

National plan on the Defence Investment Pledge – the Netherlands

Introduction

As an Alliance, we are witnessing a changing security situation, with a threat landscape that is becoming more complex, more diverse and more uncertain. Instability in Europe's neighbourhood, the proliferation of conventional and non-conventional weapons, the modernisation and strengthening of the Russian Armed Forces and the increasing sophistication of methods of hybrid warfare, have increased the risks we collectively face. In this light, it is of paramount importance that we invest in the strength of our Alliance and protect the values the Alliance stands for.

This means collectively investing in additional capabilities, interoperability and the readiness of our forces, but also investing in European and transatlantic defence cooperation. We emphasise the need to improve burden sharing within NATO in the respective areas of cash, capabilities and contributions. European NATO allies need to take more responsibility for their security. The Netherlands is strongly committed to meet the goals that were set out in the Defence Investment Pledge and welcomes the drawing up of national plans to detail our individual investment paths.

Capabilities

The Netherlands currently contributes a number of advanced, high-end capabilities to the Alliance. These include, but are not limited to, the F-16 combat aircraft fleet (to be replaced by the F-35 from 2019 onwards), our submarines, frigates, mine countermeasures vessels and the Patriot system. All these systems will be updated or replaced in order to remain high-end and modern. The Netherlands aims at building a future defence organisation that is robust and flexible, with technologically-advanced, high-quality capabilities that can be rapidly deployed at all levels of combat operations. As was stated in the Defence White Paper of March 2018, the Dutch government has decided to increase planned defence spending with €1,5 billion per year (€ 5 billion in total), to be spent between 2018 and 2021, and to maintain this new level of spending as the baseline beyond 2021. With this decision, the Netherlands has opted to invest in priority areas such as modernising our armed forces, improving military mobility, as well as improving combat support and combat service support. This allows the Dutch armed forces to adjust to a changing security environment and to improve their levels of sustainability and flexibility.

New investments

This government is committed to further increase defence spending in order to fulfill the Defence Investment Pledge. A step towards this goal is to invest in our capability targets as stated in the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP). Of these capability targets, we have prioritised five. These are:

- procurement of additional F-35s,
- reinforcement of land capabilities through investment in direct and indirect firing power,
- strengthening of maritime capabilities through investment in BMD-capabilities,
- additional enablers for our Special Operations Forces (on ground and in air, including an additional rotary wing),
- the expansion of our capabilities in the cyber and information domain.

This government intends to make additional funds available for these five capabilities. The intention is to take a step towards this goal as part of the deliberations in the spring of 2019 at the appropriate time matching our national budget cycle.

These five capabilities are another substantial step towards meeting the goals that were set out in the Investment Pledge. Furthermore, the Netherlands will meet a substantially larger part of its capability targets in the short and medium term. They will contribute to ensuring rapid response, increasing readiness and improving sustainability of the Netherlands' armed forces.

With these investments the Netherlands will be able to acquire the additional F-35s as requested by NATO. Given that the F-35s are deployable in military operations against a variety of threats,

this investment will increase the flexibility of the Dutch armed forces. Our land forces will become more robust due to the additional firing power. This will strengthen the Alliance's ability to contribute to stability along its borders. The additional maritime BMD-capabilities will provide NATO with the BMD sensor and weapon system as requested in the 2017 capability target package. The investments in our Special Operation Forces will add to our and NATO's ability to execute a variety of tasks (i.e. CT, hybrid, capacity building). All these investments are in line with the capability requirements of NATO.

The Netherlands furthermore believes that further investments in capabilities in the cyber and information domain are crucial to the Alliance and match the capability targets in that domain. This will allow for more information-driven operating methods. It will also increase the ability of the Alliance to detect and respond to acts of hybrid warfare, in which cyberattacks and information campaigns threaten both our critical infrastructure, as well as the values our Alliance wants to uphold. The Netherlands has established a Cyber Command and the Netherlands stands ready to contribute with cyber means to NATO operations.

One of the issues in which the Netherlands has a special interest, is military mobility. The Netherlands is committed to improving military mobility. The Netherlands suggests that investments in military mobility will be counted fully under the Defence Investment Pledge.

Although NATO requirements guide our defence-spending efforts, the Netherlands also takes into account EU requirements and efforts in the context of its Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). Many of these will facilitate implementing NATO capability targets. Furthermore, the PESCO commitment to increase the number, size and impact of joint and collaborative strategic defence capability projects, will also benefit NATO.

The financial aspects

In the past years, to live up to the Wales pledge, The Netherlands has reversed the declining trend of our national defence budget, leading to substantial growth in absolute terms. Between 2013 and 2017, additional budget was added in a series of annual steps, leading to a structural rise of the defence budget of 929 million euro in 2017 (whereby this new level of spending is maintained as the baseline beyond 2017). Planned cuts have been halted and several areas of shortfall have been addressed. In 2018 new measures were taken to expand the defence budget further, with up to 1.5 billion euro per year. Because of these investments, the Dutch defence budget has grown with more than 25% since 2013.

We have also recently decided to set up a Military Investment Fund for the purchase and maintenance (including midlife update) of major equipment. This fund allows us to make long term commitments, thereby making our investment budget more robust and future-proof. It also ensures more transparency with regard to our investment program and enables better reporting for the Defence Planning Capability Review. The fund will be operational in 2020.

With these investments the Netherlands will meet substantially more of its capability requirements by 2024 and will improve burden sharing within the Alliance. The investments will also ensure the Netherlands meets the investment quote of 20%. Going forward, the Netherlands will continue its step-by-step efforts to keep an upward trend in its defence spending outlook.

The Brussels Summit has resulted in a renewed sense of urgency and a reaffirmed commitment to the Wales Defence Investment Pledge. It also resulted in strengthened political commitment in the Netherlands. In 2020, the Netherlands will review its Defence White Paper. This 2020 White Paper is set to include a gradual approach with regard to the NATO capability targets as laid down in the NDPP and transcending the term of the current government (elections are planned for 2021).

Contributions for 2019

Besides cash and capabilities, contributions are an important aspect of burden sharing. The Netherlands will continue to deliver on this.

Currently, 160 Dutch troops - including 60 Special Operations Forces - are deployed in NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. Up to 270 Dutch troops are stationed in Lithuania as part of the enhanced Forward Presence in a multinational battlegroup led by Germany. Both of these contributions were recently extended until 2021. In 2019, the Netherlands will contribute up to 20 military and civilian experts to the NATO Mission in Iraq. The Netherlands also contributes several air, maritime and land forces to the enhanced NATO Response Force. An example of this in 2019 is the Dutch command of the Standing NATO Maritime Group-2 in the Mediterranean Sea, with HNLMS De Ruyter as its flagship. Other examples include F-16 fighter jets and the 1st German-Netherlands Corps as Land Component Command for the VJTF.

Outside of the NATO-framework, the Netherlands contributes to crisis management and peacekeeping operations worldwide. In the Middle East, Dutch trainers remain part of the US-led international coalition against ISIS, after withdrawing the F-16 fighter jets. In the Sahel, the Netherlands has been a frontrunner in the MINUSMA, especially regarding the use of intelligence in UN-operations. Furthermore, the Netherlands contributes regularly to the EU battlegroup. These contributions outside the NATO-framework also strengthen the collective security of NATO.

Finally, approximately 5,000 troops are on active duty to carry out national security tasks, including troops that are active in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom. Another 5,000 troops are on stand-by for guaranteed reinforcement.

The Netherlands will furthermore continue to contribute to NATO Trust Funds, such as the Afghan National Army Trust Fund.