Between the Polder and a Hard Place?
The Netherlands and the Defence Planning Challenges for Smaller European Countries

Julian Lindley-French and Anne Tjepkema
The views expressed in this paper are the authors’ own, and do not necessarily reflect those of RUSI or any other institutions with which the authors are associated.

Comments pertaining to this report are invited and should be forwarded to: Adrian Johnson, Director of Publications, Royal United Services Institute, Whitehall, London, SW1A 2ET, United Kingdom, or via email to adrianj@rusi.org
# Contents

*About the Author*  
iv

*Acknowledgements*  
v

**Foreword**  
Dick Berlijn  
vii

**Introduction**  
1

1. The Dutch Dilemma  
3

11

3. Restoring some Balance?  
17

4. Twenty Lessons from Below Sea Level  
30
About the Authors

Professor Julian Lindley-French is the Eisenhower Professor of Defence Strategy at the Netherlands Defence Academy and Special Professor of Strategic Studies at the University of Leiden. He is also Head of the Stratcon 2010 project on the NATO Strategic Concept for the Atlantic Council of the US in Washington, DC and Chief Editor of the Oxford Handbook on War. He is a member of Royal United Services Institute, as well as an Associate Fellow of Chatham House and the Austrian Institute for European and Security Studies.

Colonel Anne Tjepkema, a retired Royal Netherlands Air Force pilot, is an Associate Professor at the Netherlands Defence Academy. He spent much of his career considering the role of the Netherlands Armed Forces in a series of high-level staff positions. A widely published and respected author, Colonel Tjepkema was involved in the drafting of the 2009 Dutch Strategic Defence Review (Verkenningen).
Acknowledgements

This study emerged from a major project undertaken by the Military Operational Art and Science Section of the Netherlands Defence Academy in support of the 2009 Strategic Defence Review. All the views herein are those of the authors and in no way constitute an official Dutch view. The authors are grateful to Colonel (Rtd) Dr Jan van Angeren, Major Marcel de Goede and Mr Sjef Orbons, colleagues at the Netherlands Defence Academy, for their contributions at an earlier stage of this project.
Foreword

When I joined the Netherlands’ armed forces in the late sixties, two mighty blocs held each other hostage through mutual assured destruction. Our societies were living under the threat of nuclear Armageddon. The armed forces were trained and exercised endlessly for a scenario that luckily never occurred. So, in those days our forces never saw real action.

But then things changed. The Berlin Wall came down and the nuclear and military threat to this part of the world evaporated. However, since then our forces have seen action almost continuously. Indeed, so much so that they sometimes no longer have enough time to conduct the required training.

How did our soldiers confront massive change in the strategic situation? In reality as a group we never much talked about these changes. However, a very personal anecdote captures the essence of the change that has taken place. It was April 1993 and I was ordered to take a squadron of F-16 fighters to northern Italy to support air operations in the Balkans.

One morning I said goodbye to my young sons of ten and fourteen. It was only a year after we had seen the British pilots on television that had been tortured by Saddam’s forces in Iraq. Would we suffer the same fate? Would we return home? Years later Operation Deny Flight is seen as a relatively easy endeavour, but we did not know that then. So I can freely admit that saying goodbye to my sons was a bit emotional – and not only for my boys. Standing in the kitchen and assuring my sons that I would be back after the summer I happened to notice my neighbour across the street. His state of mind was quite different. He was busily packing his trailer for his upcoming vacation. Ironically, he and his wife were planning a short holiday in northern Italy!

No other event could have for me illustrated the gigantic changes that took place after the Cold War. Before 1989, if our defence forces had been ordered to leave their barracks, our whole society would have been in jeopardy – including my neighbour!

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, engaging in conflict became in effect much more a matter of political choice. One could either participate with armed forces or one could decide to keep one’s soldiers at home.

Thus, what happened in the late eighties started an intense debate about both the size and missions of the Netherlands’ armed forces, and which criteria should be adopted for the number of soldiers, units and weapon systems. During the Cold War each nation was assigned an area in the North German plain to defend with either a corps or division. Pivotal to the planning was assessments of how many ‘Red’ targets would likely present themselves in that particular area at any given time during a certain period.

Deciding on one’s own forces was thus basically a matter of doing the maths. Additionally, there was of course also the requirement for NATO’s then-sixteen nations to spend a minimum of 2 per cent gross national product on defence, even if the politics of the moment meant this figure often had little actual military value. However, the legacy of such a target persisted and with it an often-anachronistic debate about the relevance of the planning criterion, even as the world changed around it.

In the Netherlands each new election re-focuses the debate on three simple but pivotal questions: how big should the armed forces be, what should be their purpose, and above all how much should they cost? Unfortunately, the debate is almost always reduced to the necessity or otherwise of a particular weapon system which puts the tactical horse firmly before the strategic cart.

The current debate concerns whether or not the Dutch should buy the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. Unfortunately, we seldom if ever ask ourselves
the central political questions that all defence planning should reflect: what security role does the Netherlands aspire to play in the international environment? How do we actively contribute to upholding the international rule of law (in the Dutch constitution)? What should this contribution be? Should we seek also to play a role at the high-end spectrum of missions? Are we really serious when we raise concerns about human rights? Are we concerned about human rights in Europe alone, or do we also care about the rights of people in other places of the globe? In my opinion these are the first questions a nation should ask itself and answer before deciding on the size, scope, number and equipment of its armed forces.

In this study Professor Lindley-French and Colonel (Rtd) Tjepkema discuss the dilemmas and issues faced today by the Netherlands and their wider implications for smaller European countries at this pivotal moment in a world awash with potentially dangerous change. To that end, any nation considering the future of their armed forces should find this report an invaluable read in helping to sharpen the mind.

**General Dick Berlijn**
Former Chief of the Netherlands Defence Staff and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces
July 2010
Introduction

What are the consequences of change for the defence planning of small- to medium-sized European countries? That is the mission of this study as it considers the challenges faced by the Netherlands’ armed forces. The fall of the Dutch government in February 2010 over whether or not to extend the deployment of Dutch forces in Afghanistan highlighted the challenges that smaller European NATO and EU members face over the use of force. Consequently, the Netherlands’ armed forces find themselves in a difficult position between contrasting political and popular perception and the demands of allies, particularly the United States. This has made the use of armed force a contentious issue in the Netherlands, and one which has been exacerbated by the post-2008 financial crisis and the changing nature of Dutch society.

Thus, the Netherlands has in many ways become a case study of the challenges that smaller European countries face in deploying military missions when the link with the security and defence of national territory is at best tenuous. This paper explores those tensions and draws out the lessons from the Dutch experience for other smaller Europeans countries.

So, what to do? Exploiting those few areas of comparative advantage that reflect national strategic culture, such as civil-military relations, will be critical. Indeed, given emerging European strategic culture, creating an effective civil-military command and control culture could well be the future. This in turn will demand redoubled efforts to re-establish command links with the political class by enhancing the knowledge, experience and involvement of politicians in defence matters. Critically, smaller European states will need to better exploit human capital by qualitatively strengthening individual members of their armed forces through education and mentoring. A full range of skills will be needed, including counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism, and the integration of military and non-military instruments of power and influence. A cliché it might be, but people are pivotal.

Affordability is also central. At the politico-military level defence budgets must be kept stable (at a minimum 1.8 per cent GNP\(^1\)), but at the same time a more holistic view is needed of what today comprises defence expenditure. For example, whilst efforts to stabilise the personnel budget at a maximum 50 per cent of the defence budget are laudable, there is a very real danger that materiel budgets will be eroded. Therefore, at least 25 per cent should be spent on equipment and such ratios adhered to.

The balance between sovereignty and capability will also be critical. Pooling with like-minded countries will be essential to build capacities that exceed the national purse, but which are essential to contribute to coalition operations (and thus exert influence over larger allies). This will demand consistent contributions to multinational formations and an end to withdrawal from such commitments at short notice.

Critically, the basic principles of sound military strategy must be re-established if the bulk of equipment procured is to reinforce the main effort. It will not be an easy balance to strike as the need to ensure an ability to operate towards the high-end of the conflict spectrum will be vital, not least to preserve interoperability with US forces. Heavy, legacy platforms must thus be dispensed with, and moves sought towards more flexible, deployable and cheaper assets and formations. Therefore, priority in procurement policy should be given to joint materiel planning with major projects being sequenced so that they can enjoy absolute priority within an agreed timeframe. Equally, fast-track procurements/urgent operational requirements will remain a reality for forces deployed over time and distance, and defence bureaucracy should be structured to support such requirements.

---

\(^1\) The long-standing self-obligation for NATO countries is 2 per cent of GNP. Currently, only five out of twenty-eight members fulfil that obligation. See Deutsche Welle, ‘NATO unity threatened by defense budget and equipment shortfalls’, 3 March 2010.
The quest for more jointery will be central, particularly in the field of light infantry and air and naval support, with force rotations of both equipment and personnel designed to enable role adaptation, support complicated maintenance and retain key personnel, particularly technical grades. At the operational level the relationship between mission objectives, approach, rules of engagement and capabilities and capacity must be sound from the outset, with constraints properly understood by allies and partners alike. There can be no more rose-tinted planning!

Much is made of the challenges faced by the larger states as they consider what to plan for in a complex and challenging international environment. Indeed, there is a copious amount of literature devoted to the topic. However, there is very little in the literature devoted to the challenges faced by a country such as the Netherlands. This study will thus demonstrate not only the particular challenges faced by the Dutch, but also it is hoped offer a way forward for leaders and planners alike in many similar-sized European states.

The message of this study is crystal clear: once strategy has been established it must be adhered to because, in the absence of consistency, armed forces rapidly become victims of political short-termism. This merely transfers risk onto the young Dutch men and women who do the fighting. They deserve better.
1. The Dutch Dilemma

The problem is not how to develop new ideas, but how to get rid of old ones.

(John Maynard Keynes)

The Planning Paradox

The Netherlands considers itself the smallest of the European great powers, having enjoyed a Golden Age in the seventeenth century. In fact, politically the Dutch are more comfortable playing the role of the strongest of the smaller European powers. However, finding a level of ambition somewhere between smallness and greatness is challenging. It is a dilemma further complicated by the security tradition of a former colonial power and the political tradition of neutrality that persisted during much of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Consequently, the Netherlands has always suffered from a profound tension between smallness and greatness is challenging. It is a dilemma further complicated by the security tradition of a former colonial power and the political tradition of neutrality that persisted during much of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Consequently, the Netherlands has always suffered from a profound tension between what it seeks to do and what it can afford to do. Hitherto, Dutch generals and admirals have tended to look at the forces of the greater powers (Britain, France, Germany, and of course the US) as role models, and sought to maintain a broad and balanced force posture albeit on a far smaller scale.

Effective planning is vital for small forces facing large tasks, and modern armed forces must not be dependent on Cold War planning. However, twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall it is still hard to find a better alternative. The threat has changed beyond all recognition from a clear and present danger to something far more obscure. Today’s challenge is to make judgements about security within a world in which uncertainty abounds, and in which very few of the range of risks are as yet existential threats. This affords few hard planning drivers, placing a particular premium on informed choices and flexibility. The centre of gravity – the focus of a force – is the primary consideration. But these choices take place within an environment of almost continuous deployment and employment of armed forces on crisis management operations since the 1990s, ranging in intensity from military presence to heavy war-fighting. The Netherlands’ armed forces show all the signs of stabilisation attrition: the steady erosion of both capabilities and capacities due to the sustained use far from the home base in pursuit of an ever-expanding security and stability task-list.

The planning paradox is all too clear. Forces have been reduced in size on an assumption of short missions (‘fast in, fast out’) whereas in reality such deployments have been extended, often in difficult and dangerous environments, with capitals back home locked determinedly into a peacetime mindset. The consequences for the sustainment of both operations and capacities are thus now critical for many European states. A new balance must therefore be found between operations, capacities and capabilities if European armed forces are not to whither under the pressure of stabilisation attrition. To say the very least, weakness in European defence planning has been laid bare – the Netherlands is no exception – as years of tension between military guidance to political leaders and the choices made by those leaders is clear to see for all but the most strategically myopic.

There is nothing new in the challenge posed, nor indeed in the solutions sought to close the gap between inputs and outputs. Considerable work is being done to develop new force-adaptable structures. For example, NATO’s British-led Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) is experimenting with a range of new civilian and military partners, both critical to success in hybrid conflict. Nevertheless, unless properly embedded in new thinking, the usefulness of these efforts will be limited.

Strategic Foundations

External drivers, such as the special relationship the Dutch enjoy with the United States, NATO’s Strategic Concept and the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), are influential in shaping the strategic framework of both strategy and policy. This is important for Dutch policy-makers who have traditionally compared the Netherlands to like-minded small- to medium-sized US allies such as Canada, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden and...
shaped strategy and policy accordingly.

It is indeed also possible to identify consistent policy choices based on typically Dutch preoccupations and principles. Some of these choices date back to the long age of neutrality from 1815, which catastrophically failed to protect the country in 1940. Others have emerged more recently in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Given its economic dependence on international trade, international stability is the primary Dutch security goal with stable international relations a prerequisite for the absence of external threat, the promotion of prosperity and the maintenance of internal stability.

Given the consensual tradition of Dutch politics, a legalistic/normative order is pivotal to containing the ambitions of more powerful competitors. This is a classical posture for a smaller European power (given Europe’s turbulent history of Great Power politics) and explains the strong Dutch emphasis on both international rule of law and ethics. Equally, because the Netherlands also inherited a strong mercantilist tradition from its Golden Age, a powerful maritime (and mildly anti-continental) policy still exerts a hold on the political imagination: this tends to produce a natural closeness with the US and UK, but balancing with France and Germany, the two major continental powers.

