

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME CHAPTER 9A – INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

What is the overall challenge facing society?

The world is changing fast. Technological, economic and social developments are unfolding at a rapid pace. Countries, businesses and people who had long been on the margins of the world stage have now taken on key roles. The world's centre of gravity – in terms of demographics, economics and other factors – is shifting towards the East (and South). These rapid developments in parts of the world are positive in many respects, but they also have downsides. Progress is certainly not happening everywhere, or for everyone. In many places in the world, stability is declining, as is socioeconomic security. The emergence of new powers has led to geopolitical competition, tensions and conflicts. And not everyone is playing by the established rules. Energy, water and food security, as well as trade flows and value chains, are under increasing pressure.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine poses a threat to European security. As peace and security in Europe can no longer be taken for granted, the Netherlands and its allies must protect themselves better, by being more even more alert, better armed and better prepared. Not only with regard to the threat of armed conflict, but also when it comes to the resilience needed in order to respond to hybrid threats – in the grey zone between war and peace. Besides an aggressive Russia, we are also seeing an assertive China that wants to reshape the international order in its favour and is willing to put that order under pressure to achieve this. The regional situation in the Middle East has seriously escalated since the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the ensuing violence in Gaza. Elsewhere too in Europe's wider neighbouring region, unrest has increased and conflicts have flared up, as we saw with the takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh. Geopolitical developments around the world affect our room for manoeuvre and our interests, in the Netherlands and the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom.

Dutch people see these developments and feel their effects on a daily basis. When conflicts abroad flare up, prices rise at the petrol pump and in the supermarket. Individuals and businesses are increasingly being targeted by cyberattacks from abroad. The developments with regard to migration, as described in chapter 2, are directly related to developments abroad. Disinformation and deepfakes are spread in the Netherlands too, mainly via international social media platforms. The heightened military readiness is noticeable around the country, as space is needed to hold exercises, conduct training and accommodate more military personnel, equipment and ammunition. Dutch people living or holidaying abroad are more often faced with conflicts and natural disasters, and as a result have to turn to Dutch embassies and consulates for assistance.

The international orientation of our open society and economy is one of the Netherlands' great strengths. Our country has often successfully adapted to international changes and, if it continues to do so, it can face the future with confidence. A world with more uncertainty, unrest and war requires an assertive government that watches over the Netherlands' interests, while maintaining a dialogue with society. Everyone living in the Kingdom, as well as the more than one million Dutch people living abroad, must be able to trust the government to do everything possible to keep them safe. Dutch citizens, businesses and civil-society and other organisations must be able to rely on the government to work on their behalf at international level. The government will therefore aim to ensure an adequate network of diplomatic missions. One-third of the Netherlands' income is from foreign trade, which accounts for 2.4 million fulltime jobs. This directly affects Dutch people's socioeconomic security.

What does the government want to achieve?

The government aims to improve the Netherlands' security and resilience, by working at international level and strengthening the armed forces. An ironclad collective deterrence and defence, as enshrined in Article 5 of

the North Atlantic Treaty, is the top priority in this respect. The government wants Europe to cherish and strengthen the transatlantic bond, while taking more responsibility for its own security. Russia's war against Ukraine necessitates choices. The Netherlands will actively continue to provide undiminished political, military, financial and moral support to Ukraine, in wartime and for recovery and reconstruction, for as long as it takes. This is inextricably linked with deterring further Russian aggression. Developing a national and European defence industry will make support for Ukraine possible, and it is also of great importance for our own defence and economy. Accelerating the enhancement of the Netherlands' resilience, and pursuing a society-wide approach, is a key priority in the area of security. In order to be able to respond to conflicts and be sufficiently resilient, now and in the future, the Netherlands needs to be well prepared. In this respect there is a degree of overlap between international and national security (the latter as described in chapter 8).

The government will pursue a realistic foreign policy that serves the interests of the Netherlands and its people, honours our values, and defends our freedoms. When contacts between countries, people and business increase, opportunities emerge for the Netherlands; the government wants to seize those opportunities, in close cooperation with the private sector, knowledge institutions and other organisations. At the same time, a more interconnected world also means that conflicts and unrest in other countries are more likely to affect Dutch and European interests and security. The closer the countries concerned are to the Netherlands, the greater the impact generally is. As regards migration to the Netherlands, the countries of origin and transit – often developing countries – face great challenges and have few resources with which to respond to them. Climate change exacerbates these problems and requires adaptive measures. Partly for that reason, within the financial frameworks it has set, the government wants to promote stability in vulnerable countries, particularly in Europe's wider neighbouring region (which can stretch deeper into Africa). Contributing to conflict prevention, reconstruction, socioeconomic progress and the protection of civilians in developing countries – where it will also benefit our trade, migration management and security – ties in with that aim.

