western Mail, ‘German Mine-Layer’, 6 August 1914, p. 5.
62 See Pennell, p. 64; Hull, p. 51.
bounds of international law. A letter to the *Manchester Guardian*’s editor, furthermore, claimed that Germany’s use of mines contravened the Hague conventions by ‘poisoning the waters’ of the world.64 A similar sentiment was expressed in a *Daily Mail* article which listed the way Germany had used mines as one of their armed forces’ many atrocities.65 As these articles demonstrated, attempts to portray Germany as conducting the war in an illegal manner were not restricted to the British government but were echoed by English local governments and civil society. The *Manchester Guardian* discussed the town of Grimsby’s Chamber of Commerce’s request that the British government protest to the neutral powers who had signed The Hague about Germany’s ‘laying of mines in neutral waters’, which they claimed was ‘contrary to the laws of the Hague Convention’.66 Similarly, the *Western Mail* printed an article about the proceedings of the Cardiff Chamber of Commerce during which it was decided that their representative to an upcoming international meeting of similar bodies in Paris should convey ‘a protest against the various breaches of the articles of the Hague Convention committed by Germany’.67 Clearly, members of the British public were assessing the war in legal terms and understood the importance of winning over the international community to Britain’s side.

Of all the belligerents’ attempts to discredit their enemy’s conduct of the war in the eyes of global society, accusations of mistreating civilians were the most controversial. This has also proved to be one of the more controversial aspects of First World War historiography.68 After the war concluded, the nature and impact of Allied propaganda during the conflict was debated.69 The ‘scholarly community’ in particular largely came ‘to accept the idea that German atrocities during the Great War were a myth’, a series of fabrications concocted by Allied governments in order to maintain their publics’ enthusiasm for the war.70 John Horne and Alan Kramer argue that the post-war politics of propaganda and memory profoundly shaped accounts of the First World War,

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64 *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Correspondence’, 9 September 1914, p. 3.
67 *Western Mail*, ‘Germany’s Offenses’, 1 October 1914, p. 7.
69 See Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp. 41–44.
as did the cynicism with which the conflict came to be viewed. It was not until the 2000s that a number of historians, including Horne and Kramer, came to seriously challenge this view and demonstrate that the German forces in occupied areas did commit atrocities. Nicoletta Gullace argues that despite the work of these historians, ‘a persistent scepticism over Great War propaganda’ continues to prevent ‘popular consciousness’ accepting this interpretation. Regardless of modern conceptions of civilian treatment during the First World War, the newspapers examined in this chapter demonstrate that contemporaries discussed the issue extensively, and their references to The Hague reveal a more sophisticated engagement with the subject than historians have suggested.

British newspapers expressed doubts about the veracity of atrocity stories and concerns about the harm they might cause to post-war politics. On 12 September, an article in Forward claimed that accounts of atrocities were intended to work up public fury and that ‘half of these stories’ should not be believed. While the article noted that war was ‘a grim game’ that involved more than just a ‘goose-step and bands’, it argued that inventing atrocities and encouraging hatred between nations would harm the post-war reconstruction of peace. In an editorial in the Woman’s Dreadnought on the same day, Sylvia Pankhurst warned readers to remember that ‘the interests of war demand a certain type of enthusiasm which is kept up to simmering point by horrible stories of what our enemies do’. Pankhurst claimed that these stories ‘may or may not be true’ and British people should not focus on them. Of greater importance was the need to wrench out of the war ‘a lesson which will bring peace in the future’. The newspapers’ critical assessment of the accuracy and impact of atrocity stories reveals the British public’s more nuanced engagement with the war than the historiography presents.

Newspaper coverage of the conflict’s first two months demonstrated how people in Britain and the United States recognised the Hague conventions as pivotal in regulating the treatment of civilians in occupied areas. The key regulations for protecting civilians

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71 Horne and Kramer, passim.
72 See also Zuckerman, The Rape of Belgium; Jeff Lipkes, Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, August 1914, Leuven, 2007; Kramer, Dynamic of Destruction.
74 Forward, ‘The Atrocities’, 12 September 1914, p. 3.
75 Ibid.
76 Woman’s Dreadnought, ‘What the War Means to Us’, 12 September 1914, p. 103.
77 Ibid.
were Articles 25 to 28 in the 1907 conference’s Convention IV, which prohibited a range of actions including bombarding undefended towns, unnecessarily destroying civic buildings and pillaging private property. Even before the accusations of German atrocities against civilians came to prominence, the *Los Angeles Times* printed an editorial about the laws of war protecting civilians, in which it stated that ‘The Hague Conventions adopted a number of rules providing what belligerents may not do’ and confined ‘the operations of armies to the field of actual combat’. 78 When allegations against the German armed forces appeared in late August, they were discussed primarily with reference to these conventions. 79 Indeed, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that French government protests about German treatment of civilians should be addressed to The Hague’s signatories. 80 When German forces were accused of bombarding undefended towns, the *Los Angeles Times* claimed that this was exactly the sort of barbaric act that the Hague conventions were supposed to prevent. 81 A similar point, and an example of the dialogue between newspapers and readers, was made in the *Manchester Guardian*, which responded to a reader’s question about bombarding towns by discussing the Hague conventions. 82 Violations of The Hague exposed Germany to accusations that they were conducting the war in an uncivilised manner, an opportunity British newspapers embraced. The *Daily Mail* claimed that Germany’s treatment of civilians was ironic, revealing the cruelty of the soldiers from a nation that ‘boasted at the last Hague conference of the humanity and chivalry of the German military’. 83

The German confiscation and destruction of private property in occupied areas shocked Britons, and seemed to confirm the idea that Germany was conducting the war in an illegal and uncivilised manner. The British newspapers made it clear that The Hague protected civilian lives, and regulated the manner in which occupying forces could treat private property. 84 Adrian Gregory argues that the shock and revulsion at the damage to

79 Gregory argues that the issue first gained real prominence in the British newspapers on 21 August 1914; Gregory, ‘A Clash of Cultures’, p. 28.
80 *Manchester Guardian*, ‘A Book of German Atrocities’, 21 August 1914, p. 10; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, ‘Cruelty a Part of German Plot?’, 26 September 1914, p. 3.
82 *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Questions and Answers on the War’, 17 August 1914, p. 3.
84 1907 Hague Convention IV, Laws and Customs of War on Land, Section II, Chapter I, Article 23, stated that it was forbidden to destroy or seize enemy property unless such destruction was demanded by the necessities of war. Article 28 of the same convention explicitly prohibited the pillaging of towns, even if taken by assault.
private property was widespread and keenly exploited by British propaganda, but this has been overshadowed by the focus on the sexual-sadistic aspects of the propaganda campaign.85

Evidence of the concerns about the treatment of private property can be found in a letter to the editor of the Manchester Guardian, which claimed that Germany was ignoring The Hague but would not escape the liability for the damage it had caused as this would be assessed at the end of the war.86 When allegations of a German demand for money from the municipality of Brussels emerged, the Manchester Guardian printed an editorial discussing the legality of such an act under The Hague.87 That The Hague rules were the appropriate means of assessing the legality of the German levy on Brussels was also assumed in an article in the Liverpool Echo, which had the subtitle ‘The Demand and the Hague Convention’.88 The Manchester Guardian also printed a response to a reader’s question about the levy on Brussels as well as another on the looting of art.89 Both questions were answered with reference to The Hague and gave extensive details of the specific articles that were relevant in each case.90 The response to the question about the looting of art, for example, stated that such treasures had ‘complete immunity in time of war’ and ‘an article of the Hague Regulations states this plainly’.91 The destruction of private property and cultural icons, such as the library of the University of Louvain, particularly shocked the British public and was presented by the Daily Mail as an attack on the physical manifestations of civilisation.92 Indeed, Germany’s conduct in Belgium, it was claimed in the Daily Mail, had ‘set the progress towards civilized warfare back a hundred years’.93

British and American newspapers also discussed German responses to the claims that their soldiers were mistreating civilians, and in doing so they demonstrated the public

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88 Liverpool Echo, ‘Greed of the Germans’, 22 August 1914, p. 3.
89 The responses appeared in the same Questions and Answers on the War section; Manchester Guardian, ‘Questions and Answers on the War’, 25 August 1914, p. 10.
90 The pertinent law was the 1907 Hague Convention IV, Laws and Customs of War on Land, Section III (Military Authority Over the Territory of the Hostile State) and the relevant articles were 48 to 56. These articles regulated the manner in which occupying forces could appropriate money and other resources from those under their control.
93 Daily Mail, ‘United States to Germany’, 1 September 1914, p. 6.
awareness that The Hague determined not only how civilians in occupied territory should be treated, but also how they should behave. Both Hague conferences had discussed the issue of civilian resistance, and the manner in which it could be legally conducted was set out in 1907 Hague Convention IV, Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land.94 Even before prominent incidents, such as the sacking of the Belgian university town of Louvain by the German forces, occurred in late August 1914, the Manchester Guardian responded to a reader’s question about the legality of civilian resistance in occupied areas by stating that The Hague determined the relevant rules.95 The response noted that:

in the Hague War Regulations (1907) it is stipulated that if the civilians of a country spontaneously take up arms to resist the approach of an enemy without having time to organise themselves in an approved manner, they shall be entitled to be treated as belligerents, “if they carry arms openly, and if they respect the laws and customs of war”.96

As stories of atrocities committed by German troops emerged, Germany attempted to justify their actions by referencing The Hague and claimed their soldiers’ actions were in response to Belgian civilians violating the laws of war.97 All four newspapers printed articles discussing the German claims that the Belgian civilians in Louvain had violated the Hague conventions by firing on German troops after the town had surrendered.98 An article in the Daily Mail printed the German claim that the conduct of Belgian civilians in Louvain was ‘clearly a violation of the Hague Convention’.99 A number of other articles discussing civilian violations of The Hague in Belgium were printed in the American newspapers. The Chicago Daily Tribune, for example, printed an article that detailed the German claims about Belgian civilians concealing weapons and killing wounded

94 Articles 1–3 in Chapter I of Convention IV codified the rules for the conduct of volunteers and militia. Article 1, for example, stated that militia had to carry arms openly and have a commander who was responsible for their subordinates. The essence of the convention was that if civilians chose to take up arms against an invading force they should conduct themselves as regular armed forces, and be treated as such by the enemy.


97 Historians have demonstrated that the German claims about an illegal uprising of Belgian civilians, a franc-tireur war, are ‘as much a myth as the claim that German troops systematically hacked the hands off of Belgian children’; Lipkes, p. 16.


soldiers. An article in the Los Angeles Times claimed Belgian civilians were poisoning German water supplies, and a letter to the editor argued that Belgian civilians were not behaving in accordance with the laws of war. An article in the Daily Mail, however, claimed that it was the German civilians’ behaviour towards Russian troops in East Prussia that was in violation of The Hague.

The articles all shared an assumption that The Hague determined what acceptable conduct was for civilians in occupied areas. The assertion was reiterated in late September when the Manchester Guardian provided extensive details of The Hague’s rules on militia and volunteers in response to a reader’s question about how armed civilian units could be recognised as belligerents. Discussion of civilians’ obligations under The Hague even appeared in an editorial in the Cornishman, a small weekly publication from Penzance, England, that mainly focused on local news. The destruction of towns in Belgium had captured their attention, and the editorial discussed the ‘appalling instances of barbarity’ that had occurred. The editorial printed the German claim that their actions were in response to ‘a spontaneous popular uprising’ of Belgian civilians, and clarified that the relevant Hague convention dictated that civilians had to carry arms openly if they were to use them. The Hague was thus widely presented as an appropriate lens through which to assess the legality of civilian conduct in time of war.

Dum-Dums

From the outbreak of war, the belligerents competed in the ‘international public sphere’ to present their cause as morally superior, and The Hague’s importance to both sides’ attempts to win global opinion was evident in the debate over the use of dum-dum bullets. Dum-dum bullets were prohibited in conflicts between civilised powers by the

103 Manchester Guardian, ‘Questions and Answers on the War’, 25 September 1914, p. 3.
104 Cornishman, ‘Shot & Shell’, 17 September 1914, p. 2.
105 Ibid.
106 Horne & Kramer, p. 249.
1899 Hague conventions because of the horrific wounds they inflicted. In many of the conflicts that had occurred subsequent to the 1899 Hague conference, belligerents had attempted to discredit their enemy in the international community’s eyes by accusing each other of using dum-dums. Such accusations had been prominent during the Boer War, for example, in part because the British delegates to The Hague had defended the use of dum-dum bullets.

By late August 1914, accusations of dum-dum usage joined the broader debate about the conduct of war. The belligerents made numerous official statements accusing each other of violating The Hague by using dum-dum bullets, and these were duly printed in British and American newspapers. Personal accounts from soldiers, doctors and journalists, all of whom provided their opinion on who had manufactured, possessed or used dum-dums, supplemented official statements in the newspapers. The newspapers became a site for public engagement with the debate about using dum-dums. The British and American public’s fascination with these legal ideas was clearly demonstrated by their letters to editors that critically evaluated the belligerents’ accusations.

The importance belligerents placed on global opinion is evident in the British government’s concern with the perception that their armed forces were violating The Hague by using dum-dum bullets. The Manchester Guardian covered British parliamentary debates about the issue. During one debate, Liberal MP Sir William Byles

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108 For an examination of the accusations of dum-dum bullet usage during the Boer War see Abbenhuis, *The Hague Conferences*, chapter 5.


110 For an example of a French doctor’s claims about German use of dum-dum bullets, see Daily Mail, ‘White Flag Treachery’, 26 September 1914, p. 3. For a British soldier’s opinion on who was using dum-dums, see Manchester Guardian, ‘From the Front’, 10 September 1914, p. 7. The Chicago Daily Tribune contained a number of reports from their own journalists near the Western Front offering their opinion on who was using dum-dum bullets. Examples include: Chicago Daily Tribune, ‘Germans Adhere to Laws of War’, 26 September 1914, p. 1; ‘War Correspondent is no Longer a Romantic and Striking Character’, 27 September 1914, p. 5.

111 For example, see: Daily Mail, ‘Letter to the Editor’, 25 September 1914, p. 4; Los Angeles Times, ‘Letter to the Editor’, 14 September 1914, p. 115.
asked directly whether British forces had used dum-dum bullets.\textsuperscript{112} The government responded by stating that British soldiers were only using ammunition that met The Hague’s requirements. The next day, Irish MP John MacNeill asked the government what they were doing to counteract the accusations that Britain was using dum-dums.\textsuperscript{113} The British government had, in fact, already taken steps to refute German accusations of dum-dum usage. The \textit{Daily Mail} and \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} reproduced a placard, authorised by Sir Edward Grey and distributed throughout the Netherlands, claiming that ‘neither the British nor the French army has in its possession, or has issued, any but the approved patterns of rifle and revolver ammunition which do not infringe in any respect the provisions of The Hague Convention’.\textsuperscript{114} The questions in the House of Commons and the fact that Grey’s placards were distributed in the Netherlands demonstrate British concern with neutral countries’ opinions and the assumption that these would be shaped by belligerent adherence to the Hague conventions.

The public in neutral countries such as the United States were well aware of belligerent attempts to win their favour and engaged with the debate about dum-dum bullets in a sophisticated manner. As a prominent target for belligerent propaganda, the United States was sent a number of official protests about the use of dum-dum bullets. Belgium, France and Germany all sent protests to the United States and the newspapers extensively covered the protests’ content and how Wilson might reply.\textsuperscript{115} American journalists in Europe were also shown dum-dum bullets allegedly found on British and French soldiers by German officials, and the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} even printed photographs of the alleged bullets.\textsuperscript{116} The American press acknowledged that many belligerent accusations about the use of dum-dums were likely fabricated. An editorial in

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Manchester Guardian}, ‘House of Commons’, 16 September 1914, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Los Angeles Times}, ‘For Even Break on Censorship’, 26 August 1914, p. 15; \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, ‘Admit Having Dumdums?’, 29 September 1914, p. 1; \textit{Daily Mail}, ‘The Kaiser’s Lies for America’, 10 September 1914, p. 5; \textit{Manchester Guardian}, ‘The Kaiser’s America’s Telegram’, 11 September 1914, p. 6. Wilson, whose focus in the first months of the war was to maintain the country’s neutrality, did little more than acknowledge the protests and encourage belligerents to adhere to The Hague. For a critical account of Wilson’s actions during this period; see Coogan, pp. 192–198.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, ‘Germans Adhere to Laws of War’, 26 September 1914, p. 1; ‘War Correspondent is no Longer a Romantic and Striking Character’, 27 September 1914, p. 5. For the photographs of dum-dum bullets, see \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, ‘These are Fatal Dumdum Bullets’, 27 September 1914, p. 7.
the *Chicago Daily Tribune* noted that such accusations were ‘the first to get circulation in any war’ and that in trying to determine who was telling the truth ‘rational opinion wanders hopelessly afield’.\(^\text{117}\) American newspapers also acknowledged that the belligerents were not only trying to win the hearts and minds of neutrals in the present, but that they were simultaneously preparing their cases for a hypothetical post-war tribunal seeking to sort out the war’s illegalities. The *Los Angeles Times* expressed this idea in an article arguing that the Hague conventions specifically prohibited dum-dums and that by accusing each other of using them, belligerents were placing their cases on record to be sorted out at the end of the war.\(^\text{118}\) Clearly, The Hague had come to be considered a permanent feature of international affairs and newspapers expected that their reading publics would understand what it meant to discuss conduct in terms of The Hague.

**The Hague and Civilisation**

The newspaper reporting of the first two months of the war demonstrates that The Hague was not only a tool to evaluate the legality of particular acts, such as the use of dum-dums, but that to many in Britain and the United States it also represented an ideal. As an agreement between civilised powers about international law, The Hague was presented in the newspapers as a symbol of civilisation. Samuel Hynes has written about the importance of the concept of civilisation for contemporaries, noting the way ‘civilisation’ was a term that appeared ‘again and again in responses to the beginning of the war’.\(^\text{119}\) In France the defence of the nation was ‘transformed into the defence of civilization’.\(^\text{120}\) In Britain, ‘civilisation’ was also a central concept, but it was particularly focused on the ‘establishment and enforcement of the rule of law’.\(^\text{121}\) Indeed, the British government presented international law as the central issue of the war.\(^\text{122}\) Bethmann-Hollweg’s ‘contemptuous reference’ to the guarantee of Belgian neutrality as ‘a scrap of paper’ helped British propagandists promote their cause as protecting the rights of small nations

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\(^\text{119}\) Hynes, p. 4.
\(^\text{120}\) Strachan, p. 1123.
\(^\text{121}\) Ibid, p. 1125.
\(^\text{122}\) Hull, p. 10.
and the sovereignty of international law. Such a view was evident in British newspapers from very early in the conflict. On 15 August, Scottish newspaper *Forward* raged against those who had ‘let loose the hell hounds’ of war, but spoke of the sanctity of international treaties and claimed that ‘the one outstanding satisfaction’ of the conflict was that Britain was ‘in it ostensibly in defence of their Treaty obligations’. However, to many in the United States, the outbreak of war confirmed the superiority of New World civilisation. The United States was the home of progress and reason, and, to the progressives in particular, the war was seen as ‘a regression to medieval violence’.

The newspapers demonstrate how central The Hague was to contemporary conceptions of civilisation and the role it played in the propaganda war. One of the British government’s key justifications for going to war was the defence of international law, which Germany had violated by invading Belgium, and this framed the public discussion concerning the war’s meaning and conduct in British newspapers. Their reports presented Germany’s violations of the Hague conventions, real or imagined, as evidence of the illegal manner in which the Kaiser’s forces were waging war. The discussions’ tenor helped to establish a rationale for Britain’s declaration of war. A letter to the editor in the *Daily Mail* spoke of the ‘brutal defiance’ of The Hague by Germany and claimed that ‘civilization must punish’ those who defy its laws. The *Manchester Guardian* printed the French government’s claim that Germany had ‘been struck from the ranks of civilised peoples’ because of its violations of The Hague. The language in these examples demonstrates the way violations of The Hague were presented as violations of civilisation and were used to mobilise support for the war effort.

The link between The Hague and civilisation was made explicit by an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, about the bombardment of undefended towns, which claimed that the ‘war barbarity’ which The Hague had sought to prevent was ‘a crime against civilization’. The article claimed that respect for the Hague Convention’s laws about the bombardment of towns was what ‘civilization today expects’. That Germany’s

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123 Strachan, p. 1126.
124 *Forward*, ‘Stop the War Demands, No Use Now’, 15 August 1914, p. 8. From the outset, the newspaper presented the war as a fight against Prussian autocracy not the German people.
125 Kennedy, p. 49.
129 Ibid.
violations of The Hague created ‘conditions impossible in civilization’, was an argument made by William Hale, Professor of Latin at the University of Chicago, in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Remarkably, Hale argued that the appropriate course of action was for the United States to declare war on Germany. Hale’s argument demonstrates the importance of the link between The Hague and civilisation, as it meant violations of The Hague could be used for propaganda purposes. As both sides in the conflict attempted to mobilise support for their cause, they attempted to discredit the way their opponents were conducting the war. If The Hague represented civilisation and progress, by contrast those who violated its rules did not.

The connection between The Hague and conceptions of civilised behaviour were utilised by the *New Statesman* to criticise the United States for not offering a stronger protest about German violations of the conventions. The *New Statesman* offered a stinging criticism of Germany and a rebuke to the United States in an extensive article on the conduct of the war and The Hague conventions. The article claimed the present war had featured practices that were ‘repugnant to civilised opinion’ and had occurred despite the international code created by the Hague conventions in 1899 and 1907. The article, which was a page and a half in length and provided specific examples of German violations of the Hague conventions, noted that it was reasonable to expect some breaches of the code, but not for one of the signatory Powers to throw ‘the whole code over’. The article warned that if Germany continued to violate the conventions without reprove by neutral states, the consequences would be ‘a lasting set-back to the humanising development of international law’. In times of war, the journal argued, the responsibility for upholding international law rests with neutral states, but they had shirked this duty in the conflict to that point. The United States, as the most powerful neutral, had to bear the burden of responsibility and make an effective protest. If the United States failed to act decisively, then not only would the existing Hague Conventions become ‘a dead letter’, but future Hague Conferences would ‘not be worth holding since their decisions will have lost all authority’. If even a neutral as powerful

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131 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
as the United States did not ‘care enough’ to protest the flagrant breach of international law, no one would sign ‘future Hague Conventions’. The *New Statesman* article captures the extent to which The Hague had become a symbol of international law and civilisation, and the way it was used in the debates about what nations stood for in the war.

The volume and nature of references to The Hague in the British and American newspapers in August and September 1914 substantiates the arguments of Isabel Hull and Larry Zuckerman that The Hague was important to leaders and public opinion. The newspapers reveal the extent to which, as Hull claims, Germany’s cause was seriously harmed by their disregard for international law, symbolised by Bethmann-Hollweg’s ‘scrap of paper’ comment. The newspapers’ pervasive engagement with The Hague also supports Catriona Pennell’s more specific claim that from the outset the British public considered international law an important reason to enter the war. However, the British and American engagement with The Hague was more sophisticated than historians have suggested. Reports from the battlefront were immediately assessed with reference to the articles of The Hague and the vagaries and nuances of the conventions were highlighted and debated. When discussing the level of force occupying armies could employ to get civilians ‘to comply with requisitions and contributions’, the *Birmingham Daily Post*, for example, claimed that the level of violence that could be acceptably employed is a matter of opinion because ‘the Hague regulations are fairly vague’. The genuine desire to understand what The Hague regulations allowed was evident in the same newspaper when in late September it printed an editorial about the war at sea in which it discussed the German capture of British fishing vessels. The editorial claimed that:

> it is open to question whether it was or was not an infringement of the laws of war. Article III of the eleventh Hague Convention expressly exempts from capture “vessels used exclusively for fishing along the coast”. We confess that it seems to us likely that some, at any rate, of these fishing vessels were covered by that article.

Official statements from belligerents may have contained accusations of violations of The Hague, but editorials, letters to the editor and ‘questions and answers’ sections

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137 Hull, p. 51; Zuckerman, p. 192.
138 Pennell, pp. 63–64.
reveal that such claims were not passively accepted. The newspaper coverage suggests that people in Britain and the United States did not need officials to explain to them what acceptable conduct was in civilised war; instead, people (immediately) turned to the conventions established in 1899 and 1907 in order to make sense of the conflict for themselves.

In August and September 1914 Britons and Americans were faced with a conflict unlike any they had previously experienced. Millions of soldiers clashed across vast swathes of Europe as the war began to inexorably draw in nations from across the globe. The belligerents’ unleashed industrial warfare’s destructive power on land, at sea and in the air, and it quickly became apparent that non-combatants and neutrals would not be able to avoid the violence. Examining British and American newspapers’ coverage of the war’s opening months allows us to recapture the contemporary reactions to – and debates about – the war’s meaning and conduct. The newspapers reveal that a shared understanding of The Hague’s rules, and an expectation they would govern the conflict’s conduct, shaped public reactions to the war. The British and American press used the language of the Hague peace conferences of 1899 and 1907 extensively to make sense of the war, and the assumption that public audiences would use The Hague as a lens on the war was ubiquitously reflected in newspaper reports. The Hague conventions were discussed in front page articles, editorials and letters to the editor. The Hague offered a key framework to assess neutral and belligerent conduct and to imagine ways to prevent such a global conflagration happening again. In the face of what many perceived to be civilisation’s collapse, the Hague conventions were seen as more important than ever.

"If the military situation permits!" The Lusitania victims were deliberately murdered without warning. We rush to the text of The Hague Conference to show how this savage and uncivilized act is contrary to the spirit and letter of international law. And we discover this line from the official record of the most complete international failure in the history of civilization-The Hague Conference of 1907.1

This letter to the editor of the New York Times is an example of the rage that was expressed in the American newspapers after the sinking of the Lusitania on 7 May, 1915. The anger was generated not only by the moral revulsion at hundreds of non-combatants being ‘deliberately murdered’, but also by the realisation that such an act might not technically violate international law. The letter captures the sense of exasperation many Americans felt in 1915 that international law was not the protector of the rights of neutrals and non-combatants that they had hoped it would be. Despite the disillusionment, the letter also demonstrates the way people continued to use The Hague to try and determine the legality of particular wartime actions. The Hague, as William Mulligan argues, had become ‘the touchstone of wartime debates, a set of texts agreed before the war but whose content and meaning was contested during the war’.2 The debates about the meaning of The Hague were particularly prominent in British and American newspapers during April and May 1915 as the radicalisation of the war’s conduct became starkly evident.

During April and May 1915, a number of incidents generated discussion in the newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic about belligerent adherence to the articles of The Hague conventions; the use of gas on the Western Front, the poisoning of water wells in Africa, the treatment of prisoners of war and attacks on neutral shipping were all

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discussed with reference to The Hague. The newspaper coverage demonstrates that, ten months into the war, The Hague remained a powerful idea, representing international law and civilised ways of conducting war. However, as the above letter also suggests, contemporaries recognised and criticised the fact that many of The Hague’s rules were ambiguous and could be interpreted in a number of ways by the belligerents, even to providing justifications or pretexts for attacks on neutrals and non-combatants. The newspaper’s examined in this chapter, The Times and Daily News from Britain, and the New York Times and San Francisco Chronicle from the United States, demonstrate an awareness that rapidly developing military technology had overtaken The Hague’s ability to restrain conflict, and that the conventions were insufficient to regulate modern warfare. The new military technologies and scale of destruction were part of what Alan Kramer calls ‘a radicalization of war’, which generated in the belligerent societies an ‘acceptance of the destruction, consumption, and exploitation of whatever it took to wage the war’. ³ However, the newspapers demonstrated a contemporary awareness of this ‘dynamic of destruction’ and a discomfort with it.

