



Royal Netherlands Air Force

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**Fight tonight...**  
**Fight tomorrow...**  
**Fight together**  
*Starting point*



## Dear members of the Royal Netherlands Air Force,

Since 14 April 2023, I have had the honour of working with you on a deployable, relevant and future-proof air force. It is with pride that I again observed over the past few weeks that we, as the air force, are ready for action when needed – even within a few hours if the situation so requires. Whether far away or close to home, we are ready to make a difference in those first hours at the highest end of the spectrum of force and to create enabling conditions for our colleagues and international partners.

Furthermore, we are now operating in times of widespread tension and uncertainty. The recent fall of the Dutch government naturally springs to mind, and it is of course impossible to overlook the terrible war in Ukraine. It is likewise far from peaceful in other parts of the world. In addition, the entire air force is in transition, a process that is affecting our organisation, our weapon systems and the way in which we work. Moreover, the increase in defence spending is straining our limited capacity, simply because of the input and effort needed to formulate and implement plans. And this strain is occurring at a time when NATO is requiring more in terms of readiness, deployability, striking power and the development of new systems and new forms of deployment.

I sometimes call it a perfect storm, not least because our organisation's workforce is not as large as it needs to be relative to the range of duties that must be performed, and the workload is excessively high in certain areas. Above all, however, it is a wonderful opportunity to make, for the first time in decades, our splendid air force stronger and better in the interest of Dutch society and NATO.

Despite times of scarcity, you have brought the Royal Netherlands Air Force to where it is today. **It is one of the best air forces in the world, with fantastic people and top-of-the-bill equipment. It is one that has been deployed continuously for 30 years, worldwide, during which time it has performed all main tasks in a very wide range of conditions.** It is therefore a major asset, which is a good thing. The importance of an air force has rarely been so great, not least because we cannot rule out the possibility of becoming involved in a large-scale conflict in the near future. More than ever, deterrence must make the difference between war and peace. If that deterrence fails, we will have to be ready for action within hours, ready with everyone and everything that we have. It is a tremendous responsibility. It means that we must put our core tasks at the centre of all that we do. Doing so requires focus and the right mindset, and that we continue to operate as a team. None of us as individuals are more important than the team – service before self. It is a tough but wonderful job for a great team.

One of the greatest challenges that we are currently facing is a shortage of people. I see the high work pressure throughout the organisation. In my view, the strain in some places has been manifest and in many cases excessive for some time already. **I would therefore like to ask you to be mindful of each other and to support each other where possible. Above all, please do not hesitate to let others know if you are struggling to cope.**

## » Starting point

### Our task



#### Relevant armed forces

We are living in exceptional and unpredictable times. We see and feel the consequences of the deteriorating security situation. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked the return of large-scale warfare to the European continent. *The effects of this war, which is being fought less than a two-and-a-half-hour flight away, are also being felt here in the Netherlands.* The world's security challenges are much broader, however. Consider, for example, the unrest in the Balkans and the situations in the Indo-Pacific, the Middle East and Africa.

Furthermore, the United States is increasingly focusing on the Indo-Pacific, which means that Europe must become less dependent and do more to provide for its own security. This is all the more important because security in Europe can no longer be taken for granted and the international legal system to which we attach great importance is coming under further pressure. Therefore, in addition to dealing with challenges in areas such as climate change, nitrogen pollution, migration and housing, the government must also keep the Netherlands safe in NATO and EU contexts in an increasingly insecure world. This imposes great demands on Defence as a whole and on us as the Royal Netherlands Air Force in particular.



#### The lessons of Ukraine

Important lessons can be learned or, as the case may be, relearned from the war in Ukraine. *What the war in Ukraine in any case shows is what it means when none of the parties to a conflict are able to achieve air superiority in order to create freedom of action for friendly units on land, at sea and in the air.* The horror of over 150,000 casualties within a year near NATO borders is the result of a symmetric conflict in which both sides are fighting with the same weapons. We must at all times seek to prevent such a situation from arising by acting in concert with other branches of the armed forces and international partners in order to deter potential enemies and, if necessary, by achieving air superiority in order to gain an asymmetric advantage over our adversaries.



### Air power and space power

By performing our core task, providing air power and space power in and from the air, we make an essential, enabling contribution to keeping the Netherlands and its allies safe. **With our altitude, speed, range, precision, striking power and the information of our weapon systems and sensors, we are a key deterrent to potential enemies.** It must always be clear to potential enemies that any attack on NATO would have major consequences.

