

**Letter of 6 December 2024 from Minister of Justice and Security David van Weel, Minister of Defence Ruben Brekelmans and State Secretary for Defence Gijs Tuinman to the House of Representatives regarding resilience to military and hybrid threats**

The international security situation has deteriorated dramatically in recent years, and the Netherlands is not immune to this trend. The Kingdom's national security interests are increasingly under threat from state and non-state actors alike.<sup>1</sup> The Netherlands is already the target of hybrid attacks, such as cyber operations, espionage and sabotage. Geopolitical developments, especially Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, only amplify this trend. For the first time in many years there is a real possibility that the Netherlands could become directly involved in a large-scale armed conflict under the collective defence clause of the NATO Treaty ('Article 5'). This is made clear in the enclosed threat assessment conducted by the Defence Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) and the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD).<sup>2</sup> It is therefore important to prevent this war from spreading. Recent advisory reports by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) and the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) note that the time in which the Netherlands had little, if any, cause to be concerned about societal resilience has passed.<sup>3</sup> These developments make it necessary to boost our society's resilience.

The purpose of this letter is to offer a comprehensive explanation of what constitutes a resilient society and what must be done to achieve it. This need is already outlined in our government programme. In addition,, the report by the Special Adviser Sauli Niinistö advised the European Union and its member states to enhance their civil and military preparedness and resilience.

First and foremost, a resilient society helps to prevent conflict. It makes us less vulnerable and deters state actors, discouraging them from targeting the Netherlands. This thinking is also endorsed by NATO: resilience has a basis in Article 3 of the Washington Treaty (NATO Treaty), which refers to resilience as both a national and collective responsibility. In addition, by boosting our resilience we will be better able to withstand an actual conflict in the unfortunate event that one were to arise, and to absorb its impact more effectively. In this way a resilient society helps protect our security, freedom, prosperity and values. This not only applies to hybrid attacks or a military conflict, but also to other kinds of crises or disasters, such as large-scale flooding, a pandemic or the prolonged failure of critical processes.

Another relevant factor to consider is that amid the threat of war or the outbreak of an actual conflict, the government will not be in a position to resolve every problem. This is why society as a whole must be made more aware of the importance of self-reliance, both individual and collective, so that individuals and communities are better prepared for possible crises. Municipalities and safety regions have a key role to play in this connection, harnessing the power of ordinary citizens and organisations to carry out this 'resilience task'.

Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine highlights the importance of a resilient society. Although the government believes that a conflict on Dutch soil is unlikely, there are lessons to be learned from the situation in Ukraine. Ukrainians have demonstrated a high degree of self-reliance and social cohesion; companies are contributing to national defence; in certain parts of the country, energy networks have a sufficient degree of redundancy; and the Ukrainian government has been able to continue paying salaries, pensions and benefits in all circumstances. This has enabled Ukraine to defend itself while allowing a large part of its society to continue functioning as effectively as possible.

In the Netherlands we already have a solid foundation for enhancing our resilience, comprising the Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as well as the NATO Resilience Objectives and various EU initiatives, including the upcoming EU Preparedness Union Strategy.<sup>4</sup> The Dutch

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<sup>1</sup> The six national security interests are territorial security, physical security, economic security, ecological security, social and political stability, and the international legal order and stability.

<sup>2</sup> MIVD and AIVD, 'Dreigingsbeeld militaire en hybride dreigingen' (Assessment of Military and Hybrid Threats), 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Advisory Council on International Affairs, 'Hybrid threats and societal resilience', 2024  
Scientific Council for Government Policy, WRR report no. 109, 'The Netherlands in a Fragmenting World Order', 2024.

<sup>4</sup> The NATO Resilience Objectives are about establishing a basic level of resilience in seven different areas (continuity of government, energy supplies, dealing with the uncontrolled movement of persons, food and water resources, dealing with mass casualties, civil communications and transport systems), with the goal of contributing to the continuity of government, society and support for our common defence within the alliance.

government's approach draws on the experiences of other countries, including Ukraine, Finland and Sweden.

Although this is a step in the right direction, it is not enough. In the current climate, amid a worsening security situation, we have no choice but to take major additional steps. Moreover, the Netherlands is an open society that is focused on international cooperation and trade, and given our role as a logistical hub within NATO we are vulnerable to external threats.

The government is responsible for coordinating efforts to enhance national security. That said, a safe and resilient society relies on the collective efforts of all parties, namely the government (including the safety regions and municipalities), businesses, knowledge institutions, civil society organisations and members of the public. This purpose of this letter is therefore to initiate a close partnership and dialogue with the public, with a view to shaping a whole-of-society approach to this issue.

## **Contents**

In line with a number of parliamentary motions and undertakings given to the House,<sup>5</sup> the government has drafted this letter in order to, for the first time, set out a coherent explanation of what constitutes a resilient society and what needs to be done to achieve it. The content of this letter is based on existing policy, lessons learned from the conflict in Ukraine, an international comparison, the NATO Resilience Objectives and a national resilience analysis involving all relevant ministries. This letter consists of the following sections:

- 1) Ambition: a resilient society and armed forces that are in a state of preparedness
- 2) A whole-of-society approach
- 3) What should we build on?
- 4) The additional task: a whole-of-society approach based on six pillars
- 5) International experiences
- 6) Communication about the threat and possible courses of action
- 7) Conclusion

In this way we can develop a shared perspective that forms the basis for future steps in this area. The whole-of-society approach outlined in this letter will ensure the involvement of civil society partners in fulfilling this shared task. This letter also provides a more detailed explanation of the government's plans to enhance its communication policy on the current threat and on possible courses of action. The subject of communication is deliberately dealt with in some depth in this letter, given its crucial role in fostering a clear understanding of the issues at hand and ensuring public support for the necessary approach.