The use of military power remains an ongoing debate. Prevalent in the political class is the view that the Netherlands’ armed forces should focus on peacekeeping with lightly armed forces; others more traditionally associated with the army believe that the Netherlands should be able to play an interventionist role if need be. Equally, developments since 1991 have diminished the unique importance of transatlantic ties, and have opened up Dutch involvement in peace-making and peacekeeping missions abroad. In spite of the risk aversion of the political elite, there is increasing popular acceptance of the use of military force and the consequent loss of life – although how deep such robustness goes is open to question. Certainly, there is persistent political contention over the thresholds at which force can be used. This debate has become particularly acute since the Dutch failure at Srebrenica in 1995 and following Dutch involvement in the 2003 American-led Iraq War. Paradoxically, as transatlantic influences have waned, the importance of the European Defence and Security Policy (ESDP) has not waxed. Indeed, although the Netherlands supports and has supported several ESDP missions, there is at present no substitute for NATO as the locus for Dutch participation in organised coalitions.

The Dutch occupy the same political, economic and security space as larger NATO and EU allies and partners, and therefore their threat assessment reflects the same analysis, even if the ability to shape events and outcomes is more modest. The Dutch threat assessment can be summarised thus: inter-state conflict is likely to become more risky and so less frequent, but more dangerous when it occurs. Intra-state conflict will probably become more frequent with increased consequences for international security. There will be more conflicts with non-state actors targeting civil society. Effective prevention and response will be vital; that in turn will require whole-of-government engagement in which all citizens must play a role if a new balance is to be struck between resolve, response and resilience. State and non-state adversaries will adopt new asymmetric strategies and tactics to deny force entry, disable force multipliers, disrupt enablers and avoid combat to circumvent and deny the conventional military advantages of the US and its allies.

Therefore, in a complex strategic environment with an array of challenges, even big states will have to consider trade-offs between vital, essential and general interests. For smaller European states this process is particularly difficult because they rely so heavily on bigger states for so much of their security. All Europeans thus face a fundamental question: what to plan for? To that end a key judgement is the minimum military effort likely to afford influence over both events and key allies and partners. The Netherlands is in just such a position today. Nor can smaller Europeans hide behind modesty. Given the strong global, mercantilist tradition of the Dutch, the Netherlands is capable of generating
a big strategic picture and a contribution to the Allied effort – and such a role will be expected. The Dutch view of today’s world is a balance between globalism and parochialism; the choices implicit in such a balance make Dutch strategic judgements relevant to all smaller European states.

Such choices will need to be informed by dark futures. History suggests that war between states remains likely. Indeed, the interests at stake often go to the very existence of a state. Wars of necessity are fought amongst states by regular armed forces, often in coalition and in theatre, in which one side endeavours to impose its will through force on the other. Equally, there is a new/old type of war emerging that denies the state a monopoly over mass violence and which rejects both institutions and very existence of the state. These so-called ‘wars of choice’ usually start ‘amongst the people’ and often in weak states. For the past twenty years or so, they have been the object of Western humanitarian interventionism. Such interventions have attempted not only to impose fighting power upon the parties to a conflict, but also to establish rule of international law as a permanent solution to conflict. For the Netherlands such use of force to defend the international order has been politically seductive, even as it has added to planning dilemmas and exacerbated stabilisation attrition.

It is against this backdrop that Dutch security and defence ambitions are being reconsidered – seeking balance between forces, resources and tasks – in order to reconcile credibility, capability and affordability in a new strategic age. At heart will be a new contract between efficiency and effectiveness in which tight spending and better spending lead to improved performance. It will not be easy. The Dutch defence budget has shrunk markedly whilst the task-list has expanded. Forty years ago the Dutch armed forces enjoyed investment close to 3 per cent of gross national product (GNP). Today, the armed forces receive less than half that (made worse by defence inflation that is running at between 5 and 7 per cent per annum). Equally, operations in Cambodia, Africa, Iraq and, of course, Afghanistan have led to intensive wear and tear on weapon systems, depreciating assets far more quickly than envisaged with little or no concomitant adjustment in equipment investment. Moreover, deployment in landlocked countries has created unexpected expenditures, such as inflated air transportation costs, with logistic chains unable to cope with sudden increased demands. Urgent operational requirements have thus become the norm.

Consequently, the operating costs of deployed armed forces have grossly exceeded wholly inadequate long-term planning estimates. For example, the Dutch deployment to Afghanistan greatly accelerated normal wear and tear and accelerated the normal cycle for equipment replacement. The United Kingdom has faced a similar if not more acute problem. Back in 2003, the British Army assumed the complete re-equipping of the force would not be necessary before 2025. In fact, given the operational tempo in Afghanistan, this date has moved back to 2014. Indeed, increased short-term operating costs have also coincided with increased unit costs of equipment given the ever more complicated technology, better intelligence requirements, enhanced precision and improved information and communication systems. In effect, the Dutch have been fighting a major counter-insurgency in south central Asia with forces shaped more by the search for a defence premium than hard planning. That could not go on indefinitely.

It is a bleak picture that makes it hard for all European countries to undertake sound and

---

1 The terms ‘war of choice’ and ‘war of necessity’ were coined by Lawrence Freedman in ‘Military strategy and operations in the 21st century’, British Security 2010 Conference, London, November 1995. Currently, the latter term covers terms such as guerrilla, low-intensity conflict, war amongst the people, insurgency, asymmetric conflict and fourth generation warfare. Research has found that this type of conflict lasts nine years on the average. Therefore, some writers call this phenomenon ‘long war’. It remains to be seen whether the term ‘war’ in this case is apt; the term ‘conflict’ seems more appropriate. An interesting case was the recovery of Kuwait as a state in 1991: a necessity for the international community of states, but the achievement of which was a matter of choice for some individual states.
balanced defence planning beyond immediate requirements. However, for the smaller European countries, strategic judgements that balance limited strategic ambitions and current operational requirements with the seemingly perpetual recommendations to enhance both the EU and NATO are today nigh on impossible. The result is a culture of strategic pretence and fragmentation of effort, which both exacerbates risk in conventional warfare and promotes an unhealthy aversion to risk.

Wars of Limited Choice
The greatest shaper of Dutch foreign and security policy in recent times has been the relationship with the United States. There have been several contentious periods – such as during Dutch decolonisation in the 1950s and the early 1960s, the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as during the early 1980s over the deployment of Cruise and Pershing missiles on Dutch territory – but generally the ties between The Hague and Washington have been good. Transatlantic links have been seen by all Dutch governments as the foundation for Dutch external security. The importance of the relationship was reinforced by the Dutch willingness to contribute positively to Alliance operations in and over the former Yugoslavia.2 For example, during Operation Allied Force in Kosovo in 1999, the Royal Netherlands Air Force was the second largest European contributor to Allied air operations in terms of sorties flown. Another reason for closeness to the Americans has been the customary Dutch preference for the purchase of American aircraft. Not only has such procurement made complicated weapon systems affordable, it has also enabled an enduring strategic link with the United States Air Force and thus a high level of military-operational competence. However, as the British know only too well, a US ‘special relationship’ and access to their strategic military machine comes at a price.

Equally, supporting the Americans on expeditionary operations devoid of a clear and present threat to the Netherlands has become a source of intense political debate. There is an inherent tension between the desire of Dutch governments to ensure America remains the ultimate guarantor of Dutch security, and the Dutch people’s profound concern about the effectiveness of a seemingly endless war. This of course culminated in the fall of the Dutch government in February 2010, and such tension undoubtedly reinforced Dutch political caution in admitting the extent to which Dutch forces participated in Iraq, and are still participating in Afghanistan, at US request. There was deep popular resentment towards the Bush administration – more acute than with any Cold War-era administration – which made open political discussion all but impossible. Indeed, in the years following 9/11, the Netherlands’ armed forces frequently found themselves without overt public support, carrying out unpopular policies: a profoundly uncomfortable position, and not a typical one. For this reason the government of Jan Peter Balkenende was keen to avoid a parliamentary investigation into Dutch involvement in the unpopular, American-led 2003 Iraq War. Therefore, the decision to withdraw from Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan, during the more popular Obama administration, is somewhat puzzling. Nevertheless, balancing the need for the US security guarantee with American demands for support in its grand strategic global mission will remain the most pressing challenge for Dutch security policy.

Small States and Institutions
The tension in Dutch foreign and security policy over American leadership is exacerbated by the central role that international institutions play for the Dutch in legitimising external action. Like many smaller Europeans states, the Dutch are passionate believers in legitimate and effective institutions, such as the EU, NATO and the UN, and are keen to invest in them. However, the balancing of values and interests within such institutional frameworks also creates intense problems for the defence planners of smaller countries, because the implicit aggregation of power affords as many obligations as it does influence. Moreover, it limits the ability of smaller European nations to conduct or participate in ‘wars of choice’ because they are tied into such

---

2 See Foreword for details.
institutional arrangements. The preservation of an institution becomes an end in itself. Wars of choice are usually long, requiring significant numbers of expensive advanced expeditionary forces, something which the public in such states find hard to understand. Nervous governments often send such forces to these conflicts whilst trying to maintain peacetime conditions back home, downplaying the dangers and the role of the deployed force. Paradoxically, this has made success even harder to achieve: there is a dangerously wide gap between what needs to be done, what can be done and how to do so. To sell a mission, the public is given an overly optimistic view of what is possible based on an unrealistic assessment of cost and risk over unduly short timeframes. In theatre this is translated into very narrow rules of engagement with tight limits set over the use of force, which over time increases the risk both to the deployed force, and to the people it is seeking to protect. The Dutch approach is no different.

Wars of choice are a distinct concern for small states: they cannot control how the war may escalate. In particular, wars of choice can escalate into wars of necessity, with the scope and intensity expands beyond the initial parameters and raises the problem of perceived failure come withdrawal. Fighting a war of choice invariably requires the ability to escalate to a higher level of force, which is often beyond either the capability or capacity of smaller European states. This is a particularly acute dilemma in individual national efforts – even if the force is embedded in a multinational command chain as in Afghanistan. Indeed, American planning and its avoidance of multinational formations (such as the NATO Response Force or EU Battlegroups) has made Europeans look weaker than they are, demonstrating the lack of unity of purpose and effort at the heart of the Afghanistan strategy.

For the Dutch, the experience of Uruzgan has blurred the hitherto marked difference between wars of necessity and wars of choice, increasing a tendency towards strategic reticence shared with other smaller European states. This is particularly problematic given that the major powers themselves seem so uncertain of strategic direction, and their public opinion so firmly of the view that modesty equals strategy. For the Dutch, uncertainty over both the scope and nature of change in the strategic environment makes the strategic choices implicit and explicit in Dutch defence planning extremely difficult. Smaller powers may have an opt-out clause: effectively contracting out of defence, covering that retreat with a fig-leaf effort, and then relying on protection of other states through NATO and/or the EU. The Netherlands is a significant way from becoming such a state but it must be aware of the danger.

The Netherlands has little experience of fighting inter-state wars, and would find organising such an effort very difficult. Indeed, smaller European states place great stock in legalistic approaches to countering threats to international security. But the current uncertainty – the big ‘unknown’ – is the extent to which nuclear proliferation will re-shape the international balance of power and its attendant consequences. There is evidence that legalistic approaches (like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) will weaken, if not fail: the NPT has not prevented India, Pakistan and Israel from acquiring nuclear capabilities. Neither might it prevent Iran and North Korea from doing the same. On the other hand, the 2003 Iraq War demonstrated the controversial nature of pre-emptive war, and armed force has not otherwise consistently been used to forestall proliferation. This puts smaller European countries in a difficult position, since such undertakings can force a choice between legalistic and pragmatic approaches (such as military action without an explicit UN Security Council resolution. This may well be the case should armed action against Iran be needed.

Nevertheless, if for example terrorists gained access to the nuclear arsenals of a weak state, it is unlikely that the Dutch would take a legalistic approach. The example of the Dutch involvement in Uruzgan is telling: the key objective of the Dutch government was to contribute to the success of NATO.
Between the Polder and a Hard Place?

approach. There would be recognition that such an occurrence would represent a clear and present danger, requiring swift and effective action. Faced with such a threat, traditional nuclear deterrence could be useless. On the other hand, the Netherlands’ ability to support international action with real force would be limited. Furthermore, smaller European states face a higher threshold for action as they unlikely to be at the top of the list of targets; hence it may be an attractive decision to ‘keep one’s head down’. Policy-makers in smaller European countries are also deterred by the complex inter-relationship between intra- and inter-state war. The boundaries between small and big wars, irregular and conventional conflicts, are eroding. Both smaller European states and larger countries evaluate these ‘high-risk’ conflicts according to their critical national interests. This is particularly important since asymmetric conflict can lead to acts of terror against the home base. The 2006 Israeli military intervention against Hezbollah in Lebanon is one such example – it proved ill-conceived and executed, and strengthened Israel’s adversaries whilst making Israelis more insecure. Smaller European states must evaluate whether greater protection is afforded to their citizenry through proximity to major powers – which are often the targets of asymmetric and terrorist tactics – or judicious distance.

Turning complex, instable and dangerous places into relatively stable places that are neither a threat to themselves or others will likely remain a defence role for the foreseeable future. Indeed, for every inter-state war, there will likely be three irregular wars. Armed forces must thus adapt. Such forces must also be rapidly augmentable and able to work with a whole range partners, both traditional and novel; defence planning must also be relevant to the current threat environment. For a country such as the Netherlands, which seeks to maintain a small but balanced force posture, the challenge is thus one of focus: can (and should) the Dutch play a hub role or specialise and allow others to lead and at all times? If the latter, to what extent is the Netherlands prepared to rely on allies and partners to provide for key elements of sovereign security that it cannot afford? Can it do so?

The problem of effectiveness in conflict is not simply a question of mass and quantity. In irregular conflict the role and utility of knowledge is crucial (though it may decrease the emphasis on strike capabilities). The Dutch enjoy some advantages here: a long and extended colonial history, an advanced knowledge infrastructure and ease with English as the international language of learning. Engaging effectively in complexity requires a partnership between actionable intelligence and knowledge, which in turn needs to be centrally organised rather than located in the armed forces. Critical is the effective organisation of flexible institutions so that they are better suited to novel challenges. Again, the Dutch tend to enjoy some comparative advantages over larger states because the domestic institutional community is relatively small. Indeed, effective and comprehensive co-operation across government is as essential as between national and international institutions based on a broad concept of conflict prevention, effective engagement and post-conflict reconstruction.