Appeals in the newspapers for ‘the spirit’ if not ‘the letter’ of The Hague to be respected reveal a nuanced engagement with the nature and meaning of the war and not a wholesale acceptance of unchecked violence. Jochnick and Normand argue that The Hague failed to restrain belligerent conduct and instead merely ‘enabled political and military leaders to use a rhetorical device to justify their wartime conduct’. ⁴ It is certainly true that the belligerents used The Hague ‘to justify their own conduct and condemn that of the enemy’, ⁵ but they had to do so because The Hague had formalised the belief that war would be conducted with restraint, and this remained a powerful idea in the midst of the carnage. In 1915 The Hague continued to give people a way of making sense of the chaos and horror. This was particularly true in Britain where The Hague had also become a point of reference for people to define what their country was fighting for. Germany’s – supposed – continued violation of The Hague conventions supported the British claim that they were fighting to defend international law. This narrative, which took the German invasion of Belgium as its starting point, provided a form of retrospective justification for

³ Kramer, p. 68. Kramer argues that the First World War was part of the cumulative erosion of the distinction between civilians and combatants, and that the war was a battle over identity and cultural superiority.
⁵ Ibid.
British entry into the war. In the United States, however, the violations of The Hague increased concerns about the ability of international law to protect neutrals.

Whether militarily, politically or financially, the war in Europe had steadily drawn the rest of the world into its vortex of destruction. Awareness in the United States that the war had ‘opened a seemingly endless series of opportunities for Americans to make money’,\(^6\) was coupled with moral qualms about exploiting the carnage on the other side of the Atlantic. The majority of Americans continued to support Wilson’s efforts to keep the United States out of the war, but there was growing discontent with the belligerents’ treatment of American shipping. In Britain, the end of 1914 had seen a sort of ‘settling into the war’ but this was profoundly shaken by the German naval bombardment of Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby on 16 December.\(^7\) This raid, which Hew Strachan points out was ‘the first successful attack on English shores since 1667’,\(^8\) was not the only shock to the British public: the sighting of a German aeroplane over Dover at Christmas 1914, and the first Zeppelin raid on Britain in January 1915, brought the war home to Britons. For many in Britain, the German bombardment of British coastal towns ‘proved beyond question the barbarity of their opponents’.\(^9\) However, there was also a sense that the nature of warfare itself had irrevocably changed. The ‘long hideous slaughter of the trenches’ had replaced the great battles of the past, and majestic naval clashes had been replaced by ‘mines and sneaking submarines’.\(^10\) The war drove technological change which resulted in modern weapons that ‘inflicted impersonalized death and destruction on an unprecedented scale’.\(^11\) British and American newspaper references to The Hague reveal the sophisticated manner in which contemporaries sought to make sense of new military technologies, and the changed nature of warfare.

Gas, Poisoned Wells, and Prisoners of War

The use of poisonous gas on the Western Front exemplified the horrors of modern ‘scientific’ warfare. Although Ypres is often considered to represent the beginning of the gas war, the Germans and French had both been experimenting with gas and various

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\(^{6}\) Neiberg, *The Path to War*, p. 52.
\(^{7}\) Pennell, p. 216.
\(^{8}\) Strachan, p. 430.
\(^{9}\) Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 55.
\(^{10}\) Pennell, p. 225.
methods of delivery since the first months of the conflict. German forces had actually fired chemical-laced shells into British trenches at Neuve-Chapelle in October 1914, but they had been so ineffective that the targeted soldiers had failed to notice. The attack at Ypres, on 22 April 1915, marked the first successful large-scale use of gas. The German forces on the northern section of the Ypres salient released close to 150 tons of compressed chlorine from thousands of cylinders buried in their own trenches. A dense ‘chlorine cloud’ slowly drifted towards the French positions and the casualties and chaos caused by the gas resulted in significant gains for the German infantry. The advances were temporary, however, as the German commanders had not expected the gas to be so successful and were not prepared to exploit the opening in the Allied lines. Despite the Germans releasing more gas over the next few days, the Allied forces were able to seal the gaps in their line and launch effective counterattacks.

The creation of the ‘cloud of death’ at Ypres received extensive coverage in all four newspapers, and The Hague was central to the public discussion of the German use of gas from the outset. The first reports of the use of gas were Field Marshal Sir John French’s official despatches on the fighting around Ypres, in which he claimed that the German forces had employed asphyxiating gas contrary to the terms of the Hague Convention. French’s statement was reprinted in the newspapers and helped set the parameters for the public discussion on the use of gas. Articles and editorials that discussed the attack gave details of the battle at Ypres and inevitably repeated French’s claim that the German use of gas contravened The Hague. A public appeal by the War Office further confirmed the link between gas and The Hague. The appeal, printed as a full page advertisement in the Daily News, asked for people who could sew to help make respirators as a protection against the ‘latest weapon of “Kultur” – the poison gas’.

15 Muller, p. 98.
appeal, which provided instructions on how to make the respirators, was prefaced by a statement that Allied soldiers had lost their lives due to poisoning by gases, which was ‘a means of warfare contrary to The Hague Convention’. The War Office clearly believed the issue of legality was important to people in Britain and that it would help mobilise their support for the war effort.

The initial shock at the use of such a weapon quickly turned to indignation, and Germany was castigated in newspapers across Britain and the United States for its violation of the rules of war as defined by The Hague. While the use of gas received more coverage in Britain, the American newspapers also printed several articles that discussed it, sometimes quite prominently. The New York Times printed a front page article in which James Brown Scott, from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, detailed the exact text of the gas articles of the Hague convention, and noted that they were still in effect and that all the belligerents had signed them. It was ‘the positive prohibitions of The Hague Conferences’, the San Francisco Chronicle claimed, that had ‘prevented the more civilized nations of Europe’ using similar methods. Despite concerns with the violation of The Hague, an editorial in the San Francisco Chronicle demonstrated the sense of detachment from the war some still felt on the United States’ West Coast, when it said the use of gas had made the conflict ‘more than usually exciting’.

As might be expected for a nation whose soldiers had been targets of the attack, the British newspapers reacted with greater indignation than their American counterparts. The use of gas and its regulation by The Hague received considerable coverage in the British newspapers, and it was discussed in articles, editorials, letters to the editor, and in the coverage of parliamentary debates. Revealing just how pervasive the public discussion of The Hague gas laws was, a letter to the editor of The Times chose the punctuation of The Hague’s declaration on gas to demonstrate the ‘common misuse of commas’; the correspondent was critical of the ‘prevalent idea’ that a comma ‘ought to precede every relative clause’ and used The Hague’s gas article as an example because it

had been discussed in the newspaper. The 1899 Hague Convention had issued a declaration prohibiting ‘the use of projectiles the object of which is the diffusion of asphyxiating or deleterious gases’. The correspondent warned that a misplaced comma in The Hague declaration would create the impression that the object of all projectiles was the diffusion of gas. The grammarian’s chiding of the newspaper demonstrated how thoroughly poisonous gas was associated with The Hague in the newspaper coverage, as did a joke in the humorous section of the Liverpool Echo, in which the newspaper quipped that the Hague Convention did ‘not forbid the application of asphyxiating gas to foolish politicians’, a use which would ‘be in the cause of humanity, for it would shorten the war’.27

As more information emerged about the German use of gas, in particular the manner of its diffusion, the discussion in the newspapers involved detailed analysis of the wording of The Hague Convention in an attempt to determine whether the German attack actually conformed to the regulations. The Daily News printed an interview with a Professor of Chemistry at the Royal Naval College, Vivian Lewes, who discussed what gas the Germans had supposedly used, how they would have dispersed it, and whether this violated The Hague. It soon emerged that the Germans had used cylinders stationed in their own trenches to disperse the gas, and the newspapers discussed whether such a method of dispersion was technically a violation of The Hague Convention.29 The German High Command had been well aware of The Hague rules, and their development of gas had intentionally circumvented them.30 Indeed, there had been resistance amongst the German military to the development and use of gas, due to doubts about its efficacy and concerns about the development of a weapon that was in contravention of The Hague.31 It was the German commanders’ hesitancy to openly flout The Hague

30 Trumpener, p. 471.
31 Ibid. See also, Coleman, pp. 12–16.
conventions on gas, Kim Coleman argues, that led to the creation of delivery methods that ‘adhered to the letter, if not the spirit of the ban’.32

That Germany had violated “the spirit” of The Hague, if not “the letter”, was debated in the British press. Such an argument claimed the use of gas was a violation of the principles of The Hague, as the conventions were an attempt by civilised powers to prevent war descending into barbarism. It is clear from the public discussion in these newspapers that The Hague conventions had created a normative environment for the conduct of war. The Hague regulations’ exact meaning may have been debatable, but they nevertheless created an expectation that belligerents would exercise restraint and behave in a civilised manner during war. An article in *The Times* said that it was not clear whether Germany had used projectiles to disperse gas, as was specifically prohibited by The Hague, but it was clear that asphyxiation had been the aim and that ‘the spirit of the Declaration’ had been broken.33 The *Western Mail* reported that Harold Tennant, the Under-Secretary for War, had made the same argument in the House of Commons when he declared that ‘the actual terms of the Hague declaration forbid only the use of projectiles, the sole object of which is the diffusing of asphyxiating and deleterious gases. Obviously, the diffusion of the gases is the object of the prohibition rather than means by which they are diffused’.34 A letter to the editor of the *Daily News* said that defending the use of gas because it was not distributed by projectiles was a form of ridiculous ‘literalism’.35 The letter discussed The Hague gas article, and said it was clearly an attempt to prevent the use of gas, not regulate the manner of its dispersion.36 In contrast to the German use of gas, *The Times* reported that Lord Lucas claimed in parliament that Britain’s treatment of German prisoners of war adhered to The Hague ‘both in the spirit and in the letter’.37

British newspapers claimed that German violation of The Hague’s rules on the treatment of prisoners of war further demonstrated Germany’s war against civilisation. Although Germany’s poor treatment of British prisoners of war had been discussed in British newspapers earlier in 1914, as shown in chapter 4, Lord Kitchener brought the issue to prominence in the press in late April 1915 when he discussed it in a fiery speech

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32 Coleman, p. 16.
34 *Western Mail*, ‘Premier and War Munitions’, 19 May 1915, p. 4.
36 Ibid.
in the House of Lords. The newspapers printed Kitchener’s claim that The Hague Convention dictated the rules for the treatment of prisoners of war and that Germany ‘flagrantly disregarded’ them in their handling of captured British soldiers. Kitchener detailed the treatment British prisoners of war had received in Germany and its unacceptability under The Hague rules. A number of editorials and articles about the treatment of prisoners of war appeared in the British newspapers after Kitchener’s speech, and they presented the poor treatment of British prisoners as an equivalent level of barbarism as the use of gas. An editorial in The Times said that Germany’s cruel treatment of British prisoners showed ‘the same contempt for The Hague regulations as for other “scraps of paper”’. The newspapers presented the violation of The Hague as part of Germany’s broader disrespect of international law, something Britain had gone to war to defend. In contrast to Germany’s treatment of British prisoners, Lord Lucas offered an assurance in parliament that the British treatment of captured German U-Boat crews ‘conformed to the provisions of The Hague convention’. 

The extent to which The Hague provided the framework for assessing belligerent treatment of prisoners of war was evident in the British newspapers’ coverage of two German officers who had escaped from an internment camp in Wales and were tried by a military court when they were re-captured. The officers claimed that under The Hague Convention they should have been subject only to disciplinary action by the commander of the internment camp from which they had escaped. One of the German officers ‘quoted two articles, numbers 8 and 12, in chapter 2 of the annex of The Hague Convention to support his contention that the court was not competent to try him’. The newspaper articles went into great detail about the case and quoted the German officers’ extensive

analysis of the articles of The Hague. This case provides an example of how The Hague permeated the language of the conduct of war at an individual and state-based level.

Further proof of Germany’s apparent disregard for The Hague was provided in early May when the British Secretary of State for the Colonies released reports that showed German troops had been poisoning water wells in Swakopmund, on the West Coast of Africa. General Botha, the commander of the Allied forces in the area, had addressed a letter to the commander of the German forces saying that the poisoning of wells contravened The Hague Convention. Article 23, Section II, of the 1907 conference’s Convention IV, Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, prohibited the employment of poison or poisoned weapons, and Botha cited this convention in his statement. All four newspapers printed Botha’s claims.

In Britain, news of the poisoning of water wells so soon after the use of gas at Ypres was presented as confirmation of the depravation of the German armed forces. A letter to the editor of the Daily News argued that the poisoning of water wells and the use of gas demonstrated Germany’s attempt to destroy ‘the title deeds of civilization’. Similarly, an editorial in The Times claimed there was no use quoting The Hague Conventions to a power that treated them and civilisation itself with contempt. John Bull captured this sentiment in its cartoon section:

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46 The Times, ‘“Kultur” and Poison’, 6 May 1915, p. 9.
John Bull had mocked The Hague’s institutions for the pacific settlement of disputes, but was happy to use the conventions that regulated the conduct of war to demonise Germany. Through such imagery, British newspapers presented Germany as a ‘rogue state’ no longer bound by international law, and such an argument provided further justification for Britain’s role in the war as a defender of civilisation.

The Hague and the Morality of Reprisals

The German use of gas led to a debate in Britain about the appropriateness of retaliation in civilised warfare. The Prime Minister was asked in parliament whether ‘the deliberate and avowed violation by the Germans of cardinal provisions of The Hague Conventions by the use of asphyxiating gases and the poisoning of wells’, meant the government would sanction reprisals and adopt similar methods conducting war.48 The Prime Minister said the government would consider the question carefully.49 Sir John French had little doubt about the best way to respond to the use of gas and, despite chastising Germany for using methods of warfare that violated The Hague, immediately requested that the British

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48 *Liverpool Echo*, ‘Poison in War’, 8 May 1915, p. 3.
49 Ibid.
army be given similar means of attack.⁵⁰ He met little government resistance and within a few months British chemical weapons units were formed.⁵¹

The discussion in the British newspapers about the appropriate response to the use of gas was less certain. An article in the Daily News argued that gas was forbidden by the laws of civilised warfare but for the British to adopt similar methods ‘would be rightful retaliation as understood by the laws of war’.⁵² However, an editorial in the same newspaper articulated why it was important for Britain not to follow Germany’s example, proclamation that this was a war ‘of ideals’, in which Britain stood ‘for the public law of Europe, for the rights of small nationalities, and for the claims of humanity’.⁵³ Britain could not ‘stain such a cause by barbarism, no matter what the provocation’.⁵⁴ The Times printed Lord Parmoor’s claim in parliament that it was ‘of the utmost importance to observe the principles laid down at The Hague Conference and the rules of international law’ or the war would descend into a ‘competition in brutality’.⁵⁵ Clearly, not all Britons accepted the radicalisation of the war, and The Hague continued to provide an alternative vision of how war should be conducted.

The debate about whether to adopt similar methods of warfare, even if they violated The Hague, played out in the pages of the large national dailies and the smaller regional newspapers. The Cornishman, being a small weekly publication, used other newspapers’ reports to provide an overview of the debate. The Cornishman printed an article about the German use of gas from the Western Morning News, which made its views on British retaliation very clear:

With regard to the use of poisonous and asphyxiating bombs, a proceeding which is distinctly contrary to the Hague Convention, it is a proceeding of a character which surely relieves the Allies of the obligation to respect the regulations of the Convention in this particular respect, and to treat the Germans, if they will not desist from their use, to bombardment by missiles of an even more terrible character, if such are to be had.⁵⁶

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⁵⁰ Albert Palazzo, Seeking Victory on the Western Front: The British Army and Chemical Warfare in World War I, London, 2000, p. 44.
⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 44–45. The first British use of gas took place at Loos in September 1915.
⁵⁴ Ibid.
The ultimate aim of adopting such measures, the article was keen to point out, was ‘to compel the German Government to respect the laws of humanity and civilized warfare’. The *Cornishman* also printed excerpts from metropolitan newspapers, such as the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Chronicle*, about Britain retaliating with gas. That in the *Daily Mail* article argued that ‘mere protests and appeals to civilisation or to the Hague will not stop the Germans killing our soldiers with poisonous gas. What might stop them is the knowledge that two can play that game’. The *Cornishman* appeared to reach the same conclusion and printed an editorial saying that they hoped the French and English would launch shells with asphyxiating gas ‘of double effectiveness against the diabolical armies who have violated the laws of war and of humanity’. The *Western Mail* adopted a similar position and expressed hope that parliament would overcome the ‘timorous people who think Britain must continue to bear all breaches of the Hague Convention without resort to the methods used by the enemy’ and have the strength to sanction ‘some sort of asphyxiating gas in retaliation’.

The *Edinburgh Evening News* also utilised articles from national dailies to discuss whether Britain should conduct reprisals for Germany’s violation of The Hague but came to a different conclusion from that of the *Cornishman*. An article in the *Edinburgh Evening News* cited *The Times*’ claim that Britain could not ‘compete with the Germans in reprisals’, and that Britons needed to be true to their traditions and retain their self-respect. The same article also quoted the *Manchester Guardian*’s claim that despite German officers violating the Hague Conventions, Britain could do neither their honour nor their ‘prospects any good by seeking to compete with the enemy in a policy which he is unscrupulous enough to pursue with incomparably greater thoroughness’. The *Edinburgh Evening News* supported such calls for restraint, and an editorial about the appropriate response to the German use of gas quoted Lord Aberdeen’s statement that ‘a crush-them-to-dust policy was neither desirable nor possible’. Another editorial about the way the war was being conducted claimed that it was quite apparent that British soldiers were ‘fighting with one hand tied behind their backs by the Geneva and Hague

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62 Ibid.
Conventions’, but that they needed to overcome this with greater numbers of men and guns rather than adopting the enemy’s methods. However, the newspaper also printed a letter that implored the government to not shy away from ‘the use of gas, chloroform, or any other means to pulverise Germany, and to Hades with Hague Conventions and peace platitudes’. The *New Statesman* agreed that the decision to use gas and enact reprisals lay with the government, but they hoped the politicians remembered that ‘the responsibility for that decision will be upon the whole nation’. While the German actions may have relieved Britain of their ‘obligations under the Hague Convention’, they had not relieved Britons ‘of the unwritten obligations of humanity’.

Clearly evident in the newspaper coverage was the idea that Britain needed to adhere to The Hague if it was to continue to claim to act as a representative of civilisation. *The Times* printed a speech by the Bishop of London who said Britain was fighting ‘for freedom, for truth, for honour, for international treaties, and for the principles of Christian duty as embodied, for instance, in The Hague Convention’. Britons would not be able to claim that they were fighting to uphold international law if they adopted means of fighting that violated The Hague. In the House of Commons, Prime Minister Asquith said Germany began the war with ‘a flagrant breach of a treaty and it has been carried on with a progressive disregard of convention and of previously accepted rules of warfare’. By using the way in which the war was being fought as a justification for why the war was being fought, as was the case in Britain, adherence to The Hague gained importance. The idea that British troops were adhering to the laws of war, unlike their German foes, was evident in an advertisement for Sunlight Soap. Printed in the *Daily News*, the advertisement claimed that British troops were the cleanest in the world and their ‘chivalrous fighting instincts’ reflected the ideals of the company.

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67 Ibid.
The use of this symbolism in advertising demonstrates the extent to which notions of legality, or cleanliness in the language of the advertisement, had permeated British engagement with the war.

Public engagement with the war’s conduct was evident in the British and American newspaper coverage of the Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, known as the Bryce Report, which was released on 12 May. The report accused the German forces of violence towards non-combatants in Belgium, and reinforced the image that Germany was conducting the war in an illegal manner. In Britain, the Bryce Report was presented as firm evidence of Germany’s violations of The Hague conventions and international law and, as such, it reaffirmed the reasons for British entry into and continued participation in the war. The British newspapers gave the

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73 Gregory, The Last Great War, p. 46.
Bryce Report extensive coverage, with entire pages being dedicated to summaries and analysis of its contents.\(^74\) The British newspapers coupled the German abuse of non-combatants detailed in the report with the use of gas, poisoned wells and the treatment of prisoners of war to demonstrate a general German disregard for international law. A letter to the editor of the Daily News claimed that the German use of gas and attacks on non-combatants had placed Germany ‘beyond the pale of international law’.\(^75\) The correspondent called for the United States to declare Germany an outlaw and make itself seen as a power ‘that wishes to see the sanctity of treaties maintained and international law obeyed’.\(^76\) In this manner, people in Britain used The Hague to reassert the values underpinning the British war effort and to question the morality of the United States’ continued neutrality.

Newspapers in the United States were well aware of belligerent attempts to sway American opinion, and they regarded the Bryce Report as similar to the ‘coloured books’ in which the belligerents laid out their reasons for entering the war.\(^77\) In fact, the San Francisco Chronicle gave as much attention to the German White Book as it did to the Bryce Report. In both cases the San Francisco Chronicle outlined the information contained in the reports, including the accusations about violations of The Hague, but offered little analysis or opinion.\(^78\) This was in keeping with the newspaper’s tendency, in the hope of seeming neutral, to give the belligerents equal coverage for their official statements and equal blame for the violation of international law. The New York Times, however, was openly pro-Allied and gave significantly more coverage to the Bryce Report than to the White Book. On 13 May, the New York Times dedicated three entire pages to details from the Bryce Report, and two weeks later printed an article that suggested the White Book was inaccurate and misleading.\(^79\) The Hague had clearly become central to the propaganda war for world opinion and the battle to win the sympathy of neutrals played out on the pages of American newspapers.

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\(^{76}\) Ibid.

\(^{77}\) Germany published the White Book, Britain the Blue Book, France the Yellow Book, Russia the Orange Book and Austria-Hungary the Red Book.


The American newspapers presented the use of gas as a violation of The Hague, but also discussed the attack at Ypres as just another example of the ethical depths the belligerents would sink to in order to win the war. An editorial in the *San Francisco Chronicle* agreed that the use of gas violated The Hague, but that its conventions and international law more generally had been ‘blown from the cannon’s mouth’. Similarly, a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* noted that The Hague had ‘explicitly forbidden’ the use of poisonous vapours but its decree was ‘but “child’s play” as a deterring agent’. The correspondent thought that it might take the development of a particularly destructive weapon–gas or otherwise–before nations would no longer consider war an option. Such a view demonstrates how the American concern that The Hague was failing to restrain belligerent conduct reinforced the growing fear that international law would not protect the United States.

**Neutrals and the War at Sea**

The gas attack at Ypres took place as tensions escalated between belligerents and neutrals over the conduct of the war at sea. Throughout 1915, neutral shipping, including that from the United States, was severely affected by the British blockade of Europe and Germany’s U-boat campaign. On February 4, the German government declared the waters surrounding Great Britain a war zone in which neutral vessels risked being attacked. The British government retaliated by declaring all neutral trade with Germany contraband. Germany, John Coogan argues, ‘had cited British violations of international law to justify the submarine campaign, which Britain then cited to justify more extensive violations of its own’. The German declaration generated outrage in the United States, and the American government sent a note to Germany on February 10 warning them that they would be held to ‘strict accountability’ if American ships or citizens were harmed by submarines. There was also indignation at the British policy and some, such as Secretary of State Lansing, demanded a similar note be sent to Britain. Wilson, however,

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82 Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914–1918*, Milton Keynes, 2014, p. 239.
83 Coogan, p. 224.
84 Ibid, p. 221.
decided on a milder tone, and the note he sent to Britain in late March essentially 
aclieced to the British conduct of the blockade.85

Despite Wilson’s apparent partiality, the American newspapers did present Britain 
as violating the rights of neutrals. In early April, the New York Times printed an article 
that suggested the British blockade was as much of a threat to neutral rights as Germany’s 
U-boat campaign.86 A similar sentiment was expressed in a cartoon printed by the San 
Francisco Chronicle, in which figures representing Britain and Germany fired a 
cannonball through a scroll with ‘International Law’ written on it while Uncle Sam 
looked on in distress.87 The San Francisco Chronicle printed other articles that discussed 
the Royal Navy’s violation of The Hague and claimed that Britain was menacing the 
rights of neutrals through their disregard of the Declaration of London.88

British concerns with global, and particularly American, opinion about their 
conduct of the war were evident in their newspapers. Discomfort with the manner in 
which the Royal Navy treated neutral shipping was expressed in an editorial in the Daily 
News, which suggested that the United States was right to complain and that Britain 
needed to change their policy for the good of Anglo-American relations.89 The British 
newspapers also printed a number of articles that discussed the legality of the Royal 
Navy’s seizure of a German hospital ship, the Ophelia, which was captured after it 
exhibited suspicious conduct.90 The prize court proceedings for the Ophelia were printed 
in the British newspapers, and these made extensive references to the details of The 
Hague Conventions relating to the capture of a prize. There was clearly a desire to be 
seen to be conducting the war in adherence to international law, and The Hague was a 
useful tool to justify British actions.

Despite some condemnation of Britain’s violations of international law, the 
American press largely mirrored Wilson’s bias towards the Entente and focused their 
criticism on Germany. Although the sinking of the Lusitania signified a crisis point in 
German-American relations, the early months of 1915 had seen the tension between the

85 Robert Tucker, Woodrow Wilson and the Great War: Reconsidering America’s Neutrality, 
88 San Francisco Chronicle, ‘United States Reply to British Order’, 6 April 1915, p. 2; ‘Britain 
Cannot Force an Embargo’, 23 May 1915, p. 29;
90 The Times, ‘The German Hospital Ship Ophelia’, 4 May 1915, p. 3; ‘The Hospital Ship 
United States and Germany steadily escalate as German U-Boats sank or damaged a number of ships with Americans on board. On March 28, United States’ citizen Leon Thrasher drowned when a German submarine sunk the *Falaba*, a British passenger and cargo ship.91 Just over a month later the American oil tanker *Gulfflight* was torpedoed, with the resultant deaths of three American crew.92 The impression that American vessels were being destroyed in large numbers was captured in a cartoon on the front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle* on 5 May that pictured sunken United States’ ships blocking a ‘fish highway’ on the ocean floor.93 The newspapers insisted Germany was violating the right of neutrals and non-combatants to voyage on the sea under the rules of international law.94 They also supported Secretary of State Bryan’s statement that the United States was adhering to international law, that it would continue to do so, and that Americans would not accept the belligerent attempt to alter the rules of war and neutrality during the conflict.95

When a German U-Boat sank the British passenger ship *Lusitania* on 7 May 1915, resulting in 1,198 civilian deaths, of which 128 were American citizens, the Hague Conventions were brought to prominence in the newspaper coverage as people tried to determine the legality of the German action. There was, of course, an expression of outrage that so many non-combatants lost their lives, and the British newspapers were quick to present the sinking of the *Lusitania* as similar to ‘the other wanton and murderous outrages’ Germany had committed during the war.96 The large number of American casualties shocked people in the United States, and their newspapers were filled with the names and details of those who had perished and interviews with surviving family members.97 The event dominated the American press for several weeks, and the public reaction to the sinking of the *Lusitania* generated an avalanche of letters to the editor. The *New York Times* said it had received an overwhelming number of letters in the

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92 Ibid, p. 69.
days after the sinking, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* stated on May 20 that it had received between six–and eight–hundred letters about the *Lusitania*.98

The shock and indignation at the scale of the civilian casualties was coupled with an examination of the exact nature of the Lusitania’s cargo and whether this made her a legitimate target. Germany argued exactly that, saying the *Lusitania* was carrying contraband.99 The suggestion that the sinking of the *Lusitania* did not technically violate international law capped the frustrations that had been building in the United States over the treatment of their shipping since the start of the war. The letter to the editor of the *New York Times* cited at the start of this chapter captured the frustration. The letter suggested the U-boat’s actions were in accord with Convention IX of the 1907 Hague conference, Concerning Bombardment by Naval Forces in Time of War, specifically Article 6 of Chapter II.100 Article 6 states that if the military situation permits, the commander of the attacking naval force, before commencing the bombardment, must do his utmost to warn the authorities. Although article 6 referred to the bombardment of towns, the letter writer suggested the Lusitania was carrying war material, which, under Article 2 of the same convention, meant it was a legitimate target. The correspondent argued that the U-Boat commander could not have taken the Lusitania’s passengers on board, nor could the German craft wait for the liner to be safely abandoned as it would risk the Royal Navy arriving. In other words, the ‘military situation’ did not permit anything other than the sinking of the vessel and was legal under the Hague Conventions.101 The correspondent’s application of conventions may have been questionable, but the letter reveals the extensive and often highly legalistic analysis of The Hague and the debate about its value that took place in the American newspapers.