This letter and the enclosed document describe the steps the government needs to take in order to boost societal resilience. Because of the sheer scope of this task, a gradual approach is necessary. Choices will have to be made and priorities set. In 2025 the government will send a follow-up letter to the House setting out its specific policy plans for boosting resilience. In order to make choices and set priorities, the government will use the period ahead to explore variations of the enhanced policy focus, including a range of options, intensity levels and financial consequences. As part of this process it will also look closely at what NATO expects of us. The eventual decisions will be made at the customary times for major financial decisions. The next letter on this subject will therefore be sent to parliament after the publication of the 2025 Spring Memorandum. The government's assessment of the financial impact of boosting societal resilience will be driven largely by the Budget Memorandum in the autumn.

This letter is sent at the same time as the government's response to the AIV's advisory report 'Hybrid threats and societal resilience' and the progress report on the Security Strategy for the

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<sup>5</sup> Parliamentary Paper 21 501-02 no. 2825, Motion by MP Laurens Dassen / Parliamentary Paper 36 410-X no. 45, Motion by MPs Silvio Erkens and Laurens Dassen / Parliamentary Paper 36 410-X, no. 48, Motion by MP Jimme Nordkamp / Undertaking by the State Secretary for Defence to send a letter to the House around summer 2024 about what is needed to prepare society for a military threat and about the relevant policy options / Undertaking by the Minister of Justice and Security to address the consequences of a potential conflict in a letter to parliament on resilience to military threats, so as to gain a sense of where additional efforts are needed in order to boost the resilience of the country and the public and society as a whole, and to highlight those areas in which the government is already working hard to boost resilience, such as the protection of critical infrastructure.

Kingdom of the Netherlands 2023-2029. The government's response to the report 'The Netherlands in a Fragmenting World Order' by the WRR will follow shortly.

This letter focuses on the European part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, i.e. the part of the country covered by the NATO alliance. A threat or response here could have repercussions for the Caribbean part of the Kingdom, too, however. Furthermore, measures taken to enhance resilience will also apply to Bonaire, Saba and St Eustatius, unless there are reasons why they should not. In the latter case a tailored approach will be necessary, so as to achieve the desired result in the Caribbean Netherlands as well.<sup>6</sup>

### **1) Ambition: a resilient society and armed forces that are in a state of preparedness**

A solid, **resilient society** is one that is capable of absorbing blows, whatever the world throws at us. It is a society in which the government, public and private partners, civil society organisations, knowledge institutions and ordinary people are as well prepared as possible for social disruption, demonstrating the capacity to resist and absorb it, and then recover afterwards.<sup>7</sup> This applies not only to hybrid attacks or a military conflict, but also other types of crises, such as major flooding, a pandemic or the prolonged failure of critical processes. We need to be able to deal with a combination of prolonged system failures, shortages and disruptions. We can do this by boosting our resilience – with well-prepared businesses, with a society that is better equipped to adapt to crisis situations and with people who demonstrate both individual and collective resilience when a real threat materialises.

Security is one of the government's core tasks. The government strives to protect all groups in society. However, it is impossible to guarantee safety and security 100%. In a threat or conflict scenario the government could find itself under significant pressure as a result of the accumulation of multiple crises or a particularly severe individual crisis, especially in the initial stages. It is therefore important that people, businesses and civil society organisations are aware of the threat, do what is expected of them in preparing for shocks, and know how to deal with them when they occur. These preparations must be made with due regard for people's abilities, the level of public support and societal diversity. The government must be able to trust that society will be self-reliant to some degree or for some period of time. In addition, thorough preparation will help reduce the impact of a crisis in the unfortunate event that one should arise.

If an attack or crisis occurs, the Dutch government must respond, whether by diplomatic, economic, legal or military means. In accordance with article 97 of the Dutch Constitution the armed forces must be capable of defending the territory of the Netherlands and its allies, protecting the international legal order and supporting the civil authorities in disasters and crises. The reverse is also true: in order to carry out its military tasks, the Netherlands' Defence organisation needs everyone in society. People must be able to rely on the armed forces – and vice versa. To this end, the Defence organisation works with other ministries, other administrative bodies and its partners in civil society to ensure the Netherlands' **military preparedness**.

### **2) A whole-of-society approach**

The Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Defence are jointly responsible for coordinating government-wide efforts and the whole-of-society approach to boost resilience to military and hybrid threats. The Ministry of Justice and Security (more specifically, the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security; NCTV) mainly focuses on the resilience of the government, economy and society (civil resilience) and the Ministry of Defence concentrates on the preparedness of the armed forces and what is needed from society to achieve this aim. All ministries work on this approach collectively, united by a common goal, each addressing it from the perspective of its own policy remit, whether it be healthcare, transport and logistics, crisis

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<sup>6</sup> Given the implications of this policy for Bonaire, Saba and St Eustatius, and the Netherlands' responsibility for these special municipalities, the follow-up in this connection will be dealt with separately, in consultation with the competent authorities and civil society on those islands. The autonomous countries of Aruba, Curaçao and St Maarten will also be involved in this process, by means of the measures set out in the Security Strategy for the Kingdom. In this way it will be possible to do justice to the unique character and local context of these places, which call for a distinctive approach.

