



ORDER OF THE DAY

Colleagues,

It feels almost surreal to be speaking to you here – today – as the new Chief of Defence.

Minister Hennis and General Middendorp stepped down on Tuesday evening.

Two people who have for the last few years fought for Defence, for our armed forces.

And now they have left like this.

This must not be in vain.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The reality of today significantly influences my priorities as the new Chief of Defence.

It is clear that much needs to be done.

Much needs to be done in terms of repairing our armed forces.

But a great deal also needs to be done in terms of increasing the level of trust.

The trust of the politicians – and society – in Defence.

But also the trust of our own people in our own organisation.

For that trust has taken a battering. So we need to work on it.

After all is said and done, it is our people who have to do the important work by order of the politicians – and thus of society as a whole.

Important work which is sometimes not without risk.

I'm thinking of all the military personnel who have been killed, and all our colleagues who have been wounded.

Life-changing events for everyone involved.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Working for the armed forces is more than just a job.

Our people go the extra mile for others.

Our people place the importance of the team above that of the individual.

It is our people who come back from leave to protect Schiphol when a terrorist threat looms, or to provide disaster relief and security after the devastation wrought by a hurricane such as Irma.

It is our people who are willing to work away from home for months at a time to help others. And by doing so, to keep our own country safe too.

It is our people who operate and maintain the armed forces' materiel.

Materiel that we use to fight ISIS, to defuse explosives in the Netherlands, or to keep pirates at bay.

In other words, it is our people who make the Defence organisation what it is ...

The ultimate insurance policy for the security of the Netherlands. On which we can all rely when we need to.

So we should steer the only possible course and nurture the armed forces.

And invest in them....

In the materiel that we need to do our work as well as in the people who have to do what is at times a dangerous job.

The armed forces are running on empty.

But we know what's wrong.

And for the most part, we know what needs to happen.

So we have made a start on the recovery in order to resolve the most acute problems.

We also know, however, that this is not going to happen overnight. And that it will take time to get the Defence organisation in order.

Although we are already busy doing just that, I am also well aware that progress is often barely noticeable for the people on the work floor.

The government has made funds available for the recovery,

But the effects are not yet being felt by all units or in all workplaces.

Because not all the money for the recovery is available all at once, but in phases.

And the purchase of scarce spare parts and special ammunition, for example, just takes time.

That means that not all the equipment we need to fly, sail or drive will be available immediately.

And it also means that not everyone will be able to do all the training they need to do to be ready for deployment.

That is not only because we don't have enough equipment, but also because some of our maintenance personnel are finding work outside the Defence organisation.

That is a source of frustration for our people and I can understand that.

The recovery of the armed forces cannot happen quickly enough for me.

The understandable frustration among our men and women has an unmistakable impact on the trust and the faith in our organisation.

For me, that means that we must even more urgently seek dialogue with all our personnel.

Actually listen to their concerns and really tackle problems.

But also explain clearly what the constraints are and offer them prospects.

But recovery is not the only task.

We also need to look to the future and build a stronger military force.

We need to ensure that a balance is achieved between the combat units and their support.

We need to eliminate the constraints resulting from cuts in logistics and support.

But we also need to make sure that we can replace and renew materiel. And if more is

expected of us, then we also need to grow.

For the world around us is not getting any safer, and the pressure on the armed forces is – and will remain – high.

That means that we need to be deployable. Even under the current circumstances, taking account of the constraints that we have.

But definitely without taking irresponsible risks.

That has again been underlined by the Dutch Safety Board's report on the mortar incident in Mali and the parliamentary debate on Tuesday evening.

That is why we have taken measures to thoroughly examine mission safety once again.

To dispel disquiet among our people.

Disquiet that was caused when the Dutch Safety Report was published.

There must be no doubt about that mission safety, because our people need to be able to do their important work with confidence.

So that means I will definitely say 'no' if a political demand – a required mission – is not feasible.

The decision to deploy the military is obviously a political responsibility.

But it is my responsibility as Chief of Defence to advise the politicians on the feasibility of the desired deployment.

And the deployment must fit within the tempo of the ongoing recovery of the armed forces.

If a unit is not ready for deployment, for example, then we won't do it.

And in the deliberations on whether or not deployment is possible, the health and safety of personnel are also important criteria.

Of course there are always risks inherent in our work, but they must be kept to a minimum and thus be considered acceptable within our operational capabilities.

That was already the case under my predecessor and, because of recent events, I feel that responsibility even more acutely.

That also means that I will not only take into account the reports and recommendations that I get from our organisation, but that I will also listen carefully to what is happening in the organisation and on the work floor.

Listen to the concerns of the people who have to do the work. Understand what troubles them and what risks they see.

And the same obviously applies to all the commanders and other leaders in our organisation.

People need to feel free and safe to say from within their own professionalism what is needed, or what might be wrong.

From top to bottom.

And everyone must be confident that something will be done with the information or concerns that they share.

Nothing must be left unresolved.

Not because of uncertainty, because you might not know who to go to.

Nor because of being afraid to do so.

It should always be clear who is responsible. And for what.

A clear distribution of tasks, responsibilities and authority is important for us all.

Not least for myself, so that I can provide well-considered advice to the minister and thus the government.

For there is much at stake.

Our work is too important for that.

And as I said, that work is done by our men and women by order of the government – and thus for society as a whole.

My people should, given the risks, be able to perform that work as safely and as efficiently as possible.

I see that as my main task.

And everyone can count on that.

Men and women of the armed forces,

I am asking for your trust.

You have mine.

Thank you very much.

Lieutenant Admiral Rob Bauer