If that deterrence fails, however, we must be ready, willing and able to provide striking power immediately. Together with the air forces of our allies and comrades serving in the other branches of the armed forces, we must be capable of immediately operating at the front line in order to achieve air superiority. We must be **first in.**

This air superiority is achieved by means of a superior information position (Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance), Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD), Deep Precision Strikes (DPS) and an effective counter Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2AD) strategy. Once achieved, this air superiority would be used to protect our comrades on land, at sea and in the air and thereby give them greater scope for manoeuvre.

We must therefore maintain a high level of readiness and have the right people and equipment, as well as adequate stocks and support and properly formulated fundamentals. In other words, there must be both a high level of readiness and an ability to sustain operations for extended periods of time.

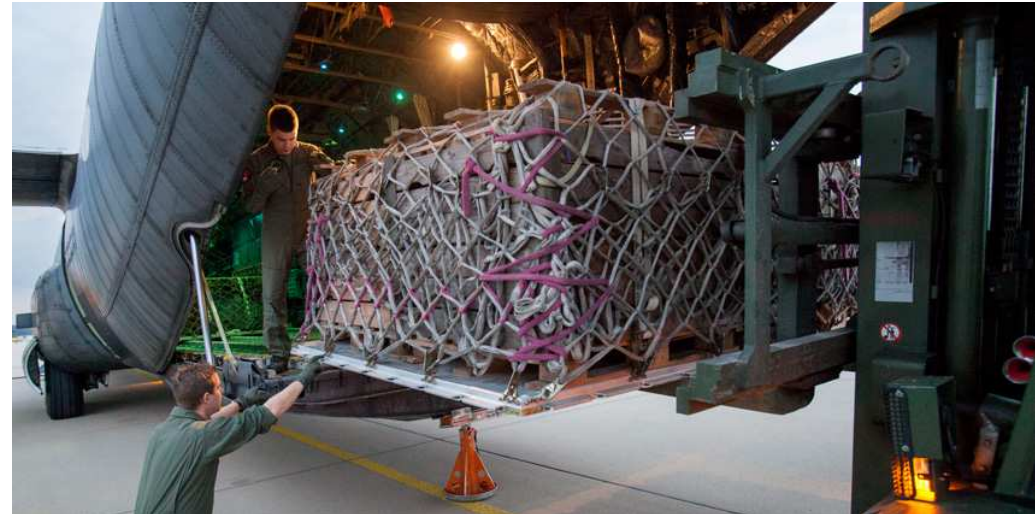


## Our focus



### Fight tonight

The era of wars of choice is behind us. More than before, it is about securing our national interests and those of our allies. Gone are the days when we could decide where to go, how long we would remain there and what our involvement could cost. Potential enemies may leave us no choice in the future. We would then simply have to do what is needed in the given situation. ***Our focus in the first instance must therefore be on what would be needed to fight tonight if required by the situation.*** This is our core business. To that end, we must first be aware of what is going on (situational awareness and situational understanding). What is happening in the world, what are our sensors and networks seeing and how do we enrich the information gained and make it available to our operational units and those of allies as quickly as possible? We must then be able to respond to this information immediately, sometimes by using force to destroy targets, though often in a manner that focuses more on undermining the adversary. This requires a high level of readiness, alertness and flexibility on the part of Defence as a whole and the air force in particular, from the security guard at the gate to the pilot who is on Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) duty, and from Defence's restaurant personnel to the men and women who ready our weapon systems for use. In other words, we must all manifest these qualities. A high level of operational readiness requires a high level of deployability and training. Above all, it requires a ready-for-action mindset.



### Fight Tomorrow

As a result of constant spending cuts, our organisation seriously deteriorated over the past decades. Efficiency predominated and effectiveness receded to the background. It was, we now know, a disturbing development. Our striking power depends entirely on our Combat Support (CS) and Combat Service Support (CSS). We simply need people and equipment to sustain operations in a conflict, also for longer periods of time, and to better support combat operations for longer periods of time. Size and robustness are essential. At the same time, we must restore the balance between the spearhead and the shaft of the spear in order to take our ability to sustain operations to the next level. We are also being required to do so by NATO. Examples in this regard include increasing stockpiles of ammunition and other items, including



spare parts, and capacity in terms of, for example, air transport, force protection, firefighting services and IT. In other words, there must be more meat on the bone. There must be a shift from efficiency to effectiveness; from just in time and just enough to well in advance and enough. Only if we ensure that the support units grow in parallel with the strengthening of the operational units will it be possible to achieve the shorter response times and levels of sustainability envisaged in the new NATO Force Model (NFM), which is needed to protect Europe. In this context, we must guard against overstretching the organisation and provide the right support to our personnel when we introduce new types of weapon systems.