<sup>7</sup> Parliamentary Paper 30 821 no. 205, Final report 'Weerbaarheid becijferd' (Resilience in figures) by RAND Europe, Ministry of Justice and Security.

management, food, energy, communications, migration, economy, the labour market or the democratic legal order. An important principle in this regard, therefore, is that any additional policy in the realm of resilience to military and hybrid threats must be aligned as closely as possible with existing policy initiatives.

The present letter is a first step in crafting a whole-of-society approach to military and hybrid threats. It provides a comprehensive overview of what constitutes a resilient society and defines the necessities to achieve it, in light of a hybrid or military threat. Rather than a rigid blueprint, this letter serves as a catalyst for dialogue and invitation to society to join efforts. It is necessary to deepen and expand on this approach and the pursuit of resilience more broadly, working with the public, municipalities, safety regions, civil society organisations, public and private parties, knowledge institutions, implementing agencies and interest groups. The key question to be addressed is: what can everyone do to help carry out the resilience task facing the Netherlands? Risk communication on the part of the government concerning threats, our response to them and about their possible impact on our way of life, will help in this regard.

The strategic course of the resilience task will be discussed comprehensively in the National Security Council. Decisions about coordinated policy plans are made by the cabinet and its regular subcommittees. Other important tools to facilitate the government's dialogue with society include setting up a resilience network and organising a Security Summit<sup>8</sup> to share knowledge, experiences and information. In response to the motion by MPs Ruben Brekermans and Caspar Veldkamp on the establishment of a geopolitical council and the motion by MP Frans Timmermans on the National Security Council, the government will also set up a public-private consultative body on geopolitical affairs and societal resilience. The purpose of this body will be to regularly bring together members of the government, the business community, knowledge institutions and civil society partners in varying configurations in an informal, confidential setting to discuss relevant developments with a view to enhance the Netherlands' resilience. These meetings will not have decision-making authority.

It is important to have a meaningful dialogue with all the parties involved in boosting societal resilience. To facilitate this, we are sharing two additional documents alongside to this letter:

- a. *A threat assessment*; this report, which was drawn up by the intelligence and security services, provides a more in-depth picture of the threat and endorses the need for further action. This assessment will help raise awareness, enabling civil society partners to better anticipate and prepare for potential risk.
- b. *An in-depth description of the resilience task*; this outlines the key requirements in various policy areas to enhance resilience. This description provides tips for initiating a dialogue on the potential additional steps that can be taken in pursuit of the whole-of-society approach.

### **3) What should we build on?**

In recent years the government has been working hard to boost the Netherlands' resilience to a wide range of threats that could harm national security. The Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands<sup>9</sup> serves as a guiding framework for these efforts. Central government is working both internally and with international partners on combating threats by state actors (including hybrid threats), opposing undesirable foreign interference, enhancing cybersecurity (both domestically and internationally), boosting the physical and digital resilience of our critical infrastructure, fleshing out the government-wide strategy for an effective approach to disinformation, promoting economic and knowledge security, protecting the economy and society, enhancing space security, strengthening the crisis management system and boosting the government's digital resilience (through the Digitalisation Strategy<sup>10</sup>).

Defence investments have increased significantly in recent years to better prepare the armed forces for potential armed conflict. Various ongoing projects within the Defence organisation are aimed to strengthen our armed forces. For example, a number of initiatives are under way to expand the number of personnel, including the voluntary service year and the HR ecosystem, and major efforts are being made to build capacity, increase stocks, and work more closely with the

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<sup>8</sup> Ministry of General Affairs, Government programme of the Schoof Government, 13 September 2024

<sup>9</sup> Parliamentary Paper 30 821, no. 178, Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>10</sup> Expected in spring 2025.

industrial sector. Internationally, the government is also working to promote international security and defence policy.

The present approach represents an intensification of the lines of action set out in the Security Strategy on areas such as enhancement of the armed forces, hybrid warfare, economic and digital resilience, knowledge security, social stability, critical infrastructure, crisis management and increasing societal preparedness (including with regard to a future pandemic).

Given the Netherlands' transnational interconnectedness, threats to other countries could also pose a threat to our national security. In addition, as part of the single market and a transit country, the Netherlands plays a crucial role contributing to the resilience of other countries and the EU as a whole. To address the transnational challenges, new solutions to transnational problems must be sought not only in the Netherlands but also at European and international level. With this in mind, the government is working to enhance resilience policy within the EU and NATO.

The government is in favour of enhancing resilience within the EU, and endorses the report by Special Adviser Sauli Niinistö.<sup>11</sup> The report serves as the basis for the European Commission's forthcoming Preparedness Union Strategy, which is also dedicated to European readiness and resilience. Improving cooperation between NATO and the EU remains one of the government's key objectives. Article 5 of the Treaty of Washington is the foundation of the NATO alliance and requires thorough military preparation. With a basis in Article 3 of the Treaty, resilience is both a national responsibility and a task for the alliance. This was decided by the assembled heads of government at the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid.<sup>12</sup> In order to carry out all parts of that task, NATO adopted a set of Resilience Objectives.