Society and War

Given the very complexity of modern Dutch (and European) society, the need to keep threats at strategic distance has become increasingly important to political leaders. The need for a new form of forward defence is of course another paradox given the prevalent strategic reticence – this is, after all, the inference of operations in Afghanistan, where a threat is being tackled ‘over there’ to avoid it ‘over here’. National survival – or rather the classical threat to national survival from another state – may not be pressing, but the cohesion of complex society is doubtless under pressure from belief communities that transcend national identity. Dutch interests are threatened by radical transnational organisations and movements (rather than national forces); thecountering of which is vital. That may change but the battle for ideas has made terrorism and the new warfare the means of conflict: Total War has been replaced by Total Security, requiring a much broader concept in which security and defence merge and in which
the relationship between grand strategy (the organisation of large means in pursuit of large ends) and the individual is intimate.

For the Dutch this raises an important question as to whether physical violence remains a necessary component of war and conflict, given the considerable aversion of Dutch society to threat and the use of force. The Dutch are leaning towards a form of human security in which the use of armed force is subservient to development goals, such as the alleviation of poverty, and in which the wellbeing of the adversary society is as important as security itself. Indeed, ‘armed development’ might today be the ‘strategic’ culture of many European states.

Therefore, a further political paradox is apparent. For the Netherlands, the main effort is now invariably in wars of choice, rather than those of necessity. However, without the discipline imposed by the latter, the political support vital to sustaining the Netherlands’ armed forces is diminishing. The Dutch security effort (as opposed to the Dutch military effort) is shifting from border protection to the role of social cohesion in countering the non-state/anti-state organisations, many of which have now become established on Dutch soil, and which find succour in foreign instability and immigration. The domestic security implications of wars of choice must therefore not be minimised; and the difficulty of classical defence planning must be understood.

Balancing Security and Defence Policy
The Dutch have been grappling with a new balance between security and defence policy for over twenty years. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) began the transformation of the Netherlands’ armed forces immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. However, symptomatic of the Dutch dilemma, the MoD did so before the National Security Policy, formulated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MinBuza), established the strategic direction of defence policy. This strategy/policy inversion is all too apparent in the Netherlands today, in spite of statements to the contrary.

In effect defence policy was followed by foreign and security policy. Not surprisingly, this led to some disconnect between security and defence policies. Such ‘autonomy’ was partly the consequence of a lack of coherent direction from the national political leadership, reinforced by policy being directly ‘imported’ from either the US or international institutions (NATO and to a lesser extent the EU). The foreign policy goal has hitherto been relatively straightforward: to keep the US engaged in European security and defence. However, in the absence of consistent force planning drivers since the early 1990s, major cut has followed major cut. Each cut has been leavened by the offer of minor investment in equipment, but even those improvements have tended to be sacrificed in later rounds of cuts with the result that the capabilities and capacities of the Netherlands’ armed forces are today dangerously close to being below operational utility or sustainability.

This development is in line with much of NATO Europe’s tendency towards strategic indolence, a state of affairs severely criticised recently by US defence secretary Robert Gates who said in February 2010:

> These budget limitations relate to a larger cultural and political trend affecting the alliance. One of the triumphs of the last century was the pacification of Europe after ages of ruinous warfare. But, as I’ve said before, I believe we have reached an inflection point, where much of the continent has gone too far in the other direction. The demilitarisation of Europe – where large swathes of the general public and political class are averse to military force and the risks that go with it – has gone from a blessing

---


5 Robert Gates, speech given at the National Defence University, Washington, DC, 23 February 2010.
in the 20th century to an impediment to achieving real security and lasting peace in the 21st. Not only can real or perceived weakness be a temptation to miscalculation and aggression, but, on a more basic level, the resulting funding and capability shortfalls make it difficult to operate and fight together to confront shared threats.

The relationship between Dutch national strategy, defence policy and security will remain complex and difficult, and a balance needs to be struck between risk and threat, and protection and projection. It is a Dutch dilemma, but one that is by no means unique to the Netherlands.

The Downwards Transformation of the Dutch Armed Forces

The roles of the Netherlands’ armed forces can be defined thus: the defence of the country, the protection of the interests of the Kingdom, together with the maintenance and promotion of international rule of law, as well as the protection of overseas territories. Since 2000 there has been more emphasis on the national security role, such as military assistance to the civil power. The Dutch constitution, true to its legalistic tradition, specifically calls for the international rule of law, with the foreign ministry from time to time formulating new policy through memoranda in pursuit of that aim. The ministry’s annual budget drafts also contain policy elements in the explanatory annexes with parliamentary leadership and oversight ensuring control over both the roles and missions of the armed forces.

Against this political and strategic backdrop, the Netherlands’ armed forces have undergone a consistent and unremitting decline. Since 1991, a number of white papers and equivalent policy documents have been produced that have led to significant change in the roles, employment and subsequent structure of the armed forces, all of which have been marked by a constant reduction in the size and budget even as the complexity and scope of mission and tasks has increased.

Whilst the 1991 Defence White Paper¹ suggested a switch in defence policy from a Cold War posture to dealing with a world in flux, the objective was in fact to cut the armed forces. Indeed, somewhat echoing the British euphemism of ‘Front-Line First’, the motto of the 1991 paper was ‘flexibility and mobility’, whilst the sub-title announced both restructuring and major reductions in the defence budget amounting to a structural cut of €320 million² annually (plus a 16 per cent cut in personnel). The army lost a division, the number of tanks was reduced by 50 per cent, with artillery and armoured infantry vehicles cut by 40 per cent. On the positive side, an airmobile brigade was created. The Royal Netherlands Navy (RNLN) and the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAF) to an extent benefited from the changes: despite losing two frigates, the navy gained a new landing platform dock; the air force gave up a fighter squadron, but was given a modest transport fleet and more capable helicopters for the airmobile brigade.

The 1993 Priorities Memorandum³ reinforced the fundamental changes implied in the 1991 White Paper. Most importantly conscription was suspended whilst the defence budget was further reduced by €500 million annually, even though the shift to full professionalisation generated significant upfront costs. In parallel, greater emphasis was placed on crisis management operations, for which conscripts could no longer be used, but for which expensive advanced expeditionary deployable forces were needed.

Additionally, threat-based planning was replaced by capabilities-oriented planning. New for the Dutch was a statement of political ambition as a defence-planning driver similar to that in the 1993 American Bottom-Up Review. This was to include simultaneous participation in four peacekeeping operations with a battalion, a fighter squadron and/or two frigates for a period of one and a half years (three segments of six months) at the low end of the conflict spectrum. It also included one operation of up to a year with a brigade, a maritime task group or three squadrons as part of a peace-enforcement mission. However, the overall size of the armed forces shrank by 30–40 per cent, with the army hardest hit losing another division, which forced it to merge the remaining division into a combined army corps with Germany (the

² Until 2002 the financial figures were given in guilders, thereafter in euros. The conversion rate is 2.2:1.
GE-NL Corps). The navy lost twelve mine-hunters, and the air force one additional F-16 squadron.

The November 1994 letter\(^4\) announced even further cuts with cost reductions of €375 million along three lines of operation: overhead and support, investments in international co-operation, and operational capabilities. Whilst the emphasis was on cutting overhead and support (again mirroring the British) against the backdrop of Kosovo, there was little or no attempt to push through the cuts in international co-operation and operational capabilities. As a result savings were sought elsewhere in training, services and support.

**From Cutting to Integrating**

The consolidation of the Dutch national foreign and security effort increasingly became seen as panacea to close the gap between security responsibilities and the lack of security and defence investment. In 1995 the Dutch foreign ministry published the cumbersomely entitled Re-evaluation Memorandum,\(^5\) designed to better integrate foreign policy, development, international economic relations and defence. This was the foundation upon which the later 3Ds (Diplomacy, Development and Defence) were established.

The main thrust of this re-evaluation was twofold: first to re-establish the policy leadership of the foreign ministry and second to present cuts and cost-savings in a more palatable manner to both allies and public alike. In fact, the effects of the Memorandum were rather limited, although it did have the unintended consequence of reducing for political leaders the distinction between internal and external security.

In 1995, the Dutch Parliament attempted to establish consistent criteria for the foreign ministry and the defence ministry on participation and engagement in operational missions abroad, particularly over the use of force. The parliament found that the established framework for participation and co-operation differed markedly from ministry to ministry, depending on the ambitions of the ministry (or rather minister) concerned. The foreign ministry thought in general terms about upholding international rule of law, international peace and security and the reinforcement of the Dutch position internationally. The defence ministry underlined the importance of achieving the level of ambition that had been established previously. Not unsurprisingly, when the final paper was agreed, the operational aspects of the mission criteria took second place to the rather more vague ambitions espoused by the foreign ministry. What became apparent was that the political leadership was not only uncomfortable about the use of force, but that it had little idea under what circumstances such force would be permissible and effective. The criteria were adjusted in 2001 to reflect a more realistic framework for the use of military force.\(^6\)

The 1998 defence budget included an annex with the 1998 Evaluation of the 1993 Priorities Memorandum. The text confirmed the two main roles of the armed forces: defence and crisis management, although for the first time all-out state-on-state war was discarded. Henceforth, regional collective defence operations led by NATO would be treated the same as other crisis operations. Therefore, to improve preparations for such operations it was decided that only the army structure needed further modification. Consequently, the army’s one remaining division was reinforced to comprise three equal brigades each with four manoeuvre battalions of four companies. Engineers and special forces were augmented and the modular structure and expeditionary character of the armed forces enhanced.

The 2000 Defence White Paper announced new budget cuts amounting to €3 billion over ten years.

---


\(^5\) Herijkingsnota [Re-evaluation Memorandum], September 1995.

years based on a two-stage approach. A so-called Headlines Memorandum\(^7\) seeking public support preceded the 2000 Defence White Paper, into which the results of the memorandum were integrated. This was not dissimilar to the way by which the former British defence secretary George Robertson had sought public consultations prior to publishing the UK’s 1998 Strategic Defence Review. The Dutch document made the expeditionary character of the Netherlands’ armed forces central for the first time, scrapping the one-year deployment limit for peace support operations.

Furthermore, following the Helsinki Declaration of December 1999 and the creation of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), a more EU-focused security policy was announced, in which political, economic, military and humanitarian efforts would complement and reinforce each other. For the first time threats to Dutch territory were discounted and as a consequence all ‘mobilisable’ units were disbanded, although the 2000 White Paper stopped short of scrapping all reserve units should force augmentation/reconstitution be required. In parallel, the navy sold two frigates, three mine-hunters and three maritime patrol aircraft, whilst the introduction of the NH-90 helicopter was to be delayed until 2007.

The air force lost a further F-16 squadron, as well as its small F27M transport aircraft fleet and the squadron of Bölkow-105 helicopters. On the positive side, a second landing platform dock was ordered for the navy; whilst the Royal Netherlands Marines were to get a third battalion and the army some eight hundred additional soldiers. Moreover, extra helicopters were ordered and a civil-military capacity created. The message of this white paper was to some extent counter-intuitive (as well as hostage to fortune), for to improve the sustainability of the Netherlands’ armed forces the frequency of personnel deployment would have to be reduced.

But disappointing recruitment figures markedly slowed any improvements in this area. However, it was not all doom and gloom. Surprisingly, the Dutch Parliament objected to the liquidation of an F-16 squadron, following the excellent performance of the air force over Kosovo in 1999. Moreover, to bolster the Netherlands’ European credentials, the German-Netherlands Army Corps (GE-NL Corps) was offered as a high-readiness headquarters for both EU and NATO missions. More co-operation was also sought with Britain (for example, the UKNL Amphibious Force), France and Germany, whilst agreement was reached with Berlin over co-use of the two countries’ air transport fleets.

**The Impact of 9/11**

As elsewhere, the events of 11 September 2001 had a profound effect on Dutch security and defence policy, making the linkages between internal and external security very much more apparent. On the one hand, the US sought a national Dutch contribution to combating terrorism and insurgency in the Afghan region. On the other hand, given the large Muslim minority resident in the Netherlands, the domestic political implications of sending such a force were clear. A direct consequence of 9/11 was the preparation of the ‘Terrorism and Security Action Plan’.\(^8\) Co-ordination between the major ministries with security responsibilities (general affairs, foreign affairs, development, defence, interior affairs and justice) was intensified. The defence ministry was instructed to prepare for unexpected shock, which led to the strengthening of the Military Intelligence Service, the Royal Marechaussee (Gendarmerie), the army special forces (KCT) and the Special Assistance Unit of the Marine Corps.\(^9\) Additionally, a number of so-called ‘active measures’ were taken in order to improve preparedness and resilience.

However, in spite of 9/11 and subsequent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the September 2003 Defence Budget and Policy Letter\(^10\) saw

---

\(^7\) Hoofdlijnennotitie [Headline Memorandum], Letter to Parliament, 2 July 2007.


\(^9\) The Bijzondere Bijstandseenheid, or BBE, now known as the Unit Interventie Mariniers.

\(^10\) The memorandum was published on the occasion of the Opening of Parliament, 16 September 2003 (third Tuesday in September). It was attached to the Prinsjesdagbrief and often quoted by that name, but the title of the memorandum was actually ‘Op weg naar een nieuw evenwicht: de krijgsmacht in de komende jaren’ [‘Towards a new equilibrium: the armed forces in the coming years’].
the downward trajectory in defence spending continue apace. This was particularly apparent in key technology investments. Modern armed forces need a growing and constant amount of investment to remain interoperable and effective, particularly in Network Centric Warfare capabilities that link intelligence, target acquisition and surveillance systems. Such capabilities also require steady investment in training and software. As a yardstick, it is typical that some 30 per cent of the total defence budget is allocated to such investment. In 2003 the Netherlands’ armed forces received instead only 16.9 per cent and this proportion improved only slightly to 19.9 per cent in 2005, but decreased again to 18.4 per cent in 2008. In 2009 the investment project estimates were sharply reduced, as a consequence of the global economic crisis.