**A War to Save International Law?**

Despite the concerns of some that The Hague was not restraining belligerents, the American newspapers demonstrate that many in the United States still regarded the Conventions as important and in need of protection. Indeed, a feature article in the *New

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101 Ibid.
The York Times claimed that international law as a whole ‘may be said to be on trial for its life’. The article claimed that the United States was a guardian of international law, but that the nation had not done enough during the current conflict to protect legal institutions. Similarly, a number of articles, editorials, and letters to the editor suggested that The Hague was still a valuable body of law, but that it needed strengthening in the future. An example of this was a statement in the New York Times by Nicholas Murray Butler, the prominent internationalist and president of Columbia University, who said The Hague lacked the ability to punish those who violated its rules and ‘more secure sanction for such conventions must be provided in the future’. A number of articles argued that the United States’ best response to the Lusitania crisis would be to lodge a protest with Germany and proclaim the need for stricter adherence to international law on the part of the belligerents. When President Wilson did just that, the San Francisco Chronicle printed a number of editorials that praised Wilson’s restraint and commitment to peace. One of the editorials placed Wilson’s restraint in the context of the development of international law, saying ‘we have gone beyond the duel to the courts for the settlement of individual difference, and should go beyond warfare to international courts for the settlement of international differences’.

For others, however, the sinking of the Lusitania was the final proof that the war had created a world of lawlessness. An article in the San Francisco Chronicle said the sinking of the Lusitania was an appalling act but that ‘the plain truth’ was that all the belligerents were ‘to be held responsible for the breaking down of international law and the violation of the rights of neutrals’. Even before the sinking of the Lusitania, the British blockade and German attacks on American ships had demonstrated that neither side respected international law, and that neutral nations, in the words of an editorial in the San Francisco Chronicle, had ‘no rights except those which they are prepared to come out and fight for’. Charles Steinmetz’ article in the San Francisco Chronicle entitled ‘The Destruction of International Law’ captured the sense of despondency.

103 Ibid.
evident in the American newspapers. The Hague conferences, Steinmetz argued, had created a ‘complex mass of rules about civilized and uncivilized warfare’, but there was no power to enforce them. The war was being conducted as though there was ‘no law between belligerents’ and no rights for neutrals.

The belief that belligerents’ disregard for international law undermined its ability to protect the United States fed into the debate about military preparedness. Even before the sinking of the Lusitania, an article in the New York Times claimed that many Americans wanted a stronger navy in order to guard the Atlantic. After the Lusitania incident, the same paper printed statements on consecutive days by General Horace Porter, the president of the Navy League and part of the American delegation to The Hague, who claimed that the treaties negotiated at The Hague had ‘failed to secure the great objects hoped for’. Porter argued that The Hague was ‘now a mere “scrap of paper”’, and a strong American navy was the surest guarantee of peace. In both cases Porter used the violation of The Hague as the justification for strengthening the navy. Even Andrew White, leader of the American delegation to the first Hague conference, said that although he hoped for peace, the crisis over the Lusitania demonstrated the need for the United States’ military to be prepared for war. In the San Francisco Chronicle Hudson Maxim, developer of explosives and the brother of the inventor of the Maxim gun, claimed that the laws of war in the European conflict had been ‘generally ignored’. The war in Europe, Maxim argued, had been marked by brutality, and the only way for the United States to avoid involvement was to be so prepared for war that no one would consider attacking them.

The belligerents’ contempt for international law even played a role in a few prominent Americans calling for the United States’ entry into the war. Although demands for the United States to enter the war were rare, the San Francisco Chronicle did note that the idea was being discussed after the attack on the Gulflight on May 1. The newspaper

111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
113 New York Times, ‘John Lane Says We Are For Allies’, 2 May 1915, p. 4. This article discussed John Lane’s letter to the London Morning Post.
118 Ibid.
derided the talk of American belligerency and said that ‘nothing could be more foolish’. However, public figures’ calls for the United States to enter the war continued to be printed in the newspapers. Theodore Roosevelt said in an interview with French newspaper *Le Temps*, which was printed in the *New York Times*, that the United States should have gone to war on the Allies’ side immediately after Germany violated Belgian neutrality as the United States had signed The Hague Conventions of 1907. Prominent internationalist William Hale also expressed this sentiment in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, in which he repeated his calls for the United States to declare war on Germany, who he described as ‘the cynical breaker of both the spirit and the letter of The Hague treaties’. Roosevelt’s calls for war may well have been a form of electioneering, but it is important to note that both he and Hale justified their calls for the United States to enter the war for the sake of defending international law. However, an editorial in the *San Francisco Chronicle* pointed out that those calling for war against Germany were ignoring British violations of international law, and that if the United States wanted to fight to protect international law it should have done so already.

The British newspapers were quick to point out that the United States wanted the benefits of international law but were not prepared to fight for it. The *Daily News* printed a letter to the editor that argued the United States needed to make itself seen as a power wanting to uphold international law and declare Germany an outlaw. Similarly, an editorial in *The Times* placed the sinking of the Lusitania alongside other German violations of The Hague, and pointed out that the United States had said they would hold Germany to strict accountability. Criticism of the United States’ somewhat muted response to German violations of international law had been present in the British press since the start of the war, as discussed in chapter 4. British newspapers were obviously self-interested and only too happy to encourage an American declaration of war against Germany; however, their criticism also reveals some of the contours of the discussion about the various nations’ roles in the war and how this was shaped by attitudes towards international law and The Hague.

120 *New York Times*, ‘Interview Roosevelt Denies’, 7 May 1915, p. 1. As the title of the article suggests, Roosevelt denied giving this particular interview.
While the belligerent treatment of neutral shipping dominated newspaper headlines during April and May, the newspaper coverage of the war at sea demonstrated the extent to which The Hague had permeated the discussion of the war. An article in *The Times* listed the technical specifications torpedoes and mines needed to meet in order to comply with The Hague, while an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* discussed claims that the German sinking of British fishing trawlers violated The Hague. The *Times* and the *New York Times* discussed whether the repairs made in a United States port to *The Prinz Eitel Friedrich*, a German cruiser, violated The Hague. The same two newspapers printed articles about the British capture of a German ship carrying refugees from a besieged port in Asia and discussed in depth whether such an act was in accordance with The Hague. The confiscation of goods that colonists in East Africa had sent to Germany, which were on a steamship British forces captured, was also evaluated with reference to The Hague. These examples demonstrate the range of incidents that the newspapers discussed with reference to The Hague.

As was evident with the town of Grimsby in 1914, discussed in chapter 4, The Hague permeated the language used to discuss the war right down to local civic bodies in Britain. The *Western Mail* printed a news blurb about the small Welsh community of Rhondda’s Federated Chambers of Trade passing a resolution to call upon the British government to give notice to the civilised world that after the war they would ‘hold the German Royal Family, statesmen, and military authorities, individually and collectively, responsible for all acts committed by the Germans during this war contrary to the decisions of the Hague Convention, especially in respect of the recent wilful murder of those on board the Lusitania’. The idea that there would be consequences for those who violated The Hague was also evident in *John Bull*. A letter to the editor suggested that all Germans from the Kaiser down who were ‘proved to have been in league with the Devil in breaking the rules of civilised warfare, shall be tried for their alleged crimes by an International Court of Retribution, constituted at The Hague’, and those found guilty

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128 *The Times*, ‘The Prize Court’, 11 May 1915, p. 3.
would be executed. After ten months of brutal fighting, The Hague continued to provide the means for people to assess the conduct of the war and hypothesise about the repercussions states would face for their actions during the conflict.

People on both sides of the Atlantic continued to use The Hague to assess the conduct of the war, as Dr. Bernhard Dernburg, the former German Colonial Secretary who was regarded as ‘the Kaiser’s official mouthpiece in the United States’, wryly acknowledged. Dernburg accused the American newspapers of covering the use of gas in a biased manner, claiming that the French had already used gas but that no protest had been made in the United States in response. When Germany used similar means to defend herself, Dernburg claimed, The Hague ‘was called into the field again’ to prove Germany’s disregard for the laws of civilised warfare. However, Dernburg himself justified Germany’s submarine warfare as a result of circumstances ‘forced upon her by her enemies in violation of both international law and The Hague agreements’. It is because of assertions like Dernburg’s that Jochnick and Normand argue that The Hague provided belligerents a rhetorical tool to justify wartime behaviour. During April and May 1915, the belligerents certainly called The Hague ‘into the field’ a number of times, but they did so because the conferences had cemented the expectation that war would be conducted with restraint, and this continued to be hugely important to people in Britain and the United States.

In the midst of all the carnage, The Hague continued to provide the parameters for the conduct of civilised warfare and a vehicle for hope. On 18 May 1915, the 16th anniversary of the first Hague Conference was celebrated at Browning Hall, London. The celebration, which the Daily News covered in detail, discussed the possibility of a third Hague conference, the potential establishment of an international police unit to enforce The Hague conferences’ decisions in the future, and what measures could be taken to ensure the belligerents adhered to The Hague’s provisions in the current conflict. At another public meeting in London, the proceedings of which were printed in The Times,

130 John Bull, "Amen" to This, 17 April 1915, p. 2.
135 af Jochnick and Normand, p. 77.
Lord Robert Cecil told the audience that it was the German leaders who were responsible for ‘the wholesale breaches of every law and custom of civilized warfare’, and that it was only upon them that any punishment should fall.\textsuperscript{137} He referenced a story he had heard about French soldiers cultivating a flower garden near their gun emplacement and said this act was similar to The Hague; the soldiers’ flowers and the Hague Conventions, Lucas claimed, were ‘a protest against the horrors of war’.\textsuperscript{138} Clearly, the symbolism of The Hague remained powerful in 1915.

\textsuperscript{137} The Times, ‘German Barbarities’, 15 May 1915, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
6. ‘The Courageous Conference’: Newspaper Coverage of the Woman’s International Congress at The Hague in 1915

The Hague ceased to mean anything when Europe went to war. Before then it looked as though all those conventions actually had some meaning for the European belligerents. The good work will have to begin all over again, and even then, if the peace is kept, it will be for financial rather than for treaty reasons.

By May 1915, when this statement was published in the San Francisco Chronicle, a number of people in Britain and the United States had begun to doubt The Hague’s ongoing relevance in the war.1 The perception that The Hague had failed to prevent the war or restrain its brutal conduct undermined its utility in the eyes of many. But not all felt this way. While people in Britain and the United States continued to use The Hague to assess wartime behaviour, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, they also drew on The Hague to discuss ways of stopping the war and preventing a similar conflict from occurring again. Ideas of achieving peace through mediation, and maintaining it through international organisation and arbitration, were discussed widely in the American and British press. The Hague featured in many of these media discussions, but no more so than during the Woman’s Congress held in The Hague in April of 1915.

Despite being one of the more remarkable events to take place during the conflict, the Congress has not captured the attention of First World War historians. The majority of general histories of the First World War fail to mention the Congress, or only mention it in passing. When the Congress is covered, it is usually in the form of a few pages in a general study of the experience of women during the First World War, or as part of a broader study of peace or suffrage movements.2 Historians who do analyse the Congress

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tend to offer the same argument about the event’s press coverage as historians do for the war in general.\(^3\) As discussed in the introduction, historians often present newspapers in the First World War, particularly the British, as villains due to their supposedly sensationalist coverage of atrocity stories and, as Martin Pugh argued, their failure ‘to report truthfully to the public about the war’.\(^4\) Similarly, the Hague Congress scholarship argues that newspapers were cynical towards the Congress and presented it in a negative light. Such arguments are often based on an uncritical acceptance of the delegates’ critiques of the press at the time, rather than the historians’ examination of the newspapers themselves.\(^5\) While it is certainly true that sections of the press, particularly in Britain, were critical of the Congress, some newspapers gave it thorough and very positive coverage. Historians’ criticism of the Congress’ press coverage reinforces the negative stereotype of wartime newspapers, and obscures the vibrant debate about the value of The Hague that they helped facilitate in belligerent Britain and the neutral United States in April and May 1915.

The Congress was a truly exceptional event, and a case study of its newspaper coverage provides a window into contemporary debates about The Hague’s place in the international order. The calling of the Hague Congress, and the resolutions it produced, sparked a new public discussion around the relevance of the Hague conferences, especially in relation to the topic of pacific settlement of disputes. The women who met at The Hague from 28 April to 1 May 1915, and others who engaged with the ideas of the Congress through various publications, drew on the legacy of the 1899 and 1907 conferences and offered a revitalised vision of The Hague machinery. The overall purpose of the Congress may have been to protest the futility of war, but what it produced was an alternative vision of international relations, one with both sexes and all the nations of the world equally represented. Underlying the resolutions of the Congress, and much of the discussion about it, was the idea that international courts of justice could only


\(^3\) Two of the most extensive studies of the Congress are by David Patterson, *The Search for Negotiated Peace: Women’s Activism and Citizen Diplomacy in World War I*, New York, 2008; and Anne Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War*, London, 1985, but these still engage with the Congress as part of broader studies. The edited collection *Women at The Hague: The International Peace Congress of 1915*, New York, 2003, is focused solely on the Congress, but it is mainly a collection of primary sources.

\(^4\) Pugh, p. 173.

\(^5\) See for example Sharer, pp. 55–57.
justify their name if they were based on principles of democracy and freedom. Proponents of the Congress insisted that The Hague courts must not just consist of elite jurors from the major powers and were not there only to settle disputes between nations. Instead, The Hague’s institutions were to act as vehicles for justice in a broader sense and were presented as a central part of a growing humanitarian internationalism.

The Congress saw a number of women activists from the suffrage and peace movements take advantage of what William Mulligan argues was a ‘new context for imagining peace’ that was created by the war’s reshaping of ‘relationships between individuals, civil society, the state, and the international order’. Through the holding of the Congress and the resolutions it produced, women attempted to write themselves into the structure of international relations. This development, however, did not go unchallenged; the Congress sat at the intersection of debates about gender and peace, two issues that were contentious before the war began and only became more so as the conflict increased the stress on traditional social structures. The separate but related debates about enfranchisement and peace, or ‘premature peace’, as many referred to it, largely shaped the public discussion of the Congress in Britain and the United States. Although the ideas of The Hague could often be subsumed within these debates, in the publications of the suffrage groups, the pamphlets of various peace organisations, and the British and American mainstream press, the ideas of The Hague and its continued relevance were enthusiastically discussed.

This chapter utilises a variety of media sources to demonstrate the range of voices that discussed the Congress’ proposal, planning, proceedings and the envoys’ journeys at the event’s conclusion. The main sources are prominent daily newspapers from the United States, the New York Times and San Francisco Chronicle, and Britain, The Times and Daily News. Publications from suffrage groups are also examined, such as the weekly publication of the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), the Common Cause. The chapter also draws from pamphlets and other publications from peace organisations, such as the New York Peace Society. These sources demonstrate the circulation of ideas between peace organisations, suffrage groups and the mainstream press, and also the sophisticated public engagement with the ideas discussed at the Congress.

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6 Mulligan, War for Peace, p. 65.
Origins of the Congress

The British and American press engaged with the Congress, or ‘women’s peace conference’ as it was often referred to, within the broader discussion of ways to achieve and maintain peace, which, as we saw in chapter two, was a vibrant part of pre-1914 public commentary and continued in newspaper articles, editorials and letters to the editor through 1914 and the early months of 1915. The newspaper coverage was supplemented by pamphlets and other publications from a variety of organisations interested in peace. So many plans were advanced for ending the current conflict and establishing a lasting peace afterwards that George Nasmyth, director of the World Peace Foundation, published a booklet in March 1915 that included a table comparing ten of the most prominent ‘constructive peace programs’. The centrality of The Hague in the programmes of Nasmyth’s table is demonstrated by the plan from the New York Peace Society. Their plan had been articulated in a pamphlet distributed in January 1915 which outlined what the society considered to be the principles essential for establishing permanent peace at the end of the war. One of the principles was the ‘renewal of the Conferences at The Hague, the meetings to be held so frequently as to constitute a Standing Committee of the Nations for promoting measures of common interest and for removing in their incipient stages causes of contention’. Clearly, The Hague continued to provide the language for people to discuss plans for peace.

Women had played an increasingly prominent role in promoting peace plans in the United States, and in January 1915 a Women’s Peace Party was formed. The impetus to create a separate organisation stemmed in part from the frustrations a number of women felt with the conservatism and passivity of larger peace societies. The American peace organisations’ hesitancy to pressure the Wilson administration into a more active push for

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9 Within a year of its foundation, the Woman’s Peace Party would have 33 local branches and 40,000 members; Harriet Alonso, Peace as a Women’s Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women’s Rights, New York, 1993, pp. 64–65.
10 Patterson, The Search, p. 17. For an examination of the ideas that motivated the women who founded the American Peace Party, see Linda Schott, Reconstructing Women’s Thoughts: The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom Before World War II, Stanford, 1997, pp. 40–46.
immediate peace stemmed from their connection to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The Endowment was the primary source of funding for the American Peace Society, which in turn distributed money to its affiliated groups. The Endowment avoided taking official positions on controversial issues such as neutral rights and mediation, and the peace organisations, fearing the loss of much needed funding, did the same.\textsuperscript{11} The formation of the Women’s Peace Party was also partly a result of the hesitancy of the American women’s suffrage organisations to actively promote the cause of peace. Carrie Chapman Catt, for example, sympathised with peace efforts, but continued to view suffrage as her priority during the war. The suffrage cause seemed to be reaching its climax, and she recognised the divisiveness of issues such as peace and military preparedness in the United States.\textsuperscript{12} Women such as Lucia Mead and Anna Garlin Spencer, who were frustrated by the peace and suffrage organisations’ timidity, supported the creation of a new party which could adopt a more active role in peace propaganda.\textsuperscript{13}

The formation of the Woman’s Peace Party created a network of women in the United States that played an important role in the Hague Congress.\textsuperscript{14} The Congress also drew heavily on the work of Julia Grace Wales, a member of the Woman’s Peace Party, who authored an extensive plan for neutral mediation while she was a member of the Wisconsin Peace Party. Known as the ‘Wisconsin Plan’, this was adopted as a central policy by the Women’s Peace Party and later by the Hague Congress.\textsuperscript{15} When European suffragettes proposed the Congress, the American women’s enthusiastic support for the event helped it to take place. The prominent activist, Jane Addams, also assumed a leadership role in the Women’s Peace Party and used her influence to generate support for

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\item\textsuperscript{11} Patterson, \textit{The Search}, pp. 2–17.
\item\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, p. 37. This did not preclude Catt offering Rosika Schwimmer a house to stay in while the Hungarian pacifist was in the United States, or using her contacts to organise a meeting between Schwimmer and President Wilson. Catt also played a central role in the creation of the Woman’s Peace Party, partly as a way of separating the peace and suffrage movements, and wrote a letter of support to the Hague Congress.
\item\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, pp. 2–17.
\end{itemize}
the Congress amongst American women. As the most famous social activist in the world at that time, Addams’ involvement gave the Congress valuable publicity and ‘an aura of respectability’.\(^\text{16}\)

While a vibrant public discussion about ways to achieve and maintain peace took place in the United States, a very different conversation about peace occurred in Britain. As soon as war was declared, the government articulated and defended the reasons for British entry into the conflict. The public discussion about the reasons for Britain’s involvement focused on the defence of small nations and international law and the need to crush Prussian militarism.\(^\text{17}\) The mounting casualty figures at the front quickly created another reason for the war to be fought to its conclusion, as the sacrifices of British soldiers needed to be justified. ‘Premature peace’ became a commonly used pejorative phrase which was hurled at those who sought to end the conflict as soon as possible.\(^\text{18}\) The political fallout from the failure of the British Spring offensives in 1915, which British Expeditionary Force commander Sir John French blamed on the government’s inability to provide a sufficient number of shells, contributed to the pressure on Asquith to form a coalition with the Conservatives and Labour, and a hardening of the ‘war to the end’ attitude within the political establishment.\(^\text{19}\) The British domestic context in April and May 1915, therefore, was not particularly conducive to the discussion of peace.

British women who advocated for peace, unlike their American counterparts, also faced the pressure of a society trying to determine the appropriate role of women in wartime. Traditional gender roles in British society were destabilised by the departure of men into the armed forces and the movement of women into areas of work previously closed to them.\(^\text{20}\) The employment of women in industry caused concern to social conservatives but was justified as a necessity of war, and even celebrated as a sign of national solidarity.\(^\text{21}\) Women supporting the war effort could be made to fit the narrative of national unity; women protesting for the right to vote or travelling to the war-torn continent to discuss peace with enemy nationals could not.

\(^{16}\) Wiltsher, p. 86.
\(^{17}\) Pennell, pp. 58–64.
\(^{18}\) An excellent study of the interplay between ideas of peace and gender in Britain during the First World War is that of Nicoletta Gullace, *“The Blood of Our Sons”: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War*, New York, 2002.
\(^{19}\) Pugh, p. 174. For more on the British social and political context in 1915, see Gregory, *The Last Great War*, chapters 3–5.
\(^{20}\) Grayzel, p. 77.
\(^{21}\) Ibid, p. 49.
British suffrage groups were divided over the appropriate attitude for them to take with regard to the war. On 7 August 1914, the Common Cause printed an address by Millicent Fawcett, the organisation’s president, to the members of the National Union, saying that as long as there had been hope for peace they had supported it; but with those hopes now extinguished, their ‘duty’ was to offer ‘the greatest possible aid to our country at this momentous epoch’.\(^{22}\) In the final sentence, Fawcett implored the members to show themselves ‘worthy of citizenship’, whether their claim to it be recognised or not.\(^{23}\) On the same day, the Suffragette, the weekly publication of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), printed an article by Christabel Pankhurst, co-founder of the group that blamed men for starting the war and claimed that things would have been different if women were enfranchised. Nevertheless, she offered her support to the government in this time of national crisis.\(^{24}\) However, Sylvia Pankhurst’s East London Suffrage Federation’s (ELSF) newspaper, the Woman’s Dreadnought, called for women to keep their sense and judgment as ‘what we have learnt to think of as wicked and horrible, we are now called upon to admire; what we know to be wrong we find we are trying to persuade ourselves is right’.\(^{25}\) Pankhurst argued that the war was undeniably wicked, and they had to ‘wrench’ out of it ‘a lesson which will bring peace in the future, the only lesson of any worth that war could bring’.\(^{26}\)

As many of the British – and other belligerent nations’ – suffrage groups turned their energy to supporting the war effort, the international suffrage network came under strain. However, it was the network of women created by the suffrage organisations that helped the Congress at The Hague take place. Germany had been due to host the biennial meeting of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) in Berlin in June 1915, but the war had forced its cancellation. As an alternative, Aletta Jacobs, the first female doctor in the Netherlands and the head of the Dutch branch of the Alliance, proposed to the various auxiliary organisations the idea of holding the IWSA meeting on neutral Dutch territory.\(^{27}\) Jacobs’ intention was for the meeting to discuss nothing more than the alliance’s routine business matters and for it to act as a symbol of the friendship and

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\(^{22}\) Common Cause, ‘To the Members of the National Union’, 7 August 1914, p. 376.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.


\(^{25}\) Woman’s Dreadnought, ‘What the War Means to Us’, 12 September 1914, p. 103.

\(^{26}\) Ibid.

solidarity that still existed amongst suffragists. However, Chrystal Macmillan, a Scottish lawyer and secretary of the Alliance in Britain, suggested that the meeting should involve women from a wide range of organisations and discuss subjects like arbitration, armaments, territorial boundaries, and world organisation.28 Macmillan sent letters with her proposal to the various national organisations of the IWSA. It was endorsed by a number of Dutch feminists who organised a preparatory meeting in Amsterdam in February 1915.29 Dutch, German, British and Belgian women attended this meeting and worked out a preliminary programme for the conference and its proposed resolutions. They then issued a call to the women of all nations to attend a peace Congress at The Hague.30

Defending and Planning the Proposed Congress

The idea of the Congress did not receive universal support from suffrage groups, and the invitations generated a heated debate amongst them.31 The publications of the British suffrage groups demonstrated a range of approaches from outright rejection and hostility, to informed debate and wholehearted support. The *Suffragette* was strongly opposed to the Congress but dedicated a lot of space to critiquing it. The publication, edited by Christabel Pankhurst, offered its readers a clumsy jingoism, a sort of *John Bull* for suffragettes. The *Suffragette*, like *John Bull*, was anti-German, anti-peace, and argued that British women’s role in the war was to urge men to fight and not to promote peace. Christabel Pankhurst was clearly concerned that people might mistake the upcoming Congress for a suffrage meeting, and made it clear in a number of articles that the Congress would not be representative of the British suffrage movement.32 The *Suffragette* also published critiques of the Congress by groups such as French suffrage organisations, and individuals such as Theodore Roosevelt.33 Christabel argued that the calls to use

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31 An excellent account of the debates about the Congress within and between the suffrage groups can be found in Liddington, pp. 87–106.
arbitration at The Hague and the development of The Hague’s arbitration machinery were futile, as the current war started because Germany had ignored arbitration.34

Although the NUWSS also declined the invitation to attend the Congress, its journal, the Common Cause, presented a more balanced picture than appeared in the Suffragette. There was, in fact, a huge amount of discussion about the Congress in the pages of the Common Cause since the proposed meeting caused ‘a significant collision’ within the NUWSS’ membership.35 A number of articles discussed the upcoming event, and the correspondence section was dominated by letters on the Congress. Fawcett, the Union’s autocratic leader, was forced to clarify why the organisation had declined the invitation to the Congress, a decision that caused the resignation of a number of members of the NUWSS executive, one of whom was Helena Swanwick.36 Fawcett, who pointed out that the majority of the executive were in favour of the Union not sending official delegates to the Congress, argued that the meeting at The Hague was likely to do more harm than good for the causes of peace and suffrage.37 Clearly not all the readers of Common Cause agreed, as a range of debates played out in the letters to the editor: a number of letters argued that the time was not right for peace, but others expressed support for the Congress and argued that suffrage and peace were interlinked.38 Some correspondents noted that the objection to physical force in politics was a key theoretical basis for the organisation’s demand for women’s enfranchisement, and argued that this meant the NUWSS should also object to war and support the development of pacific methods of settling international disputes. The letters demonstrate the convergence of peace and suffrage movements and the appeal of The Hague for those promoting the expansion of democracy.