#### **4) What is the additional task?**

The government recently conducted a comprehensive resilience analysis clarifying the resilience task facing the Netherlands, drawing on input from all relevant ministries. This analysis was conducted using the scenario below, the lessons learned from the Ukraine conflict and an international comparison. Additional work is needed in order to address the gaps that have been identified. In addition, the analysis took account of the additional work needed in light of the seven NATO Resilience Objectives.<sup>13</sup>

**The resilience task has been formulated on the basis of a scenario comprising the following elements:**

- There is a military conflict in Eastern Europe;
- The Netherlands must fulfil its obligations as an ally;
- There is a significant hybrid threat (including disinformation, cyber operations, sabotage or espionage), in the run-up to and during conflict;
- The Netherlands plays a leading role in the transport of troops and materials;
- There is a threat to critical infrastructure, strategic objects (both military and non-military) and the support structure for allied operations (logistical lines);
- There is prolonged and widespread disruption to the economy, labour market and society;
- There are large movements of people, such as migrants and/or casualties.

<sup>11</sup> The House will be informed in the near future about the government's assessment.

<sup>12</sup> Parliamentary Paper 28 676 no. 417, Report of the NATO Summit in Madrid, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence.

<sup>13</sup> See footnote 4.

Based on the analysis, the government formulated the following pillars of the resilience task.<sup>14</sup> These pillars form the framework for the whole-of-society approach, which consists of two tracks: societal resilience and military preparedness.

In concrete terms, societal resilience requires:

1. the protection of critical and other important processes in society;
2. a prepared and robust society;
3. the preservation of our democracy, the rule of law and the government;
4. a resilient economy.

In addition, military preparedness involves:

5. protecting and defending the territory of the Netherlands and that of our allies;
6. safeguarding civilian support for the armed forces in carrying out their military duties.

**NB:** An in-depth explanation of this task is enclosed with this letter as a separate publication. A summary can be found below.

### *1. Protection of critical and other important processes in society*

As a digital and logistical hub and gateway to Europe, the Netherlands is a possible target, for example for parties seeking to disrupt logistical support for Ukraine or troop transports to Eastern Europe. The disruption of critical or other important processes could swiftly lead to social disruption, public unrest and/or major economic damage.

To equip society to deal with this scenario, we must further strengthen our critical infrastructure, both physical and digital, specifically in the light of a hybrid threat or military conflict. Our critical infrastructure must be robust, with multiple redundancies in place. This is especially important for processes on which a large number of other processes rely, such as the energy supply, mobile communication networks, the internet, positioning, navigation and timing technology (e.g. GPS and the Galileo navigation system) and transport (by rail, air, road, ports, the North Sea and rivers), or processes that relate to basic human needs such as emergency care or food and drinking water.

When it comes to transnational processes in particular, we need to identify new ways to enhance resilience, not only at national level but also at European and international level. For example, the energy crisis illustrated the importance of taking swift action at EU level to diversify supplies and, wherever possible, phase out existing high-risk dependencies in order to boost resilience.

Given the hybrid threat context in a crisis and conflict scenario, proactive steps are needed to offer better resistance to physical sabotage and espionage (including cyber espionage). This also applies to the digital domain. The Netherlands must be able to defend itself in the digital domain. It is crucial to facilitate joint efforts (including public-private initiatives) in order to successfully prevent, detect, address and halt attacks on network and information systems.

Ensuring adequate access to safe, healthy food in sufficient quantities in exceptional circumstances (including in support of military operations) is crucial to society. The same goes for a decisive, flexible and scalable healthcare system that can withstand prolonged crises or conflicts and is thus capable of handling a large number of casualties and providing support to troops from the Netherlands and allied countries. Furthermore, preparations must be made for the reception of large groups of people as a result of a threat or conflict. In addition, tools must be developed to safeguard, to the greatest possible extent, the functioning of the labour market, the continuity of education and the independence of the media in the run-up to and during a conflict.

To ensure that society is better equipped to deal with disruptions, measures must be taken to better deal with a situation of scarcity, with due account for societal continuity. For example, a shortage of products, raw materials, staff or capacity. Knowledge and tools need to be developed to enable scarce resources to be shared equitably if such a situation should arise.

### *2. A prepared and robust society*

Disruptive hybrid attacks or a military conflict will have a major impact on our daily life, even if the conflict in question is happening outside the Netherlands itself. If our freedom is affected, our

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the enclosed publication 'The Resilience Task: Boosting Resilience in the Light of Military and Hybrid Threats'.

political and social stability is undermined, or if we have to deal with a long-term systems failure, scarcity or even destruction, our daily lives will be seriously disrupted. This could lead to concerns, demands for assistance and in some cases, social unrest. At the same time, both the national and subnational authorities' ability to coordinate our response and offer solutions in a conflict scenario will be under great strain, as a result of the accumulation of multiple crises – especially during the initial phase.

In terms of the scenario outlined above, this will require additional efforts with regard to government communication about threats and possible courses of action so that people are prepared and capable of dealing with prolonged system failures, shortages or damage. (See also the section below, 'Communication about the threat and possible courses of action'.) A comprehensive review of the redundancies built into our communication and information systems must be undertaken to ensure that all crisis partners can reach one another responsibly in a scenario as described above, and that the public can be warned in the case of danger.<sup>15</sup> Among other things this will safeguard our crisis management capabilities. A national platform or network will connect traditional emergency workers, volunteer and other organisations, and companies to prepare for major disruptions, system failures, and disaster and crisis scenarios, including conflict.

To enhance the individual and collective self-reliance of the people of the Netherlands, more must be done to organise volunteer emergency medical personnel, and plans for evacuation and shelters need to be updated. Efforts will also have to be stepped up to educate, train and drill people throughout society. In addition, the government is working to build a resilient society in which young people can also play their part, in line with the whole-of-society approach. To this end, we are studying existing initiatives and evidence-based interventions regarding youth participation. It is essential for central government to work with municipalities and safety regions to build a prepared and robust society.