Cuts amounted to some €255 million in 2004 and €380 million in 2008: in other words, around 5 per cent of the defence budget. Nominally, the level was the same as 1990, with the defence budget as a proportion of GNP dropping to 1.5 per cent, considerably less than the NATO objective of 2 per cent. The effects of the reductions compounded earlier cuts as the wear and tear on older army weapon systems became apparent with no budget for replacements. The ambition level of four simultaneous operations had already been brought back to three the previous year, whilst Defence Minister Henk Kamp looked to cut even deeper into operational capabilities to free up money for high-priority investments.

The list of measures undertaken was extensive. Personnel numbers were scaled back from 70,000 (including 20,000 civilians) to 57,000. All maritime patrol aircraft were sold. The Multiple Launch Rocket System was discontinued, two army bases closed (Ede and Seedorf); whilst the number of mechanised brigades was cut from three to two, tanks from 180 to 110 and howitzers from 57 to 39. Two air bases were closed (Valkenburg and Twente) with one made inactive (Soesterberg), and fast jets were reduced from 137 to 108 (six squadrons remaining) and attack helicopters cut from 30 to 24. The navy saw its frigates reduced from 14 to 10, with mine hunters similarly reduced from 12 to 10 with the promised third battalion for the Marines cut. Moreover, there was no expansion in the number of Patriot missiles. As a sop to the services, the frigates were to be equipped with tactical land attack missiles, whilst army special forces were expanded and the air force got a third DC-10 transport aircraft.

These cuts were particularly telling. Whilst anti-terrorism capacity was enhanced, the need for stronger expeditionary capabilities (especially logistics and combat service support) and national emergency assistance was recognised, but notably not financed. The ground forces were reduced to a new ‘minimum’ low, a situation aggravated by mandated commitments and the need to send personnel to the NATO Response Force and EU Battlegroups. For the first time since 1991, capacities were discarded that were unlikely to be restored. Unfortunately, these cuts took place at a particularly sensitive moment in the transformation cycle, further weakening the ability of the Netherlands’ armed forces to work alongside key allies, such as the Americans and British.

The 2003 Defence Budget and Policy Letter also complicated the position of the Netherlands within the NATO Alliance, not least because in 2003 former Dutch Foreign Minister Jaap de Hoop Scheffer was appointed NATO Secretary-General. Moreover, in the wake of the 2002 Prague Capabilities Commitment, the Alliance had given transformation a high priority. Allied Command Transformation (ACT) and the Joint Air Power Competence Centre (JAPCC) were tasked with bringing about the required changes across five key capability areas: intelligence/surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) and situational awareness; Command, Control, Communications and Computers (C4); power (force) application; deployment and sustainment; and interoperability. The emphasis on these requirements covered the full range of basic requirements necessary to

11 An agreement by NATO defence ministers made in 2002 on country-specific defence capabilities.
achieve better operational performance from teeth to tail. The only consolation for the Dutch was that they were not the only European Ally that failed to fully engage in transformation; with a Dutch secretary-general at the helm of the Alliance, it nevertheless proved politically embarrassing.

Sensitivity to the impact of repeated cuts and pressure from both the Dutch armed forces and Allies did lead to some revision. The 2005 Naval Study concluded the need to increase the support for land operations from the sea, with an emphasis on the lower force spectrum, but a lower requirement for sea control/denial capabilities. The study led to a commitment to improve the navy’s expeditionary capacities through the exchange of four M-frigates for four maritime patrol vessels suitable for NH-90 helicopter operations and the launching of two fast intercept boats. Tactical Tomahawk and Standard missiles were earmarked for the four new command and air defence frigates, and increases in personnel were proposed for the two Marine manoeuvre battalions. The replacement of the oiler Zuiderkruis by a multifunctional logistic support ship in 2011 was recommended, as well as better sensor suites for the four Dolfijn-class submarines and new mine sweeping suites for the ten mine hunter vessels.

As the Dutch deployed to Uruzgan, Afghanistan in June 2006, the 2003 Defence Budget and Policy Letter was updated. Entitled ‘New Equilibrium, New Developments; Towards Future-Proof Armed Forces’, the Letter recognised the profound impact of changes in the strategic environment on the armed forces. It promised a ‘solid base for further targeted enhancements of its capabilities, over the coming years’. The document also outlined six directions for future development to better undertake complex operations far away from the home base. In principle, this implied a choice in favour of the expensive but exceptionally multi-functional F-35 (Joint Strike Fighter), and the MALE unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The Letter also called for a Dutch contribution to the Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) project and four to six additional Chinooks, with more NH-90s helicopters being switched from the maritime to the land transportation role. Two extra C-130s were identified as necessary to replace two small Fokker F-60s, with a requirement identified for at least one C-17 strategic air transport, and crucially, cancellation of the intended sale of attack helicopters.

A new strategy was also announced in 2006 which aimed to enhance national assistance capacities, including improved co-operation between ministries. There was also a move towards enhanced jointery between the services through the creation of the whole-defence-organisation plus a new Joint Air Defence Centre (JADC), Defence Helicopter Command (DHC) and a commitment to create a permanent joint headquarters (PJHQ) modelled on the UK. More intelligence co-operation was proposed between the main agencies (MIVD, NCTb and AIVD) for offensive military intelligence and counter-intelligence. Improved network-enabled solutions were sought by linking sensors to shooters through enhancing a range of communications systems together with more investment in personnel. Paradoxically, the large-scale cutbacks in personnel that had taken place since 2003 helped the investment percentage increase from 16 per cent in 2003 to 19.9 per cent in 2005.

In July 2007, the so-called Headlines of Defence Policy document was submitted to Parliament and starkly revealed that the agreed expenditure for the Uruzgan mission had already risen far above planned spending. As additional money could not be found elsewhere (notably in the so-called inter-ministerial budget), the MoD was ordered to absorb the running costs from within the defence budget. Consequently, in July 2007 Defence Minister Eimert van Middelkoop proposed the cancellation of the Tactical Tomahawk, MALE

---

12 Dutch Ministry of Defence, Marinestudie [Naval Study], 14 October 2005.
UAV and the Dutch commitment to NATO’s AGS; a reduction in the number of operational F-16s from ninety to seventy-two (fifteen would remain available for training); a reduction in the number of tanks from eighty-eight to sixty and howitzers from thirty-six to twenty-four. In addition, he proposed the withdrawal of a company from Curacao; and the merger of the logistics and combat service support brigades of the army.

In keeping with a now established tradition of covering cuts with implied enhancements, several new investments were also announced in July 2007. They included *inter alia* a small increase in civil-military relations and security sector reform personnel, better Network Enabled Capability, and improved security for personnel on mission. Also announced was a permanent joint headquarters, improvements to the Apache weapon system and more money for intelligence. In fact most of these measures had been announced before, and they did not compensate for another round of deep cuts. The submission to Parliament employed the phrase ‘as civil as possible, as military as necessary’, which in the context of the Uruzgan mission implied that (re)construction should be the primary objective, with security coming a firm second. This did not reflect reality on the ground.

Squaring the Deployability/Downsizing Circle

The record of defence cuts over the period from 1991 paints a bleak picture for the Netherlands’ armed forces. The navy was reduced from 18 to 9 frigates;16 maritime patrol aircraft from 13 to nil; submarines from 6 to 4; mine-hunters from 29 to 10; and personnel from 22,000 to 11,000. The army suffered a reduction in brigades from 10 to 3; tanks from 913 to 82 (22 for training); artillery from 543 guns to 24; armoured anti-aircraft artillery from 95 to nil; armoured fighting vehicles from 1,327 to 794; and personnel from 75,000 to 25,700. The air force was reduced from 162 F-16s to 87 (with 15 for training) whilst Hawk units were reduced from 16 to nil, with personnel cut from 18,500 to 9,400.

However, even as the cuts bit deep, the Netherlands’ armed forces had to adapt to face major new challenges. Such change was only possible through a profound transformation in doctrine, professionalisation of the services, and some new equipment (helicopters, support ships, tanker and transport aircraft, command and control, and logistic systems). The ‘transformation’ process (such as it was) was nevertheless haphazard, piecemeal and dominated by a continuous uncertainty making force planning nigh-on impossible. Moreover, over the twenty-year period only two significant documents suggested a defence strategy: the memorandum of 1993 and the budget of 2003, both of which effectively eclipsed the two White Papers (1991 and 2000).

Such a climate of uncertainty persists. For the Netherlands, as for many smaller European countries, several essential defence and force planning questions remain unresolved. Can and will the defence budget be stabilised? Can the erosion of investment due to operations be prevented? Can any stated level of ambition be translated into capabilities, capacities and sustainable forces? Is jointery driven purely by budgetary concerns? Is it possible any longer to attract talented personnel to specialised roles in units that have already been reduced below any meaningful operational limits (such as tanks, artillery, air defence artillery and guided missiles)? Dutch policy-makers must grapple with these questions over the next defence planning cycle if the Netherlands’ armed forces are not to slip beneath the level of credible utility.

---

15 ‘Zo civiel als mogelijk, zo militair als nodig’ – as civil as possible, as military as necessary. This motto had been used in the late nineties by the unions in order to achieve working conditions for military personnel, based on contracts with civil servants.

16 After 2007 three more Karel Doorman-class frigates were to follow. Four patrol vessels of the Holland-class will be commissioned between 2010 and 2012.
3. Restoring Some Balance?

All armies are facing the need for transformation, particularly those of NATO and the former Warsaw Pact, but currently this is a debate concerning technology, numbers and organisation – not how these forces are to be fought, and to what purpose.1

In real terms, the Netherlands now spends 20 per cent less on defence than in 1991.2 Moreover, Dutch defence expenditure has slipped from 2.8 per cent (average 1985–89) of GNP to 1.35 per cent in 2010,3 a decline which has been further exacerbated by defence inflation that is running currently at between 5–7 per cent. To be fair, this decline is in line with reductions in most other smaller NATO European countries. In terms of operational output, the Netherlands is performing better than its position midway in NATO's expenditure league table. In per capita terms, the Dutch rank seventh among the twenty-nine member-nations, although the lowest ten positions are taken by former Warsaw Pact countries and Turkey.

Therefore, the real question facing the Dutch as they contemplate the next defence planning cycle and the capability demands that will inevitably emerge from the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept is simple: what do they need to afford and what can they afford? While the total annual defence budget amounts to somewhat over €8 billion, only around €1.5 billion (18.4 per cent) was available for equipment in 2008, while €260 million went to infrastructure.4 It is interesting to note that whilst the defence budget has decreased over time, expenditures for internal national security have more than doubled in real terms over the same period. Indeed, almost three times the defence budget is now spent on secondary health (the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act) and the Ministry of Development is committed to spending 0.8 per cent of GNP, irrespective of its effect.

At the very least, it would be helpful if the defence budget could be set at a minimum fixed percentage, if for no other reason than sound and efficient planning and use of public money. NATO member-nations have agreed to spend 2 per cent of GNP on defence (although only five out of twenty-eight meet this target), but it remains a reasoned and reasonable target. Certainly, given even lower-end assumptions about future operations, capabilities and the recapitalisation of forces, such a figure should represent minimum defence investment whatever the financial constraints over the short to medium term, albeit as a target to be reached via annual increments over a number of years.

Ideally, 25–30 per cent of the defence budget should be spent on investment in new equipment. Whilst this level was achieved in the mid-1980s, it steadily fell back to 24 per cent in 1993–95, although it increased again to 29 per cent in 1996–98. However, from 1998 on it fell again to 16.9 per cent in 2003, its lowest level in modern times. At present, the defence ministry seems to have given up striving for even 20 per cent, even though it is fully aware that such under-performance is steadily eroding the capability and thus the utility of the force. It is a moot question for the Dutch as to whether there is sufficient investment to sustain modern armed forces of a reasonable size.

Moreover, although the required level of investment varies per service (air forces always face high capital costs), several factors further complicate the situation:

- The costs of modern technology are rising

---

1 Rupert Smith, The Utility of Force, the Art of War in the Modern World (London, 2005), pp. xi, xii.
4 NATO, figures as of 2008.
faster than inflation in the wider economy

- Smaller equipment orders are driving unit costs up
- Ever-more complex weapon systems need ever-increasing amounts up-front of research and development, together with major investment in the design and development phases (as well as mid-life upgrades)
- Living and working conditions for the professional soldier cost more than for conscripted predecessors
- The armed forces show less favourable teeth-to-tail ratios due to the increasing complexity of logistics
- Expeditionary operations involve much wear and tear on equipment.

Furthermore, such investment by its very nature always tends to be dealt with at the end of the fixed costs food chain. Therefore, if the defence ministry is short of money due to unexpected expenditure, it is hard to find money elsewhere, given existing obligations. In other words, cuts in investment are often a first resort if money has to be found to make ends meet, particularly when the cost of operations has to be found from within the defence budget. Therefore, whilst all of the above demand that the 25–30 per cent figure represents an investment minimum, political reality and short-termism suggest a 20 per cent solution at best. The resulting higher running costs lead over time to a far higher price for very limited Dutch security and defence than should be the case.

The Human Cost

While the total military personnel in the Netherlands’ armed forces in 1990 amounted to some 104,000, over half (57,000) of these were professionals. This contrasts with 2009, when the entire professional force amounted to only 47,000. Civilian personnel have gone down from 24,500 in 1990 to 20,000 in 2006, with a target of 14,000 in 2012. Expenditure on personnel is now around €3 billion, or 39 per cent of the defence budget (52 per cent including pensions). Of the annual intake of 5–6,000 recruits, some 9 per cent are female, of whom only a relatively small number will occupy technical jobs. These figures do not compensate for maternity leave and other factors diminishing the effective service engagement of women.

Table 1 lists the distribution of military personnel over the services in 2007. This distribution is surprising even given the requirement for a high number of educated personnel manning complex weapon systems in both the navy and the air force. The equivalent number of officers in the army seems out of proportion, but this may reflect recent land-centric operations. Moreover, although the armed forces encounter problems in retaining captains and majors, management regulations for the higher ranks reinforce rather than prevent imbalance. Put simply, the Netherlands’ armed forces are top-heavy.