The Woman’s Dreadnought’s reaction to the call for the Congress was overwhelmingly positive. While the other suffrage publications and the mainstream media tended to focus on the idea that the Congress was intended to achieve peace, the

34 While the Suffragette was critical of the PCA’s ability to prevent conflict, it also demonised Germany for violating The Hague’s rules of war.
35 Ouditt, p. 138.
36 Swanwick argued that militarism was the arch-enemy of women’s enfranchisement, and after resigning from the NUWSS went on to become an active leader of the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace; Grayzel, pp. 81–83.
38 For example see: Common Cause, ‘Correspondence’, 1 April 1915, p. 793; ‘Correspondence’, 30 April 1915, p. 44; ‘Correspondence’, 7 May 1915, pp. 57–58; ‘Correspondence’, 28 May 1915, pp. 104–105.
Woman’s Dreadnought discussed the Congress as though its primary purpose was to refine The Hague machinery. Indeed, the Woman’s Dreadnought discussed the Congress as though it was an official conference rather than a meeting of private citizens. Sylvia Pankhurst wrote an extensive article in early April that listed all of the resolutions that were to be discussed and proposed some herself. She expressed hope for the democratisation of arbitration and suggested that each country’s representatives to the Hague court should have at least one woman, as the gentlemen who represented Britain on the Hague Court were ‘hardly representative of the whole people’.39 She also wanted the global expansion of arbitration and asked if representation on The Hague court should be allocated according to population.40 The detailed analysis and discussion of the upcoming Congress was coupled with outrage when the British government prevented the British delegation from attending. The front page of the publication on 24 April asked if this was ‘the first fruit won by this war that is supposed to be fought for freedom, and in order that democratic government shall prevail over autocratic government’.41 The Woman’s Dreadnought presented The Hague as an important institution in international relations and one that, if reformed by the Woman’s Congress, could act as a vehicle for spreading and protecting freedom and democracy.

The British suffrage groups’ varied reaction to the call for the Congress was replicated in the British and American mainstream press. The idea of the Congress was met with a bemused scepticism by a number of publications and outright hostility by others. The British newspaper the Daily Express, for example, referred to the meeting as ‘a pow-wow with the fraus’.42 However, there were a number of publications that reacted positively to the call for the Congress and offered encouragement to the women involved. As the British and American press debated the value of the proposed Congress, the ideas of The Hague were publicly discussed once again.

A key feature of the press coverage of the proposed Congress was the debate about what it was actually intended to achieve. The preliminary programme for the Congress publicised after the preparatory meeting in February included a call for an immediate truce in the war.43 This proved particularly contentious and before the

40 Ibid.
42 Cited in Wiltsher, p. 88.
43 Patterson, The Search, p. 56.
Congress took place, the organising committee substituted this proposal for a call for continuous mediation until a peace settlement could be reached.\(^{44}\) The public relations damage had already been done, however, and was compounded by activists like Rosika Schwimmer continuing to state in public that the Congress’ purpose was ‘to urge the belligerent nations to cease hostilities’.\(^{45}\) Much of the press discussion of the Congress in the lead-up to the event, therefore, focused on whether it was an appropriate time to call for immediate peace. Congress organisers and supporters were clearly concerned with its public perception and attempted to clarify misconceptions about the event by publishing explanatory statements in newspapers. *The Times* printed articles conveying the British Committee’s reassurance that they were not attempting to achieve peace at any price and that they had received support from a number of French women.\(^{46}\) The *Daily News* also printed a statement from the British Committee that made it clear they were ‘not interested in peace at any price’.\(^{47}\) Similar statements were also printed in the *Western Mail* and the *Edinburgh Evening News*\(^{48}\).

As the public relations battle over the purpose of the Congress took place in the British and American press, a number of suffrage organisations shared Christabel Pankhurst’s concern that the Congress would be mistaken for a suffrage meeting and jeopardise the political gains their support of the war had achieved. To some extent their concerns were justified. Sylvia Pankhurst’s support for the Congress was chastised by Lady Astor, who in 1919 would become the first woman MP to take a seat in Westminster, and caused a number of wealthy patrons of the East End Federation to withdraw their support.\(^{49}\) Those who did not support the Congress wanted it made clear to the public that they were against the Congress and had refused the invitation. For example, Adeline Chapman, the president of the New Constitutional Society for Women’s Suffrage, asked the *New Statesman* to publish her letter declining the invitation to the Congress.\(^{50}\) Emmeline Pankhurst was particularly vocal about her disapproval of the Congress and voiced her opinions in interviews and open letters to newspapers in

\(^{44}\) There was something of a split between delegates who wanted to stop the war immediately and those who wanted to stop war happening again; Wiltsher, p. 91.
\(^{49}\) Wiltsher, p. 83.
\(^{50}\) *New Statesman*, ‘Letter to the Editor’, 3 April 1915, p. 637.
Britain, which were also reprinted in the United States. Such denunciations were immediately rewarded by the more conservative press, such as *John Bull* which congratulated Emmeline Pankhurst for her public objections to ‘the idle peace palavers at The Hague’.52

The suspicion that Germany was somehow behind these peace initiatives regularly appeared in the British and American press, and in both countries it was suggested that the Kaiser’s agents were responsible for instigating the Congress. Emmeline Pankhurst asserted that ‘the idea of the congress really originated with a German woman, and the motives of some of the promoters abroad may not be so innocent’ as those of the women in Britain.53 Those British women were, in the words of Emmeline’s daughter Christabel, ‘cat’s-paws of the Kaiser’.54 This view was repeated later in the month when the *New York Times* printed an article based on a cable from London that claimed ‘the German Government is fostering The Hague conference as another method of encouraging peace talk under the present conditions, which are regarded as more or less favourable for Germany’.55 *The Times*, in an article entitled ‘Peace at any Price Danger’, said the German propagandists were ‘indefatigable’ in their attempts to ‘manufacture a demand for premature peace’ and that The Hague Congress was a result.56

There was even doubt about the origins of the Congress amongst those directly involved in the peace movement. In a letter to Henri Golay, of the International Peace Bureau, James Tryon, director of the New England department of the American Peace Society, asked Golay ‘personally and confidentially of course’ what his opinion was on the Women’s Peace Congress at The Hague. Tryon replied that ‘it has been thought by some people that it was inspired and promoted by the Germans’ and claimed that he had been ‘repeatedly approached from that quarter to work for immediate peace’.57 Tryon may have been exaggerating his own importance in an attempt to further his career, as he also asked in the letter to be kept in mind if a position at the Bureau in Bern became

52 *John Bull*, ‘Candid Communications’, 22 May 1915, p. 16.
available, but his scepticism about the Congress demonstrates the distrust it faced from within the peace movement.

Despite American peace activists’ doubts about the origins of the proposed Congress, such a large-scale venture ‘was a newsworthy event’ and received prominent press coverage in the United States. This was particularly evident in the *New York Times*, which included articles containing extensive information on the delegates and the proposed resolutions. A number of letters of support for the Congress were printed, including one from Lucia Ames Mead, which called the event ‘a moral venture’. The newspaper also published a number of articles that were critical of the upcoming event. Theodore Roosevelt derided the women pacifists as ‘silly, base and hysterical in the extreme’, claims that were reiterated by Louis Cuvillier, Chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs in the New York Assembly, in a letter to the *New York Times*. The *New York Times* also reprinted an editorial by the French newspaper *Le Temps* that claimed it was laughable that women from neutral countries should seek to settle the differences of the belligerents. An editorial in the *New York Times* even suggested that the delegates’ insistence on ‘carrying out their mad plan’ was sure to damage the suffrage cause. However, a letter to the editor in the same newspaper argued that the women’s ‘splendid movement’ to bring about a conference at The Hague demonstrated exactly why they should have the vote. Such debates demonstrate how the Congress sat at the nexus of peace and gender debates, subjects which had become such contested issues, even in the neutral United States, that the Congress was always going to generate criticism.

The *New York Times* was not alone in its reluctance to offer unqualified criticism or support of the Congress. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported positive and negative reactions to the call for the Congress without adopting a clear editorial stance either way. The newspaper printed articles that contained the British and French suffrage organisations’ critiques of the idea of the Congress, as well as President Wilson’s offer of

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58 Patterson, *The Search*, p. 63.
64 Patterson argues that American editorial opinion on the Congress varied substantially; Patterson, *The Search*, p. 63.
sympathetic support’ for the venture. The paper appears to have been unsure what to make of the event as its most extensive article on the Congress appeared in the newspaper’s ‘women’s section’ alongside news of women’s clubs and domestic advice. Whether the newspaper began to take the event more seriously, or it responded to readers’ demand for more information on it, its coverage of the Congress became more prominent when it finally took place, even making it onto the front page. Despite the American newspapers’ varied stance on the Congress, the newspaper-reading public had been exposed to extensive information about the event before its proceedings began.

The British press coverage of the Congress proposal was not as overwhelmingly negative as the historiography suggests. Wendy Sharer argues that the press refused ‘to provide accurate coverage’ of the upcoming Congress, while Lela Costin claims that The Times exemplified the ‘hostility with which the International Congress was viewed’ in Britain. However, The Times’ coverage of the proposed Congress was quite equitable. The newspaper was clearly suspicious of attempts to achieve peace and printed criticism of the Congress by the suffrage organisations. However, the paper also printed details of who was going to attend the event and what they were going to discuss, and also gave space for the British Committee of the Congress’s statement clarifying that the event was not intended to achieve ‘peace at any price’. The Times’ coverage was certainly more restrained than that of the Daily Express, which, as Anne Wiltsher claims, had ‘geared up its reporters for an orgy of ridicule’ and suggested on 23 April 1915 that ‘the Congress should be held at St Helena in the middle of the South Atlantic’.

While The Times could be termed moderately critical of the Congress, some of the British press were enthusiastically supportive of the Congress’ attempts to achieve peace and reshape the post-war world. The Daily News and the Herald had both been critical of a war they saw as exploiting the working classes and were more than happy to support...

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68 Sharer, p. 55; Costin, p. 310.
71 Wiltsher, p. 85.
attempts to end it. The Herald noted that the Congress had aroused ‘the ire of fire-eating, stay-at-home editors who are attempting by their parrot cries of treason, sedition, German finance, and so on, to discredit and belittle an attempt to find a way out of the present muddle’. The Daily News reacted to the call for the Congress by claiming it promised ‘to play an important part in the world crisis’. The proposed resolutions offered a revision of the old diplomatic order, and this resonated with the liberal and left-wing press, upon whom the symbolism of a conference organised and run by women with no official authority was not lost. The Herald wrote that the Congress marked a big advance as it was ‘a people’s meeting, not an assembly of diplomats’. The Congress was a sign that the days of secret diplomacy were over and that ‘in the future people, and not their governors, will settle questions of peace or war’. Such sympathetic reporting demonstrates the space still available for a public discussion of peace – and the important role of The Hague in that conversation – in Britain in April 1915.

Press Coverage of the Congress and its Envoys

When the Congress finally took place, wartime conditions restricted the numbers of those who wished to attend. The French and Russian governments prevented their women from attending, and the British delegation was reduced to 24 after the Home Office refused to issue the 180 requested passports. When the Admiralty banned all steamer traffic in the Channel the week before the Congress began, only three British delegates who had gone across earlier were actually able to attend. The American delegation, travelling by steamer from New York, were delayed by the Admiralty’s ban, but their delegation of over 40 women arrived in time for the Congress’ opening. In the end, approximately

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72 For the duration of the war, the Daily Herald became a weekly publication and was accordingly known only as the Herald.
76 Ibid.
78 Patterson, The Search, p. 73. Only Kathleen Courtney and Chrystal Macmillan, who had both gone to The Hague earlier in the month to help with organising the event, and Pethick-Lawrence, who had travelled with the American delegation, were able to attend.
79 Bussey and Tims, p. 19.
1200 delegates from 12 countries attended the Congress, and Jane Addams was elected presiding officer.80

The meetings were held at the zoological gardens, as the Peace Palace could not accommodate the vast numbers of people, and all speeches and resolutions were translated into English, French and German.81 Those attending were made well aware by the organisers that there would be no discussion of who was responsible for the war or the way that it was being conducted. In her opening speech Aletta Jacobs also asserted that the organisers had never called the event a ‘peace conference’; it was a Congress of women who wished to protest against war in general.82 While anyone was free to attend the Congress, including men, only women who expressed ‘general agreement’ with the resolutions on the preliminary programme could become official members.83 The organisers interpreted this fairly loosely, and in practice just expected members to share a conviction that women should be granted parliamentary franchise and that pacific means should be used to settle international disputes.84

The women who attended the Congress produced an impressive body of work in the space of a few days. The Congress passed 20 resolutions, including calls for a prohibition on the transference of territory without the consent of the inhabitants, democratic control of foreign policy, and the enfranchisement of women. The Congress claimed war was ‘the negation of progress and civilization’, causes their resolutions sought to advance.85 The resolutions proposed an internationalism based on concepts of justice that the global community would enforce through ‘moral’ as well as economic and military force.86 The resolutions presented internationalism as a state of mind as much as a collection of legal agreements, and resolution 16 called for the need to cultivate this mentality through the education of children.87

80 Patterson, The Search, p. 75. Bussey and Tims, p. 19. About 1000 of these were from the Netherlands.
81 Bussey and Tims, p. 19; Sharer, p. 46.
82 Costin, p. 310. See also Bussey and Tims, p. 19.
83 Towards Permanent Peace, p. 6. The 24-page publication Towards Permanent Peace was first distributed in June 1915 by the British Committee of the Hague Congress. It contained details of the Congress’ origins, proceedings, resolutions adopted and reaction to the event from around the world.
84 Ibid, p. 6.
85 This phrase is from Resolution 6 ‘Arbitration and Conciliation’; Towards Permanent Peace, p. 8.
Resolutions 10 and 11 dealt with The Hague directly. The women drew on the norms established by the conferences of 1899 and 1907 but developed them with the addition of suffrage and a more expansive conception of democratic representation in general. The 10th resolution called for a third Hague Conference to be convened immediately after the war. The delegates noted that another conference was ‘all the more necessary in view of the violation of the law of nations which had taken place’ during the war. Resolution 11, which consisted of two parts, called for the ‘organization of the Society of Nations’ to be ‘further developed on the basis of a constructive peace’. Part A called for the development of the Hague Court of Arbitration by creating ‘a permanent International Court of Justice to settle questions or differences of a justiciable character’. Part B called for the ‘development of the constructive work of the Hague Conference’ by establishing ‘a permanent International Conference holding regular meetings in which women should take part, to deal not with the rules of warfare, but with practical proposals for further international co-operation among the states’. Clearly, The Hague was a central feature of the delegates’ conception of a peaceful international system.

The women delegates were concerned about the nature of the British and American press coverage of the Congress. Jane Addams spoke of ‘the importance of the press as an agent of public opinion formation’ and claimed that the press perverted international relations ‘by favouring militarism and discrediting pacifism’. Addams’ concerns about press coverage of the event led her to send a series of reports on the Congress to the American press, and these were duly printed in the *New York Times*. The American delegation were sceptical of the intentions of the journalists who attended the Congress, suspecting that most of them arrived at The Hague looking for an amusing story about silly women whose peace conference would break up due to a quarrel. Their

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89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
92 Sharer, p. 58.
93 *New York Times*, ‘Women in Earnest, Says Jane Addams’, 29 April 1915, p. 2; ‘Women Urge Ban on Secret Treaties’, 30 April 1915, p. 3; ‘Women’s Congress Honors Belgians’, 1 May 1915, p. 2; ‘Women to Appeal to Chief Capitals’, 2 May 1915, p. 5; ‘Women to Keep on Their Work for Peace’, 5 May 1915, p. 2. These reports were ghost-written for Addams by her private secretary Louis Lochner, who had resigned from the Chicago Peace Society over their refusal to adopt a more active peace programme. Patterson, *The Search*, p. 63.
94 Sharer, p. 56.
concerns were justified to some extent; Rosika Schwimmer, for example, claimed that journalists looking for scoops on friction within the Congress harangued her daily at her hotel.95

The anticipated nationalistic squabbling failed to occur, and *The Times* printed a report from a journalist who said the Congress’ proceedings had been so harmonious that a minor dispute amongst the delegates had been ‘a welcome relief from routine’.96 However, the American newspapers gave coverage to whatever confrontations between delegates they could find and suggested others that were likely to occur. While the *New York Times* printed updates of the proceedings cabled to them by Jane Addams, they criticised her for omitting the disputes that they assumed had taken place amongst the women. The newspaper therefore also claimed that Addams’ reports did not meet journalistic standards as they did not tell the whole truth.97 The *San Francisco Chronicle* also focused on the supposed tension at the Congress, and claimed condescendingly that ‘the wings of the dove of peace were ruffled’ by a confrontation between the Belgian and German delegations.98 The *San Francisco Chronicle* regularly printed war news alongside articles on society scandals so its attempt to make news of the Congress more exciting was not out of character.

The press in Britain and the United States were not solely interested in scandal, however, and covered the proceedings of the Congress in some detail. A number of newspapers printed articles that provided general information about the proceedings, such as who was involved and where they were from, as well as detailed accounts of the speeches by the delegates. The newspapers also provided descriptions of the various resolutions debated and adopted by the women at The Hague. The *New York Times* printed nine articles that discussed the proceedings of the Congress, with reports by Jane Addams and the Associated Press providing details of the resolutions.99 The *San Francisco Chronicle*, despite its interest in delegate disharmony, also printed articles that

95 Wiltsher, p. 98.
gave details of the resolutions. In Britain, *The Times*’ distaste for the enterprise did not prevent it printing articles discussing the proceedings. Similarly, regional newspapers like the *Western Mail* and weekly publications like the *New Statesman* provided updates on the Congress proceedings and brief details of the resolutions.

Overall, the reporting was largely descriptive with newspapers offering little analysis or critique of the resolutions. In part this was because the proposed resolution that generated the most debate before the Congress, the call for the belligerents to define the terms on which they would be prepared to make peace, was watered down during the proceedings. The final version of the resolution called for the governments of the world to put an end to the bloodshed and to create peace based on justice. Such a resolution, noted the *New York Times*, could have been produced by any one of the belligerents’ war offices. It was the idea of women from all over the world meeting to discuss calls for an immediate peace that had caused such consternation, and when such a discussion failed to take place, the fire went out of the newspapers’ coverage. The other resolutions adopted by the Congress were not particularly offensive. Calls to develop international law, expand arbitration machinery, reduce armament expenditure and enfranchise women had been part of international political discourse before the war began. The Congress’ resolutions offered a new combination of these ideas and placed a much greater importance on the role of women, but such abstract hopes for a future world order were not as distasteful to newspapers as the call for an immediate peace.

To some of the liberal and left-leaning British press the Congress’s conceptualisation of the new international order offered hope for the future, and they produced the most extensive and positive coverage of the Congress. The *Daily News*, the *Herald* and the *Woman’s Dreadnought* had all applauded the call for the Congress when it was announced, and their support for the event only increased when it took place. The *Daily News* offered its readers five articles discussing the Congress proceedings, some of

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103 This was Resolution 3, ‘The Peace Settlement’.
which included detailed examinations of the resolutions. The resolutions were also listed in full in the *Woman’s Dreadnought*. Similarly, the *Herald* printed numerous articles about the Congress: the newspaper’s edition on 8 May was largely dedicated to the event, and the next issue, on 15 May, included two pages that reproduced each of the resolutions in full. The *Herald* claimed that the ‘gutter press had howled its worst’ at the women of The Hague and ‘misrepresented them and lied about them’. The opening lines of the *Herald*’s editorial on 1 May capture the newspaper’s support of the Congress and continued concerns about the misrepresentation of the event by the “gutter press”:

> The Hague Conference of Women has met: not without great difficulties and not with that full complement of numbers which we might desire, but at any rate in sufficient force to make it clear beyond dispute that there does exist in every belligerent country a strong feeling against war, a resolute and courageous adherence to the principles of peace. Not that the Conference demands peace-at-<i>any</i>-price, or even professes to discuss the allocation of blame for the present war or the terms which any particular nation should seek now to enforce. The whole range of such discussion has been specifically excluded, and only the most incorrigible of liars persist in pretending the contrary.

The Congress would linger in the British and American news coverage for the rest of May since those involved in the event gave public talks in Britain and the United States and envoys visited world leaders and presented them with the resolutions of the Congress. Schwimmer had raised the proposal for envoys to visit world leaders at the end of the Congress, and the plan met with considerable resistance. A number of the delegates were happy to participate in an international Congress, but balked at the idea of assuming the role of unofficial emissaries. Addams, and most of the American delegation, disliked the proposal but allowed it to be discussed despite not being lodged according to agreed procedure. A lively debate took place during which it was

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110 The sinking of the *Lusitania* on 7 May, the publication of the Bryce Report on 12 May and the Italian declaration of war on 23 May would come to dominate the news coverage.
112 Patterson, *The Search*, p. 80.
suggested as an alternative that the resolutions should just be presented to the ambassadors present at The Hague. Refusing to accept this compromise, Schwimmer rallied support for her plan in a passionate speech, and the resolution narrowly passed.\textsuperscript{113} Representatives from neutral nations were chosen as the envoys to visit leaders of belligerent nations, while those from the belligerents would visit neutral nations.\textsuperscript{114}

The tour of the Congress envoys was one of the most extraordinary events of the First World War, and during their travels, the women had audiences with a remarkable range of government officials: British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey, German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg and Foreign Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow, Habsburg Foreign Minister Stephan Burian and Russian Foreign Minister Segey Sazonov. The women also met leaders of neutral nations, such as the Norwegian Prime Minister Gunnar Knudsen and Swedish Foreign Minister Knut Wallenberg, and were even granted an audience with Pope Benedict XV.\textsuperscript{115} Belligerents were particularly concerned with winning the hearts and minds of the world and, as they had all claimed to be fighting wars of defence, few wished to be seen as shunning attempts at peace. Jo Vellacott argues that because the women at The Hague possessed no political power, they based their arguments on ‘moral rights’, and it was this language of morality that made it difficult for the leaders of the western world to decline meeting them.\textsuperscript{116} However, meeting with the envoys was as far as most of the leaders were prepared to go. They received the resolutions of the Congress but were hesitant to actively support the women’s efforts to instigate a neutral conference for continuous mediation, despite some expressing sympathy with the idea.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{113} Patterson, \textit{The Search}, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{114} Jane Addams, Aletta Jacobs and Rosa Genoni, an activist from Italy, were the envoys from the neutral nations, although Genoni would have to remove herself from the process when Italy declared war. Alice Hamilton, from the United States, and Wilhelmina van Willften Palthe, from Holland, accompanied them as unofficial delegates. The delegation tasked with visiting the neutral nations of Denmark, Sweden and Norway were Chrystal Macmillan from Great Britain, Rosika Schwimmer from Hungary, Emily Balch from the United States and Cor Ramondt-Hirschmann of Holland. This delegation also visited Russia but without Schwimmer who, as a Hungarian, was unable to accompany them; Patterson, \textit{The Search}, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{115} Costin, pp. 312–313; Wiltsher, pp. 103–125; Patterson, \textit{The Search}, pp. 83–100.
\textsuperscript{116} Vellacott, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{117} The envoys travelled between the neutral and belligerent nations a number of times in their attempt to acquire assurances from the belligerents that they would not see the calling of a neutral conference as an unfriendly act, and to convince the neutrals to call such a conference. The best accounts of this remarkable period of unofficial diplomacy are by Patterson, \textit{The Search}, pp. 83–100 and Wiltsher, pp. 103–125.
Although the women were unable to publicly discuss their conversations with the various officials, the press in Britain and the United States continued to cover the progress of the envoys. These reports tended to be brief updates of where the women were and who they were meeting with.\textsuperscript{118} When the envoys reunited in London at the end of their journey, they gave speeches at public meetings which were duly reported in the press.\textsuperscript{119} \textit{The Times}, for example, reported that Jane Addams was going to address a meeting at the London Opera House about the work of the women’s Congress and that the members of the British Committee were going to ‘hold a conference to discuss the resolutions carried, and to consider a suggestion for forming an organization to carry on in England the work started at The Hague’.\textsuperscript{120} The coverage of the envoys’ activity suggests that the newspapers believed their readers were still interested, a public interest which is understandable given that the women were meeting with the most senior officials of belligerent and neutral nations. There was certainly considerable interest in the Congress amongst those of the British peace movement, and they flocked to hear the speeches of Addams and the other envoys. Bertrand Russell, for example, considered the achievements of the Congress far more impressive than ‘the cool intellectualizing of many articulate male pacifists’.\textsuperscript{121}

The envoys’ attempts to instigate continuous mediation through a conference of neutrals did not succeed, but their efforts demonstrated that peace was a powerful idea, one that could mobilise people from all over the world. President Wilson praised the Congress’ work, and Bussey and Tims suggest the resolutions influenced Wilson’s 14 points.\textsuperscript{122} Certainly there were many similarities between the two visions of the post-war international order. Whatever the legacy of the Congress, the public discussion it generated reveals contemporary ideas about peace, gender, international law, and the important role The Hague played as a vehicle to discuss these issues.


\textsuperscript{120} \textit{The Times}, ‘News in Brief’, 10 May 1915, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{121} Vellacott, p. 94.

\textsuperscript{122} Bussey and Tims, p. 27.
Newspapers and Hague Congress Historiography

Hague Congress scholarship focuses on the negative press coverage of the event and fails to engage with those publications, such as the Herald and Daily News, which presented the Congress favourably. Anne Wiltsher, for example, offers the most extensive engagement with newspaper coverage of the Congress and claims that ‘on the whole’ the American press thought the Congress was an impractical but laudable moral gesture, while the British press viewed it with contempt. No evidence at all is provided for the American press, and the claims about Britain are based on the Daily Express, a few smaller regional papers, and Evelyn Sharp’s summary of the British Press coverage of the Congress in the British Committee of the Women’s International Congress’ publication Towards Permanent Peace. However, Towards Permanent Peace claimed that the Congress was presented favourably by the ‘good sections’ of the press, and Sharp’s section lists a number of major newspapers that she says covered it as well as they could given the limited available information. Wiltsher actually cites Sharp’s claim that the Congress received positive coverage from certain sections of the press, but focuses on the cynicism towards the event a number of smaller newspapers displayed. Towards Permanent Peace did discuss particular newspapers’ disparagement of the women’s efforts, but it certainly does not support the claim that the British press held the Congress in contempt.

The scholarship’s focus on critical press coverage is partly the legacy of delegates’ claims about the Congress’ coverage. Wendy Sharer, for example, engages with the press coverage of the Congress, but does so solely through the writing of Jane Addams. Addams claimed that the newspapers of the belligerent nations were in the service of their armed forces and ‘presented largely negative or belittling reports of the women’s efforts’. Sharer quotes Addams but does not provide any analysis of the press herself. Historians’ lack of critical analysis of the delegates’ claims about the press may in part be due to the reverence with which the historians view those who participated in the Congress. Historians tend to present the women who went to The Hague as ‘heroines’

123 Wiltsher, pp. 87–88.
124 Wiltsher, p. 88. Grayzel argues ‘the press treatment accorded the Women’s Peace Congress was mostly but not unanimously hostile’, but bases this claim on Wiltsher’s work; Grayzel, p. 83.
126 Sharer, p. 58.
who fought against the forces of misogyny and militarism to have their voices heard.127 In such a narrative, it is easy to cast newspapers in the role of adversary, an obstacle the women needed to overcome.128 But by uncritically accepting and echoing the delegates’ complaints about the newspaper coverage of the Congress, historians perpetuate the general scorn in which the First World War press is held.

The detailed study of a number of newspapers reveals that the delegates’ claims that their message was deliberately misrepresented or not represented at all are incorrect. Critical press coverage of the Congress can certainly be found – should you wish to find it – but so can coverage that is supportive. Even those newspapers that were critical of the Congress printed its resolutions. Historians’ focus on negative press coverage, and their disregard for newspapers like the Herald and Daily News, is particularly problematic when circulation figures are considered. Although there are no exact figures for newspaper sales in 1915, the available information suggests that the Daily News had four times the circulation of The Times, the newspaper so often presented as the voice of Britain, and almost double that of the Daily Express.129 To use the attitude of the Daily Express to the Hague Congress as representative of British newspapers is incredibly misleading. A broader survey of the British and American press reveals that an extensive engagement with the Congress took place on both sides of the Atlantic, and a significant amount of support for the women’s efforts could be found in a number of prominent newspapers.