### *3. Preservation of our democracy, the rule of law and government*

In a hybrid conflict, state actors may seek to influence the Dutch population by employing a wide range of tools such as sabotage, espionage, disinformation, and undesirable interference. This could disrupt and undermine our democracy, our government and rule of law, and threaten the democratic legal order. There is also a growing risk of extremism, radicalisation and polarisation, at the very time when trust in the government is crucial and the government needs to step up. It is essential that our public administration continues to function, and that fundamental rights are safeguarded to the greatest extent possible.

For that reason we must work to enhance our understanding of every aspect of the potential hybrid threat, preventing and mitigating vulnerabilities like espionage, sabotage, state interference or influencing (overt or covert), safeguarding knowledge security and boosting the government's ability to 'push back' or 'strike back' in response to hybrid warfare. This must be done not only with a view to deterrence, but also to make clear that undermining the Netherlands will not be tolerated. To counter hybrid threats, a proactive effort is needed. To this end the government will further develop the Approach to State Threats in 2025. In addition, it is important to strengthen our capacity for geopolitical action by stepping up international cooperation, both bilaterally and within the EU, NATO and the UN.

Identifying threats to national security and the democratic legal order in time and, if necessary, preventing or disrupting them require high-quality intelligence. We must also be able to monitor the threat and scale up our response if the geopolitical context should warrant it. This applies not only to threats like physical sabotage and cyber or conventional espionage; we also need a proactive and public-facing approach to preventing overt or covert influencing and/or interference. Examples of the latter include activities intended to influence public opinion, such as the dissemination of disinformation by state actors<sup>16</sup>, but also overt or covert activities that undermine the integrity of our political and administrative system. A free and independent press is essential for trust in government. Our approach to societal resilience therefore recognises the importance of ensuring the continuity of independent media.

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<sup>15</sup> Parliamentary Paper 21 501-20, no. 2040, Motion by MP Joost Eerdmans.

<sup>16</sup> As announced in the letter detailing the progress made on the central government-wide strategy for dealing effectively with disinformation, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations will conduct a broad exploratory study of vulnerabilities in the open public debate, including the ways in which disinformation can influence the Netherlands's democracy and the rule of law.

In a crisis or conflict scenario the government will also have to deal with system failures, shortages and disruption, making it impossible to guarantee the functioning of public services. In order to ensure continuity of government, ongoing democratic oversight, continued functioning of the public sector, access to an independent judiciary and optimal protection of fundamental rights, efforts are needed to make government processes and operational management shock resistant. This is particularly true of the tax and benefits system, individuals' access to their own financial resources, access to the debt market and protection of government services like social security.

In addition, it is necessary to safeguard decision-making processes in both the government and parliament, so that they can continue functioning as effectively as possible, even in these kinds of situations. At local level the authorities must be able to maintain public order. In a polarised society people are quicker to reject government authority. Processes must be designed to be robust, with multiple redundancies built in, and the government must have sufficient recovery capacity.

To ensure that the government can continue to function if all regular communication channels fail, a comprehensive review must be conducted of necessary redundancy in our information and communication systems. This includes the further development of emergency communication facilities for administrative decision-making in crisis situations.

In order to handle multiple and complex crises such as an Article 5 situation (or the run-up to such a situation), it is necessary to have an enhanced crisis structure and decision-making system in place with good connections to local, sectoral, national, European and international, and military crisis structures. Closer cross-border cooperation, including scope to share classified and other information, is a key requirement. With a view to aligning, coordinating and prioritising military and civil needs and activities, a permanent civil-military crisis coordination, decision-making and steering structure is needed.

Finally, a suitable statutory framework will be drafted, with provisions for an assessment framework and public communications, including in the run-up to a conflict. Both regular and emergency law are being reviewed to determine whether there are any gaps that need to be filled. Amendments could include additional powers or deployment options for various conflict scenarios.

#### *4. A resilient economy*

A strong and competitive economy ensures that society can continue to meet its basic needs, such as food, energy and healthcare. Of course, maintaining economic continuity also requires the availability of sufficient numbers of staff who can continue to work in these sectors. It is therefore necessary to further reflect on what economic processes must be kept operational in times of significant threat, and how sufficient labour market mobility can be guaranteed at such times. Maintaining the Netherlands' earning capacity also sustains our prosperity. In a time of scarcity, disruption and damage, it will be crucial to maintain our earning capacity and mitigate the impact of shocks to employment and investment. What is more, a healthy economy will also support the deployment of the armed forces.

A conflict could seriously disrupt the Dutch economy, labour market and international trade, which in turn could hinder the government's efforts to safeguard public interests. This will be particularly challenging if the availability of key products or services is jeopardised. In such situations, efficient and proportional government intervention will be needed to ensure access to crucial products in times of crisis. In that connection it is important to intervene early on and minimise market disruption.

The government is working to boost the Dutch economy's resilience to shocks. The private sector, including SMEs, plays a crucial role in this regard. After all, companies bear primary responsibility for organising their own value chains. With a view to supporting the deployment of our armed forces, certain sectors or companies may be asked in the run-up to a conflict situation to adapt their production and resources to the increasing demand for goods and services that are essential to the Defence organisation, such as food, medical necessities, means of transport and military equipment. The government is therefore working to ensure the swift introduction of a bill aimed at boosting the resilience of the defence and security-related industries. Obviously, such a request will have an effect on society, and so account must also be taken of civil needs and the impact on the sectors and companies concerned.