Not unusually during times of economic growth and increased job opportunities, the Netherlands’ armed forces have traditionally had difficulty

Table 1: Composition of the Netherlands Armed Forces, 2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military Personnel</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>NCOs</th>
<th>Other ranks</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>4,700</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>10,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>4,100</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>11,200</td>
<td>22,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>2,700</td>
<td>4,700</td>
<td>2,700</td>
<td>9,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marechaussee</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>5,900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in recruiting people. For example, in 2009 only 85 per cent of the organisation was filled, with a slight improvement forecast for 2010. This is again particularly apparent in the technical professions, including aircrew, which simply do not attract enough candidates. Interest in the combat arms of the army has been marginal at best with ongoing recruitment efforts failing to fill the ranks; prospects for the near future are also dim. Better labour conditions would help the armed forces compete for quality personnel with extra allowances to attract scarce technical personnel. Recently, recruitment has become easier but the economic crisis still makes it difficult for the armed forces to afford the quality recruits that complex operations and equipment demands.

**Interoperability**

The decision to buy the conventional version of F-35 Joint Strike Fighter as a successor to the F-16 reinforces interoperability with the United States Air Force (USAF), which is one of the few areas of Dutch capacity likely to endure. However, maintaining interoperability with the US is a matter of increasing concern in other areas given the weakness of defence spending and the growing unit cost of American equipment and supporting technologies. Even the British are having some problems maintaining interoperability with American forces, with UK defence spending at 2.5 per cent of the gross national product and with €16,500 invested per British soldier per year. However, the equivalent Dutch investment is now below €4,000 per soldier per year. Thus, whilst the dependence on the US has increased over the years, the ability to work with the Americans has become increasingly difficult.

This is critical because – as the 2009 *Verkenningen* (Strategic Defence Review) attests – decisions taken today will be judged sternly in a not-so-distant future. Combat after 2015 will be shaped increasingly by remote and autonomous systems, and will take place over a wider array of environment including space, cyberspace and the electromagnetic spectrum. The nature of strike operations will largely be determined by US transformation. Full spectrum dominance will thus be built on precision engagement, information superiority, full-dimension protection and focused logistics. US-led combat operations will be increasingly non-linear and dynamic, employing dispersed and precise forces at high tempo. Stabilisation operations will evolve to encompass more frequent counter-insurgency, more systematic burden sharing between contributors, and between the military and other agencies. Tough choices will need to be made by the Dutch in order to compete in a world where new combat technology is vital to maintain both comparative advantage on the battlefield and interoperability with the US.

**Efficiency vs Effectiveness**

Many a NATO minister of defence is faced with such choices: increase the defence budget in order to uphold the quality and quantity of the forces; maintain the quality while reducing the numbers; and/or lower the quality while maintaining the numbers. Dutch defence ministers have tended to prefer the second option over the last fifteen years. However, there is now a danger that further cuts aligned with the increased costs of technology will lead to a marked reduction in both quality and numbers. Indeed, capabilities in some areas, most notably tanks and artillery, have already slipped below minimum utility and the future of whole capability areas is now at risk. The maritime patrol air capacity has been disbanded, and if policy remains unchanged more critical areas will follow. It is questionable whether it will even be worth bringing back heavily used equipment from Afghanistan.

Herein lies a fundamental dilemma. Interoperability and task specialisation within the framework of international organisations to which the Netherlands contributes would be the obvious solution because it could offer policy-makers in The Hague access to the capacities of allies. However, interoperability is suffering from materiel under-investment in most countries and for political reasons, task specialisation has never matured. Equally, simply abandoning capacities without endeavouring to seek offsets from allies results in reliance upon those self-same allies, but with even less political or operational leverage. Moreover,
such cuts are always irreversible with the result that mission design is limited too often to what can be achieved rather than what needs to be done. This makes the Netherlands less desirable as an ally because allies believe that the Dutch either cannot act, or cannot be relied upon to act.

Uncertainty is particularly apparent in materiel planning, which makes an already tight equipment budget more inefficient than it should be. The Royal Marechaussee has mostly been spared from cuts due to its role in internal security, but tensions between the other services persist, despite the so-called 1:2:1 rule, which roughly sets investment for the navy, army and air force work within more or less fixed ratios. To quote an oft-used metaphor in the Dutch military, three cars are driving abreast on a narrowing road; to pass safely the cars must become both leaner and longer. Consequently, all the services have been forced to stretch their long-term investment plans over ever-greater periods, with the result that complex materiel investments are made ever more complicated and costly. Ideally, instead of producing a limited amount of equipment each year over a lengthy period, larger orders over a shorter time would save costs. Such an approach would lower production costs, and ensure that the original system and its replacement spend less time in parallel service. That is not the case currently.

The example of the F-16 replacement is telling. As it stands (assuming that a positive decision is made in 2012 on the F-35) the investment budget as a whole between 2014 and 2023 will largely be absorbed by new fighter aircraft. Consequently, there will be hardly any room for other pivotal requirements, some of which paradoxically will be critical enablers of the F-35 itself. The alternatives are equally unpalatable because any further budget reductions would doubtless lead to even more delay, smaller numbers and higher costs.

It could be possible to break out of this negative spiral by allotting certain projects to a limited number of years, while stalling (almost) all other projects, irrespective of service. To use the same car metaphor as above, road time would then be given to just one driver till he has finished the journey safely. Such a shift in policy would not only save money, but also lead to better prioritisation. Exemptions would only be made when the national industries involved in projects (such as the armoured infantry fighting vehicle replacement)

Table 2: Projects in € millions, 2008–12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008 in progress</th>
<th>2009 in progress</th>
<th>2010 in progress</th>
<th>2011 in progress</th>
<th>2012 in progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>260.8</td>
<td>256.3</td>
<td>214.5</td>
<td>137.5</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>540.0</td>
<td>384.3</td>
<td>209.2</td>
<td>190.4</td>
<td>127.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>310.2</td>
<td>243.2</td>
<td>117.0</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,111.0</td>
<td>883.8</td>
<td>540.7</td>
<td>360.1</td>
<td>203.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Projects in € millions, 2010–14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010 in progress</th>
<th>2011 in progress</th>
<th>2012 in progress</th>
<th>2013 in progress</th>
<th>2014 in progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>182.4</td>
<td>130.9</td>
<td>128.3</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>357.8</td>
<td>242.4</td>
<td>182.6</td>
<td>128.3</td>
<td>120.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>152.3</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic Defence</td>
<td>183.0</td>
<td>212.3</td>
<td>155.9</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>875.5</td>
<td>656.2</td>
<td>476.0</td>
<td>229.5</td>
<td>168.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were limited by production capacity. Certainly, the argument that urgent operational requirements must interfere with structural investments is both false and dangerous. In the Netherlands, the 1:2:1 rule should be abolished and prioritised joint materiel planning introduced as a matter of urgency.

The 2008 materiel investment figures (which cover the period of 2008–12) demonstrate that the opportunity for new investment (or more cuts) will increase over time as a consequence of reduced contractual obligations.6

The major projects of 2008, amounting to over €250 million, were:
- Navy: NH-90 helicopter
- Army: Infantry Fighting Vehicle (CV-90), Armed Wheeled Vehicle (Boxer)
- Air Force: F-16 replacement (SDD phase), Chinook.

In comparison with the 2008 project overview, Table 2 above shows a considerable reduction in investment.7 Whilst total expenditures for 2008–12 has been estimated at €3.15 billion, the figure for 2010–14 (Table 3) decreases to €2.5 billion: a reduction of €1 billion over five years.8 Thus the introduction of a defence-wide approach to equipment procurement for the three services cannot conceal the fact that the intended 20 per cent for investment is further away than ever.

There are currently several projects involving expenditures of more than €250 million. For the navy four new patrol vessels (2006–14) are being built, together with a joint logistic support ship (2008–14). Generic defence projects include defence transport vehicles (2009–19), the NH-90 (ends 2014) and improved soldier equipment (2007–18). At the top of the scale is the replacement F-16 programme (2007–25) for the air force.

The figures for the planned period beyond 2012 are not available to the public. The most conspicuous project is of course the F-35, which not surprisingly is subject to regular political and public comment. Rough 2008 estimates would put the total costs for this aircraft at around €6 billion for eighty aircraft in two batches (fifty-five and twenty-five) at around €50 million per aircraft, but repeated over-runs and delays compromise these figures.9 Actual production for the Royal Netherlands Air Force was scheduled to take place between 2011 and 2023, with the peak years being 2017–19, when around €500 million annually would be spent on the project.10 It would make more sense for the Netherlands to compress the bulk of this project into four years or as early as is practicable. Indeed, if the air force could diminish its F-16 operations to a minimum level during that period, additional money could be saved on improvement and maintenance programmes. This could enable the two major navy projects (patrol vessels and the joint logistic support ship) to precede the aircraft project, while the vehicles and soldier equipment projects could be delayed to the end of the period.

Ambition and Capability
Paradoxically, the relative inability of a country such as the Netherlands to afford strategic technological defence solutions may encourage cost-effective complementary solutions that would afford the Dutch both effect and influence. Non-lethality emerged during the 1990s as a new dimension in military operations aimed at closing the gap identified between diplomacy and the use of (lethal) violence. Crisis response operations call for more tailored military approaches in situations where the use of lethal force is considered only as

---

8 The defence budget (Begroting Defensie) for 2010 mentions a reduction of €291 million for 2010–14 (p. 28). The text maintains that 20 per cent for investment is still feasible.
9 Parliament decided in 2009 to enter the test phase with one aircraft instead of the two originally planned.
10 The US services plan for 2,443 aircraft.
a last resort, often counter to the accomplishment of mission objectives in people-centric operations. Moreover, media presence has tended to enhance the need for solutions other than the use of lethal force. This is particularly so given that adversaries are becoming increasingly adept at manipulating the media with a consequent impact on mission momentum in both theatre and at home.

In 1991, The Hague formulated military ambitions based on a reasoned assessment of threat. This led to the requirement to maintain a battalion-size involvement in four simultaneous operations abroad. The 2000 Defence White Paper stated that national and international co-operation were to be cornerstones of Dutch military operations and, to that end, the Dutch progressively adopted conceptually a whole-of-government approach to security. In 2002 this ambition was downscaled to three operations over a period longer than a year at the lower end of the conflict spectrum, with task groups of battalion size or their equivalents, in the event of air and maritime operations. The parallel commitment to deploy forces for no more than a year on an operation at the higher end of the conflict spectrum, with a brigade of land forces, two squadrons of fighter aircraft or a maritime task group remained unchanged. Equally, participation was confirmed as lead nation on land operations at brigade level and, together with allies, at corps level, as well as maritime operations at the task group level, and air operations at levels equivalent to a brigade.

Apart from these three key commitments, as stated in Chapter 2, major contributions to both the NATO Response Force and EU Battle Groups were outlined together with minor contributions to the European Gendarmerie Force, as well as training and advice missions, evacuation operations, counter-terrorism

Figure 1: European Defence Capability Shortfalls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EU/ECAP</th>
<th>Areas of Overlap</th>
<th>NATO/PCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attack helicopters/support helicopters</td>
<td>Nuclear, biological and chemical protection</td>
<td>Deployable combat support and combat service units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre ballistic missile defence</td>
<td>Strategic air and sea lift</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployable communication modules</td>
<td>Air-to-air refuelling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Role 3/Medical Collective Prevention Role 3</td>
<td>Combat effectiveness, including PGMs and SEAD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headquarters (OHQ, FHQ, CCHQs)</td>
<td>Unmanned air vehicles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrier-based air power</td>
<td>Surveillance and target acquisition units</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic ISR IMINT collection</td>
<td>Command, control and communications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early warning and distant detection, strategic level</td>
<td>Air-to-ground surveillance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat search and rescue</td>
<td>Special operations forces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11 See Chapter 2.
12 The 2000 Defence White Paper also established protection of overseas territories as a defence role. However, the structure of the Netherlands Antilles is in a process of change. Curaçao and St Maarten are to become independent states within the kingdom; Aruba has this status already. The other three islands will have status comparable to communities in the Netherlands. In all cases, foreign affairs, defence and the coast guard will be full responsibility of The Hague, or dominated by Dutch capabilities.
and international emergency aid. In addition, the Royal Marechaussee, Coast Guard and Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit were assigned to carry out national tasks. Across the armed forces a minimum of 4,600 personnel\textsuperscript{13} were to be available for disaster and accident relief.

Jointery between the services, and combined operations with foreign services were deemed essential, through the UN, NATO, EU, OSCE or bilaterally with partners who were most likely to be the US, UK, Germany, Belgium and/or Norway, but co-operation was also sought with France, Australia and Canada. National co-operation was to be promoted between the armed services and national institutions, police, interior forces, the counter-terrorism co-ordinator, intelligence and others. Operationalising the Comprehensive Approach was deemed pivotal to promote co-operation between civil institutions and armed forces during conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict phases.

Operations in Eritrea and Uruzgan have shown that Dutch land forces are perfectly capable of carrying out complex lead nation command and control (C2) tasks and recent investments in the field of C2 on board the landing platform dock/command ship HNLMS Johan de Witt confirm enduring national ambitions to command medium-scale operations.\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, earlier investment in a deployable air operations control station and the German-Netherlands High Readiness Headquarters pointed in that direction. However, the tensions between ambition and capability again emphasise contradictions in the force posture and equipment policy of the Netherlands’ armed forces.