### Fight Together

Of course, fighting is not something that we would be doing on our own. **To deal with the deteriorating security situation, we must cooperate even more closely with our colleagues within Defence and with our national and international partners in different alliances and coalitions of the willing and able.** Together, we achieve effects in and from all domains. This is the case when achieving air superiority, whether or not temporarily or locally, and in the further course of a conflict in which we are involved. We then provide essential information and direct support for our own operations and those of our sisters and brothers serving in the other branches of the armed forces, for instance during air manoeuvre operations or maritime ISR and strike, SOF air, air mobility or ISR missions. In all of these missions, we must be able to neutralise strategic and tactical targets, if necessary in enemy territory and under a high level of threat.

We must also fully integrate new domains, such as the cyber and space domains, into our operations. While these domains currently receive less attention and are less visible, they are extremely relevant, as are areas such as further automation, the robotisation and the digitalisation of our air force and the use of artificial intelligence (AI). These areas relate to being connected to our environment, the need-

to-share idea in our genes, faster and better decision making, short sensor-to-shooter times and a notice-to-effect period of hours rather than days. Our air force and the characteristics of air power constitute a crucial force multiplier for the entire armed forces.

This is the only way that we can maintain an edge over our adversaries. While this comprehensive approach is not new to us, it has a new standard, namely achieving synchronised effects in and from all domains through the use of essential information systems. What are referred to as **Multidomain Operations (MDO) constitute the standard for our future operations and must become part of our DNA. This means more us instead of them and, most importantly, being connected.**

## Our mindset



### To daring and to do

Today's world requires exemplary behaviour, knowledge, skills, leadership, creativity, innovative solutions and, above all, the right mindset from all of us. Our tasks and focus are central. **Give each other space and trust. Dare to speak out and always ask whether what is being done is contributing to the delivery of air power.** I challenge you to push the envelope when doing so. Rather than always directing a 'May I...?' up the chain of command before taking a step, say 'I plan to....' There is also no need to pinch every penny and always figure everything out to ten decimal places until the very last wrinkle is



smoothed out. **Instead, ask yourself the following questions: is it contributing to our mission? Are we taking unnecessary risks? Are we breaking the law? And then act within our mandate to achieve results.** If we want to get our fine air force up and running on time, we must accelerate our efforts and be daring. That mentality of daring and doing together is essential in all layers of the organisation. I realise of course that things sometimes go wrong. That is a fact of life. Mission First, Safety Always.



### Thinking in terms of solutions

The current security situation has resulted in a substantial increase in defence spending. Following years of contraction and spending cuts, we are working on restoration and are in a position to grow

again. We have a splendid opportunity to further develop the Royal Netherlands Air Force together. This process will not be free of struggles, however. As an organisation, we must become accustomed to the new situation and, after 30 years of spending cuts, our mindset must change. ***We must transition from 'No, it's not possible. There's no money' to 'Yes, good idea. How can I help?'*** Growth is absolutely essential if we are to restore to our armed forces the striking power, deployability and ability to sustain operations required to protect what we value. It is good to know in this regard that we are not starting from scratch. Indeed, take a moment to look back and consider everything that has been achieved. That is to your credit.



It should be noted that by growth I do not only mean more people and fine equipment. What will also help is the further digitalisation of our operations and the structuring of our processes such that we will not need an ever-increasing number of people in support. Progress in these areas is important not only in terms of ensuring the affordability of our organisation but also simply because we cannot always have the right number of people with the right qualifications and experience. ***In this era of rapid technological development, close cooperation with industry and knowledge institutes should make it possible to become even smarter, faster and better. Our security must not depend on the state of the labour market.***



### Ambition versus ability

Many different aspects play a role in the aforementioned perfect storm, and this can result in tension. Whether it is about the changing threat environment, our national and international responsibilities, the transition or the current shortage of personnel, we will always have to strike a balance, together, between everything that we want to do, what we must do and what we can do. While there is absolutely nothing wrong with a healthy ambition, we must guard against taking on more than we can handle. We will sometimes have to say 'No' and be transparent about it to others. I expect that, in the coming years, we will at times have to have difficult discussions to ensure that we always walk the talk. Dutch society and our allies must be able to count on us. In other words, there must be no far-fetched goals or plans that we know cannot be achieved.