The above measures are intended to ensure that, amid economic disruption, both society and the armed forces will continue to have access to essential goods and services.

Furthermore, The government is working to mitigate risks associated with strategic dependencies, including by diversifying sources, encouraging circularity, promoting alternative products or substitutes, and accumulating strategic stocks. This will help enhance the independence of the Netherlands and the EU in crisis and conflict situations. The interministerial Strategic Dependencies Task Force plays a key supporting role in this regard.

#### *5. Protecting and defending the territory of the Netherlands and that of our allies*

The deteriorating security situation and the growing risk that the Netherlands could become directly involved in a military conflict requires structural investment in the Defence organisation. This is the only way to protect and defend our own territory and that of our allies. Investment in the Defence organisation has increased sharply in recent years, especially since the outbreak of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. The current government has brought defence spending to a minimum of 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) to ensure that our armed forces are better equipped to perform their three core tasks. Moreover, the House of Representatives, with the government's support, wishes to enshrine this 2% minimum in law. This will provide our Defence organisation with the multiannual certainty it needs to take on long-term obligations. This way, efforts to strengthen the Defence organisation can be accelerated in the years ahead.

The military force needs more than just a financial injection in order to be properly equipped for its tasks and to maintain an advantage over its opponents.. A number of initiatives have already been developed that will boost both military preparedness and societal resilience. Examples include the National Crisis Plan for Military Threats, the National Defence Plan for Critical Infrastructure and the National Plan for Space for Defence.

Although these initiatives are a step in the right direction, additional efforts are needed, both in the preparations for and the run-up to a military conflict. The Defence organisation must train more and stage more exercises in order to achieve a state of military preparedness. This means that additional physical space is needed. Increased military training and exercises may also cause noise pollution. This requires public understanding for the needs of the Defence organisation. In addition, the Defence organisation needs legislation that makes these kinds of preparations possible and contributes to deterrence. Current legislation is mainly geared towards peacetime,<sup>17</sup> while the Netherlands unfortunately now finds itself in a grey zone between peace and war. In order to perform its tasks effectively and keep the Netherlands safe, the Defence organisation is working with partners to draft appropriate legislation. In addition, it must be clear what tasks the Defence organisation can and should carry out in a conflict situation and what the associated political and administrative responsibilities and powers should be. This also requires the relevant parties to reflect on ways of filling any legislative gaps that currently exist.

Furthermore, it is important for society to be more involved in national defence. This is necessary, for example, in order to increase public understanding about the armed forces' need for more space to train personnel and conduct exercises. With regard to the need for sufficient personnel, the Defence organisation is introducing a model for military service, and the number of reservists is being expanded.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, more people will undertake a voluntary service year. To boost enlistment the Defence organisation plans to conduct a voluntary survey among young people.<sup>19</sup>

People are becoming more familiar with the concept of reservists, and public trust in this form of voluntary service model is growing, as it **is perceived to benefit all parties involved**. Together with market players and representatives of both employers and employees, we are working to create a situation where it is considered normal for reservists to have more than one employer at once. In order to generate large numbers of reservists, it is crucial to make cooperation attractive to employers. In addition, reservists need to make arrangements with their employers about their availability for training and other activities. The government will also explore what other arrangements can be automatically incorporated in collective labour agreements (or, if necessary, laid down by statute) so as to give them a more binding character. In order for the government to keep the public informed and engaged regarding defence activities, including in crisis situations, a robust online information platform is needed.

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<sup>17</sup> Current legislation also encompasses the emergency powers of the state, including the War Act.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to parliament proposing a model for military service that is consistent with scalable armed forces, BS2024015423, 3 June 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to parliament on a survey regarding a model for military service of the Defence organisation, BS2024029750, 3 October 2024.

Finally, a number of basic requirements need to be arranged: developing analogue alternatives in case digital systems fail, enhancing the digital striking power of the intelligence and security services, and continually encouraging innovation. In this connection the government is working to improve synergy between NATO and the EU with regard to crisis management, resilience-related matters, and a potential Article 5 situation, so as to better coordinate civil and military efforts.

#### *6. Safeguarding civil support to the armed forces in carrying out military duties*

As a gateway to Europe, the Netherlands plays a key role as a hub and transit country for military materiel and troops, for example through the ports of Rotterdam and Vlissingen, and also using our roads, railways and waterways. This is already the case, during NATO exercises for example, and it will be even more of a factor in the run-up to and during a military conflict. This will have a major impact on regular, civil transport flows and the import and export of goods.

In the event of a military conflict, the Defence organisation will require sufficient civil support with regard to food, transport, infrastructure, healthcare, energy supplies, the internet and mobile networks. To facilitate a constructive dialogue with society about this issue, the government is currently taking stock of what exactly the Defence organisation will need in the run-up to and during a conflict.

At the same time, the labour market is tight, physical space scarce and resources limited. It is likely that, during a conflict, society and the armed forces will have to share the same scarce people, resources and capabilities. Therefore, it will be necessary to balance the needs of society and the armed forces, and in exceptional cases priorities will have to be set.<sup>20</sup> In order to make such choices, we have to thoroughly examine what is needed. In addition, preparations must be made to mitigate scarcity or to reduce its impact, having weighed up the different needs. For example, it is necessary to take stock of what preparations are required to keep healthcare (in terms of both personnel and medical supplies) accessible to as many people as possible (including Dutch and allied troops) for as long as possible, and with safeguards for the quality of care.