Such contradictions are also apparent in the approach to and use of technology. Technology can of course help influence outcomes enormously, but without clear military strategy selecting the right required technologies becomes extremely difficult and promotes a tendency to seek improvements to the past at the expense of preparing for the future. For the Dutch the lack of a clear military strategy has too often led to ill-informed investment decisions. Some fifteen years ago most Western ministries of defence shifted from threat-based planning to capabilities-based planning. Although capability goals agreed in NATO and the EU were not always the same and were adapted over time, common wisdom dictated that the following shortfalls had to be addressed with some urgency (see Figure 1).\textsuperscript{15}

Many of these capabilities are possessed by the Netherlands’ armed forces. Some areas, such as carrier-based air power, strategic ISR/imagery intelligence collection, early warning, distant detection strategic level, CSAR, suppression of enemy air defences (SEAD) and surveillance and target acquisition units, are extremely costly and, with a few partial exceptions, out of reach. Therefore, higher-end capabilities can only be acquired through NATO or with a group of like-minded countries. However, the Dutch have been involved in the development of most of these capabilities, but have tended to wait for others to undertake hard purchase decisions, thereby losing a real say over specification of capabilities. A positive case in point is the Dutch participation in the NATO C-17 pool in which the Netherlands buys five hundred hours per year.

**Objective vs. Legacy**

Whilst the defence ministry is understandably reluctant to make public the lessons learned from operations in Uruzgan, it can safely be said that the armed forces have learnt a lot from the ISAF-OEF experience. Major improvements have been made in the field of joint and combined operations, staff work, intelligence, the employment of special forces and, not least, logistics and long-distance transportation. However, far more needs to be done – and urgently.

---

\textsuperscript{13} The Letter to Parliament of 2 June 2006 mentions 4,600 personnel at the minimum (para 4) and 25 per cent of the military component on a rotational basis (para 5).

\textsuperscript{14} The UN Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia started in 2000 with the Netherlands as lead nation.

\textsuperscript{15} This overview was presented by Michèle A Flournoy, senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, at Clingendael on 14 December 2005.
The Netherlands’ armed forces were among the first Western forces to adapt to a new era, which resulted in the so-called Objective Force. In the early 1990s it was decided to base the force structure on one unit on mission, one recuperating and one preparing for deployment, as part of balanced force rotation. However, this important principle has been abandoned, leading to a steady lessening of the performance of personnel: frequent deployments eat into recuperation, and deny people essential education and training. Indeed, the ratio has gradually (although not officially) been scaled up to one to four or five, placing particular strain on operational units deployed abroad. This is especially the case for critical components or enablers (hinge capabilities) such as special forces, engineers and helicopter units. Consequently, most personnel have been too frequently sent on operations. This has created undue stress, compounded by a defence

Table 4: Dutch Military Capability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current or planned capabilities</th>
<th>Ideal capabilities cf. basic rules</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LCF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-frigates</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future patrol vessels</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarines</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mine hunters</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynx naval helicopters</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFH-90 (maritime)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanised infantry battalions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light infantry battalions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tank battalions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery (howitzer) battalions</td>
<td>2 = 4 batteries x 6 guns</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-16 squadrons</td>
<td>5 x 12 a/c</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AH-64 Apache flights</td>
<td>5 x 4 a/c</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriot fire units</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPDs</td>
<td>3 (inc. successor to oiler)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(K)DC-10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-130 Hercules</td>
<td>2 + 2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport helicopters:</td>
<td>5 flights of 8 a/c = 42</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 C-47 Chinook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Cougar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 NH-90 (TTH)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
establishment back in The Hague doggedly sticking to a peacetime structure and approach.

Consequently, units are now degrading, with retention of key technical personnel particularly difficult. Therefore, hinge capabilities should rotate on a four or five-to-one basis as a maximum (not minimum) peacetime effort. Some air force units have already been organised along these lines, but the approach has yet to be applied across the armed forces. Moreover, such ratios depend largely on two factors: the availability of weapon systems and the demand for individual capacities. It is clear that aircraft (in particular fighters and helicopters) offer relatively low availability, due to frequent and complex maintenance, plus the need to maintain sensitive sensors and sub-systems (which are expensive to use). Relative utility costs also matter, with an F-16 costing roughly €20,000 per hour, an Apache €10,000 and a UAV €5,000. Conversely, support elements offer more favourable availability figures, although the number of times a weapon system has been deployed will have an attritional effect not only on maintenance, but also on what personnel can reasonably handle over any given period.

To ease this critical dilemma, operational air and land (manoeuvre, combat support, main logistic elements) should be rotated on a five-to-one basis, with all other units rotating on a four-to-one basis. In some fields, extra equipment will have be purchased for training purposes and attrition. If the new ratios were applied to the armed forces, the following figures in Table 4 would be attained.

**Future Force**

The force planning of the Netherlands’ armed forces will also require a delicate balance to be struck between the projection of force and its protection. At the very least, the force will require some strategic sea and air capabilities and enablers in support of land-heavy stabilising missions. The equipment available will need to be transportable (small and light payloads), and the logistic tail as small as practicable, albeit augmentable through partnership and access to the relevant parts of the wider economy to sustain any effort over time and distance.

Combat support, combat service support and insertion/extraction capabilities will likely be similarly modest, with troops that are self-reliant (small in numbers, highly educated and highly trained) and able to provide for their own force protection. This explains the emerging penchant for more small special operations units with their own expertise in language and cultures. Together, such measures will form an important step towards a lighter footprint in theatre, which is a pre-requisite for balancing Dutch political strategy and military method. So, what to do?

The 2006 *Militair-Strategische Verkenning* stated that the Dutch armed forces should be equipped for the complete spectrum of force, from the high to low end. Usually, that would mean high-end equipment that is also suitable for low-end operations. In fact, materiel planning has tended to focus on the high-end (rare), whilst promoting improvisation at the low-end (often). Indeed, whilst high-end air forces, given their inherent flexibility, can achieve such a balance, the danger is that the army is given equipment that degrades their operational flexibility: rarely is low-end equipment effective in high-end conflict.

Unfortunately, operational attrition and increased reliance on UORs has broken traditional procurement and equipment planning processes. Moreover, complicated technology has also driven up planning lead times for new equipment, whilst the roles and subsequent materiel requirements of the forces today demand much shorter turnaround.

---

16 Research undertaken by Military Operational Art and Science Section, Netherlands Defence Academy, 2007.
17 Equipment for wartime attrition should be included in the planning for every mission.
18 The number of eighty-eight tanks is a good example of diminished capabilities leading to a minimal capacity.
19 A better alternative would be to acquire five batteries of light towed guns.
20 Chief of Defence Staff document, 6 February 2006, p. 23.
periods than during the Cold War. This is further complicated by the nature of stabilisation and reconstruction operations, which demand shared wisdom, with international doctrine dictating the shape and use of multidisciplinary operations (defence, diplomacy and development), rather than any formal planning process. Thus, the emphasis today tends to be on reacting rather than planning. The critical need for the Dutch future force is thus to strike a balance between relevant and affordable modernisation, and reform that promotes all-important operational flexibility. Such an approach will be built on seven force pillars:

- Integrated command to refocus the bulk of the force at the sharp end of the mission
- The sustaining of high readiness
- Ability to control escalation (within reasonable limits)
- Improved strategic mobility
- Enhanced force protection
- Better strategic and situational awareness and improved sensor-to-shooter times
- Operationalisation of the Comprehensive Approach.

**Integrated Command**

The brigade level used to be the lowest level of integrated tactical command, at which manoeuvre, combat support and (some) combat service support forces were directed. Higher command in the army (division and corps level) no longer exists, so the brigade has now become the highest level of integrated command. In preparation for and during deployments, brigades tend to focus on the ad hoc composition of battalions, as this level often acts as the highest level of integration. During missions, the ‘battalion plus’ is designated as a battle group. However, peacetime training rarely includes operating as a battle group because every deployed army unit tends to be composed of elements of several parent units. Likewise the brigade, often charged with a myriad of administrative tasks, is given the title of Task Force nowadays. However, task forces are nearly always ad hoc organisations, to the detriment of their tactical role.

To re-focus the force towards mission success, the army should be structured so that the brigade focuses on its tactical command role and provides the basis for a task force command, including lead nation assignments, whilst administrative tasks are handled by a parallel peacetime organisation. The battalion would thus be reorganised into a semi-permanent battle group based on permanent links with fast deployable modules. The battlegroup would become the main building block of the army, thus facilitating easy deployment during crisis management operations.

**Readiness and the Mid-Spectrum**

High readiness involves both cost and force degradation. However, preparing for a war of choice should imply enough readiness to fight a war of necessity. Therefore, being able to upscale must be a central force-planning objective. Indeed, the capacity to upscale the force rapidly in an emergency should dictate the inventory, rather than being forced to downscale during an operation based on the inventory that exists. Downscaling has fostered a culture whereby the Dutch (and others) either tend only to recognise as much threat as they can afford, or created situations in which any deployed force faces a far-higher level of operational risk than a more capable partner force of similar size. At the very least, an adapted rotation of the force suggested above would enable the sustaining of a force at higher readiness for longer periods at reasonable cost.

The Netherlands’ armed forces should thus at the very least be able to escalate and de-escalate from the middle of the conflict spectrum. This would imply that the Dutch future force be deployable over large distances, be ready for employment soon after arrival and able to adapt fast to unexpected tactical situations. However, that suggests a need for equipment that is modular and adaptable: able to change both sensor suites and weapon systems over a conflict cycle. Sadly, this is not supported by investment choices. For example, the 2005 *Marinestudie* recommended that six of the eight *Karel Doorman* M-type frigates be replaced by four patrol vessels of frigate size without anti-submarine warfare and anti-aircraft artillery capabilities. Moreover, the vessels would have no provisions for modular installation and thus could only
operate at the lower end of the conflict spectrum. The role of these vessels would be limited to land support and peacetime patrol, being designed as platforms for helicopter and seaborne pursuit/interception operations with so-called ‘superrhibs’ (Super Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats). Therefore, the cost-effectiveness of these vessels is extremely questionable.

Protection vs. Sensors
The army has taken a different, high-end approach than the Navy, but one which is also highly questionable. As an example of high-end army equipment, the modern self-propelled tracked panzer howitzer is top-notch kit. However, the howitzer is too cumbersome for expeditionary operations; more operational flexibility would be afforded by towed artillery. The same applies to the 60-ton Dutch main battle tank (MBTs), the Leopard 2. Indeed, in the absence of an opposing tank army (unlikely), they could be compensated for either by Apache attack helicopters, or by generic armoured infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) equipped with 35mm or 70mm guns. Certainly, as long as improvised explosive devices (IEDs) continue to pose a risk, some armour will be needed. However, investments in sensors and smart design (such as the ‘round’ bottom of the Bushmaster) offer cost-effective defences, reinforced by technologies that stop IEDs from exploding. The shift from armour to more (and better) sensors will doubtless continue. Effective network enabled capabilities can help pave the way to better sensor-to-shooter times and the fast escalation dominance that the Dutch future force will have to master.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
The army has gained some experience with the Sperwer unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), a sensor platform originally acquired for artillery support. Unfortunately, this system suffers from mechanical shortcomings, compounded by the relatively modest air expertise of the army in Uruzgan, which helped lead to its replacement by an outsourced and overly expensive alternative. By contrast, small and simple hand-held UAVs, such as the Raven, given their limited size and support could offer reasonable price-quality characteristics (the key to affordability) and are ideal for light infantry support roles. Strategic UAVs, directed via satellite links, can loiter for tens of hours and are a unique sub-space asset, but their costs are prohibitively high for smaller European powers.

Medium-sized UAVs, such as the Predator, matured fast during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. They can be outfitted with weaponry (e.g. Hellfire missiles), reducing the sensor-to-shoot time considerably. The advantage of these platforms is their small size, long loiter times and casualty-free operations. However, there are drawbacks. They require complex infrastructure support (ground stations) and they lack an airborne pilot who can ‘read the battle’. Moreover, UAVs are susceptible to the weather and equipment failure. Further, over their life span they tend to be very costly. Nevertheless, UAVs will undoubtedly prove to be invaluable future assets, complementary to fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft. Whilst withdrawal from the French MALE UAV programme was understandable, the Dutch need to participate in a medium-size UAV programme remains vital. Indeed, in the long run, effective UAVs offer the best cost-effective solution for carrying out long, tedious and casualty free-missions.

Information Operations
The need to reinforce the intelligence chain and enhance the ability of the Netherlands’ armed forces to take part in information operations has been stated in every recent defence review. Nevertheless, the defence ministry has abandoned the Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) and the MALE UAV projects. But there is no alternative to AGS. The last aircraft loaded with sensors in Dutch military service was the 13 PC-3 Orion which was – albeit only for coast guard duties in the Caribbean – replaced in 2007 by two outsourced (and expensive) Dash-8 aircraft. The Orions had been outfitted with modern sensors, and could have played a meaningful tactical support role in Afghanistan similar to that played by British Nimrods over Helmand Province. Therefore, whilst this capacity was lost with the sale of the Orions, the opportunity to retain a diminished capacity through AGS was also foregone. Given the stated
policy of putting greater emphasis on intelligence, this was clearly a mistake.

**Enhanced Tactical Jointery**

In 2004, the defence ministry conducted a study into intensified co-operation between the Marine Corps, the Commando Corps (special forces), the Air Manoeuvre Brigade and the Tactical Helicopter Group. The object of the study was to maintain the current structures, traditions and cultures of each unit, whilst exploring further and future co-operation – for example, in training, procedures, C2, equipment standardisation, logistics. The study was dismissed at the time by the individual services, mainly because they saw intensified co-operation as a threat to their existence and a precursor to yet another cut dressed up as ‘efficiency’. However, its lessons need to be urgently revisited.

Equally, since 2004, jointery within the Netherlands’ armed forces has improved considerably. For example, the navy and air force have concentrated some ninety transport, attack and maritime helicopters in the Defence Helicopter Command. Such need for helicopter support suggests the need for a further review. Specifically, the Air Manoeuvre Brigade and the Marines, which are increasingly seen as twinned units, need to be organised accordingly. This would rationalise logistics with the same procedures based on the same doctrine, promoting synergistic training programmes, and would differ only in specialised training environments. Furthermore, the force would be a pool from which the special forces could recruit, with the option for individuals to serve in parent units. Undoubtedly, any move in that direction would cause a huge uproar in the navy, but in effect that is what happened in the UK – with no loss of identity for the Royal Marines.