The superficial examination of the British and American press coverage of the Congress has obscured the lively public debate the event instigated. British newspapers and periodicals were not overwhelmingly scathing about the women’s meeting as historians have suggested. The argument that the press only mocked and derided the Congress relies on the image of wartime newspapers simply as jingoistic, war-mongering vehicles for government propaganda. Such a view of the British and American press is completely misleading. The liberal and left-leaning newspapers in Britain, as discussed in this chapter, applauded and promoted the Congress, an approach that was entirely in keeping with their support for the women’s movement and their critical discussion of the

128 Those involved with the Congress did face a number of obstacles, and what they achieved was indeed remarkable; however, in their desire to celebrate the women’s efforts, historians have been hesitant to critically assess the delegates’ accounts of their own achievements.
129 McEwen, p. 482.
war since its outbreak. The Scottish socialist newspaper *Forward*, for example, claimed on 8 August 1914 that the only ‘hope for the future rests with Socialism and the women’s movement’. The newspaper hoped that ‘out of the present unexampled conflagration, a general Revolutionary movement will arise which will sweep away the rotten European system that has brought us to this pass. For that we may pray; meanwhile a long, black night is in front of us’. It is no wonder that newspapers like *Forward* and the *Herald* looked so kindly upon the women’s proposed revision of the ‘rotten European system’.

The women’s Congress was less jarring to contemporaries than historians have suggested; prognostications of what the post-war world should look like, and what role The Hague should play in it, were a common feature of wartime newspaper reportage. An editorial in the *Cornishman*, for example, discussed a local publication that contained various predictions of what the terms of peace that would end the conflict might be. The contribution the *Cornishman* cited most extensively, and described as an ideal ‘probably all of us would follow’, called for a United States of Europe:

> Let the Hague Palace of Peace be a realised tribunal for the adjustment of international affairs, and make the regulations so stringent that any country attempting to evade its rulings should be made an outlier to the United States of Europe; a rebel to be summarily punished by the joint action of the Tribunal for violation of international peace.

While the future role of The Hague was being discussed in a newspaper in Cornwall, on the other side of the Atlantic its importance was being extolled in schools across New York. The *New York Times* reported that Hague Day had been observed on 18 May in public schools across the city at the request of the State Commissioner of Education. The school Principals had ‘made short addresses at assembly, calling attention to The Hague Convention’ and informed the students of ‘the benefits of peace and the cruelty and destructiveness of war’. These examples reveal the number and variety of ways The Hague and ideas of peace were discussed in newspapers in Britain and the United States, and it is within this context that the public reception of the women’s Congress needs to be understood. By assuming that newspapers were critical of the Hague Congress’ attempts to challenge the gender and diplomatic status quo, historians

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130 *Forward*, ‘Untitled’, 8 August 1914, p. 4.
131 Ibid.
reinforce the negative stereotype of the wartime press and neglect the richness of the contemporary public discussion.

What the British and American newspaper coverage of the Congress reveals is that many contemporaries engaged with the meeting as more than simply a 'women’s event’. Debates about the best way to structure the international order had regularly appeared in British and American newspapers since the 1899 Hague Conference, and they continued to do so during the First World War. Rather than just being reported on as another suffrage meeting, the Congress found a natural home in the extant discussion about international relations. The newspapers reveal the genuine interest in Britain and the United States with what the delegates had to say about such issues. An examination of the event’s press coverage shows not overwhelming criticism, but widespread acceptance of the Congress as another contribution to the longstanding discussion of what the international order should look like. Contemporaries were exposed to a more expansive coverage of the Congress than historians have suggested, and we can assume that their perspectives on the event were accordingly more varied than is presented in the historiography. The women who travelled to the Congress presented The Hague as a positive aspect of the old order, but one that needed to be expanded and improved. Whether this view of The Hague continued throughout the war will be discussed in subsequent chapters.
7. Enduring Civilisation: The Hague and the Conduct of War in 1917

You have gone from one thing to another in the heat of conflict until you are no
doubt almost as much amazed as we are to discover how far you have gotten away
from those nice considerations of civilization we used to discuss at The Hague.¹

In this manner Uncle Sam addressed the royalty of Europe in a satirical article in March
1917 in the *St Louis Post-Dispatch*. The article claimed that after almost three years of
war Americans were coming to the conclusion that ‘the general principles of civilization’
would not be preserved unless the United States came to rescue them.² In early 1917, the
*St Louis Post-Dispatch* was not alone in its reference to The Hague, which was also used
by other British and American newspapers to assess the war’s conduct. The two and a
half years since the German forces had swept into Belgium and France had seen the
nature of warfare change irrevocably. The vast scale of the conflict was coupled with the
emergence of new weapons. Aircraft fought each other in the skies and rained explosives
down on cities, tanks rumbled across the battlefields over which the opposing armies
flung various types of gas. Enormous resources had been allocated to the development of
death-dealing technology, and the world watched with horror at the destruction this
investment led to. Despite the very different image of warfare possessed by the delegates
who drafted the conventions in 1899 and 1907, The Hague remained essential to the
popular understanding of war. In the first months of 1917, Britons and Americans used
the language of The Hague to make sense of developments in the war in the same way
they had since August 1914.

The Hague remained relevant because there continued to be an expectation that
warfare should be conducted in a civilised manner. As discussed in previous chapters, the
idea that war should be conducted without restraint had not been universally accepted,
and the newspapers examined in this chapter – the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* and *New York
Evening World* from the United States, and the *Daily Express* and *Daily Chronicle* from

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¹ *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, ‘Just a Minute’, 5 March 1917, p. 14.
² Ibid.
Britain – demonstrate that people in Britain and the United States continued to be concerned that the war was conducted in adherence to international law. The importance of international law remained an undercurrent in British and American newspapers’ coverage of the bloodshed during 1916, typified by the battles at the Somme and Verdun. However, from February to April 1917 international law returned to prominence when the newspapers covered developments in the war at sea, attacks on hospital ships, and the debate about the morality of reprisals; issues that revealed contemporary concerns in Britain and the United States about the nature of the war. The discourse in both countries was shaped by the recognition that the Germans seemed to have no restraint, and by the discomfort with the realisation that even the British were willing to transgress the rules of civilised war. In this context The Hague continued to be a framework to consider the humanitarian implications of the war, as well as a symbol of civilisation from the past.

The article in the St Louis Post-Dispatch also provides an example of the role The Hague played in the British and American publics’ perpetual search for meaning in the war. Ideas about civilisation were central to British and American identity, and they permeated the discussion of the respective nations’ roles in the war. People in both countries claimed they represented civilisation, particularly civilisation epitomised by the rule of law. In Britain, violations of The Hague were used to present Germany as a rogue state and thus justify British participation in the war. The Hague was also used as a guide for appropriate British conduct, particularly in response to German transgressions. The debates in the British newspapers about the appropriateness of reprisals reveal the persistent insecurities about the nation’s role in the war. Evident in the newspaper reporting is the recognition that in order to continue to claim to be fighting in defence of civilisation, British forces had to conduct the war in a civilised manner. If Britain was fighting the war in defence of international law, then – some claimed – it could not resort

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3 A keyword search of prominent British and American newspapers reveals a vast number of references to international law generally – and The Hague specifically – during 1916. For example, a keyword search for International Law during 1916 returns 469 articles in the Manchester Guardian, 449 in the Los Angeles Times and a staggering 1,697 in the New York Times. The newspapers also continued to use The Hague to assess the legality of particular acts. For an example of The Hague being applied to the use of aircraft see the Daily Mail, ‘London Fortress: German Map to Justify Air Attacks’, 8 January 1916, p. 6; for the use of submarine mines see the Manchester Guardian, ‘German Mines at Sea’, 13 March 1916, p. 4; and for the treatment of civilian property see the New York Times, ‘A German Judge on British Mail Seizure’, 9 October 1916, p. 10.

4 See chapters 2 and 4.
to uncivilised conduct in the form of reprisals. Throughout the war the American newspapers had presented the United States as a law-abiding exemplar to the Old World and urged the belligerents to respect The Hague and conduct the war in a civilised manner. The American discourse about the war changed with the nation’s entry into the conflict, and newspapers in the United States used The Hague in a similar manner to those in Britain: to demonise Germany and justify their participation in the conflict. Thus, in 1917, The Hague continued to be a framework to consider the humanitarian implications of war, while also providing a rationale for belligerency and neutrality, and the shift between the two for the United States.

The newspaper references to The Hague in the early months of 1917 were shaped by their particular domestic political contexts in Britain and the United States. Since 1915, the American public had looked on in horror at the relentless carnage in the trenches and with outrage at incidents like the German submarine attack on the passenger liner Sussex and the British forces’ brutal suppression of the Easter Uprising in Ireland. While sections of the population may have sympathised with a particular belligerent, there was still an overwhelming desire to stay out of the conflict. Cognisant of this desire, Woodrow Wilson made ‘He Kept Us Out of the War’ a key slogan of his presidential campaign of 1916. The election was mainly fought on domestic issues as Wilson and Charles Hughes, the Republican challenger, largely agreed that the United States should ‘uphold American rights of travel and trade’, but continue to avoid direct involvement in the war. Wilson sought to do exactly that after he was re-elected by an incredibly small margin, and he continued to promote himself as a mediator to the belligerents. While the majority of Americans had shared Wilson’s desire to stay out of the conflict if possible, many were growing increasingly angry with the belligerents’ treatment of United States shipping, and there was a growing sense, as expressed in the opening article, that their participation in the war was inevitable if they were to protect themselves and civilisation.

Britain had experienced more significant political upheaval than the United States, since David Lloyd George replaced Herbert Asquith as Prime Minister in December

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5 Neiberg, The Path to War, p. 205.
7 Neiberg, The Path to War, p. 152.
8 Doenecke, p. 213. The election came down to the result in California, a state Wilson won by fewer than 4,000 votes.
1916. When Asquith’s coalition fell, Arthur Balfour replaced Edward Grey as foreign secretary, and the new War Cabinet shifted the emphasis on wartime considerations over neutral rights even further. In February 1917, the new British government, concerned with war-weariness, overhauled the administration of their propaganda organisations and created the Department of Information. The new department had an advisory committee that included prominent newspaper men, such as Robert Donald, the editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, C. P. Scott, editor of the Manchester *Guardian*, and Lord Northcliffe. The new organisation, and the establishment of the National War Aims Committee in May 1917, instituted a new era in British propaganda and censorship. Attempts to reinvigorate Britons’ commitment to the war became more overt and the censorship provisions of DORA were enforced ‘with renewed vigor’. However, it was press reaction to the application of DORA regulations in the case of the *Nation* that demonstrated the significant room for dissent that continued to exist.

The *Nation*, a liberal journal that published the anti-war poetry of Siegfried Sassoon, was banned from export in March 1917 after it printed an article that contained unauthorised information from the front. An editorial in the *Daily Express* criticised the treatment of the *Nation* and claimed the Press Bureau was suppressing too much information. The *New Statesman* argued that the ban was ‘a blunder of the first order’ as the Government had previously avoided interfering with the ‘expression of opinion’ and used DORA sparingly. Two weeks later it published another article in which it claimed the ban had been criticised by a number of other publications, such as the *The Times*, and the Government was refusing to revoke it out of ‘pig-headedness’. The *Woman’s Dreadnought* criticised the Government’s treatment of the *Nation* and provided a commentary on the debate about the ban in the House of Commons on April 17. That

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10 Robb, p. 119. Much of the reorganisation of the British propaganda machinery was the result of reviews instituted by Lloyd George when he became Prime Minister in late 1916. For an excellent survey of this period, see Sanders and Taylor, pp. 55–97.
11 Haste, p. 40.
12 The best account of the formation and conduct of the NWAC is that of David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain: The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale*, Liverpool, 2012.
13 Robb, p. 120.
14 Sanders and Taylor, p. 32.
16 *New Statesman*, ‘Untitled’, 14 April 1917, p. 27.
17 *New Statesman*, ‘Untitled’, 28 April 1917, p. 75.
18 *Woman’s Dreadnought*, ‘The Case of the Nation’, 28 April 1917, p. 737.
the case of the *Nation* generated such a strong reaction from other newspapers is remarkable, as it only received an export ban and its distribution in the United Kingdom was still permitted. Clearly, the British press were prepared to fight to protect their freedom, somewhat restricted though it might have been, and despite the greater resources given to the organisations in charge of censorship and propaganda in early 1917, there still existed considerable room for criticism of the government’s conduct of the war and debate about the war’s meaning. The newspaper coverage in Britain and the United States in the early months of 1917 reveals a lively and well-informed debate about the manner in which the war was being fought, and how such conduct could reinforce or undermine the justifications states’ gave for participating in the war.

**The Continuity of Newspaper References to The Hague**

Despite the radicalisation of combat since the war began, The Hague’s place in the newspaper coverage of the conflict in 1917 was remarkably similar to 1914. Belligerents continued to release statements accusing each other of violating the Hague conventions, which were duly printed in the press. In March, the Birmingham *Daily Post* printed an article about the French Minister of Foreign Affairs’ claims that German forces had committed ‘acts of barbarity’ in French territories.\(^\text{19}\) The article discussed the French accusation that German troops had pillaged French towns and stolen securities from bank vaults. The theft of the securities, the French claimed, was ‘in violation of Articles 23, 28, 46, and 53 of the Regulations for Laws and Customs of War and Land annexed to the Hague Convention of October 18, 1907’.\(^\text{20}\) This was a particularly detailed engagement with The Hague and is an example of belligerent governments’ attempts to demonstrate how their enemy’s conduct was illegal.

Public engagement with the laws of war also continued in a similar manner to 1914, as is evident in a letter to the editor of the *Daily Chronicle* in February. The correspondent was responding to a letter printed in the *Daily Chronicle* a few days earlier that encouraged British people to send food parcels to prisoners of war through the Red Cross. The correspondent asserted that ‘The Hague Convention lays the obligation of feeding the prisoners upon the enemy’, so the British public’s food parcels could go to


\(\text{20} \) Ibid.
greater use elsewhere. The Hague’s rules for protecting prisoners of war and civilian assets in occupied territory had been discussed in newspapers in August 1914, and almost three years later The Hague continued to be a key part of the public discussion of the war.

The Hague also continued to be regularly invoked in the discussion about the treatment and conduct of neutral nations. The St Louis Post-Dispatch printed an article on the United States’ Supreme Court decision to restore the liner Appam and its cargo to its English owners. Crew from the German raider Moewe had brought the Appam into an American port as prize, but, as the Court noted in its decision, The Hague conventions did not sanction belligerents using neutral ports as ‘a place for deposit of prizes as spoils of war’. In a similar manner, the Birmingham Daily Post and Daily Chronicle printed articles discussing the Dutch treatment of a German submarine. The Dutch government had allowed the crew of the German submarine to make repairs to their vessel and defended this action by pointing out that ‘Article 17 of the 13th Hague Convention allowed the repair of damage as far as this was necessary for a safe voyage’. The article in the Daily Chronicle also noted that the crew members of the submarine that had been left in the Netherlands had to be interned, ‘in accordance with Article 15 of the tenth Hague Convention’. That particular actions were being justified with reference to The Hague suggests that people in Britain and the United States had not accepted that the war entailed unbridled destruction, and they continued to discuss the war within the framework of legality. It was because of this acknowledgement that belligerents could not act with impunity that the German declaration that they were resuming unrestricted submarine warfare was met with such opprobrium.

Civilisation and the War at Sea

From February to April 1917, the debate about the conduct of the war at sea, inflamed by Germany’s declaration, dominated the newspaper reporting in Britain and the United States. Germany’s first campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare, which was essentially a policy that any ship entering a designated war zone around the British Isles was liable to be sunk without warning, lasted from February 1915 to September that same
year.\textsuperscript{25} The German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, had consistently opposed unrestricted submarine warfare, not because of ethical concerns about torpedoeing merchant ships, but because he doubted it would have a critical effect on Britain and feared it would antagonise the United States into joining the war.\textsuperscript{26} In 1915, the Chancellor had used neutral outrage at submarine attacks to leverage the German navy’s acceptance of modified rules of engagement, the so-called ‘cruiser rules’, and throughout 1916 he played a key role in fighting off the German navy’s attempts to reverse these restraints.\textsuperscript{27} For most of 1916 Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff had also refused to support the calls for the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, but after the defeat of Romania in December, the two swung their considerable influence behind the proposal.\textsuperscript{28} The Kaiser soon approved the policy, and Bethmann-Hollweg announced to the Reichstag that unrestricted submarine warfare would resume on 1 February 1917.\textsuperscript{29} The effects of the renewed submarine campaign were felt immediately as the tonnage sunk by U-boats in February increased by 50 per cent from the previous month and continued to increase rapidly through March and April.\textsuperscript{30}

British and American newspapers were filled with coverage of the German declaration. Official statements from belligerents and neutrals about the German strategy were reprinted in newspapers, and their front pages, editorials and letters to the editor provided an extensive discussion of the policy’s ramifications. Belligerents and neutrals alike invoked the language of international law when discussing the German declaration, and the newspapers did likewise. The Hague was a key part of the discussion as both sides accused each other of violating the conventions and presented themselves as the defenders of international law.

Newspapers in Britain and the United States immediately proclaimed the German policy to be illegal and presented the threat to neutral shipping as an example of Germany’s contempt for international law. An article in the \textit{Birmingham Daily Post} claimed that even ‘the least thorough student of international law’ knew that neutral vessels not carrying contraband were exempt from anything worse than a search and that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Stevenson, p. 256.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Stevenson, p. 257; Watson, \textit{Ring of Steel}, p. 421.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Watson, \textit{Ring of Steel}, pp. 421–423. ‘Cruiser rules’ required U-boats to surface and search ships before sinking them.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid, pp. 422–423.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Strachan, pp. 226–227.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Watson, \textit{Ring of Steel}, p. 426.
\end{itemize}
the German conduct was in violation of the Hague Conventions.\footnote{Birmingham Daily Post, ‘London Letter’, 2 February 1917, p. 4.} An editorial in the \textit{Daily Chronicle} labelled the German policy ‘a criminal scheme’ that was divorced from any regard for ‘humanity or law or civilised opinion’.\footnote{Daily Chronicle, ‘Germany’s Challenge to the World’, 2 February 1917, p. 4.} A similar sentiment was conveyed in an editorial in the \textit{Daily Express} which claimed that ‘the Skull and Crossbones’ had been adopted as Germany’s national flag.\footnote{Daily Express, ‘The Challenge’, 2 February 1917, p. 4.} The American newspapers offered a similar indictment of the German threat, and an editorial in the \textit{New York Evening World} said Germany clearly intended to resume its ‘lawless methods of warfare on sea’, against which the United States had protested.\footnote{New York Evening World, ‘No Choice’, 1 February 1917, p. 16.} The \textit{St Louis Post-Dispatch} printed a quote from President Wilson’s note after the attack on the \textit{Sussex} in March 1916, in which he claimed that Germany was using submarines ‘without regard to what the United States must consider the sacred and indisputable rules of international law and the universally recognized dictates of humanity’.\footnote{St Louis Post-Dispatch, ‘Germany’s Pledge and Her Notice of Its Withdrawal’, 1 February 1917, p. 1.}

The newspapers placed the submarine policy in the context of other German violations of international law during the war. The \textit{New York Evening World} argued that the German declaration was ‘the climax to a long series of aggravated cases’ in which Germany broke ‘her pledges to respect international law’.\footnote{Daily Chronicle, ‘Germany’s Challenge to the World’, 2 February 1917, p. 4.} An editorial in the \textit{Daily Chronicle} argued that the German submarine policy demonstrated the same disregard for international law as the invasion of Belgium and made sense as ‘a frigid calculation of military advantage’.\footnote{Daily Chronicle, ‘Germany’s Challenge to the World’, 2 February 1917, p. 4.} The \textit{Liverpool Echo} printed a scathing article that called Germany a ‘prostitute who talks of morality and bleats about anxiety for the freedom of the seas’ while from the first day of the war sowing those seas with mines in contravention of The Hague.\footnote{Liverpool Echo, ‘Sifting the War News’, 5 February 1917, p. 3.} Admiral Lacaze, the French Minister of Marine, made a similar argument in a statement to the Senate in France, which was printed in the \textit{Birmingham Daily Post}. Lacaze claimed the German submarine strategy corresponded with their policy since the start of the war of ‘violating all the pledges in humanity solemnly made by her at The Hague, and in acting with cruel contempt for human life’.\footnote{Birmingham Daily Post, ‘No Measures of Defence Neglected’, 3 February 1917, p. 7.} Since the start of the war, British and, to a lesser extent, American newspapers had presented Germany as a rogue
state, and the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare was used to reinforce this characterisation.

Statements from German officials, which were printed in British and American newspapers, invoked the language of international law in defence of their actions in the same manner that British and American officials denounced them. The text of the German declaration claimed that the submarine policy was an attempt to ‘move Britain and her allies to return to the laws of nations and to respect the law of the freedom of the oceans’.\(^{40}\) German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman claimed that unlimited submarine warfare was the only option left to Germany in their ‘fight for existence against the Entente’s violations of international law’.\(^{41}\) In late February, Bethmann-Hollweg made a speech to the Reichstag in which he claimed that it was British measures at sea that were contrary to ‘the principles of international law universally recognised before the war’.\(^{42}\) The German press seemed to agree with their Chancellor as, according to the *Daily Chronicle*’s review of the German newspapers, many of them argued that the submarine policy was a reaction to Britain’s illegal conduct of the war.\(^{43}\) This support may have been the result of the strict censorship under which German newspapers were kept, but, as Alexander Watson argues, the unrestricted submarine campaign remained popular with the German public.\(^{44}\) The failed harvest of 1916 and the Allied blockade’s prevention of food imports to Germany led to the so-called ‘turnip winter’, and in February 1917 the German public’s calorie intake from daily rations dropped to half that of the pre-war years.\(^{45}\) In such a context, it was easy to cast the British navy in the role of villain and present the use of submarines as a valiant attempt to re-open the sea-lanes.

Austro-Hungarian statements of support for their ally, which were also printed in British and American newspapers, used The Hague to justify German actions. The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Ottokar Czernin, published a note sent in reply to President Wilson’s request for an explanation of the Dual Monarchy’s attitude towards

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\(^{40}\) *Birmingham Daily Post*, ‘German Challenge to the World’, 2 February 1917, p. 5.


\(^{42}\) *Daily Chronicle*, ‘German Chancellor Says He Will Break England’s Sea Power’, 28 February 1917, p. 3.


\(^{44}\) Watson, *Ring of Steel*, p. 444. Watson notes that the submarine campaign was presented to the German public as the most effective means of ending the conflict quickly and the press were careful to never portray it as a means of revenge or starvation.

\(^{45}\) Strachan, p. 218. Strachan notes that this figure is an average and that there was considerable variation in food consumption between different groups in German society.
the German submarine policy. The note followed the German line of attributing the intensified U-boat campaign to the Entente Powers’ violation of international law. The note discussed the British role in the attempts to devise a modern naval law at The Hague and claimed the Royal Navy threw the principles of international law overboard as soon as the war began.\footnote{Birmingham Daily Post, ‘The Freedom of the Seas’, 7 March 1917, p. 5.} It was the Central Powers, the note argued, who were fighting for international agreements like The Hague to be respected, not the Entente.\footnote{See Birmingham Daily Post, ‘The Freedom of the Seas’, 7 March 1917, p. 5; Edinburgh Evening News, ‘Austria’s Attitude’, 6 March 1917, p. 3; Daily Chronicle, ‘Austria Endorses U Boat Crimes’, 7 March 1917, p. 1; St Louis Post-Dispatch, ‘Text of Austria’s Reply to the U.S. Regarding New Submarine Warfare’, 6 March 1917, p. 6.} The note and the statements from German officials provide examples of the manner in which the belligerents utilised The Hague to delegitimise the other side’s conduct of the war. The belligerents’ claims and counter-claims appeared on the pages of British and American newspapers, ensuring that international law continued to frame the public discussion of the war. The willingness of British newspapers to print articles from the Central Powers, particularly those that accused British forces of misconduct, also reveals a more sophisticated press engagement with the war than historians have typically presented.

German accusations about the legality of the Royal Navy’s conduct of the war were discussed in British and American newspapers, and articles and letters to the editor used The Hague to evaluate British actions. A report in the Birmingham Daily Post on new British naval measures stated that a large area in the North Sea had been declared ‘dangerous to shipping’ and the details had been sent to neutral countries ‘in accord with Convention 8 of The Hague Conference of 1907’.\footnote{Birmingham Daily Post, ‘Tightening the British Blockade’, 1 February 1917, p. 5.} A letter to the editor of the St Louis Post-Dispatch argued that Britain’s use of naval mines was legal while Germany’s tactic of setting floating mines adrift at sea was contrary to The Hague conventions.\footnote{St Louis Post-Dispatch, ‘Letters to the Editor’, 16 March 1917, p. 4.} Another letter to the editor of the St Louis Post-Dispatch claimed that the British blockade adhered to international law and the only problem was that Germany could not break it ‘by legitimate means’.\footnote{St Louis Post-Dispatch, ‘Letters to the Editor’, 18 March 1917, p. 14.} However, Sylvia Pankhurst, in an editorial in the Woman’s Dreadnought, argued that the British blockade was the equivalent of the German submarine campaign. Pankhurst claimed that the interests of the great powers prevented them creating laws at The Hague in 1899 and 1907 that truly protected the freedom of the seas. Britain had exploited The Hague’s laws and, according to Pankhurst, was largely
responsible for the radicalisation of the war at sea. Although the verdict on whether British actions adhered to The Hague varied, the conventions were still being presented in the newspapers as the ultimate source of the rules of war, and their application to particular incidents reveals the importance contemporaries placed on conducting the war in a legal manner.

American concerns that their forces were adhering to international law were evident in their newspapers’ discussion about the manner in which the United States should respond to Germany’s submarine policy. As diplomatic tensions between the United States and Germany increased in early February, the New York Evening World’s front page coverage of the crisis noted the importance of President Wilson making ‘no move not justified by international law’. A month later the New York Evening World printed another front page article about the need for American ships to conduct themselves in accordance with international law when faced with German submarines. There was significant debate in the United States about the benefit of arming American merchant ships, with a number of people arguing that such action risked outright war. The New York Evening World and St Louis Post-Dispatch both printed articles with the opinions of international law experts on how American ships could respond to the submarine threat while not violating international law themselves. The practical importance of this had been demonstrated in 1916 when the Germans court-martialled and executed Charles Fryatt, the captain of the British merchant vessel the Brussels, for attempting to ram a U-boat while not part of a combatant service. The New York Evening World printed parts of a speech by Ellery Stowell, an associate professor of international law at Columbia University, in which he cautioned against American ships firing on submarines as it could technically be a violation of international law. A similar argument was made by Sterling Edmunds, a lecturer on international law at St Louis University Law School, in an article in the St Louis Post-Dispatch in which Edmunds claimed that the German navy could treat gun crews on American merchant ships as

51 Woman’s Dreadnought, ‘Starvation’, 10 February 1917, p. 668.
54 Doenecke, p. 259.
55 Strachan, p. 222.
While there were genuine concerns about the safety of American sailors, there was also a desire for the United States to retain its image as exemplar of civilisation and law, a narrative that American newspapers had cultivated throughout the war.