It is also crucial to have scalable armed forces that can deploy capabilities (personnel, materiel, infrastructure and knowledge) from both the Defence organisation and society in short order. This requires the ability to scale up and back rapidly. A key requirement in that connection is to enhance public-private cooperation in areas like staff exchanges, logistical support (including medical capacity), surveillance and protection, IT infrastructure and cyberspace, and enhancing cooperation with industry. In addition, there needs to be closer cooperation with knowledge institutions in order to enhance and enlarge the Defence organisation's knowledge and innovation base.

### **5) International experiences**

Many countries in Europe and elsewhere in the world are facing the same task and the same threats. The government has therefore studied the experiences of other countries with regard to enhancing resilience, specifically Ukraine, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom, in light of the knowledge they have gained over the past few years and the efforts they have made to enhance their own resilience.<sup>21</sup> In order to both continue learning from countries with a strong culture of resilience and structure cooperation in this area over the long term a partly Dutch-led coalition has been forged, comprising Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. This is part of our broader international cooperation efforts, both at bilateral level and within the EU, NATO and UN, aimed at multilateral partnerships based on shared interests – including less like-minded countries.

Russia's illegal military invasion has severely tested Ukraine's resilience. Even though Ukraine is at war, life in large parts of the country goes on as normal, as much as circumstances allow. The Ukrainian people have shown admirable resilience. We can learn from this, with regard to matters like strategic communication and combating disinformation. Therefore, the government aims to develop not only strong central government communications but also bottom-up communication via, for example, social media. The involvement of public and volunteer organisations is also considerable, for example through local-level initiatives. One lesson that can be learned from this is that it is important to organise such involvement even before a conflict situation occurs. Experiences in Ukraine also underscore the need to invest in cybersecurity and business continuity,

<sup>20</sup> As also described in the NATO Resilience Objectives.

<sup>21</sup> Parliamentary Paper 30 821 no. 222, Motion by MP Gijs Tuinman.

including back-up systems, continuity of essential services, and staff retention. It is also essential to invest in multiple redundancies in our energy networks. The government is taking account of these experiences in the further development of its plans, as also described above.

In Finland and Sweden there is a major focus – in some cases, a renewed focus – on resilience. This includes clear communication with the public about self-reliance at times of crisis or war and the Total Defence concept. For Sweden, Total Defence means that anyone living in the country aged 16 to 70 can be called up to help, in either a civil or military capacity, if war is looming or has broken out. Finland has a similar concept, with contractual agreements in place with various companies about their role and product guarantees. In the UK, the National Preparedness Commission – a private initiative and network – is a driving force in influencing policy and setting the agenda with regard to a resilient society.

We are taking account of these international experiences, including the Total Defence concept and the role of the National Preparedness Commission in the UK, in our whole-of-society approach. However, the wholesale adoption of other countries' approaches is not possible. There are differences in our security culture, threat context, history and policy approaches. For that reason we will seek a Dutch response, and these international experiences will have to be translated into a Dutch context.

## **6) Communication about the threat and possible courses of action**

In order to galvanise society and increase societal resilience, the government will communicate clearly about 1) what the threat is, 2) how the government and other partners are preparing for it and 3) what the people of the Netherlands can do in order to be ready and resilient.

This is the first time in many years that the government is communicating to the public so emphatically about the threat and the need to take action. This therefore requires a thorough approach.

### *Communication principles*

The government will observe the following principles in its approach to communication:

- *Offering a sense of control and a grasp of the situation*  
The aim is to inform people about how they can prepare for possible consequences of the present threat, such as the prolonged failure of critical processes. Such a message could unintentionally reinforce people's sense of insecurity. The government's job is to give people a sense of control and a grasp of the situation by providing accurate information and clearly explained courses of action.
- *Dialogue is part of the approach*  
For some time now, all basic information about risks in the Netherlands has been available on the website [denkvoornuit](#) ('Think ahead'). But in the coming months the government will be proactively raising nationwide awareness of risks and the role that ordinary people and civil society organisations can play in order to be better prepared for them. This may lead to questions and conversations about the role of the government, and that of companies and organisations, and about society's self-reliance, both individual and collective. The government will engage in these discussions, at both national and regional level.
- *Working in line with existing policy*  
The enhancement of risk communication is included in the Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands<sup>22</sup> and the National Crisis Management Agenda<sup>23</sup>; the current military and hybrid threat has prompted the government to accelerate this process and tighten its focus.
- *We are doing this for everyone in this country, working with the whole of society*  
It is the government's ambition to reach everyone in the Netherlands. The information to be shared must therefore be comprehensible, relevant and applicable to everyone. The whole-of-society approach makes maximum use of organisations and civil society networks to reach people.
- *Communicating with the public is a priority*  
We cannot wait any longer to actively inform the public. The course of action we envision for everyone in the Netherlands is an 'all-hazard' approach that encompasses the effects of the

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<sup>22</sup> Parliamentary Paper 30 821, no. 178, Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>23</sup> Parliamentary Paper 29 517, no. 255, National Crisis Management Agenda, Ministry of Justice and Security.

military and hybrid threat. As a result, we are able to anticipate the results and courses of action tied to the specific task of boosting resilience to these threats.

In concrete terms the communication approach consists of the following elements:

1. Providing information about the threat and its implications for the Netherlands  
Hybrid warfare, which can take a variety of forms, is not a widely known concept among members of the public. Research<sup>24</sup> has shown that nearly half of Dutch people (47%) require more information from central government on the possible repercussions of the war in Ukraine for the Netherlands. So there is a need for information.

