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Crises as a mirror of the nation: the role of morality, nationalism, and religion in creating ontological security in the wake of MH17 and the Brussels Attacks

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'Hurry up and wait!' Occasionally, military professionals use this catchphrase to characterise the conduct of operations: new orders tend to be accompanied by a sense of urgency, and in some cases that turns into a spontaneous masterclass in operational wheel-spinning. To me, it seemed to characterise the transition from an operational post, with omnipresent plans and objectives, to starting as a PhD candidate at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic which made this urgency less immediately evident.

Of course, this first impression was false. Completing this PhD within the set timeframe called for precise planning, consistent progress, and commitment to meeting deadlines and bringing the project to a successful conclusion. In addition to its scientific contribution, this dissertation was therefore also a journey of personal and professional development, which was invaluable to me and will remain so in future assignments. Although writing this dissertation was a largely solitary labour, several people were instrumental in starting and completing the project.

First, I am grateful to the Royal Netherlands Army. Throughout an officer's career professional development is vital aspect of reaching one's potential. However, the opportunity to devote four consecutive years and take the final step to develop into an 'officer-scholar' is rare. I am therefore grateful to the Royal Netherlands Army for their confidence in me and for giving me this opportunity.

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Lastly, I am grateful for the unwavering encouragement of my partner Marloes to finish this project and help me keep things in perspective. Throughout this project we created a new dynamic in our lives by becoming a family. I dearly cherish our lives together as a family. I now know for sure that there is more to life than work.

Curriculum Vitae

Curriculum Vitae

Daan van den Wollenberg (1988) completed his pre-university education at the Bisschoppelijk College in Weert (2008), after which he enrolled at the Royal Military Academy in Breda. In 2012, he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in War Studies from the Netherlands Defence Academy. He subsequently obtained a Master's degree in International Security Studies from the University of Groningen in 2013.

Commissioned as a Field Artillery officer, Daan has held a range of positions within the Royal Netherlands Army, varying from operational leadership roles to instructional and training appointments focussed on preparing leaders and units for operational deployment.

Driven by the ambition to develop as an '*officer-scholar*' – integrating operational expertise with academic research – he was granted the opportunity by the Royal Netherlands Army to pursue a PhD starting in 2020. Alongside his doctoral research, he lectured undergraduate officer-cadets in the War Studies department and earned his University Teaching Qualification.

Following the completion of his dissertation manuscript, he was assigned to the Strategy and Plans Branch of the Royal Netherlands Army Headquarters in 2024, where he focussed on the operational implementation of Unmanned Aircraft Systems. In 2026, he was appointed Policy Advisor to the National Armaments Director of the Netherlands Armed Forces.