The belief that a respect for law was a key element of American identity inevitably led to questions about the United States’ responsibility to enter the war in order to defend international law. The *St Louis Post-Dispatch* printed Taft’s claim that Germany was pushing the United States towards war and the ‘moral leadership in the maintenance of international justice’. An editorial in the *New York Evening World* claimed that the United States had acted as ‘the representative of law and humanity’ in their attempts during the war to restrain German attacks on merchant vessels, but that diplomacy alone would no longer suffice. The editorial claimed that Germany’s resumption of a strategy that systematically violated international law revealed what a ‘desperate, murderous, menacing force’ they were, and that the United States could no longer tolerate such ‘brutality and barbarism’. Similarly, an editorial in the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* claimed it was inconceivable that the United States or any ‘self-respecting nation’ could tolerate all international law being ‘tossed aside’ by Germany. The calls to defend international law were part of a growing belief in the United States in early 1917 that they must take a more active role in the war. However, such a view clashed with the sentiment of President Wilson, who continued to lag behind ‘his country’s increasingly bellicose mood’. It would take a series of crises over the next few months for Wilson’s desire for the United States to remain neutral to become untenable.

The British newspapers naturally paid close attention to the deteriorating relations between Germany and the United States, and contemplated whether the latest German violation of international law would force the American President to abandon neutrality. An editorial in the *Daily Chronicle* on 1 March called the German submarine campaign a ‘crime’ and questioned whether Wilson would consider the attack on the passenger liner  

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57 *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, ‘Germany Might Class Gunners on U.S. Merchant Ships as Pirates’, 5 March 1917, p. 2.
58 *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, ‘If War Comes, Says Taft, Blame Will be Berlin’s’, 3 February 1917, p. 6.
60 Ibid.
61 *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, ‘Germany’s Last Card’, 1 February 1917, p. 1.
Laconia ‘the overt act’ that he claimed would cause American entry into the war. The Birmingham Daily Post printed an editorial that claimed Wilson knew better than most that the acts threatened by Germany could ‘find no sanction in the Hague Conventions relating to the right to blockade’ and that the American president’s patience must surely be at breaking point. The discussion in the British newspapers recognised that Wilson was becoming an isolated figure as the mood in American society swung towards belligerency. While the American newspapers were filled with indignation at the German submarine policy, the British newspapers were filled with hope that Wilson would finally realise the threat Germany posed to civilisation due to its disregard for international law.

The British government continued to use Germany’s violations of international law to mobilise support for the war effort in Britain and their attempts filtered through into the newspapers. An article on the front page of the Daily Chronicle discussed the proceedings of a public meeting in Hull about the war loan. A speech at the meeting said the British people were threatened daily with ‘acts of barbarity on the high seas’ by an adversary that had adopted piracy and ignored ‘the law of nations’. On February 9, an advertisement in the Daily Express called for people to enlist for war work rather than war service. The advertisement claimed that Germany’s ‘declaration of war on the sea-traffic of the whole world’ meant that ‘no regard for law’ would stand in the way of their attempt to starve British children. A letter to the editor of the Daily Chronicle suggests that some of this language had resonated with the British public; the letter asked if there was not a German ‘in politics, learning, science, or literature’ who had the courage to denounce the crimes their nation’s forces had committed. Germany’s illegal conduct of the war, the correspondent claimed, was creating a heritage of dishonour that would be passed down to future generations. Catriona Pennell argues that Britons viewed the defence of international law as an important reason for entry into the war in 1914, and the newspaper coverage in 1917 suggests that the issue continued to motivate the British public.

Other nations were outraged by the German declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare, and the protests of a number of South American states that appeared in British

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68 Pennell, p. 64.
and American newspapers reveal the importance of The Hague in the global discussion of the war. The *St Louis Post-Dispatch* printed the Uruguayan government’s claim that the German policy was ‘contrary to the established laws of blockade’. The Uruguayan protest cited The Hague convention of 1907 and warned Germany that Uruguay would take measures to defend the rights this agreement afforded them. The Brazilian government made a similar statement and claimed they would not tolerate restrictions on their rights that had been established by international treaties. In April, the German Minister in Bolivia was handed his passports and a note declaring that diplomatic relations between the two nations were severed. The note, printed in the Birmingham *Daily Post* and *Western Mail*, declared that the situation had been aggravated ‘by the practical realisation of the proceedings announced against neutral vessels, outraging the principles of international law and of the treaties and conventions signed at The Hague’. The *Daily Post*’s headline captured the essence of the note: ‘Bolivia’s Rupture with Germany: Breach of Hague Treaties’. The newspaper coverage reveals the contemporary belief that violations of The Hague, or international law in general, would have consequences, and that a state of war did not allow unrestrained violence. This belief was particularly prominent in the debate about the treatment of hospital ships.

**Hospital Ships and Reprisals**

Perhaps no issue demonstrates the continuation of The Hague as a symbol of civilised warfare more than the debate over German attacks on British hospital ships. Historians have focused on the broader German announcement of the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, but the attacks on hospital ships received extensive newspaper coverage. The tenor of the newspaper reporting illustrates contemporary concerns about

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73 For example, as part of his extensive and informative study of the war at sea, Lawrence Sondhaus discusses the German resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, but does not discuss the attacks on hospital ships; Lawrence Sondhaus, *The Great War at Sea: A Naval History of the First World War*, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 241–277.
the radicalisation of the war and whether the fight to protect civilisation had to be conducted in a civilised manner. The Hague was central to the newspaper discussion about the German attacks on hospital ships and what the appropriate British response should be. Article 4 of Hague Convention X, 1907, provided details of what hospital ships could carry, how they should be marked, and specifically prohibited the use of hospital ships for military purposes. In February 1917, Germany made an official statement accusing Great Britain of regularly violating the Hague Convention by transporting munitions and troops on hospital ships. Germany claimed that because of British violations of The Hague convention, German naval forces would be instructed to sink British hospital ships that did not keep within a designated safe zone. Whether the German accusations about British hospital ships were accurate is not totally clear. Paul Halpern argues that British hospital ships may have been guilty of sometimes signalling the location of German submarines, but there is no evidence to support the German claim that British hospital ships were carrying troops and munitions.74 In any case, the British Foreign Office released a statement that emphatically denied the allegations and pointed out that under The Hague Convention belligerents had the right to search hospital ships if they were suspected of carrying munitions, an obvious remedy that Germany had failed to utilise.75 The British statement also noted that reprisals would occur immediately if British hospital ships were attacked.

The newspapers provided extensive coverage of both sides’ accusations and discussed in detail what The Hague’s rules actually entailed. The statement from the Foreign Office was printed in a number of British newspapers, and the German threat was discussed in editorials and front page articles.76 The Daily Express reacted with outrage and in a front page article claimed that ‘all pretence of humanity is being discarded by the German wild beast’.77 An editorial in the same newspaper argued that the threat was part of ‘a succession of diabolical outrages against decency and humanity’ committed by

75 See Daily Express, ‘We Will Sink Your Hospital Ships’, 1 February 1917, p. 1; Daily Chronicle, ‘Reprisals If Hospital Ships Are Sunk’, 1 February 1917, p. 1.
76 For example see: Daily Express, ‘We Will Sink Your Hospital Ships’, 1 February 1917, p. 1; Daily Chronicle, ‘Reprisals If Hospital Ships Are Sunk’, 1 February 1917, p. 1; the Cornishman, ‘New German Threat’, 8 February 1917, p. 2; Birmingham Daily Post, ‘Germany to Wage War on Hospital Ships’, 1 February 1917, p. 5; Edinburgh Evening News, ‘To Sink Hospital Ships’, 1 February 1917, p. 3; Western Mail, ‘Dastardly German Threat: British to Take Reprisals’, 1 February 1917, p. 5.
77 Daily Express, ‘We Will Sink Your Hospital Ships’, 1 February 1917, p. 1.
German forces since the invasion of Belgium. \(^78\) The *Daily Chronicle* also presented the threat against hospital ships as part of the sequence of atrocities Germany had committed during the war. An editorial in the *Daily Chronicle* argued that the threat against hospital ships was based on the same callous calculation of military advantage as the invasion of Belgium, and that both cases demonstrated a lack of regard for ‘humanity or law or civilised opinion’. \(^79\) The newspapers presented The Hague’s rules as an expression of humanitarianism, and Germany’s violation of the conventions was another example of the disregard for law they had first demonstrated with the invasion of Belgium. The Hague, therefore, played a key role in the newspapers’ characterisation of Germany and helped reaffirm the reasons for British participation in the war. \(^80\)

There was clearly still a belief that adherence to The Hague mattered to international opinion, and the *Birmingham Daily Post* demonstrated the British newspapers’ awareness that they were engaged in an international discussion about the conduct of the war when they printed an extensive section of a German newspaper that contained allegations of British hospital ships’ ‘grievous violation of The Hague Convention’. \(^81\) The German newspaper article cited in the Birmingham *Daily Post* claimed that the British breaches of The Hague justified the new German policy towards hospital ships, and that in view of the violation of The Hague their government would be justified in ‘renouncing the agreement in its entirety’, but that it would refrain from doing so ‘on grounds of humanity’. \(^82\) In the same edition of the *Birmingham Daily Post*, a feature article refuted the German claims and argued that the German threat ‘absolutely violates the provisions of the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907’. \(^83\) The article then provided details of the conventions. Contemporary concerns about the international influence of newspapers was demonstrated by a statement from the British Admiralty, which the *Daily Chronicle* printed on their front page, that accused the German press of circulating ‘lies about Britain abusing the immunity accorded to hospital ships’. \(^84\) The Admiralty wanted it emphatically restated that on no occasion during the war had British

\(^78\) *Daily Express*, ‘Exposé the Beast’, 1 February 1917, p. 4.


\(^80\) As David Monger demonstrates, the NWAC’s propaganda adopted the method of contrasting German and British conduct in order to highlight British values; *Patriotism and Propaganda*, pp. 8–9.


\(^82\) Ibid.


hospital ships been used for anything other than invalids and medical staff. The Hague
continued to be a key part of the battle for international opinion as the British and German
governments defended their own actions and denounced those of their enemy through
reference to the conventions.

Attacks on hospital ships returned to prominence in April, when the British
Admiralty released a statement claiming that two British hospital ships had been sunk and
that because of the German attacks, such vessels would no longer bear the distinguishing
marks agreed on at The Hague. The Daily Express edition on April 23 contained a
number of articles and editorials that expressed outrage at the German attacks on ‘hospital
ships flying the Red Cross flag and otherwise acting in complete conformity with the
requirements of The Hague Convention’.85 The German savagery, the Daily Express
claimed, was ‘without parallel in civilised warfare’.86 A similar sentiment was expressed
in an article in the Daily Chronicle, which said the attacks on hospital ships were one
more ‘terrible manifestation of the German nation’s utter lapse from civilisation’.87 The
article noted the code of rules that had been drawn up at The Hague for the specific
purpose of protecting the sick and wounded at sea, and bemoaned Germany’s flagrant
violation of the convention. The attacks on hospital ships were front page news, and the
blatant violation of The Hague generated outrage in Britain.

Despite the universal outrage in Britain at the German attacks on hospital ships,
the newspapers reveal a debate about whether reprisals were the most appropriate way to
respond. The British government had warned Germany in February that any attacks on
hospital ships would be met with reprisals, and on 17 April the Admiralty released a
statement that a squadron of British and French aeroplanes had carried out ‘a reprisal
bombardment’ of the town of Freiburg.88 The Admiralty’s statement made it clear that the
attack was ‘in consequence of attacks made by German submarines on British hospital
ships, in direct and flagrant contravention of the Hague Convention No. 10’.89 The

85 Daily Express, ‘End of Humane Conventions’, 23 April 1917, p. 1. See also ‘The Mad Dog’s
Deserts’, p. 2 and ‘Another Lie Exposed’, p. 3.
88 See Daily Chronicle, ‘Our Reprisals for Hospital Ships’, 17 April 1917, p. 1; Daily Express,
‘Reprisals!’, 17 April 1917, p. 1; The Cornishman, ‘Air Raid on Freiburg’, 18 April 1917, p. 4;
Birmingham Daily Post, ‘Reprisals for Sinking of Hospital Ships’, 17 April 1917, p. 4; Edinburgh
Evening News, ‘Reprisal Raid’, 17 April 1917, p. 3; Western Mail, ‘German Town Bombed’, 17
April 1917, p. 5.
89 Ibid.
reprisal raid on Freiburg, therefore, was explicitly justified by reference to The Hague. The raid on Freiburg generated questions about its morality in the House of Commons, which was reported in the *Daily Chronicle*. Liberal MP Percy Molteno asked Chancellor Andrew Bonar Law if the bombing raid was ‘part of a new policy of entering into a competition with the enemy by way of reprisals?’ Molteno added that women and children were reported to have been killed in the raid and asked if this was ‘in accord with the high principles of humanity for which we are fighting’. Bonar Law offered little in the way of justification and merely said that the risk of civilian casualties had been considered when planning the raid. Molteno captures contemporary British concerns about the way their forces needed to conduct the war if the nation was to maintain its claim to be fighting in defence of civilisation.

The British newspapers varied in their support of reprisals and demonstrated the different contemporary attitudes to the radicalisation of the war, as they had done in response to the German use of gas in 1915. Reprisals for attacks on hospital ships had been discussed in the British newspapers since the Foreign Office’s response to the German declaration in February. A *Daily Express* editorial on 1 February congratulated the government for not just denying that British hospital ships had violated The Hague, but for also explicitly saying there would be reprisals if the Germans carried out their threats. Indeed, two days later the *Daily Express* discussed putting German prisoners on hospital ships as a form of retaliation and a way to discourage U-Boats from attacking them. There were a number of calls for German prisoners to be placed on British hospital ships, even from the head of the Prisoners of War department of the Foreign Office, Lord Newton. The *Daily Chronicle* printed Lord Newton’s proposal and a quote from a German newspaper that claimed if Britain adopted such methods, Germany would conduct reprisals of its own. The *Daily Chronicle* was hesitant to endorse reprisals due to concerns such a policy could spiral out of control into a competition in barbarity: an editorial in this newspaper accepted that the threats against hospital ships were ‘criminal’, but argued that the only way to dissuade Germany from ‘indulging in new forms of barbarity’ was for the Allies to come to an agreement about what ‘penalties’ would be

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90 *Daily Chronicle*, ‘Reprisals Inevitable’, 25 April 1917, p. 3.  
91 *Daily Chronicle*, ‘Reprisals Inevitable’, 25 April 1917, p. 3.  
92 *Daily Express*, ‘Expose the Beast’, 1 February 1917, p. 4.  
95 Ibid.
imposed upon Germany after the war and which specific individuals would be held liable. 96

During March and April the Daily Express and Daily Chronicle continued to advocate vastly different responses to the German attacks on hospital ships. After the sinking of the hospital ship Asturias, a Daily Chronicle editorial said the German Government and people were determined to place themselves ‘ever further outside the pale of civilised relations’ and that after the war was over they would ‘learn what outlawry means’. 97 The editorial called the sinking of the Asturias an ‘atrocity’, but the newspaper retained the desire to see Germany held accountable through law rather than reciprocal violence. This was in stark contrast to the Daily Express, which promoted more radical measures and called for hangings of German aristocracy for every hospital ship sunk. 98 The Daily Chronicle was clearly concerned that only those responsible for committing acts of barbarity were punished, while the Daily Express was prepared to enact revenge on Germans more generally. The Daily Chronicle’s insistence that legal processes should take precedence over reciprocal violence was consistent with the narrative that Britain was fighting to protect civilisation and the rule of law. For the Daily Express, however, protecting civilisation was an end that justified almost any means.

When the reprisal attack on Freiburg actually took place, there was also discussion in a number of newspapers about the raid itself adhering to The Hague convention. The Birmingham Daily Post supported reprisals, but sought to highlight the legality of the raid on Freiberg. The newspaper claimed that this raid was directed against military targets in the town, which made it legal according to The Hague. 99 The newspaper reiterated that British forces conducted themselves in accordance with The Hague in an article printed on 1 May that compared British and German methods of dealing with hospital ships. The article argued that the British treatment of the Ophelia, discussed in chapter 5, was in accordance with The Hague, while the German attacks on hospital ships ‘flagrantly’ broke The Hague and Geneva conventions. 100 The St Louis Post-Dispatch argued in an editorial that the raid on Freiberg was justified as an attempt

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100 Birmingham Daily Post, ‘Contrast in British and German Methods’, 1 May 1917, p. 5.
to ‘compel an enemy to desist from illegal practices’. The editorial discussed at length the Hague’s rules for the bombardment of towns and engaged with the issue of how to define a town as ‘defended’. The editorial was critical of the wording of the convention, under which it could be claimed that a town with a single soldier was classified as ‘defended’. However, it claimed that non-combatants were still protected by the broader intention of the law, which was to forbid killing that did not have ‘an adequate direct military object’. The Birmingham Daily Post and the St Louis Post-Dispatch reveal the different ways The Hague could be utilised to defend or criticise particular acts. The Birmingham Daily Post sought to defend the British raid because it technically adhered to the letter of The Hague law, while the St Louis Post-Dispatch argued that despite being justified as an attempt to force Germany to desist attacking hospital ships, the raid violated the spirit of the conventions.

Adherence to international law was an important part of Americans’ assessment of the war, and although the British newspapers gave more extensive coverage to the threats against their hospital ships than the American press did, the St Louis Post-Dispatch did print a number of articles that discussed the debate between Britain and Germany. On 1 February, the St Louis Post-Dispatch printed the initial German claim about the misuse of hospital ships and the British response. A week later the newspaper printed an article that discussed the evidence Germany had provided in support of their claims. This included sworn statements from eyewitnesses that the Germans claimed established Britain’s violation of The Hague. The St Louis Post-Dispatch’s coverage highlighted the attempts by the belligerents to demonstrate that they had adhered to international law. The emotive language of the British newspapers was largely absent from the St Louis Post-Dispatch as the newspaper’s coverage focussed on the relevant Hague convention and what evidence had been provided to demonstrate its violation. This would change dramatically in April when the United States entered the war and Germany continued to attack hospital ships.

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102 Ibid.
103 St Louis Post-Dispatch, ‘Germany Limits Traffic Routes of Hospital Ships’, 1 February 1917, p. 11.
104 St Louis Post-Dispatch, ‘Affidavits Say British Used Hospital Ships Illegally’, 7 February 1917, p. 3.
The United States Enters the War

After two and a half years of maintaining neutrality and promoting mediation, a series of events in February and March 1917 forced Wilson to lead the United States into the war. In early February, in response to the German declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare, Wilson formally broke diplomatic relations with Germany, but stated that the United States would wait for the ‘overt act’ before joining the war. Justus Doenecke argues that most Americans supported Wilson’s reluctance to lead the United States into belligerency as ‘even in mid-February there was no popular desire for war’. Michael Neiberg, however, claims that amongst Americans ‘a willingness to go to war was widespread by March’. Whatever the public mood in February, there is no doubt that it was decisively shaped by news in early March of a telegram the German foreign minister Arthur Zimmermann had sent to the German legation in Mexico. The telegram proposed an alliance between Germany and Mexico should the United States enter the war and suggested Mexico could regain lost territories such as Texas and New Mexico. The telegram did not immediately lead to a United States’ declaration of war, but, as Neiberg argues, ‘it certainly confirmed in the minds of many Americans, including those who had recently been ambivalent, that declaring war was the only remaining choice’.

In the face of the American public’s growing bellicosity, Wilson ‘had little alternative to going to war’, and on 2 April he requested a declaration of war from Congress. Wilson’s address to Congress reveals an underlying tone of restraint: he argued that the United States would be at war with the German government, not their people, and the American objective was to protect democracy and defend the small and weak against the powerful. This was not a call for a punitive expedition to the Old World; rather, it was a proclamation of the need for the United States to rescue the principles of civilisation. By framing the need for American entry into the war in this manner, German violations of The Hague, which amounted to uncivilised behaviour, could be used to justify belligerency. The American use of The Hague, therefore, became similar to that of the British.

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105 Doenecke, p. 256.
106 Neiberg, *The Path To War*, p. 222.
107 Ibid, p. 221.
The tenor of the news reporting in the United States changed significantly when the nation entered the war, and the restrained coverage of the German threat to hospital ships in the American press in February was replaced with scathing criticism in April. Hospital ships had become a touchstone for debates about who was adhering to The Hague, and an editorial in the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* on April 26 suggested that ‘of all the unspeakable crimes’ committed by Germany during the war, none was ‘more revolting to the human conscience’ than attacks on helpless sick and wounded. The editorial questioned where the vaunted honour of the German naval officer was that Baron Marschall von Bieberstein had so vociferously extolled at the 1907 Hague Conference. Von Bieberstein had declared that conscience and ‘the sense of duty imposed by principles of humanity’ would be better guides for the conduct of sailors than conventions. The editorial claimed there was little evidence to suggest German sailors were operating in accordance with either the principles of humanity or any conventions. Such an editorial stance demonstrates how the American newspapers no longer had to tiptoe around German sensitivities with the United States now at war. Concerns about Germany’s violations of international law had been present in the United States since the start of the war, but the American entry into the conflict immediately led to their newspapers using The Hague to mobilise support for the war against Germany in a similar way as had been done in Britain.

In other ways, the use of The Hague remained similar to that in 1914, particularly in regard to the declaration of war. As tensions between the United States and Germany increased and war between the two became more likely, both American newspapers discussed how The Hague determined the rules for declaring war. A very similar discussion had taken place in 1914, as discussed in chapter 3, and almost three years later the newspapers again turned to The Hague to help predict what actions states would take. An article in the *New York Evening World* discussed the precedents for breaking off relations between states and the possible steps to outright war. The article said that throughout history wars had often begun before being officially declared, but The Hague Convention ‘adopted an article making it mandatory for a nation to declare war before beginning hostilities’. A number of articles were printed in the *St Louis Post-Dispatch*

109 *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, ‘Sinking Hospital Ships’, 26 April 1917, p. 16.
110 Ibid.
111 *New York Evening World*, ‘Trade Relations of U.S. With Germany Same as Before Diplomatic Break’, 3 February 1917, p. 3.
in which experts in international law discussed The Hague’s regulation of the declaration of war.\footnote{St Louis Post-Dispatch, ‘Effect of Break in Our Relations With Germany’, 4 February 1917, p. 28; ‘What Our Course Should Be if War Comes, Defined by International Expert’, 11 February 1917, p. 1; ‘War Condition May Arise in Two Ways Besides Declaration of Hostilities’, 21 March 1917, p. 2; ‘Rule for War Declaration Was First Adopted in 1907, U.S. German Situation Explained’, 24 March 1917, p. 2.} One of the articles utilised an interview with Sterling Edmunds, a lecturer on international law at the St Louis University Law School, to explain the situation with Germany and the rules of The Hague for declaring war.\footnote{St Louis Post-Dispatch, ‘Rule for War Declaration Was First Adopted in 1907, U.S. German Situation Explained’, 24 March 1917, p. 2.} Similarly, a front page feature article written by Dr Ellery Stowell discussed the practicalities of declaring war and noted that the United States government would have to make a formal declaration of war ‘in accordance with the provisions of articles I and II of the third Hague convention (Oct. 18, 1907)’.\footnote{St Louis Post-Dispatch, ‘What Our Course Should Be if War Comes, Defined by International Expert’, 11 February 1917, p. 1.} The prominent coverage that this issue received suggests that Americans still considered The Hague important, and that there was a very real concern about the United States’ adherence to international law.

Both American newspapers also noted that because The Hague’s provisions had been violated during the war, it was not certain whether nations would still feel bound by them. The article in the \textit{New York Evening World} that discussed the manner in which The Hague provided regulations for the declaration of war also expressed concern that the conventions may not be adhered to. The article argued that ‘The Hague conventions and the fabric of international law generally’ had been so abused during the war that it was difficult to say ‘how far any nation may be expected to regard itself as bound by the provisions’.\footnote{New York Evening World, ‘Trade Relations of U.S. With Germany Same as Before Diplomatic Break’, 3 February 1917, p. 3.} An article in the \textit{St Louis Post-Dispatch} made a similar argument. The article noted that the United States and Germany were signatories to The Hague convention governing the declaration of war, but that ‘The Hague treaties had been so openly disregarded in the war in Europe that no compliance with them may be expected with any confidence’.\footnote{St Louis Post-Dispatch, ‘War Condition May Arise in Two Ways Besides Declaration of Hostilities’, 21 March 1917, p. 2.} There was clearly still a desire to understand what the United States’ legal obligations were under international agreements like The Hague, but also a genuine concern that other nations would not adhere to those treaties.
Although the American newspapers demonstrated uncertainty that Germany would follow The Hague’s rules for declaring war, they still looked to the conventions for guidance on the treatment of belligerent ships while the nation remained neutral and the confiscation of enemy ships that would follow a declaration of war. On February 12, both newspapers printed front page articles using information released by the American government about the types of German ships in United States’ ports.\(^{117}\) The ships were divided in two: merchant ships that were free to ‘try their luck’ at sea; and warships, such as the *Prinz Eitel Friedrich*, that had taken refuge in neutral harbours and had been interned with their crews under The Hague conventions.\(^{118}\) An article in late March in the *New York Evening World* argued that should a state of war be declared between the United States and Germany, German-owned war and merchant ships in American waters could be requisitioned for war purposes ‘in accordance with international law’.\(^{119}\) However, an article in the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* pointed out that ‘The Hague convention relative to enemy ships at the outbreak of hostilities’ did not apply to German passenger liners.\(^{120}\) The article then provided analysis of the convention to support its claim. On 2 April, the *St Louis Post-Dispatch*’s ‘miscellaneous’ section had responses to readers’ questions on a range of topics, one of which was the ‘rules as to crews of enemy merchant ships captured by a belligerent as laid down by Second Hague Conference’.\(^{121}\) The rules prescribed by The Hague were then given in detail. The American newspapers reveal contemporary concern that the United States treated other nations’ ships and crew according to international law, and that The Hague remained the key to understanding what conduct was appropriate.

Despite the incredible scale of the carnage, people in Britain and the United States continued to assess the conflict in legal terms and used The Hague to try and predict future behaviour. That people were prepared to accept the application of the Hague regulations even if detrimental to their side was evident in the response to the Turkish internment of an American warship when the United States entered the war in April. The


\(^{120}\) *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, ‘What Our Couse Should Be if War Comes’, 11 February 1917, p. 1.

\(^{121}\) *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, ‘Miscellaneous’, 2 April 1917, p. 14.
American warship *Scorpion* had been in Constantinople at the outbreak of war and was occupied by Turkish forces after the ship failed to leave harbour. Newspaper articles in Britain and the United States discussed the case of the *Scorpion* and the legality of its internment under The Hague convention.¹²² None of the articles made any complaints about the Turkish actions, and a *New York Evening World* article stated that the internment was ‘perfectly in accord’ with the Hague Convention.¹²³ The Hague was still viewed as an authority on the civilised way of conducting war, and the enemy’s adherence to the conventions was met with approval.

The newspaper reporting in Britain and the United States from February to April 1917 reveals how important international law continued to be for people’s understanding of the war. The newspapers’ references to The Hague were remarkably similar to those in 1914 and 1915. The Hague had been established as a key framework for discussing the conduct of the war at its outbreak, and it continued to be used as such in 1917. In Britain, the defence of international law had been a key justification for entering the war, and it continued to be so in 1917. The idea of conducting the war in a civilised manner clearly still resonated with people in Britain, and the unease felt over the adoption of reprisals reveals the contemporary desire to contain the destructive forces of the war. Similarly, the American newspapers presented The Hague conventions as a protector of neutral rights in much the same way as they had done in 1914. When the United States entered the war, the American newspapers began to use violations of The Hague as a way to demonise Germany as a rogue state. In both countries, The Hague continued to be a symbol of humanitarianism, an attempt to mitigate the horrors of war. While the newspaper coverage in the early months of 1917 demonstrates the continued importance of the Hague conventions for assessing the conduct of the war, it also reveals that The Hague was displaced from the conversation about the international organisation that would likely be created at the end of the conflict. The manner in which The Hague began to disappear from the discussion about the future world order is discussed in the next chapter.