**Operationalising the Comprehensive Approach**

Today, the achievement of national strategic objectives relies on a combination of power and influence. The military creates the security space for partners to exploit. However, as a result far too much of the effort has been ad hoc. Nevertheless, the Netherlands, with its close-knit institutions, is in many ways better placed to create whole-of-government apparatus. Such mechanisms are vehicles for influence in their own right, as they represent comparative advantages that a state such as the Netherlands can and must exploit. Furthermore, with the Dutch development budget fixed (unlike defence) at 0.8 per cent GNP, the development effort is established on a more stable planning base. This enables unexpected expenditures and contingencies during crisis operations to be built into campaigns, thus benefiting the overall national effort. One example of this was the purchase of an extra C-130 Hercules aircraft in the early 1990s – partially from the development budget – in order to transport aid. Another example was the availability of small funds for local projects in Cambodia, initiated by the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps in 1991. In Afghanistan, development funds were widely used for the improvement of local living conditions through a strong civil-military partnership, with the military helping to ensure the funds were delivered and used to best effect.

**Creative Solutions**

Since the mid-1990s, the navy increasingly focused on brown water operations as the submarine threat decreased. As a result, the Marines have become central to the service. Today, the navy is looking for ways to enhance its role in and beyond the littoral in land support operations. To that end, projects include the building of four patrol vessels, the replacement of the oiler Zuiderkruis by a multifunctional support ship, which can double as a helicopter carrier. Sadly, in that context the decision to cancel the acquisition of Tomahawk cruise missiles for the new frigates (LCFs) was, to say the very least, counterintuitive.

However, given the importance for smaller European powers of finding a niche, the Dutch could lead the way in land-support riverine operations. For example, modular platforms in riverine and estuarine environments would reduce the ever-important cost per platform per operation during crisis operations in countries where land basing is difficult, costly or extremely dangerous, such as Central Africa or Southeast Asia. Operations could then be run independently from these floating
platforms, which could comprise housing, mess, repair, supply, medical and other facilities, such as helicopter hangars. These platforms would be accompanied by armed fast patrol boats, and require significant civilian support (in this, the Dutch are world leaders, with companies such as Smit International and Mammoet). Future riverine operations are currently in the study phase, but the idea is being actively pursued following the July 2009 delivery of the initial report to the Operational Command of the Royal Netherlands Navy.

Restoring Some Balance?
The Dutch defence budget has today fallen to an historic low of 1.35 per cent of GNP. Given the position of the Netherlands as a state dependent on overseas trade, it is reasonable to assume that allies and partners will continue to demand of Dutch governments substantial contributions to crisis management. To meet even minimum commitments, the defence ministry must therefore be able to plan ahead with a defence budget established firmly on a fixed and stable percentage of GNP. This will better enable planners to make efficient use of a limited budget, supporting small but effective forces that are internationally recognised as such and thus capable of reinforcing the diplomatic influence of the Netherlands over allies, partners and adversaries alike. Failure to do so will put at risk not only the reputation of the Netherlands, but also the other two pillars of Dutch external engagement – diplomacy and development – as The Hague fails the credibility test, particularly in Washington. True security policy works on point of contact with danger. Sound defence policy is therefore critical to all other elements of national engagement.

The bottom line is this: the inherent uncertainties in the security environment can only be met by certainties, the most important being to spend sufficient money to enable the forces to maintain core competence. However, too often Dutch policymakers have met the problem of uncertainty with incertitude, which sacrifices both effectiveness and efficiency.

Restoring balance in the Netherlands’ armed forces will thus demand a gradual increase in the equipment budget over a limited number of years. Only through this can current capacities be maintained, their frittering away in small but incremental reductions be prevented. Joint materiel planning will also be essential if big-ticket items are to be afforded, and prevent the services from competing when major equipment projects are run in parallel fashion. That will take tough choices, but, above all, leadership.
4. Twenty Lessons from Below Sea Level

**Choices**

In 2008, the total defence expenditure of NATO European states was €204.95 billion. Of that, Britain, France and Germany accounted for 60 per cent. Moreover, of around 1.7 million uniformed personnel in Europe, only some 170,000 (10 per cent) could be deployed at any time, and much of that figure was made up of British and French forces. Indeed, many smaller European states could only deploy 3–4 per cent of their forces. In the second rank came Italy (7 per cent), the Netherlands and Spain (each 5 per cent), Sweden (3 per cent) and Poland (3 per cent) – which together mustered some 23 per cent of the NATO Europe total. Therefore, just eight members contributed around 88 per cent of the total. Of the remaining 12 per cent, Greece provided a significant portion, with much of its expenditure devoted to potential conflict with a NATO ally, Turkey (and vice versa). The contribution of all other nations was, in effect, negligible. Smaller European states now face a profound set of defence choices – be it to generate a credible defence role in its own right, give meaning to an EU-led European security and defence identity, or ensure NATO remains the cornerstone of collective defence underpinned by an American security guarantee.

Whether improvements to the European defence effort take place under the umbrella of NATO or the EU misses the point. The majority of Europeans are in both organisations, and the forces available to both are by and large the same. The 2010 NATO Strategic Concept will, doubtless, lead to new capability goals. But too often in the past, the NATO defence planning questionnaire (DPQ) has resulted in some of the greatest works of European fiction to date, with Americans pretending to believe European commitments and Europeans pretending to be serious. This must stop.

Not surprisingly, smaller European states tend to be more comfortable investing at the lower end states to respond credibly to the spectrum of crisis operations, be they covered by the EU’s Lisbon Treaty or NATO’s Strategic Concept. Therefore, the individual attempts of all member states to restructure and reform their armed forces should be reviewed and managed within the frameworks of both the NATO Strategic Concept and the European Security Strategy (ESS), with the smaller members of both organisations pushing for harmonisation between the two.

To that end, the challenges faced by the Netherlands’ armed forces are the same as the militaries of many smaller European states. The tension that exists between the benefits of collective security and defence, and the responsibilities it imposes, profoundly complicates defence planning. This is particularly so when membership of NATO demands investment in large architecture, such as missile defence, for which the immediate threat to smaller states is not clear and present, while requiring resources that could be spent elsewhere on national security.

Equally, every EU or NATO member is and should be expected to share the burden of collective security and defence. At the very least, this implies regular contributions to expeditionary missions. However, with annual cost inflation of around 5–7 per cent for high-tech equipment, governments face a choice of either allowing weapon systems to ‘rust out’ or to find monies at the expense of other areas of national investment. Indeed, even standing still demands a minimum 25 per cent of the annual total defence budget spent on replacing equipment and infrastructure to withstand the ravages of time and defence inflation. Therefore, how to afford such capabilities is the central challenge faced by smaller European countries, and the Netherlands is no different.

---

1 Britain alone accounts for 34 per cent of the total, although that figure was inflated by the costs of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.
of the conflict spectrum. However, such choices can lead to a false economy. Effective engagement in irregular warfare may indeed require smaller, more flexible force packages, and synergies with a strong civilian component (the Comprehensive Approach) can shift somewhat the burden of cost. But the longer the mission, the greater the need for a sound force funding base. Shifts toward civil-military force concepts are taking place across Europe, with smaller Europeans in the vanguard of what may be an emerging European strategic culture. However, rhetoric must be matched by reform, and whilst novel approaches eschew the classical view of force, such force will still be needed. Sadly, the armed forces of too many smaller European states remain mostly organised as they were during the Cold War. Indeed, some of them are little more than ‘armed pensions’.

Therefore, meaningful reform will require the forces of such states to become more expeditionary and more modular in structure, with special and specialised forces reinforced. Paradoxically, for many of them the strategic underpinnings of defence planning (particularly during times of financial stress) reinforces the need for expeditionary, multinational efforts of long duration, involving non-military agencies. Given that this is also the case for larger European states, it raises an interesting debate about what constitutes ‘smallness’ in today’s strategic environment. Indeed, modesty in future may be the first step to effective strategy for all European states, given that good strategy is of far greater importance to the relatively weak than the overbearinglly strong.

Equally, for smaller European powers the relationship between effect, risk and political cost is felt more keenly than bigger powers; not least because the national community is often complex, and the manpower pool small. However, whatever novel solutions and narratives smaller European states seek, the preservation of interoperability with lead and framework nations in coalition operations will be central. This will likely force leaders to strike a balance between effectiveness, efficiency and sovereignty in the first half of the twenty-first century, primarily through the pooling of strategic enablers (signals intelligence, fast air, sea lift, and so on) and/or reliance on the enablers of others, most notably the Americans. In time, the recognition that strategic modesty must be balanced with credible action could well lead to narrow specialisation and even defence integration. However, that is still for the future.

The focus of this study has been the here, the now and the immediate future. Therefore, the twenty lessons from the experience of the Netherlands’ armed forces presented below are thus relevant to all smaller European countries.

**Politico-Military Lessons**

1. **Make transformation more relevant:** Promote smart transformation through both NATO and the EU that is relevant to smaller countries, and use the commitments made therein to maintain force modernisation.

Alliance and Union transformation must be focused on force modernisation for smaller European powers. Transformation emphasises convergence on high-end, networked capability, which is all well and good – however, smart transformation would enhance the natural strengths of NATO and EU members throughout the strategic stabilisation task list, and across the conflict intensity spectrum.

2. **Create stable defence budgets:** Regular changes to the defence budget, be they increases or decreases, make sound defence planning impracticable, and thus undermine the efficient use of tax-payers money. Stability is the key.

Of twenty-eight NATO member states, sixteen of them spend less than 1.8 per cent of GNP on defence and a few spend as little as 1 per cent. The seven ‘big spenders’ include Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Turkey: countries that make little difference in peace support operations and which spend badly. Only the US, UK and France spend reasonably efficiently and effectively, and above 1.8 per cent GNP. The defence budget should be seen as an insurance policy for which a certain...
amount of money should be set aside – just as the Dutch perceive the height of dykes as a standard that cannot be adjusted to changes in political will. However, only clear political leadership on foreign and security policy will enable the construction of a framework in which defence is not repeatedly squeezed between multiple missions and a structural shortage of funds, personnel and equipment.

3. **Establish better personnel/equipment investment ratios:** Lower the personnel budget to a maximum 50 per cent of the defence budget, spend at least 25 per cent on equipment, and stick to such ratios.

The transformation of the Dutch armed forces from a conscription to an all-volunteer force markedly inflated the personnel budget. Better paid professionals tend to absorb a larger part of the total budget (rightly so), but only a professional force can be employed effectively in crisis operations abroad. However, inflation also occurred in the higher ranks. This persists. Therefore, armed services can save money by downsizing from the top. With 50 per cent of the budget covering personnel costs and 25 per cent covering materiel investments, another 25 per cent of the defence budget should remain for operating costs. However, special attention should be given to operating costs during missions. The Netherlands has a budget in place for 3D expenditure, from which all three ministries (foreign affairs, development co-operation and defence) can draw funds for any unforeseen costs for which the normal budget does not provide. However, too often the Dutch have had to fund the cost of extended operations from within the defence budget: this must be avoided by partners and allies.

4. **Seek stable pooling arrangements:** Build long-term, stable relationships with like-minded countries to build capacities through pooling that exceed the national purse, but which are essential for contributing to coalition operations and thus exert influence over larger allies.

Pooling of European sea and air transport assets is already showing results through savings on and access to increasingly in-demand capabilities. Such co-operation is an investment, even if at the outset it tends to slow performance. Downstream, however, such co-operation offers the advantages of enhanced sustainability, more international materiel options and learning from the experience of allies. There is of course one proviso: coherent political direction from all capitals involved is a precondition for success, but that is the price all states must pay if it unilaterally and effectively cedes authority over its own defence needs. In 2009, NATO finalised an initiative to fund the acquisition of a limited number of C-17 heavy transport aircraft, in which the Netherlands is participating. The European Air Transport Command in Eindhoven is another example of such efforts.

5. **Invest in multinational formations:** Multinational formations, such as EU Battlegroups and the NATO Response Force, are important levers of influence for smaller European states. They must contribute consistently to such multinational formations and not reduce commitments at short notice.

The Netherlands enjoys military-operational partnerships with several allies and is a partner with Germany (land), Belgium (navy), the UK (navy, marines), Norway (air, land) and the US. Moreover, temporary operational and/or industrial relationships have been developed with a range of other countries, most notably with Australia in Uruzgan (Afghanistan), Ireland (Chad) and France (Chad, Afghanistan). However, trust has been dented over recent years by a lack of consistency weakening some key relationships, most notably between the British Royal Marines and the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps. Equally, several

---

3 The German Government will, in 2010, cut some €8.3 billion from a €31 billion defence budget. At present it can deploy abroad only around 7,000 of its 250,000 troops. *Economist*, ‘At Ease’, 17 July 2010, p. 27.

4 The so-called *Homogene Groep Internationale Samenwerking* [Homogeneous group international co-operation].
multilateral headquarters and military forces have also been established in which the Dutch play an important role and which suggest a way forward for other Europeans. Indeed, formations such as the NATO Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (particularly as it concerns work to operationalise the Comprehensive Approach), the EU’s Battlegroup 1500 and the NATO Response Force are important levers of influence for smaller European states, and should be supported as such.

6. **Exploit comparative advantages:** Areas of comparative advantage that reflect national strategic culture should be exploited, such as civil-military strategic relations.

Co-operation between the Dutch Ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs and Development over the 3Ds originated in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a complex interplay of civilian, military and international organisations led to a bewildering diversity of influence factors and levers. The military instrument alone could not deal with such a complicated situation, and whilst other government departments and agencies (as well as NGOs) both added to the complexity, only through new partnerships could stability momentum be generated. Today, such partnerships are vital and smaller European states are uniquely placed to foster new civil-military strategic relations. Indeed, lessons learnt from the Bosnian experience resulted in what became known as the Comprehensive Approach. This concept has since been developed given experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, with a civil-military partnership emerging that in many ways reflects Dutch strategic culture (shared with much of continental Europe).

7. **Promote internal key leader engagement:** Strengthen strategic culture by re-establishing links with an oft ill-informed political class by enhancing the knowledge, experience and involvement of politicians in defence matters. Also undertake more public diplomacy to re-embed a small force in a large society.