This need can be met by a clear explanation of geopolitical developments, and the position of and consequences for the Netherlands. The Scientific Council for Government Policy<sup>25</sup> has advised the same approach: clearly explain what is at stake and how big the challenges are. There is considerable expertise in this area, as illustrated by the recent advisory reports by the Advisory Council on International Affairs and the Scientific Council for Government Policy.

The government is working hard to spotlight this information and thus to help people in Dutch society expand their knowledge and form opinions. This is done in various ways: using existing communication opportunities (such as speeches), providing information to the media, and arranging media appearances for members of government. A new section on [www.government.nl](http://www.government.nl) now provides regularly updated information, making it easily accessible to the general public in one place.

2. Information about how the government and its social partners are preparing  
Before we ask the public to help boost the Netherlands' resilience, it is important to shed light on what the government and critical sectors are doing to this end. Research has shown that only 20% of people in this country feel they have a good sense of what central government is doing to limit the effects of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine for the Netherlands.<sup>26</sup>

This aspect of the government's communication task involves giving the public a clear idea of Dutch society's preparedness level. What can people expect of professionals' efforts to make us better able to deal with the impact of shocks? And also: what needs *cannot* be directly met by the government and its partners? Information from this track is highlighted through a variety of communication channels, from many sources: government bodies, organisations and companies are all invited to be transparent about their efforts. Public communication from the Defence organisation serves as an example, offering a concrete explanation of how the armed forces are working on preparedness, including visible exercises.

3. Galvanising the public through communication that sets out possible courses of action  
Boosting societal resilience is best achieved by ensuring that people are prepared for the consequences of a disaster or crisis, regardless of the nature of the threat. This means that people must change more than one aspect of their behaviour: we not only want the people of this country to assemble a package of emergency items. We also want them to discuss the issue with friends and family (risk awareness) and create an emergency plan. This is why our most important communication efforts will be aimed at conveying specific courses of action. Research<sup>27</sup> suggests that this will be a major task. In the spring of 2024 over three-quarters of people in the Netherlands (77%) indicated that they have taken no action to be better prepared for risks and threats. The percentage of people who have not taken any action has increased since 2022: from 61% in the spring of 2024 to 77% two years later.

The NCTV commissioned a survey of the public to examine the resilience behaviour and resilience mindset of the Dutch population in general and special target groups (such as young people and less self-reliant people) in particular. The results form the basis for central government's multiannual approach to risk communication and societal resilience. This approach will take shape with the launch of a multimedia publicity campaign in 2025, tailored to various target groups, such as young people. A house-to-house pamphlet (as suggested in the motion by MP Gijs Tuinman<sup>28</sup>)

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<sup>24</sup> Latest flash poll on Ukraine (21) of 6 November 2024, available at [nctv.nl](http://nctv.nl).

<sup>25</sup> Scientific Council for Government Policy, WRR report no. 109, 'The Netherlands in a Fragmenting World Order', 2024.

<sup>26</sup> See footnote 25.

<sup>27</sup> Including the Risk and Crisis Barometer.

<sup>28</sup> Parliamentary Paper 36410-X no. 54, Motion by MP Gijs Tuinman.

is an option if research shows it to be effective. This approach thereby fulfils the motion by MP Silvio Erkman.<sup>29</sup>

#### *Organisation of communication*

In line with general efforts to boost societal and military resilience, the NCTV and the Defence organisation are jointly coordinating the interministerial communication approach. The approach will be supported, and partly implemented, by an active communication network. Because this network will include other government authorities, companies and civil society organisations, the perspectives of ordinary people and civil society groups will automatically be taken into account. This aspect of the communication approach fulfils the undertaking given by the Minister of Justice.<sup>30</sup> International networks are also being used, allowing us to craft an approach that incorporates lessons learned from elsewhere. Preparing for and engaging in crisis communication is part of the regular planning process for various types of crises, which takes the form of National Crisis Plans (LCPs). Specific arrangements on communication will be embedded into the National Crisis Plan for Military Threats. This fulfils motion X31 and takes account of lessons taken from the Parallel and Coordinated Exercise that took place in October 2024.

## **7) Conclusion**

The deteriorating international security situation makes it imperative to enhance the resilience of Dutch society. At the present juncture, with security challenges escalating, we cannot avoid taking a major additional step. This letter serves as an important starting point in defining that extra step, in the light of military and hybrid threats ('the resilience task'). The resilience task is about boosting both societal resilience and military preparedness. But it requires more than this. In the coming period we will need to reflect on and expand this task. The government cannot achieve this alone; although it is responsible for coordinating efforts to enhance our security, creating a safe and resilient society depends on the collective efforts of everyone.

In the months ahead, the various ministries, working with regional and local authorities and civil society partners, will formulate the specifics of the resilience task. The central question that must be addressed is: what can everyone do to help carry out the resilience task facing the Netherlands? Risk communication on the part of the government concerning threats, our response to them and their possible impact on our way of life, will help in this regard. In 2025 the government will send a follow-up letter outlining the government's initial policy plans for boosting resilience. Ensuring the safety of this country is our shared responsibility.

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<sup>29</sup> Parliamentary Paper 30 821 no. 224, Motion by MP Silvio Erkmans.

<sup>30</sup> Undertaking given by the Minister of Justice and Security to address, in the government's letter to parliament on resilience to military and hybrid threats, how society and the business community can be involved in making the Netherlands resilient.

<sup>31</sup> Parliamentary Paper 21 501-20, no. 2039, Motion by MP Mirjam Bikker.