¹²³ *New York Evening World*, ‘U.S. Warship Scorpion is Interned by Turkey for Remainder of War’, 16 April 1917, p. 3.
In his excellent work on the League to Enforce Peace (LEP), Stephen Wertheim argues that historians have reduced early twentieth-century internationalism to a ‘one-dimensional, polarizing, and, not least, inaccurate’ caricature. Historians’ focus on the United States’ rejection of the League of Nations Covenant has led to the propagation of a simplistic isolationist-internationalist dichotomy, Wertheim argues, and such an approach obscures the nuanced debate among American politicians such as Elihu Root, William Taft and Theodore Roosevelt that occurred in the United States throughout the First World War. Central to the views of these legalists, as Root, Taft and Roosevelt can be loosely grouped, was the desire ‘to create an international league dedicated to developing international law and enforcing judicial settlement upon member states’. The focus on international law and international courts was anathema to President Woodrow Wilson, and his disputes with the legalists over these issues, Wertheim suggests, are key to understanding American politics during the formation of the League of Nations.

While demonstrating the breadth of internationalist thought among American politicians during the First World War, Wertheim’s focus on prominent political figures, such as Taft, Roosevelt and Wilson, ignores the extensive and sophisticated public engagement in the United States with ideas of the future world order. Roosevelt’s public diatribes, Taft’s plans for the League to Enforce Peace and Wilson’s famous speeches and declarations did not create the public discussion in the United States about the structure of the post-war world; rather, they joined an existing conversation, the contours of which had been significantly shaped by the ideas of the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907. The American public were far more engaged with international relations than historians have acknowledged, and the First World War saw a continuation of the public discussion

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid. A similar argument was made 30 years earlier by David Patterson in his article ‘The United States and the Origins of the World Court’, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (Summer, 1976), pp. 279–295.
4 Wertheim claims that in the United States the public debate on the post-war world ‘proved sterile’; Wertheim, p. 802.
It was not just in the United States that Wilson’s vision came to dominate public discussion, since the British newspapers also gave prominent coverage to the ideas of the U.S. president. Throughout the war, Wilson had been a key figure in the discussion of attempts to mediate an end to the conflict, but in the first four months of 1917, he also came to dominate the debate in Britain about what the post-war world would look like. While there were concerns in Britain about the prominent role Wilson might play in the post-war settlements, the president’s focus on democracy provided a useful rhetorical tool to argue for the total defeat of autocratic Prussia. The potential for The Hague to act as a foundation for some sort of international organisation largely disappeared from British newspaper coverage as the focus shifted from international law to Wilson’s calls for democracy and self-determination. Despite the efforts of peace activists and prominent figures like Taft to promote the expansion of The Hague, in the early months of 1917, the conferences and courts associated with them were subsumed by Wilson’s ideas.

This chapter traces the transition in 1917 that saw Wilson’s ideas take prominence over the ideas of The Hague. The purpose of this chapter is not to offer a new interpretation of Wilson’s ideas or their effect on the international order; there is a vast and ever expanding historiography that does exactly that. Instead, this chapter specifically argues that Wilson’s rhetoric had a significant effect on the discussion of The

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Hague in British and American newspapers in early 1917. The first part of the chapter discusses the continued efforts of peace activists and those interested in international law to promote The Hague and discuss ways of improving its effectiveness. To do this, I have utilised a number of pamphlets, conference proceedings and other publications that were released by a range of different organisations on both sides of the Atlantic. The rest of the chapter discusses the way in which Wilson’s rhetoric steered the British and American newspaper conversation away from the ideas and plans put forward by those groups. The chapter argues that in 1917 a number of peace activists and international lawyers continued to believe in the value of The Hague, but their attempts to promote it to the British and American public fell victim to Wilson’s emergence as a global leader and the influence of his post-war vision.

Promoting The Hague, 1915–1917

Prior to 1917 proposals for the construction of a peaceful world tended to involve The Hague. The women’s congress in 1915 had offered a revitalised vision of The Hague, and debate amongst politicians, lawyers and peace activists about the future role of The Hague continued through 1916 and into 1917. Individuals and organisations from around the world continued to discuss ways to stop the conflict and how international organisations could prevent war in the future. Such organisations sought to convince each other, government officials and – importantly – the general public that their plan was achievable. Peace activists and enthusiasts of international organisations published a wide array of pamphlets and held a number of meetings – the details of which were often printed in newspapers – in an attempt to educate and persuade the public and those in power. The Hague featured prominently in many of the proposals and continued to be a touchstone for visions of the post-war world. Many involved in peace activism continued to assume that a third Hague Conference would be held and that the post-war settlement would involve the development of international courts at The Hague.

A number of those who had been involved in the Conferences of 1899 and 1907 continued to act as advocates for The Hague. In August 1915, Andrew White, the leader of the American delegation to The Hague in 1899, spoke to about 100 students from 40 leading colleges in the United States and Canada who were attending a two week conference on international relations and peace. Organised by the World Peace
Foundation (WPF) and held in Ithaca, New York, the conference included talks by other prominent activists such as Norman Angell. White told the students that ‘the Hague conferences to come will be of vastly more importance than those past’. He also expressed hope that the decrees of the permanent Hague tribunal, which ‘was sure to come’, would be enforced ‘by the general opinion of mankind’. White clearly assumed there would be more Hague conferences, and they played a central role in his imagining of the post-war world. The details of his speech were printed in the newspaper the *Christian Science Monitor*, and a clipping of the article was sent to the International Peace Bureau in Switzerland, which demonstrates the circulation of ideas between peace activists and the general public.

While Andrew White spoke to college students, other leading activists produced pamphlets in an attempt to influence public opinion and encourage support for The Hague. In a pamphlet published in January 1916, Arthur Deerin Call, secretary of the American Peace Society, argued that the Hague conferences had been key moments in the development of international organisation. The 1907 conference had, he believed, created ‘a draft convention for the establishment of a permanent court of justice – in other words, a supreme court of the world’. He argued that there would likely be a third conference at the end of the war and that the duty of every intelligent American would be to support ‘the greater perfection of the congress and court of nations, existing there in embryo, so to speak, in the Third Hague Conference that is to be’. A month later he made similar points in another pamphlet, in which he argued that the first Hague conference was ‘the beginning of the legislative branch of our international government that is to be’ and that ‘the recurring Hague conferences constitute in themselves the beginning of a legislative body’. In both pamphlets Deerin Call emphasised the importance of engendering public

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7 ‘Students Take Up Problems of World Peace’.
8 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
support for The Hague, and claimed that the Tsar’s Rescript, which resulted in the first Hague conference, was itself ‘an expression of a gradually growing public opinion’.12

While many in the peace movement still looked to The Hague as the ideal foundation for the development of international organisation, they also expressed concern that the conferences and institutions of The Hague might be excluded from the post-war settlement. A letter to the International Peace Bureau (IPB) from the Neutral Conference for Continuous Mediation in Stockholm discussed the likelihood of a world conference at the end of the war, and argued that an unofficial world congress of pacifists should be held at the same time and place in order to promote peace. The letter suggested that the various peace organisations needed to co-operate in order to plan and run the conference, and asked for help from the IPB.13 The President of the IPB, Henri La Fontaine, agreed; in a pamphlet published in July 1916, which was also printed in the American Peace Society’s publication the Advocate of Peace, he discussed the need for those interested in a lasting peace to be organised and co-ordinated so that they could act as soon as the war ended. La Fontaine suggested that the various organisations needed to find a common platform to present to the public and gave his idea of what that could be. He claimed that ‘unanimous opinion’ pointed to ‘an international judiciary which might be formed of the now existing Permanent Court of Arbitration, an international court of justice, a permanent commission of inquiry, and an international council of conciliation’.14 La Fontaine argued that petitioning needed to be organised on an unprecedented scale and that the 1899 and 1907 Hague conferences demonstrated its effectiveness.15 Peace activists like La Fontaine continued to present The Hague conferences as the result of – and model for – public agitation and attempted to generate similar support for another conference after the war.

The importance of public engagement in order to pressure government action was a common theme in activist propaganda for The Hague. In August 1916, the League to Abolish War published a pamphlet called ‘After This War Is Over Why Not Abolish All

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15 Ibid.
War At The 3rd Hague Conference?’ The pamphlet emphasised the need for ‘a Hague-Worker’ to be present ‘in every important centre’ to promote The Hague to the public and government authorities.\textsuperscript{16} Three months later, in November 1916, the League to Abolish War produced another pamphlet that further demonstrated their concern with the public’s attitude towards The Hague. The pamphlet acknowledged that the demand for a third Hague Conference to meet to end the war and develop international relations may have been regarded as fanciful or Utopian, but argued that similar ideas to those advocated at The Hague were evident in the statements of leading political figures, such as Arthur Balfour, Edward Grey, Lloyd George, and President Wilson. Wilson’s call for a Universal Association of Nations, the pamphlet argued, could best be fulfilled by the convocation of the Third Hague Conference.\textsuperscript{17} The pamphlet pointed out that statements from political leaders demonstrated that it was not untimely to speak of ways to prevent war. Given the anti-peace-at-any-price rhetoric that existed in 1917, the pamphlet was clearly an attempt to convince people that prominent politicians had normalised the discussion of peace.

A key feature of the debate about the future relevance of The Hague, and something the League to Abolish War emphasised in its pamphlets, was its ability to ensure compliance with the decisions of its courts. The League’s pamphlet in August 1916 claimed that war had become so destructive it was ‘the collective suicide of the human race’, and that in order to abolish war nations needed to bind themselves to submit all disputes to the Hague Tribunal.\textsuperscript{18} The conventions, the pamphlet argued, had been torn to shreds in the current conflict because there had not been sufficient power to enforce compliance. The pamphlet called for an expanded Hague organisation that could use economic force to pressure nations to submit disputes to arbitration and accept the results, and if this failed an international police force at the disposal of the Permanent Executive of the Hague Conference.\textsuperscript{19} Compliance with the decisions of international courts had always been a key point of contention for The Hague, and international law more generally, and became even more prominent during the war as the need to ensure German

\textsuperscript{16} Pamphlet, ‘After This War Is Over Why Not Abolish All War At the 3rd Hague Conference?’, by the League to Abolish War, in International Peace Movements, International Peace Bureau, Box 304, File 4, United Nations Archives, Geneva.
\textsuperscript{17} Pamphlet, ‘For the Abolition of War’, by the League to Abolish War, in International Peace Movements, International Peace Bureau, Box 304, File 4, United Nations Archives, Geneva.
\textsuperscript{18} Pamphlet, ‘After This War Is Over Why Not Abolish All War At the 3rd Hague Conference?’, by the League to Abolish War, in International Peace Movements, International Peace Bureau, Box 304, File 4, United Nations Archives, Geneva.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
adherence to law became a key narrative. The pamphlet was an example of the attempts to convince people that, if modified, The Hague could be a forum for developing and enforcing international law.

A booklet published in May 1916 demonstrated that many still thought The Hague was relevant and would play an important role in the post-war world, but had concerns about its ability to enforce its decisions. This booklet, published on the anniversary of the inauguration of the First Hague Conference, was the result of the Nederlandsche Anti-Oorlog Raad (Dutch Anti-War Council) submitting three questions about The Hague to a number of prominent men and women around the world.20 The questions were:

1. Do you think it desirable and possible that the work of the Hague Conferences shall be continued after the war, so that they may realize what the Czar laid down in his manifesto of the 24th of August 1898 “to seek by means of international discussion the most effectual means of ensuring to all peoples the benefits of a real and durable peace, and, above all, of putting an end to the progressive development of the present armaments”?

2. Do you think it desirable and possible that in connection with the peace-negotiations a World’s Conference shall be held, in which the neutrals shall be represented, a third Hague Conference, which will create international machinery to prevent further wars (periodical Hague Conferences, International Court of Justice, International Court of Conciliation) and which will remove some of the causes of the actual war (by concluding treaties concerning the open door in the colonies, limitation of armaments, freedom of the seas, abolition of secret treaties)?

3. Do you think it desirable and possible that at this third Hague Conference a treaty shall be made to ensure compliance with International Law through joint military or economical measures against the state that violates Law and breaks Peace?21

There were about 100 responses, including ‘for honesty’s sake’ those that were ‘not written in a favourable spirit’.22 The respondents, who were mostly lawyers, politicians and peace activists, appeared in alphabetical order and included Joseph Alexander, member of the Council of the International Peace Bureau and formerly Hon. General

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20 Nederlandsche Anti-Oorlog Raad, Peace Conferences After the War?, Leiden, 1916.
21 Ibid, p. vi.
22 Ibid.
Secretary of the International Law Association, Eduard Bernstein, Member of the Reichstag in Berlin, and Francis Hirst, editor of the *Economist* and special correspondent of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in London. Other well-known contributors were Bertrand Russell, Ramsay MacDonald, Sylvia Pankhurst, James Tryon, and Charles Trevelyan. While the vast majority of the respondents answered ‘yes’ to the first two questions, the third was met with circumspection and, at times, hostility. Rev. C. F. Aked from San Francisco, the chairman of the American Delegation of the Neutral Conference at Stockholm, answered ‘yes’ to question one and two, but to question three said he seriously doubted ‘the wisdom and the morality of the proposal’. In fact, it was the inclusion of this ‘plank’ in the platform of the Anti-Oorlog which had prevented him applying for admission to its membership.

The booklet is a remarkable collection of contemporary opinions on The Hague and demonstrates the support it continued to have amongst those interested in international law. The overwhelming sentiment of the responses is that the war had not demonstrated the futility of The Hague conferences or institutions they created, but that The Hague needed to be expanded and reformed if it was to fulfil its potential. However, the booklet also demonstrates how divisive the issue of compliance was, even amongst those who shared a desire for The Hague to be developed. The war had demonstrated the susceptibility of international law to being broken by nations who judged that the benefits of doing so outweighed the repercussions. The respondents in the booklet reflect the division between those who argued coercion was the only way to ensure adherence to law, and those who argued that the moral imperative to obey law should be enough.

The Hague, however, was not just the subject of elite discussion, and it continued to be a mobilising idea for local organisations. In October 1915, the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union’s (W.C.T.U.) Department of Peace and International Arbitration published a pamphlet with their annual report. The report listed the activities of the organisation around the United States, which included mass meetings to discuss peace, sermons in churches, essay competitions in schools, articles for the mainstream press, books on peace given to libraries, and protests to congress about military preparation. A number of States also reported the observance in schools and churches of

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23 A number of the women involved with the Women’s Congress at The Hague in 1915 also contributed, such as Aletta Jacobs, Chrystal Macmillan and Helena Swanwick.

24 *Peace Conferences After the War?*, p. 3.
‘Hague Day’ on 18 May. The District of Columbia noted that Hague Day ‘had for several years been marked by appropriate exercises in all the public schools, and many ministers gave peace sermons the Sabbath preceding May 18th’. The District of Columbia also reported that for Hague Day in 1915 they ‘printed and distributed twenty-five thousand peace leaflets, one for each child in the Sunday school’. Other states, such as Arkansas, New Jersey and Minnesota, reported similar activities. Hague Day had been celebrated in Britain and the United States throughout the war, as discussed in earlier chapters, and the 1899 and 1907 conferences continued to act as a symbol of peace.

The celebration of Hague Day in the United States can also be viewed in the wider context of the global network of peace organisations, and the vibrant discussion between them is evident in a publication by the Neutral Conference for Continuous Mediation and the annual report of the New South Wales branch of the Peace Society. The publication from the Neutral Conference for Continuous Mediation, based in Stockholm, noted the great disappointment in the ‘failure’ of the United States to take the lead in organising a neutral conference for mediation. It noted that the first Hague Conference convened on 18th May, 1899, and on ‘the anniversary of this epoch-making event’, there would be simultaneous mass meetings held in ‘scores of cities’ throughout neutral Europe and the United States for the purpose of urging the neutral governments to convene a conference for mediation. The report from the New South Wales branch of the Peace Society said the organisation had received letters and literature from peace organisations all over the world, such as the United States, Denmark, and Britain, and that the only public meeting the organisation held in 1916 was to celebrate the anniversary of the Hague Conference in May. The report claimed that the information they had received from around the world suggested that political leaders were beginning to realise the value of The Hague, and to acknowledge that an international tribunal capable of ensuring ‘obedience to its decrees’ was the only security against war. The organisation considered it a cause for celebration

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26 Ibid.
27 Letter from The Neutral Conference For Continuous Mediation Now Sitting at Stockholm, in International Peace Movements, Nippold Collection, Box 117, File 1.1.1, United Nations Archives, Geneva. The letter was addressed to members of the Henry Ford Peace Expedition and ‘other friends’. There is no date on the letter, but given its reference to the Henry Ford Peace Expedition and the Neutral Conference for Continuous Mediation, it is most likely from 1916.
that the wisdom of this remedy to war was ‘slowly sinking into the minds and hearts of men’. The pamphlets demonstrate the exchange of information and ideas amongst peace organisations around the world and the central role The Hague continued to play as a vehicle for change and as a foundational event to be celebrated.

In 1917, the attempts of peace advocates to work together and influence public opinion continued, and their efforts were reported in the mainstream newspapers. In February 1917, the *New York Evening World* printed an article covering a conference of peace workers from a number of organisations. Peace activists like Anna Garlin Spencer, William Hull and Emily Balch attended, and Henri La Fontaine, president of the IPB, gave an address. The conference discussed the need for democratic control of international politics, disarmament and a ‘peace press’. The continued importance of The Hague to the international peace network was demonstrated by an article in the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* about Baron Yoshiro Sakatani. Sakatani, who had recently travelled to Europe, wrote an article for the Japan Peace Society in which he called for a league of six nations to guarantee the peace of the world. The league should consist of Great Britain, the United States, France, Russia, Italy and Japan, and their combined armies and navies would ensure that all conflicts between nations that could not be settled by diplomatic means should be submitted to the international court at The Hague. Under Sakatani’s plan, the combined armed forces of the league would punish any nation that failed to utilise The Hague. That Sakatani’s plan was printed in the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* demonstrates the flow of information between the peace organisations and the mainstream newspapers. This proposal, which was similar in basic intent to the ideas of Roosevelt, also demonstrates the continued relevance of The Hague in 1917.

Calls for further Hague conferences to take place had appeared in British and American newspapers throughout the war, often in response to statements from peace activists like Deerin Call or from prominent political figures like Taft and Roosevelt. The two ex-presidents loomed large over the public discussion of the post-war international order: Roosevelt had outlined plans for a great-power league as soon as the war had started, and Taft became the lead activist for the League to Enforce Peace, which grew to

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be one of the largest pro-league organisations in the world. Although their visions of the post-war world differed in a number of respects, they both suggested The Hague had an important role to play in the development of international organisation. Both stressed the importance of an international court, but they disagreed on the manner in which such a court’s decisions should be enforced. The plans of people like Taft, Roosevelt and the women at The Hague Congress joined the public discussion about the structure of international relations that had taken place in British and American newspapers since the start of the war.

Wilson’s Rise to Prominence

The period from December 1916 through to April 1917 saw the nature of the discussion about the structure of international relations change. This period saw Wilson’s ideas and proposals come to dominate the public discussion of the post-war international order, and Wilson’s vision did not include The Hague. Wilson articulated his plans for the future – vague as they still were at this stage – in a number of speeches and notes to belligerents from late-1916 onwards. International organisation featured in these statements, but notions of legalism were replaced with more nebulous concepts like ‘freedom’ and ‘justice’. In his note requesting all belligerents to offer concrete peace terms in December 1916, Wilson said the objects of the statesmen on all sides of the conflict were virtually the same: they wanted to protect the rights of their people and were prepared to consider the creation of ‘a league of nations to insure peace and justice throughout the world’. Wilson stated that the American people would ‘cooperate in attaining such goals’ when the war ended. In his famous address to a joint session of Congress on January 22, 1917, Wilson stressed the need for ‘peace without victory’. He called for an end to military and economic alliances, for the limitation of armaments, for freedom of the seas, and for the right of all peoples to choose the governments under which they would live.

32 For Taft and Roosevelt’s activism during the war, see Wertheim, passim; Patterson, ‘The United States and the Origins of the World Court’, passim.
33 Wertheim, p. 804; Mazower, pp. 120–121.
34 There is a vast historiography on Wilson and the development of his political vision. This thesis engages with the newspaper discussion of Wilson’s public statements rather than offering a new interpretation of Wilson’s ideas. See note 5 on page 180 for some of the key texts on Wilson.
35 Doenecke, p. 230.
36 Ibid.
And he called for a ‘covenant of cooperative peace’, an international organisation that alone could foster and ensure ‘an organised common peace’.38

Wilson’s language was similar to those advocating the expansion of The Hague machinery, but the absence of an international court was a key difference. Wilson refused to endorse the calls for regular international conferences to codify international law and, David Patterson argues, ‘displayed a particular aversion to the internationalists’ dream of a world court’.39 An international court was central to The Hague idea, but in Wilson’s view The Hague was ‘old world’ and a symbol of legalism, two things he opposed.40

The American press reprinted Wilson’s speeches and notes to the belligerents in full, and the newspapers were filled with the discussion of Wilson’s ideas. On 23 January, for example, the St Louis Post-Dispatch and New York Evening World both gave front page coverage to Wilson’s speech in Congress the day before.41 The same day the New York Evening World’s editorial claimed Wilson had espoused ‘nothing less than the greatest plan – though still but partly formulated – that civilisation has yet evolved out of the bitterness and tragedy of experience’.42 Prior to 1917, The Hague would invariably be referenced whenever ideas of international organisation were discussed. This changed during the early months of 1917 as Wilson came to dominate discussion of the post-war world. The omission of The Hague and international courts from Wilson’s plans meant they also began to disappear from the public discussion.

Predictions of what form international relations would take after the conflict’s conclusion had appeared in British and American newspapers since the start of the war, and a key feature of such prognostications was the belief that some sort of international organisation would be created. What form such an organisation would take and how it would operate was debated, but as the New Statesman’s review of Henry Brailsford’s book A League of Nations reveals, there was little doubt one would be brought into existence at the end of the war.43 The reviewer claims Brailsford argues that international relations could be based on either force or law and justice, and that some sort of League

38 Zieger, p. 48.
of Nations, as proposed by President Wilson, was ‘the sole means of attaining the latter conditions’. The review discusses Brailsford’s account of the immense difficulties such an organisation would face, and notes that other reviewers have claimed the book pointed ‘to the impossible utopianism of internationalism’. However, the review also argues that Brailsford’s book demonstrates that despite the immense difficulties of organising and running some sort of League of Nations, there was no alternative.

Calls for an international collective, often referred to as a ‘league’, had become a common feature of American political discourse during the war, and this was replicated in the nation’s newspapers. In his response to the German declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917, which was reprinted in the New York Evening World and the St Louis Post-Dispatch, Taft argued that the policy removed any illusion that the United States would be able to remain isolated from the war and again called for the creation of a ‘league to enforce peace’. In his statement, Taft discussed the changing nature of the international order and the duty of the United States to become part of an international organisation. The United States, Taft claimed, had a duty to themselves and ‘to the world to help it protect itself against the horrors of another war’. Taft and the LEP proclaimed the need for regular international conferences to be held in order to formulate and codify international law. It was this focus on international law that Wilson disliked, although he publicly expressed approval of the LEP’s broader project.

The ideas of Taft, Roosevelt and other proponents of international organisation were to a large degree subsumed by Wilson as he came to dominate the discussion of the post-war international order. The St Louis Post-Dispatch produced extensive analysis of Wilson’s speech in early February. An editorial argued that Wilson was correct to assert that the principles underlying American politics were in ‘accord with the ideas of peace’. The editorial noted that despite Wilson’s noble intent, it was difficult to make the ideas of sovereignty and independence fit with structures created to ensure world

45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
49 St Louis Post-Dispatch, ‘Analysis of the President’s Call for World Peace’, 4 February 1917, p. 10. The article starts on the front page and continues across multiple pages.
peace. The newspaper thought ‘ultimate government by a judicial tribunal’ was the main object of the world court movement, and that Wilson was right to not commit himself to such a goal despite his inclinations towards the plans of the LEP. The editorial went on to question how a league of peace could create machinery to ensure peaceful relations given the irregular growth and development of nations worldwide. While it expressed uncertainty that this would ever be possible, the editorial noted that Wilson had in any case revived the belief held by many that future wars could be prevented. This extensive and well-considered piece made no reference to The Hague machinery for the pacific settlement of disputes, and only referenced the conferences as an example of the diplomatic difficulties attendant on international conferences.

The St Louis Post-Dispatch’s editorial the next day continued to discuss the structure of the post-war world and Wilson’s role in shaping it. The editorial described Wilson’s note to neutral nations as part of a move ‘towards a league of nations to enforce just peace and preserve the fruits of civilization’. The end of the war would see a ‘union of nations joined to prevent lawless warfare and to enforce justice and liberty’. The editorial demonstrates how the language of civilisation was coming to be attached to international organisations, and it presented such organisations as key to preventing war and spreading justice. Despite the appeal to justice, there was no reference to an international court or international law.

Despite calls for greater American involvement in international affairs from people like Taft and Roosevelt, Wilson’s program was espoused in the newspapers with much greater vigour. An editorial in the New York Evening World argued that Wilson’s second inaugural speech, in March, was a call for Americans to recognise that the nation had ‘new duties and responsibilities in a disordered world’. This editorial is an example of what John Milton Cooper Jr. called ‘the shock of recognition’, which was the realisation of Americans during the First World War that they were involved in international politics whether they liked it or not. The editorial in the New York Evening World agreed that the United States would have to play a more expansive role in

50 St Louis Post-Dispatch, ‘Analysis of the President’s Call for World Peace’, 4 February 1917, p. 10.
52 Ibid.
international affairs and thought Wilson’s speech was ‘an impressive exposition’ of the ‘new Americanism’ that this entailed.\textsuperscript{55} The editorial demonstrates the remarkable change in the discussion about the United States’ role in the world that occurred during the First World War. It also shows the extent to which Wilson had come to be associated with American internationalism long before he made his 14 points speech.\textsuperscript{56} As Wilson rose to prominence in the discussion of post-war international relations, the number of references to The Hague in British and American newspapers diminished.

It was not lost on the British newspapers that Wilson’s proposals, such as they were at this stage, signified a fundamental change in American interaction with the world. After Wilson’s second inaugural speech in March, an editorial in the \textit{Daily Express} claimed that a new era was beginning in American history. Isolation was no longer possible, since the American citizen was now ‘a citizen of the world’.\textsuperscript{57} Wilson, the editorial claimed, would not just take part in the rescue of civilisation from the ‘powers of darkness’, but would play a key role in ‘the reconstruction’ that would prevent future assaults.\textsuperscript{58} People in Britain now identified Wilson not just as someone who could assist them in the war, but as a key figure for shaping the post-war world.