The Netherlands is an open society and, at heart, a trading nation. The government stands for our democratic values, freedoms and rule of law principles. The Netherlands benefits from fair and clear rules that ensure international cooperation runs smoothly, promote human rights and create a level playing field, on which our businesses can flourish in their international dealings. The government wants to strengthen the position of the Netherlands and its partners on the world stage, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of multilateral institutions. As a maritime trading nation, we have a particular interest in upholding freedom of navigation and the international law of the sea. Obstacles to freedom of navigation, such as China's claim in the South China Sea, are not recognised internationally. The Caribbean parts of the Kingdom also have a strong interest in a functioning international legal order, in which the interests of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) can be better safeguarded, for instance.

How will this be achieved?

Of the approximately 195 countries in the world, the Netherlands ranks number 131 in terms of land area, number 69 in population and number 17 in terms of gross domestic product (GDP). At international level it is therefore a country to be reckoned with, but certainly not a great power. In order to promote our international interests, the Netherlands must set clear priorities, and work together with other countries as much as possible. These are central themes that run through the government's actions at international level.

NATO and the European Union are the two most important partnerships for our international security. The government wants to enshrine in law that at least 2% of GDP will be spent on defence on a permanent basis, in accordance with NATO's Defence Investment Pledge. Not only because that is what has been agreed within NATO, but primarily because strong and credible armed forces are needed in order to keep the countries of the Kingdom and Dutch interests safe. The Defence organisation must be able to carry out its main tasks and fulfil its constitutional duty and strategic objectives: being prepared for large-scale conflict; being ready for future

warfare; adapting to changing threats; and standing ready to carry out national tasks and assist the civil authorities. The government will invest the additional funds in, among other things, capabilities requested by NATO as priority targets. To ensure the armed forces are ready and can be deployed for longer periods, the government will invest in ammunition stocks, the logistics chain and other necessary support. The government will also strengthen the Defence organisation's cybersecurity and the digital capacity of the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) and Netherlands Defence Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD), so that our intelligence and security services continue to play a leading role internationally. In addition, the government will work on legislation that will help remove obstacles to increasing the readiness of the armed forces, and on a draft policy outlook on 'space for Defence' in cohesion with the National Spatial Strategy. The strategic objectives and defence policy are set out in greater detail in the Defence White Paper 2024.

The geopolitical situation requires an active defence industry policy, in order to quickly increase the production and supply security of equipment and raw materials. At EU level, the government will be a constructive partner. In that context, it will contribute to building a more capable Europe and a strong basis for defence technology and the defence industry, focusing on innovation and increasing the interoperability between the various European armed forces. These efforts should be coordinated effectively with the United Kingdom, as an important non-EU partner, and with the United States. The armed forces will scale up if deployed in a conflict. To ensure the armed forces are fully staffed, it is necessary to have more personnel and more possibilities in terms of employment contracts. The Ministry of Defence wants to recruit and retain people by means of more attractive human resources policy and good veterans' care.

At international level, the government will work to enhance societal resilience, in cooperation with businesses and organisations and in cohesion with the national measures described in chapter 8 and 10. The government will focus on, among other things, building international coalitions in order to be better prepared and to be able to respond to cyber operations, threats to our critical infrastructure, pandemics, disruptions affecting economic security, vulnerabilities in the area of knowledge security, and other forms of undesirable foreign interference. To bolster its security and resilience, the Netherlands must maintain strategic stocks of essential items such as medicines, ensure its food security in particular is in good order, and safeguard its critical infrastructure, including water and energy supplies. To this end, the recommendations made by the Netherlands Court of Audit in 2022 will be adopted. For some raw materials, fuels and products, the Netherlands is dependent on countries that wish to enhance their power by means of economic pressure, which entails risks to our economic security. By taking measures such as diversification in terms of supply chains and suppliers and by establishing partnerships, the government aims to mitigate these risks (such as the risks associated with China with regard to critical raw materials, and obstacles relating to international shipping routes). We will also enhance our resilience and technological leadership by maintaining and building on vital positions in global value chains.

