

# The Costs of War to Occupied Countries

**John Tepper Marlin**

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The high cost to the lives of occupied civilians explains why resistance grows. In World War I, Holland was neutral and at the outset of the Second World War the Dutch were prepared again to be neutral. The Nazis bombed much of Rotterdam into rubble in May 1940 and threatened to move on to Amsterdam. The shock and awe brought Holland, completely surrounded by German forces, to surrender after just five days.

At first resistance was weak, however, five years later the Dutch animosity to the occupying Germans was furious. As a boy I saw and felt the anger when my Dutch mother and grandmother took us to Holland in 1949 to visit our many Dutch relatives, most of whom were still grieving. Concrete Nazi bunkers were still there. An estimated 158,000 Dutch civilians were the victims of genocide or reprisals; another 16,000 died of starvation in the winter before liberation - overall, about 2.4 percent of the pre-war population. I was told that some Germans were so clueless about Dutch feelings that they brought their families to visit the homes where they were billeted during the war, and were dismayed at the anger with which they were greeted.

I grew up with stories of the Dutch Resistance and my mother, Hilda van Stockum, wrote about it from the perspective of two Dutch boys living in the family windmill east of Leiden, in her book *The Winged Watchman*. It won the Brotherhood award of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. The book starts with a ten-year-old boy wondering whether there ever could have been a time when sugar beets were fed to pigs and people threw away potato parings and apple cores. He had never tasted chocolate.

The book describes how the family protects two Jewish children and a downed RAF pilot. At great risk, the family participates in the Resistance by passing on forbidden newspapers and communicating through *molentaal*, the language of the windmills based on how the wings are placed (in a "joy" position or a "sorrow" position, for example).

An understanding of how people feel under occupation might have been helpful when Washington was considering its options after the 9/11 attacks. Right after the President heard the news, he was listening to pupils read about a girl who had a pet goat that made the girl's dad angry by eating too many things. The dad says: "That goat must go." The story's quick denouement is that the goat butts a man allegedly planning to steal the family car. So the hero goat stays. Mission accomplished.

The message of the story seems to be that a moment of impressive violence is enough to create a permanent peace. Possibly President Bush, sitting in front of that class in Sarasota, may have been absorbing this message. The truth, however, is that our occupation of Iraq is more costly than we expected.

The continuing annual US costs of the Iraq war are newly estimated by Nobel Prizewinner Joseph Stiglitz and Harvard Professor Linda Bilmes at about two percent of US GDP. For the Iraqis themselves, economist Professor Colin Rowat of the University of Birmingham estimates per-person costs at 20 times greater than the corresponding US cost. Now three researchers at Johns Hopkins University and a professor at Baghdad's Al-Mustansiriya University have estimated that an estimated two percent of the Iraqi population has been killed, far higher than previous estimates. This number, published in the peer-reviewed UK journal *Lancet*, is nearly as high a proportion of the Iraqi population as the percentage of Dutch people killed in Hitler's occupation of Holland.

I'm sending a copy of *The Winged Watchman* to the President. Better late than never.

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