Since 1996, when the Netherlands ended conscription and reduced (and upgraded) its armed forces into a professional, mobile and more flexible force, linkages with both the political class and wider society have been steadily eroded. This has also been the case in several smaller European countries, with the result that the debate over the use of force is increasingly ill informed at both the political and popular levels. This is due to a widening gulf between armed forces and the public. It is therefore vital that political leaders and opinion leaders have a sound grasp of military affairs, not least because the use of military force is a political act. The military leadership should thus encourage a form of internal key leader engagement with politicians (and journalists) to follow dedicated or general courses in these vital areas. Defence academies and universities should be equipped for such a purpose. That will enable politicians with little experience of the armed forces to better understand the complexity of military operations, and thus make informed decisions on security and defence matters, rather than leave it to an unelected civilian bureaucratic elite often mired in bureaucratic, rather than national politics.

8. **Invest in knowledge communities:** Exploit human capital through new knowledge communities by strengthening the quality of individual members through education and mentoring.

The Netherlands is blessed with excellent human capital and knowledge communities. Like many of its European counterparts, the Netherlands’ armed forces need to become far more adept at reaching out to such communities to enhance knowledge. For many engagements, knowledge is a pre-requisite for mission success, including the full range of skills needed for counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, and integrated military and non-military instruments of power and influence. Defence academies are ideal hubs for the exploitation of national knowledge power. Indeed, much more needs to be done to access open-source expertise through the European university system.

---

and beyond. Paradoxically, as forces are cut, they tend to withdraw into bespoke, limited knowledge stovepipes.

Military-Strategic Lessons

9. Re-establish sound military strategy: Return to basic principles as the main force driver.

Planners must balance ambition with obligations and resources. Judgments over the level of engagement (from low to high end of the conflict spectrum) are rarely made on a sound, considered basis. However, such judgement is vital in sizing, structuring and equipping the force; history is all too full of examples of ill-equipped and ill-prepared forces being sent into dangerous places. European planners today must produce forces with a core effective at the low end (peacekeeping missions), but also credible as a partner with the Americans at the high end. Currently, only British and French forces are capable of operating (and co-operating) with the Americans at the high end, and even here Europe’s two most powerful military actors suffer considerable shortcomings. Paradoxically, it is generally easier for small powers to co-operate with the navies and air forces of larger powers at the high end of the spectrum than with land forces, but they must be equipped: if not, their utility is profoundly diminished. Therefore, defence planning for smaller European states should focus on the main effort of its forces. To that end, the capacity for limited high-end operations should be retained in the requirement for new weapon systems.

10. Better align procurement with strategy: Procure the bulk of equipment for the middle of the conflict spectrum, in line with the main effort of its forces.

Priority in procurement policy should be driven by joint materiel planning with major materiel projects receiving absolute priority within an agreed timeframe. Inter-service rivalry is normal, especially at times when the defence budget is tight. However, such competition can become counterproductive if services start putting too much energy into fighting each other. Indeed, in the absence of a united front, it is often finance ministries that tend to decide, and for reasons that have little to do with sound military strategy. All smaller European states would thus benefit from a more rigorous joint (i.e., overall defence) priority-driven materiel planning process that encompasses all service requirements. Such an approach would have the advantage of promoting faster production times, thus making projects more affordable; lead to shorter time-frames for maintaining parallel weapons systems during the introduction of new systems; and demand fewer highly trained (and expensive) personnel involved in research, development and quality control. In parallel, smaller European states should drive forward reform of multinational procurement project management – most obviously through the European Defence Agency and NATO’s Conference of National Armaments Directors.

11. Re-balance limited mass with the need for manoeuvre: Remove heavy, legacy platforms such as main battle tanks and armoured howitzers, and move towards more flexible, deployable assets and formations.

Contemporary stabilisation and reconstruction operations suggest there is quality in quantity – a critical mass of boots. Although the truth of this wisdom differs from system to system and service to service, it is obvious that larger numbers allow more flexibility for maintenance, training and deployment. Tanks are unfit for expeditionary operations and force the inefficient use of heavy-lift air assets, as normally only one vehicle can be moved per sortie. Strangely, many European countries hold large numbers of tanks, for no other apparent reason than that they have been paid for and that their replacement would impose a heavy financial burden. Tight equipment budgets bound to the maintenance of legacy platforms will prevent investments in much more flexible assets such as modern armoured infantry fighting vehicles.

12. Promote jointery: Continue the quest for more jointery, particularly in the field of light infantry and air and naval support.
A task force structure must be fostered in peacetime to enable all the key force elements to work together during conflict. Brigade headquarters should focus on tactical roles, so that they can form the core of task-force structures during missions abroad, while battalions should be transformed to permanent battlegroups with earmarked combat and combat service support. A certain role specialisation (amphibious, air-mobile, mountain, desert, jungle) could be an additional capacity. In the Netherlands, the light infantry has been split between the army and navy, a situation leading to duplication and on occasion fruitless competition. At the very least, such duplication should be brought to an end without undermining the identities of either the army or the marines (the latter could well be needed in future to fulfil their unique mission suite). Therefore, identical procedures should be adopted at least in training and logistics, save those areas specific to marine operations. Efforts in this direction are thankfully underway, with a company of the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps having deployed as part of an army mechanised battalion in 2009. Another useful step would be to further promote the common use of scarce capabilities. Role specialisation at the company or battalion level should also be encouraged, which would enable focus of force elements on amphibious, air-mobile, mountain, desert or jungle operations.

13. **Reconsider force rotation:** Force rotation should be a minimum of ratio of one to four rather than one to three to enable role adaptation, complicated maintenance and retention of key personnel – particularly technical grades.

During the early 1990s, the Dutch armed forces concluded that a force rotation of three to one enabled employment of one unit on mission, one recuperating and one preparing for deployment. However, this capabilities-led assumption proved too tight, as it did not take into account role adaptation, complicated maintenance of worn equipment and the non-availability of personnel. Consequently, personnel retention in practically all units became difficult, as the operational tempo was hard to sustain.

15. **Pay for police forces from the civilian budget:** Shift gendarmerie-type forces to the ministries of justice or interior, as their deployed gendarmerie function reinforces the 3Ds. End the distortion of the defence budget that their costs imply.

By tradition, some European nations have adopted a Napoleonic structure of the armed forces in which (part of) the police forces are organised along military lines. There are some advantages to this, especially during expeditionary operations, when it is useful to have specialists for legal proceedings and police training, and experts in maintaining law and order, all in the same organisation. However, there are also disadvantages that the Dutch have discovered. In the Netherlands, the exclusive military tasks of the Royal Marechaussee have been reduced from 40 per cent in 1990 to about 20 per cent today. Over the same period, the ‘fourth service’ has been growing and taking up an increasing part of the defence budget, with few obvious advantages for the defence effort. During deliberations on budget reductions, the minister of justice will always point at operational requirements without offering financial support. Therefore, the Royal Marechaussee should be transferred to the justice and/or interior ministry. During missions, the assistance of those ministries for specialised tasks could be called upon, thus strengthening the 3Ds/ Comprehensive Approach.

16. **Seek creative synergies with the civil sector:** Where possible, work with the civil sector when they can support operations at the lower end of the conflict spectrum with equipment and know-how.

All European states should seek synergies with the civil sector. Unfortunately, the narrowness of thinking in most militaries is self-defeating (even though they speak constantly of ‘thinking outside the box’). That said, there is some evidence that the sheer scale of the challenge faced is leading to genuine new thinking. For example, the Netherlands enjoys one of the largest maritime salvage and support industries in the world. In 2008–09, the Netherlands Defence Academy undertook a research project for the Operational Command of the Royal Netherlands Navy that explored
the role of navies and marines in stabilising the littoral. One factor was the excessive cost of using large, bespoke naval vessels as offshore bases in support of deployed marines engaged on ship-to-objective manoeuvre, and the establishment of a security zone in the area of operations. Discussions with Dutch contractors Smit International and Mammoet demonstrated that not only were such civilian contractors familiar with operating in robust environments, the quality of key enabling skills and technologies far surpassed that of the forces. One area of exploration was the construction of floating riverine bases to provide a base of operations in areas lacking infrastructure and also afford force protection. The use of standard container-sized pontoons designed by Mammoet could be deployed in any required configuration and markedly reduced the cost per operation per ship and re-supply. The Pentagon has now taken up this Dutch idea.

Operational Lessons

17. Establish (and stick to) sound and realistic mission objectives and deploy to succeed: Ensure that the relationship between mission objectives, rules of engagement and capabilities and capacity is realistic from the outset, and that constraints are properly understood and communicated to allies.

The mission in Uruzgan, Afghanistan was never intended to defeat the Taliban per se, but had as its priority the protection and support of the population. Therefore, such an approach required a thorough knowledge of the local environment and the integration of critical expertise within the mission. Moreover, preventing casualties among the civil population could only be accomplished through strict rules of engagement. However, the situation on the ground changed and the pressure from allies to do more, particularly the Americans, increased. The lack of clarity in The Hague about both the role of the force and the limits of the operation were understandable, given a very reasonable desire to satisfy both the domestic lobby and allies. However, uncertainty over intention and role persisted for a long time, which weakened support at home and made it very hard for allies to plan for contingencies in a key part of Afghanistan. This is a trap that many smaller European states fall into, driven often by the view that force deployments in fact take place not to succeed in any given mission, but rather to do the minimum possible commensurate with obligations to NATO and the EU (and above all, to the Americans). Such an approach weakens, rather than strengthens, ties with the Americans (and others); too often, its leads to misunderstandings and disappointment.

18. Build and sustain key domestic relationships and celebrate success: Ensure that relationships with ministries and partners vital to mission success work in the field, not just back in capitals. Celebrate success when it is achieved.

The Dutch experience in Uruzgan has many lessons for other smaller European states, particularly in counter-insurgency and the Comprehensive Approach. The doctrinal umbrella under which the Dutch defence ministry co-operated with the ministries of foreign affairs and international development made it clear from the outset that no progress could be made without a reasonable degree of security. Gradually, Task Force Uruzgan (comprising Dutch, Australian and American troops) succeeded in rendering the most densely populated parts of the province relatively secure, and this paved the way for multiple development initiatives. Consequently, invaluable experience in the field of counter-insurgency was developed during the mission that in many ways reflected old lessons from the colonial past, seen through a modern lens. The Dutch have much to be proud of given their effort in Afghanistan but have shown a marked reluctance to trumpet their successes. Much more effort should be made to inform both publics and allies alike of those successes. Sadly, the Dutch will not be remembered their good work, but rather as the first European to quit and run for home.

6 Kamerbrief [MoD Letter to Parliament], Nr. 27925/366, 14 October 2009. This letter refers to the initial assessment of the then new ISAF commander, General Stanley McChrystal, in which strong similarities with the Dutch strategy are apparent.
19. **Know the limits:** Understand the strengths and weaknesses of key equipment before the force is deployed and avoid having to learn dangerous truths on the job.

By trial and error, the Netherlands’ armed forces learnt that not all equipment is suitable for all circumstances. Infantry vehicles and jeeps were vulnerable to IEDs, which led to fast-track procurement for some eighty-three Australian-made Bushmaster infantry vehicles, purchased in four batches. The Bushmaster offered much better protection against IEDs than other vehicles. Of the latter, the Fennek reconnaissance vehicle proved particularly vulnerable: bought for its excellent low-noise profile, it offered little protection against roadside bombs. Of the equipment in Uruzgan, little may be sold to coalition partners due to the fact that it is too expensive, or handed over to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) because it is too sophisticated. Equally, leaving materiel behind may be dangerous if it falls in the hands of the Taliban. Therefore, most of the equipment will be transported back to the Netherlands, with much of it badly in need of a thorough overhaul after the wear and tear caused by the climate and geography of southern Afghanistan.

20. **Put the force first:** Put the needs of the deployed force before bureaucratic convention and organise bureaucracies to support operations. There must be no split with capitals back home over the level of ambition and urgency in the field.

Until recently, a very elaborate, political and bureaucratic system ‘provided’ materiel for the Netherlands’ armed forces. This dated back to the Cold War and a relatively static military-strategic environment. Whilst some reforms have taken place, lessons from Uruzgan suggest the need for a system-wide overhaul to enable the system to respond far more nimbly to fast-track procurement and UORs. However, such reform will require the force, rather than the bureaucracy, to be put first. Many of the defence establishments of smaller European states are noted for bloated bureaucracies. One approach would be to create joint studies to examine how best to streamline procurement procedures, and the role of bureaucracy therein.

**The Netherlands’ Armed Forces: Between the Polder and a Hard Place?**

The lessons above have been inspired by Dutch practice and experience over the recent operational past. Indeed, although Dutch planners are ahead of many of their European counterparts in adapting to new operational requirements, many incremental steps now must be taken to promote synergies and cohesion. This will only be achieved via top-down joint planning and execution. Clearly, the incremental approach the Netherlands has adopted thus far has been far from efficient.

For their part, the Dutch people need to better understand that war and conflict remains a grim reality in the twenty-first century, and that Dutch soldiers, sailors and airmen will continue to be sent to far-flung, dangerous places to secure the realm, often at great risk. The armed forces at large and individual soldiers on mission are profoundly motivated by such support back home, and its absence is as critical as a lack of capability or capacity. Furthermore, like many smaller European states, the Netherlands has Alliance and Union obligations and will not simply be able always to say No. In such circumstances, it will be the young men and women who so proudly serve in the Dutch armed forces who will ultimately pay the price if they find themselves deployed alongside their American or British counterparts with only a fraction of the power and protection enjoyed by their brothers and sisters in arms.

This study concludes that considerable work needs to be done if the Netherlands is to improve planning, structures, procedures and practices, without breaking the national exchequer. Equally, the Netherlands is in many ways ahead of the European game with an opportunity to lead by example. However, the moment must be seized and that will take political vision underpinned by a rational and consistent determination to reconstruct a balanced force, endorsed by politicians and public alike – and fit for what will be a long and challenging twenty-first century.