The Netherlands will continue to provide undiminished support to Ukraine, both bilaterally and in European and other partnerships, by contributing to the supply of military equipment and the training of Ukrainian military personnel; helping ensure Ukraine has sufficient finances; contributing to critical infrastructure repairs and reconstruction, for instance in the area of energy supply; encouraging and facilitating efforts by the business sector; providing humanitarian aid; further developing and implementing sanctions (with adopting new national sanctions legislation and combating circumvention as key elements); and contributing to ensuring accountability. Besides air defence and the F-16 coalition, accountability is a good example of an area in which the Netherlands has played a leading role and will continue to do so. The Netherlands will continue to take the initiative in specific areas where, on account of its position, it is better equipped than other countries to fulfil such a role. The Netherlands will also support other European countries whose existence is currently vulnerable, such as Moldova and Armenia.

The Netherlands cherishes its relations with its neighbours: our Benelux partners, as well as Germany, France, the United Kingdom and other European countries. In its approach to relations with eastern and southern European neighbourhood countries, the Netherlands will operate at both bilateral and European level, motivated in part by the conviction that united efforts are essential to strengthening our geopolitical clout. For instance, the government will work to strengthen European ties with Armenia. To facilitate its economic development and improve its access to regional transport and other networks, Armenia must be able to benefit to the greatest extent possible from the available EU funds such as the Global Gateway, the Constituency Programme connected with the World Bank/IMF, and other Dutch programmes. As noted in chapter 2, the government will be taking a leading role in working with like-minded member states and the European Commission to explore outside-the-box solutions in the area of asylum and migration, within the framework of international and European law and taking into account broader partnerships. The government will keep the fight against terrorism, as well as tackling the root causes of radicalisation and jihadism, high on the agenda. The international approach to tackling organised crime will be given a further boost. It is important to continue to contribute to international missions outside NATO and EU territory in the context of promoting the international legal order. The geographical priority of countries in Europe's wider neighbouring region will be taken into account when deploying military, police and civilian personnel for such missions. Where there are serious violations of human rights and the rule of law, for example in Iran, Venezuela or Belarus, the government will speak out and take action.

The Netherlands supports the State of Israel's right to exist and its right to security, and will resist any denial or threats in this respect, particularly by Iran and its proxies. As regards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Netherlands will continue to strive for a lasting solution that has the support of both parties, for which the two-state solution remains the basis. The government condemns acts of terrorism and values international (humanitarian) law. The government will also work to achieve the alleviation of the serious humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the release of all hostages. With due consideration for solutions to the conflict and the Netherlands' diplomatic interests, an examination will take place of when would be an appropriate moment to move the Dutch embassy to Jerusalem.

As the world's centre of gravity shifts towards the East (and South), the Netherlands will need to be even more assertive in standing up for its interests and values. The government will focus on entering into broad partnerships with emerging countries, particularly in Asia but also elsewhere, for example in Africa. That will mean examining and weighing up all of the Netherlands' interests vis-à-vis such a country, as well that country's wishes and expectations vis-à-vis the Netherlands, as a cohesive whole. The government will therefore adopt a country-specific approach in which competing interests are weighed against one another and, where necessary, clear choices are made. At EU level the government will argue for economic and security interests to be given greater consideration and for the strategic use of European instruments such as the Global Gateway.

The Foreign Trade and Development portfolio is part of a broader foreign policy focused on the Netherlands' strength, prosperity and resilience in the world. A strong economy with a substantial earning capacity will increase our country's security and resilience; foreign trade has a significant contribution to make in this respect. The government will strengthen this earning capacity by continuing to identify priority markets, taking into account the growth markets for the Netherlands and the National Technology Strategy. This will be done in cooperation with companies and the Trade and Innovate NL (TINL) partners, including regional development agencies. The economic dimension of the mission network, trade missions and trade instruments will be used to this end. At EU level the government will advocate for international trade agreements that incorporate equal and reasonable standards. Development assistance will be focused on promoting the socioeconomic development of partner countries, in accordance with the internationally applicable development goals. This is in the interests of those countries and their people and of our country too, because it will benefit our economy and businesses, help prevent irregular migration and contribute to our security. In the context of development assistance, the government will focus on areas where the Netherlands has interests and enjoys a good

reputation, for instance water management and food security.

The Netherlands will actively help strengthen the international legal order and multilateral cooperation. The government will comply with binding international law and treaty obligations in good faith. The Netherlands has a strong reputation and responsibility as host country of the key international law institutions based in The Hague. Partly for this reason, the government attaches importance to the trial, investigation (including evidence gathering) and prosecution of crimes committed by Islamic State (Daesh) and will take the initiative for the establishment of an international tribunal as well as taking the necessary steps at national level. Together with the other affected countries, the government will keep doing all it can to establish the truth and achieve justice and accountability with regard to the downing of flight MH17, including continuing to work to ensure that the perpetrators and other responsible parties do not escape punishment and evade responsibility, and continuing to pursue the proceedings before the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). The government will not accept threats targeting holders of political office, whether made by or emanating from within other countries that refuse to cooperate in the investigation, prosecution or trial of such threats, and will take action in response.