Wilson’s prominence only increased after the United States’ declaration of war, and his speech to Congress in early April generated a considerable response in newspapers in Britain and the United States. Newspapers in both countries reproduced Wilson’s speech in full and provided articles and editorials analysing its contents. The speech was important not just because of American entry into the war, but because it offered a clearer vision of why the war was being fought and what form of international society would emerge at its conclusion. Wilson emphasised democracy and justice as the guiding principles for American participation in the war. In a note to the American press that was reprinted on the front page in the \textit{Daily Chronicle}, Herbert Asquith, Britain’s recently deposed Prime Minister, stated that the fundamental issues which were at stake in the war had never been stated ‘with more precision or with a greater elevation of

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Daily Express}, ‘America’s Hour’, 6 March 1917, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
thought and language’ than in Wilson’s address. Asquith claimed that the ‘animating motive’ for the Allies – and now the United States – was the vindication of the human rights which were the common interest of the family of ‘civilised societies’. Wilson’s speeches seemed to provide clarification of the issues at the heart of the conflict and soothed the doubts a number of people in Britain continued to have about the purpose of the war.

A number of British newspapers propagated the depiction of Wilson as an ‘American prophet of a liberal future’ fighting to reform ‘the corrupt old world’. The *Daily Chronicle* was effusive in its praise for Wilson and his proposed League of Nations. Wilson’s aims for the war, an article in the *Daily Chronicle* argued, were ‘to vindicate the principles of peace and justice’ against selfish autocratic government. The League proposed by Wilson would be ‘a concert of purpose and action’ to ensure those lofty principles were observed. The article noted, in reference to the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, that ‘the wonderful things’ that had recently happened in Russia meant it would now be a fit partner for such a League. An editorial in the *Daily Chronicle* claimed that Wilson ‘carries our eyes forward to a further ideal – not the saving of democracy from extinction, but its enthronement as the governing principle among all the independent peoples’. Such a view clearly resonated with the newspaper’s liberalism and provided a rallying cry for British participation in the war. Indeed, the editorial presented Wilson as a sort of messiah and claimed it was no ordinary message that the President had sent from the New World to the Old: it was ‘a banner to fight by; a charter to stand upon; a gospel to be preached to all nations’. Like other forms of gospel, the newspaper stated that the President’s speech should not merely be re-read, but should be re-read ‘again and again’. Although a vast array of individuals and organisations had

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60 Ibid.
61 Tooze, p. 17.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
promoted some form of multinational league, Wilson was clearly assuming a key position in the discussion of its character, and was shaping the terms of the debate.68

Wilson’s plans resonated with a number of different groups in Britain, as is evident from a single edition of the Daily Chronicle. On 10 April, 1917, the newspaper printed an article about the Independent Labour Party conference, in the opening statements of which a conference participant claimed that Britain was actually fighting the war for the dismemberment of Turkey and the German colonies. The opening address noted the prevalent fear that a policy of annexation and dismemberment would follow the war, expressed sympathy for Wilson’s international policy, and hoped Britain would agree to the ‘unselfish aims’ of the United States President.69 On the same day the article about the ILP conference was printed, a letter to the editor of the Daily Chronicle discussed the implications of Wilson’s proposals for the Prussian autocracy. The correspondent claimed that Wilson’s speech demonstrated the belief that no peace negotiations could be entered into with autocratic regimes as no such government could be trusted to keep faith with ‘the steadfast concert of peace’ that they looked forward to after the war.70 Wilson’s speech and his proposals for an international organisation based on principles of democracy had clearly influenced people’s views on the nature of the war. Indeed, the newspapers reveal that it was in the early months of 1917 that Wilson came to be regarded as a leader of global stature, rather than in 1918 after the enunciation of his 14 Points.71

Debating Wilson’s Ideas and the Relevance of The Hague

Although The Hague had often been invoked as a symbol of civilisation during the war, it was not strongly associated with democracy. Protecting or enabling the spread of democracy and self-determination had not been a feature of the discussions at The Hague in 1899 or 1907. The deliberations at The Hague had been focussed on regulating relationships between nations, rather than fundamentally changing their political

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68 David Monger notes that a number of groups in Britain promoted the idea of a League of Nations during the war, and provides an excellent account of how the NWAC adopted Wilson’s ideas in their propaganda; Monger, pp. 198–213.
71 Tooze argues that it was ‘in January 1917 that the American President first staked an explicit claim to world leadership’; Tooze, p. 53.
structure. The women’s Congress in 1915 had produced a vision of The Hague that presented its courts and conferences as potential vehicles for democracy, but newspaper reporting suggests that The Hague continued to be associated with international courts and the regulation of warfare. International courts did not feature in Wilson’s vision, in which democracy could be served by the concert of nations he proposed, rather than by The Hague.

Wilson was not universally admired in the British press, and a number of articles criticised Wilson and his plans. The Daily Express in particular took umbrage at the adulation Wilson received, and produced a number of editorials criticising the United States for taking so long to enter the war and arguing that Britain and the Allies had already been fighting for the ideals Wilson was promoting. An article in the Daily Express claimed that France, Britain, Russia and Belgium already constituted a league to enforce peace and that the United States would be belatedly joining it, not creating it.\(^72\) Indeed, an editorial in the Daily Express in early April said the United States would ‘do itself the honour’ of finally entering the war ‘on the side of freedom and civilisation’.\(^73\) The editorial pointed out that the Allies had ‘been fighting to preserve the great principles enshrined in the American Constitution’ for the last two and a half years.\(^74\) Two days later an editorial discussing Wilson’s attitude to the war reiterated the criticism that the Allies had been fighting and dying for the cause of civilisation for years.\(^75\) Another editorial claimed that Britain and France had stood ‘shoulder to shoulder’ in the defence of democracy, while the United States had failed to understand ‘the meaning or the necessity of the fight’.\(^76\) The Daily Express was not against the United States’ entry into the war, or the idea of a league of nations, but it was critical of particular war aims being identified with Wilson. The newspaper was keen to point out that Britain had been fighting for democracy all along.

Wilson’s call for ‘peace without victory’ was also met with scepticism in the British press. The Daily Chronicle printed a series of articles based on Asquith and Lloyd George discussing the necessity of Prussian militarism being destroyed. In early February, Asquith praised Wilson’s speech but, in the words of the Daily Chronicle,

\(^72\) Daily Express, ‘America’s Part in the War’, 23 March 1917, p. 3.
\(^73\) Daily Express, ‘Another Nail’, 2 April 1917, p. 2.
\(^74\) Ibid.
\(^75\) Daily Express, ‘The End of Autocracy’, 4 April 1917, p. 2.
‘gave crushing reasons for rejecting’ the idea of peace without victory.⁷⁷ Germany, Asquith said, could not be trusted to adhere to any protocols that might be agreed to, and Britain could only be content with ‘a victorious peace’.⁷⁸ An editorial in the *Daily Chronicle* expressed its agreement with Asquith and argued that a Europe governed by ‘public right’ could not be achieved until Germany had learnt ‘that foul crimes against humanity do not pay’.⁷⁹ In a speech a few days later, Lloyd George praised Asquith for saying that peace without victory was no peace at all and agreed that it was necessary for the Allies to destroy Prussia’s military power.⁸⁰ The *Daily Chronicle* printed a debate in the House of Commons in late February, in which Arthur Ponsonby claimed that the war was being fought for the aggrandisement of the British Empire, and that the desire to destroy Germany masked a desire to swallow up their colonies. Bonar Law replied that war had been forced on Britain, and that they were in fact fighting to protect themselves by destroying German militarism.⁸¹ It was no longer enough for Germany to be forced back into the fold of international law and punished for the nation’s transgressions; autocratic regimes were no longer compatible with international law at all. The discussion of Britain’s war aims had also permeated popular culture, as an advertisement for tobacco that appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* and *Daily Express* demonstrates. The advertisement played on the notion of a premature peace by saying ‘peace worth having: a pipe of Cope’s Bond of Union’.⁸² The destruction of German militarism had become a key reason for continued British participation in the war, and the British newspapers expressed scepticism towards attempts to end the war that would leave the Prussian autocracy intact.

Wilson’s call for a peace without victory riled many in Britain, and the newspapers quickly highlighted the incompatibility of the Prussian autocracy with Wilson’s proposed League of Nations.⁸³ An editorial in the *Daily Chronicle* claimed that the revolution in Russia and the entry of the United States into the war had sharpened what had always been the central issue of the war: ‘the issue between liberty and

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⁷⁸ Ibid.
⁷⁹ *Daily Chronicle*, ‘Mr Asquith and the War’, 2 February 1917, p. 4.
⁸⁰ *Daily Chronicle*, ‘Mr Lloyd George’s Speech’, 5 February 1917, p. 7.
⁸³ There was also considerable debate among British politicians about the value of a league of nations, a study of which can be found in Peter Yearwood, *Guarantee of Peace: The League of Nations in British Policy, 1914–1925*, Oxford, 2008.
despotism’. The editorial argued that Wilson had identified the eradication of autocracy as ‘necessary for a true World Concert’. Another editorial in the *Daily Chronicle* said Wilson had indicated in his speech that Germany had been fighting against American ideals, and that the Allies had been fighting on their behalf. Wilson, according to the editorial, had come to recognise that the war was ‘a common struggle’ in which all the great democracies were concerned. The British newspapers had expressed concerns about the concessions the Prussians might be able to extract at the peace conference that would take place after the war. Wilson’s insistence on democracy allowed the British newspapers to present the current German (Prussian) leadership as incompatible with the post-war world.

Wilson’s rise to prominence also generated concern in the British press about the role the US President might have at the post-war conference. In February, the *New Statesman* expressed concerns that Wilson did not really want a League of Peace but ‘a new balance of power in Europe, which would enable America to be arbiter’. The article, published two months before the United States entered the war, suggested that American influence at the peace negotiations following the conflict might not be in British interests. The *Daily Express* also expressed concern that Britain was being usurped in the global order by the upstart United States. Britain, a *Daily Express* editorial argued, was a ‘pioneer of civilization’ and needed to ensure its prominent role in global affairs continued after the war. While many in Britain had been persuaded that their nation’s participation in some sort of international organisation may be in the interest of peace, David Monger argues that most Britons still presumed the post-war world would ‘centre upon Britain’. The British newspapers utilised aspects of Wilson’s rhetoric to reinforce the need to defeat Germany, while remaining hesitant on significant changes to global power structures.

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85 Ibid.
87 Apprehension about Wilson’s rise to prominence was an element of broader British suspicions about the ‘long-term rise of American power’; Tooze, p. 48.
90 Monger, p. 198.
A number of Americans shared British concerns about the greater involvement of the United States in European politics.\footnote{Neiberg argues that few Americans in 1917 ‘envisioned a permanent role for the United States in a postwar Europe’; Neiberg, \textit{Path to War}, p. 211. An examination of the range of American objections to the United States’ declaration of war and greater involvement in European politics can be found in Kennedy, pp. 20–24.} William Stone, a Democratic Senator for Missouri, became something of a figurehead for the opposition to armed neutrality and then to greater American involvement in European politics. Stone caught the attention of the \textit{Daily Chronicle}’s United States correspondent, Frank Dilnot, who called the Senator ‘a leader of pacifist obstruction’.\footnote{\textit{Daily Chronicle}, ‘America Awaits a Clarion Call to Arms’, 2 April 1917, p. 1.} Dilnot pointed out that Stone had come to accept the need for the United States to fight Germany, but was reluctant to involve the United States in European politics. Stone had argued against the arming of American merchant vessels and was one of six Senators to vote against the United States declaration of war against Germany. Stone’s actions generated criticism in the \textit{St Louis Post-Dispatch}, and in March a letter to the editor called Stone ‘anti-American’ for his opposition to arming merchant ships.\footnote{\textit{St Louis Post-Dispatch}, ‘Senator Stone Anti-American’, 16 March 1917, p. 4.} The letter claimed that Stone was unable to see the difference between British and German conduct at sea, even though the German use of floating mines set adrift was clearly contrary to the Hague Conventions.\footnote{Ibid.} Clearly, The Hague remained important to some Americans, and violations of the Conventions were a crucial means of differentiating belligerent conduct and identifying who deserved the United States’ support.

A number of organisations and individuals initially thought The Hague was compatible with Wilson’s plans. \textit{Internationaal}, the publication of the WILPF, congratulated Wilson on his 22 January speech and claimed the ideas he expressed were the same as those proposed at the women’s congress at The Hague in 1915.\footnote{\textit{Internationaal}, Vol II., No. 1, (January-February-March 1917), p. 67.} Henri La Fontaine wrote a letter to Wilson on 7 February in which he expressed ‘gratitude and elation’ in response to the president’s address in the senate. La Fontaine referenced the efforts of the peace movement during the war, but said Wilson’s words were of great importance due to the president’s much greater reach. Indeed, La Fontaine called Wilson the ‘lead peacemaker’ in the world and asked him to call an international conference of neutrals. Wilson’s bold initiative, La Fontaine claimed, would have been the highest reward for those who a century earlier had started the peace movement which culminated...
in the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907. Those conferences brought people closer to a world organisation and Wilson’s plans, La Fontaine suggested, were part of the same programme.\footnote{Letter from Henri La Fontaine to President Woodrow Wilson, 7 February 1917, in International Peace Movements, International Peace Bureau, Box 267, File 2, United Nations Archives, Geneva.}

The lack of reference to an international court in Wilson’s speeches and proclamations about the post-war world did not prevent people identifying similarities between the American president’s vision and the work of The Hague. An editorial in the \textit{Liverpool Echo} situated Wilson within the ‘centuries old’ tradition of statesmen’s attempts to achieve universal peace.\footnote{\textit{Liverpool Echo}, ‘The Dreams of Peace’, 18 April 1917, p. 4.} The editorial presented Wilson’s ideas as the latest incarnation of Henri IV’s plans for a federated Europe and Nicholas II’s convocation of the Hague conferences. The editorial argued that The Hague had ‘laid the foundations on which a noble structure may yet be built’ and that the auspices were favourable that Wilson could build it.\footnote{Ibid.} A letter to the editor of the \textit{New Statesman} discussed the debate about whether the American constitution and Monroe Doctrine prevented the United States being part of organisations like the League of Nations. The correspondent argued that the American delegations to the Hague conferences had specifically stated that their agreement to the conventions ‘in no way bound the United States to depart from its policy of non-interference in European affairs’.\footnote{\textit{New Statesman}, ‘The American Constitution’, 17 March 1917, p. 563.} The letter claimed this demonstrated the ability of the United States to be a member of an international organisation such as that Wilson had proposed, while respecting their own constitution.

The minimisation of international law’s importance in Wilson’s speeches did not prevent others linking its development to the President’s ideas of a league of nations. On 15 April, two weeks after the United States’ declaration of war, the \textit{St Louis Post-Dispatch} printed an extensive front page article on the need for international law to be rebuilt after the war. The article discussed the ideas of Frederic Coudert, a lawyer and expert on international law. Coudert argued that the difficulty for international law was ‘not so much that its terms were uncertain, but that there was no one behind it to enforce it’.\footnote{\textit{St Louis Post-Dispatch}, ‘Rebuilding Law of Nations the Greatest After-War Task, Says Noted Authority’, 15 April 1917, p. 1.} The war had proved this, since Germany had violated the Hague Conventions
simply because it felt strong enough to do so. Coudert claimed to have been told by Edward Grey that he would never want to enter ‘a body like The Hague Tribunal, to lay down rules for the arbitration of future disputes, or to place restrictions on the practices of war, with any nation which is not willing and able to back up such rules with armed force’. Coudert argued that the English speaking nations, France, and a reorganised Russia could form a league that supported the principles of international law. That such an article appeared in the middle of the front page suggests the level of interest in this subject, but it also demonstrates the attempts by some to reconcile the idea of a league of nations with older institutions of international law like The Hague.

American opinion towards the United States’ involvement in the war was diverse, and The Hague was still seen by some as a means of avoiding it. The *St Louis Post-Dispatch* printed a full page advertisement from the Emergency Peace Federation in New York asking people in the American West to tell their Congressman to oppose United States’ entry into the war. The advertisement said the West had voted for Wilson in the recent election because he had kept the country out of the war and that despite the provocations there were still honourable alternatives to war. One of those alternatives, the advertisement claimed, was a joint commission ‘in accordance with the agreements adopted at The Hague Convention’. An editorial in the same edition, however, complained about the pacifists’ talk of peace and argued there would be no peace until Germany had been defeated. Only then, the editorial stated, could there be talk of a ‘just peace’. What such a peace would consist of was not discussed. The newspaper reveals how peace activists continued to view The Hague as a viable means of stopping the conflict but their attempts to generate public support were countered by growing editorial support for American participation in the war.

As the American war effort and the accompanying nationalist fervour gathered steam, The Hague and other attempts to prevent war were derided. Two weeks after the United States had declared war, an editorial in the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* complained about the inadequacies of a volunteer army and quoted British General Maude, who in

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103 *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, ‘How to Unify Americans’, 30 March 1917, p. 16.
104 Ford argues that the declaration of war created a ‘combustible atmosphere’ across the United States; Ford, p. 57. For a discussion on the American public’s increasing bellicosity in 1917, see Neiberg, *Path to War*, pp. 221–229.
1907 claimed that ‘the peace-at-any-price party and Hague conference enthusiasts will have much blood to answer for before many years are over’. The editorial presented The Hague as symbolic of the pacifist idealism that had prevented the development of a strong United States army. Pacifism was also mocked in a cartoon in the *New York Evening World* in which a man is eaten by an alligator:

The cartoon was a clear expression of the contemporary belief in the United States that appeals to arbitration would not protect them from the voracious European powers. Similarly, an editorial in the *New York Evening World* called for a selective draft and argued that even the ‘super-pacifist’ Henry Ford now agreed that militarism could only be crushed by militarism and that this was the ‘spirit of Americans’ at that time. The anti-peace sentiment that had existed to varying degrees in Britain since 1914 was now becoming visible in the United States. Wilson’s emphasis on democracy, the atmosphere

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105 *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, ‘The Volunteer Fetish’, 14 April 1917, p. 4.
of militarism generated by the declaration of war, and its association with pacifism, combined to push The Hague out of the newspaper discussion.

The four main newspapers examined in this chapter were filled with references to Wilson and extensively discussed his ideas about the international order. While the newspapers contained numerous references to The Hague conventions that regulated the conduct of war, as the previous chapter demonstrated, there were far fewer articles that discussed what role The Hague should play in the post-war international order. Search figures from the online newspaper databases further demonstrate how Wilson and the idea of a League of Nations had supplanted The Hague in the discussion of peaceful international relations. A keyword search for The Hague during the first five months of 1917 in the *Los Angeles Times* returns 69 articles, however, the majority of these articles are about the assessment of whether particular acts have violated the conventions, or have only been identified by the search engine because the news item was sent through the city of The Hague. Only a few articles discuss The Hague as a mechanism for achieving peace or being central to its maintenance after the war.\(^{108}\) In stark contrast to the handful of articles that referenced The Hague’s potential role in future international organisations, a keyword search for League of Nations during the same months returns 87 articles.\(^{109}\) This is a dramatic shift for a newspaper that printed a number of articles in the early months of the conflict about the role The Hague should play in regulating relations between states in order to prevent war.\(^{110}\)

In the first months of 1917 the structure of international relations was at the forefront of British and American news reporting. How international affairs should be structured and what role the United States should play was discussed with a high degree of sophistication on newspapers’ front pages, editorials and letters to the editor. The discussion drew on the ideas of The Hague conferences and can be seen as the continuation of the international forum created by the Tsar’s Rescript in 1898. Woodrow Wilson’s circumvention of The Hague and international law subtly but significantly changed the nature of this public discussion. Even organisations that had previously promoted The Hague began to shift their focus to Wilson and the broad principles he

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\(^{109}\) Similar numbers can be found in the *Manchester Guardian*, where The Hague as a vehicle for peace is referenced only five times while a search for League of Nations returns 93 articles.

\(^{110}\) See Chapter 3.
advocated. In June 1917, Harvey Haskell, the secretary to the Director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s Intercourse and Education division, wrote a letter to Henri Golay in which he stated that the Endowment stood ‘exactly for that kind of a peace which is based upon the principles outlined in President Wilson’s message’.

Such a peace did not necessarily preclude the use of The Hague altogether, but it is clear that Wilson and the ideal of democracy now dominated the discussion of how to achieve peaceful international relations.

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9. Conclusion

The Hague’s marginalisation in the public discussion of internationalism that occurred in Britain and the United States after Wilson’s rise to international prominence belies its importance to that conversation during much of the war. What is abundantly clear from wartime newspaper reporting on both sides of the Atlantic is that The Hague featured prominently in the press discourse, and continued to matter to the British and American public in ways that historians have not previously recognised. Sheehan’s claim that ‘in the face of the rising tide of violence that would inundate Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, the few weeks at The Hague disappear from view, drowned in the blood of millions’, reveals the problem of assessing The Hague – and the First World War – as part of a long-term narrative. Contemporaries did not experience – or try to make sense of – the conflict as the first shots in a century of political turmoil and bloodshed; to them it was an anomaly, and they only had the recent political context in which to try and understand it. The Hague had been a prominent part of the pre-war political landscape, and it remained very much in view for Britons and Americans during the war, as newspaper references to its conventions and institutions reveals. The persistent references to The Hague during the war demonstrate how entrenched it had become in the Anglo-American understanding of war and peace. Contemporaries acknowledged that The Hague was imperfect for preventing and regulating conflict, but also recognised its unique value as a framework for discussing appropriate ways of conducting war and averting it in the future.

Although it had a multitude of meanings, the newspapers primarily discussed The Hague as a body of treaty law intended to restrain the destructive forces of war, and as a seat of international organisation to promote the peaceful resolution of disputes. The newspapers demonstrate how receptive people were to the former, and how contested the idea of the latter was. Newspapers such as the Daily Mail, for example, frequently proclaimed states’ obligation to adhere to The Hague’s laws of war, but derided the ability of its institutions, such as the PCA, to maintain peace. For conservative newspapers like the Daily Mail, nations remained the primary actors in world affairs, and

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1 Sheehan, p. 26.
international organisations would not constrain them. Newspapers’ political worldview and national context dictated their discussion of The Hague’s role in the development of arbitration, international law, and multinational organisations; however, the idea that The Hague was an agreement amongst civilised states that war should be conducted in a particular manner seemed to be acceptable to newspapers across the political spectrum.

By 1914, The Hague had become entrenched in the public discussion as the appropriate framework to assess conduct during conflict, and the British and American newspapers reveal that this remained the case throughout the Great War. The newspapers referred to The Hague in their discussion of the treatment of prisoners of war in the same manner in 1917 as they did in 1914. Newspapers acknowledged that belligerents had likely violated some of The Hague’s conventions on the treatment of captured soldiers, but this resulted in widespread calls to adhere to the laws, not to ignore or abandon them. Likewise, newspapers used The Hague to assess – and predict – the conduct and treatment of neutrals throughout the conflict. The newspaper coverage suggests that people sought ways to make sense of the conflict – which was unlike anything experienced before – and viewed The Hague as a tool not just to assess states’ conduct, but to predict what might happen next. Apparent in newspapers’ use of The Hague to predict states’ conduct, is an attempt to provide a sense of structure to a world in turmoil.

The Hague conventions appeared to be outdated in the face of rapidly developing military technology, but the principles that underpinned them proved resilient. Newspaper discussion of the war reveals contemporaries’ belief that armed forces had a responsibility to avoid inflicting unnecessary suffering on their opposition and on civilians; and this remained the case even if a particular act or piece of military technology was not explicitly prohibited by The Hague. Appeals for ‘the spirit’ if not ‘the letter’ of The Hague to be respected demonstrate the extent to which the conventions had become associated with the idea that war should be conducted with restraint. That such appeals were made throughout the conflict shows the resilience of this idea, and the resistance of contemporaries to the emerging ‘dynamic of destruction’. The newspapers reveal a public discussion in which the radicalisation of war was not uncritically accepted, and The Hague was used to present an alternative vision of how the conflict should be conducted.

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2 Kramer, p. 68.
Newspapers’ discussion of whether states’ conduct adhered to The Hague also reveals contemporaries’ views on the values at stake in the war. The Hague acted as a touchstone for claims about civilisation; certain acts needed to adhere to the underlying sentiment of the conventions to be considered civilised. This was particularly evident in British concerns about their armed forces’ adherence to The Hague, and whether German violations of the conventions justified reprisals in kind. British newspapers used violations of The Hague to present Germany as a rogue state, one that had fallen from the ranks of civilised nations. In contrast to Germany’s violation of The Hague, British adherence to the conventions buttressed their claims to be fighting for civilisation.

References to civilisation also permeated the American newspapers’ coverage of the war, and they suggested that the United States’ adherence to The Hague’s rules demonstrated the nation’s position as an exemplar of law. During the period of neutrality the American newspapers proclaimed the need for belligerents to adhere to The Hague’s rules for civilised conduct; Germany’s failure to do so was then presented as a key reason for the United States’ declaration of war.

The debates about civilisation demonstrate that a more sophisticated discussion of the war took place in British newspapers than historians acknowledge, and that the wartime press has been neglected as a useful source-base. Because historians’ focus has fallen on atrocity stories and misleading reports from the battlefront, the British newspapers’ animated discussion of the war’s conduct and meaning have been neglected. British newspapers facilitated a vibrant discussion about the war, and their coverage reveals the public’s sophisticated engagement with the way in which the conflict was being conducted and what the international order might look like after it had finished. The widespread patriotism that undoubtedly existed in wartime Britain did not preclude Britons actively discussing why they were at war and how a civilised people – such as themselves – should conduct it.

The American newspapers’ references to The Hague reveal a similarly vibrant public discussion. The newspapers examined in this study suggest that – from the outset – Americans had a more extensive and sophisticated engagement with the conduct and meaning of the war than historians suggest. The assessment of how the war was being conducted and what the United States’ role in the post-war world might be were not just the subject of discussion for the American political elite. The newspapers reveal the American public’s awareness that the international order would not be the same when the
conflict finished, and their engagement with the debate about the appropriate role for the United States in the new global context. The American public’s reaction to the formation of the League of Nations and creation of the World Court needs to be understood in the context of the extensive engagement with ideas of international organisation that was evident in newspapers’ discussion of The Hague from 1899 to the end of the war.

The British and American press engagement with The Hague also reveals the circulation of ideas between newspapers and organisations promoting peace and arbitration. Throughout the war, newspapers summarised the discussions at peace groups’ meetings and printed the contents of their pamphlets. Prominent groups like the League to Enforce Peace and the Union of Democratic Control have received historians’ attention; however, the newspapers reveal that these organisations were part of a much broader conversation, the contours of which had been significantly shaped in the years before the war. The political elites – of whom these groups mostly consisted – did not have a monopoly on the discussion of international organisation in Britain and the United States. In both countries The Hague was discussed by a variety of voices and in a number of different contexts, such as editorials, letters to the editor, and joke sections. That the references to The Hague often appeared without explicatory information demonstrates the newspapers’ assumption that their readers knew what was meant, and demonstrates the extent to which The Hague had permeated the discussion of war, peace and international organisation. The newspapers reveal that ideas of how the international order could be structured had been prominent in Britain and the United States well before the discussions began after Versailles.

The newspaper coverage demonstrates how people in Britain and the United States – when confronted with a global conflict – drew on an established language of war and peace which came from The Hague. The proceedings and conventions of the Hague conferences of 1899 and 1907 gave the public conversation about war and peace a coherency that continued throughout the war. Despite the conflict occurring on a scale and in a manner unforeseen by the conferences’ delegates, Britons and Americans turned to the established framework The Hague provided to understand it. The ideas underpinning the conferences and conventions remained relevant because they were seen as expressions of civilisation, something Britain and the United States claimed to represent. Examining British and American newspapers’ references to The Hague allows
us to recapture the sophisticated contemporary debates about the war’s meaning and conduct, which have largely been omitted from historians’ accounts of the conflict.
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