## Our DNA



### One team

We are working on solutions to get more done with the same number of people and are looking for different ways of increasing our workforce in order to lessen the pressure of work. We are finding solutions by engaging more civilian employees, reservists and members of the business community. We are also making considerable efforts to recruit and train new colleagues in order to reduce current workloads. However, doing so is not easy because of labour market shortages. Furthermore, attracting new colleagues will serve no purpose if we do not give them reasons to stay. We will therefore focus even more on retaining personnel. You are all very much needed in this regard, not least because you know better than anyone what drives someone to want to remain with or, as the case may be, leave Defence. Please discuss the matter with each other as well. ***We are and will remain one team.***

We are not alone in the world. As stated, ***only with our partners within and outside Defence, both national and international, are we in a position to keep the Netherlands and allied territory safe.*** In this context, we serve and work in a society that is rightly asking us to contribute to a better climate. In concrete terms, this means two things: care for the environment and care for each other. As a team, we must therefore ensure a socially and physically safe environment for all of us and must make concerted efforts to make our



work more sustainable. **Furthermore, we must create an environment in which each individual can excel to the benefit of the team.**



**One task**

The air force is in the vanguard in almost every conflict. For this reason, people will in the first instance look to us in future conflicts as well. **Our colleagues in the other branches of the armed forces must be able to count on us when they need us. We must then be ready for action, ready with everything that we have.** Our professionalism, mentality and cooperation will then make the difference in and from the air and space. We show these qualities when performing our national tasks and have shown them in the assistance provided to earthquake victims in Turkey, when fighting wildfires in Albania, in the deployment of our F-35s and F-16s to NATO’s eastern flank in Poland,



in large-scale drug seizures in the Caribbean and, more recently, during the evacuation mission in Sudan. When the alarm sounds, we are there, not only physically with people in the deployment area. Great efforts are also made at home base and by support elements to make continued deployment possible. That makes me proud.



**Small in number, great in deeds**

Dear members of the Royal Netherlands Air Force, we must overcome a number of major challenges if we are to continue to defend a way of life that we cherish. There is a mountain to climb. Nevertheless, although we are few in number, I am confident that we can overcome these challenges together. Our mentality has always led

to success, also in the years of contraction. The right course had already been set by my predecessors and considerable steps have already been taken in the transition of the air force. Now that more resources and greater financial scope will be available, we will be able to take greater strides. **We will do so together, mindful of each other and with a shared goal, one that we will achieve on the basis of an itinerary or, to stay with air force terms, a flight plan that has yet to be detailed.**

I will continue to count on each and every one of you in the years to come so that, together, we can make one of the world's best air forces even better in the service of our freedom. It is an honour and a privilege to serve with you.

*Parvus Numero, Magnus Merito*



Lieutenant General André "Jabba" Steur



# » Starting point

Fight tonight... Fight tomorrow... Fight together



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# Starting point

## » Summary

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Important lessons can be learned or, as the case may be, relearned from the war in Ukraine. **What the war in Ukraine in any case shows is what it means when none of the parties to a conflict are able to achieve air superiority in order to create freedom of action for friendly units on land, at sea and in the air.**

By performing our core task, providing air power and space power in and from the air, we make an essential, enabling contribution to keeping the Netherlands and its allies safe. **With our altitude, speed, range, precision, striking power and the information of our weapon systems and sensors, we are a key deterrent to potential enemies.**

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no choice in the future. We would then simply have to do what is needed in the given situation. **Our focus in the first instance must therefore be on what would be needed to fight tonight if required by the situation.**

We simply need people and equipment to sustain operations in a conflict, also for longer periods of time, and to better support combat operations for longer periods of time. Size and robustness are essential. **The focus must therefore be on the things that we are already doing, but we must do them better and for longer. Put differently, only after there is depth should breadth be restored in the organisation. Balance is the magic word.**

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