What resources are available for these purposes?

Structural financial certainty will give the Ministry of Defence scope for making long-term investments in strong and innovative armed forces capable of fulfilling their constitutional duties. During its term in office this government will invest extra in the Defence organisation, so as to bring defence expenditure into line with the NATO norm. In addition the government will encourage the financial sector to scale up its investments in the defence industry. The existing course for strengthening the Defence organisation will thus be continued but also accelerated, with further investments in effective combat power and sustainment. By meeting the NATO norm of at least 2% of GDP, the Netherlands will be able to invest in the security and defence of the countries of the Kingdom and the NATO alliance. Nevertheless, the Netherlands is not yet able to supply all capabilities required by NATO and choices will still have to be made.

As explained in the financial section at the start of this government programme, the government will have to make clear financial choices. Part of this will be a substantial reduction in international budgets, both for official development assistance (ODA) and for general foreign policy (non-ODA), although the funds for foreign trade and security will remain unaffected. The financial details will be elaborated in the various ministerial budgets. As a general rule, existing legal contracts and obligations will be honoured wherever possible, on the basis of the principle that the Dutch government must be a reliable partner. The reduction in the financial resources for international purposes will necessitate making clearer choices, deploying available personnel in an efficient manner, taking advantage of multilateral benefits of scale and effectively coordinating various parties across central government for the sake of a coherent country-specific policy as outlined above.

Finally: people are the most important 'resources' in our diplomacy, our intelligence and security services and our defence. An adequate diplomatic mission network that is managed, supported and facilitated from The Hague is indispensable for representing government-wide international interests and providing Dutch citizens, businesses and organisations abroad with the services they expect from the government. The government will therefore exercise great care in carrying out a responsible retrenchment at our embassies, consulates and permanent representations abroad, amounting to 10% instead of 22%. The government aims to ensure that the Defence organisation is fully staffed by 2030. With this aim in mind, efforts will be made to reach an inflow of 9,000 military personnel per year as of 2029, consisting of career military personnel, reservists and personnel undertaking a voluntary service year. The Ministry of Defence will aim to have women comprising 30% of its personnel by 2030.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME CHAPTER 9B – EUROPEAN COOPERATION

The EU is crucial for peace, security and wellbeing in the Netherlands. Much of our income is earned in Europe; many of our jobs depend on it. Besides the economic benefits, it also protects our democracy and rule of law and the security, fundamental rights and personal freedoms of our citizens.

We are living at a time of great tensions. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has brought war to our continent. The global economy is under pressure. As a country with an open economy and as a founding member state, the Netherlands is inextricably linked to the EU. The Netherlands benefits from a strong EU and will remain a constructive partner within it, also with a view to achieving our own objectives. In this connection the government will prioritise securing Dutch interests in relation to asylum and migration – such as reducing and bringing all forms of migration under control – as well as agricultural policy and EU budget negotiations. We will continue to make every effort to achieve our objectives in Europe.

We will work with other countries to achieve greater strategic independence and step up defence cooperation in the areas of transport, production and industry. Policy on trade and industry, including in the framework of the EU, will help reduce strategic dependencies, for example in relation to China in the area of critical raw materials. In addition the government will aim to promote green growth and the EU's innovation capacity and competitiveness. It is important in this connection that member states pursue sound financial and economic policies, which include reducing high levels of government debt. The government is not in favour of the issuance of common debt for new European instruments.

The Netherlands takes a highly critical stance on further EU enlargement. We will adhere strictly to the criteria for EU membership, including the Copenhagen criteria. Reforms in relation to good governance, transparency and the rule of law are important and where possible the Netherlands will provide support. No concessions will be made regarding these criteria.

The vigorous pursuit of national interests will require a stepping up of bilateral cooperation and efforts to form coalitions with other European countries. It is therefore important to invest in cooperation, particularly with key partners in and outside the EU. By joining forces we can increase the Netherlands' capacity to act.

The Netherlands will always make a careful assessment of EU initiatives. A Europe Act (*Europawet*) will be introduced, and will include rules on information provision and procedures during the preparation and establishment of European legislation. European legislation must not go further than strictly necessary, must be workable and must take account of the geographical, economic and demographic differences between member states. The government will also take into account the impact of European legislation on the challenges that exist in the Netherlands. And European legislation is not always desirable in every area. Member states can also work together without the involvement of Brussels. Consideration must always be given to which approach lends itself to any given subject. The government will set priorities in this connection.