





*IOB Evaluation*

# **Stronger together?**

Evaluation of Dutch foreign and security policy towards the EU and NATO, 2020-2024

**March 2025**

# Executive summary

This evaluation report examines Dutch policy on contributing manpower and resources to the security and defence efforts of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to protect national security. The evaluation covers the policy for the period 2020-2024. During this period, the Dutch government pursued a dual-track approach to NATO and the EU: it wanted to strengthen both NATO and the EU and promote cooperation between the two organisations.

This evaluation was completed when the transatlantic relationship came under pressure and was changing. However, as of mid-March 2025, it is still too early to draw conclusions about NATO's future role based on current developments. The evaluation assumes that NATO will continue to play a vital role in Dutch security. At the same time, it is clear – at the time of writing – that Europe must take significant steps to ensure its own security. The evolving geopolitical context presents not only risks but also opportunities for the Netherlands and Europe. The lessons from 2020-2024 remain relevant for the Netherlands' commitment to partnerships in the broader European security architecture.

Central to this evaluation is the question of how effective the Netherlands has been in recent years in strengthening NATO and EU security efforts and in improving cooperation between NATO and the EU.

The study, carried out by the independent Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, finds that the Netherlands' efforts in the NATO and EU context have been effective but that there is room for improvement in several areas. This is reflected in the main conclusion:

| 4 |

*During the period under review, the Netherlands' engagement in NATO and the EU has contributed to the country's security. The diplomatic efforts and the knowledge, manpower and resources provided by the Netherlands have strengthened NATO and the EU. However, opportunities are still being missed. During the period under review, the Netherlands lacked a clear guiding strategy to inform decision-making on its NATO and EU commitments.*

This conclusion is further elaborated in the study in the four sub-conclusions summarised below.

**Sub-conclusion 1: The Dutch commitment to NATO and the EU contributed to the security of the Netherlands during the period under review. However, in an unstable geopolitical context, continuous effort is required to strengthen NATO and the EU in line with Dutch interests.**

It is difficult to determine precisely how much the EU and NATO contribute to the security of the Netherlands, but their impact is likely to have been significant. In international power politics, the Netherlands has limited means to defend its position independently. Therefore, international partnerships are crucial, especially as geopolitical instability and external threats increase. Cooperation with NATO allies and other EU member states gives the Netherlands the knowledge and capabilities to respond effectively to external threats.

The Netherlands is highly dependent on the NATO alliance for its military defence – and within that alliance, particularly on the United States (US). However, the US appears increasingly reluctant to commit unconditionally to Europe's security. This is especially concerning given the EU's current vulnerabilities. Europe faces economic pressures, has limited military capabilities, and suffers from a fragmented defence industry. In 2025, Europe faces major challenges, including a war on the continent in Ukraine. The challenges facing Europe directly impact the Netherlands' security position. Therefore, the Netherlands must use the available resources and manpower for foreign and security policy as strategically as possible, with a long-term vision for strengthening the European security architecture and the role that the EU and NATO should play in it.

**Sub-conclusion 2. During the period under review, the Dutch government did not develop a guiding strategy to shape the division of roles and responsibilities between NATO and the EU, nor to enhance their complementarity, on the basis of which our country could determine distinct priorities and commitments for each organisation.**

Both NATO and the EU have expanded their security efforts in recent years. Issues such as cybersecurity and critical infrastructure protection now fall within the remit of both organisations. In addition, the EU has ambitions to become a geopolitical security actor, conducting both civilian missions and military missions and operations. The EU has also increasingly focused on strengthening the European defence industry.

As NATO and the EU become more active in the same policy areas, there is a risk of competition between them. However, both organisations have distinct capabilities. For example, NATO provides a nuclear deterrent and strong military and operational capacity, while the EU has legislative powers and far greater financial resources. This suggests potential for mutual reinforcement if cooperation were more explicitly focused on combining their respective strengths.

However, during the period under review, the Netherlands did not develop a guiding strategy on how the EU and NATO can complement each other on sub-themes to determine which priorities the Netherlands will pursue in each organisation. Recently, the focus on complementarity has been mainly on avoiding duplication. What NATO and the EU should do individually to complement each other has not been specified.

Nonetheless, during the 2020-2024 period, the Netherlands adopted a constructive and pragmatic approach to strengthening cooperation between the EU and NATO. These efforts primarily led to improvements in informal cooperation between the two organisations. Contacts between the international staff of NATO and EU institutions have intensified, facilitating the exchange of unclassified information. These closer staff-level contacts have improved mutual understanding and coordination, for example, regarding the timing of public statements. The Netherlands' pragmatic approach has thus contributed, albeit modestly, to improving EU-NATO cooperation.

However, the assumption in Dutch policy that improved cooperation automatically leads to greater complementarity does not always hold. Even if NATO and the EU have a shared understanding at the staff level of what they want to achieve, this does not necessarily translate into coordinated goals at the member state level to promote mutual complementarity. In practice, the individual countries, as the organisations' members, ultimately determine the extent to which the EU and NATO can genuinely complement each other.

The Netherlands' pragmatic approach to improving EU-NATO cooperation has yielded results, but it has also exposed the limitations of what is possible at the staff level. Formal coordination is needed among EU member states and NATO allies to truly advance EU-NATO complementarity and cooperation. However, certain political obstacles, such as the frozen conflict between NATO ally Türkiye and EU member Cyprus, remain outside the Netherlands' direct influence.

The current shifts in transatlantic relations are further constraining the scope of EU-NATO cooperation. The level of complementarity and cooperation between the EU and NATO that is possible – and in the interest of Dutch security – will partially depend on how the US positions itself within NATO. Now more than ever, a clear Dutch strategy is needed to guide its engagement with the EU and NATO and shape the future of EU-NATO cooperation.

With the recent appointments of a new Secretary-General at NATO, a new European Commission and a new High Representative at the EU, there seems to be some scope for improved EU-NATO cooperation. The Netherlands could take advantage of this opportunity. As a founding member of the EU and a NATO ally from the start, our country enjoys a good reputation in both organisations. With The Hague set to host a NATO summit in June 2025, the Netherlands is well-positioned to play an encouraging role in further EU-NATO cooperation.

**Sub-conclusion 3. The Netherlands' diplomatic efforts within NATO and the EU are generally effective, but there are opportunities to exert more influence.**

Our evaluation shows that the Netherlands is generally effective in exerting influence on NATO and EU security and defence policies within the available scope. One of its key strengths in the NATO-EU context is its ability to take a middle-ground position in policy negotiations and to seek constructive, pragmatic solutions through coalition-building. As a result, many countries see the Netherlands as a constructive partner. Dutch diplomats also remain easily accessible to other countries and the international staff of NATO and the EU. This contributes to the Netherlands' ability to influence policy effectively.

The Netherlands also has other capacities to effectively influence EU and NATO security and defence policies in other ways. For example, the Netherlands is generally well-prepared and brings relevant expertise to discussions. It also often takes the initiative in policy development, for example by putting forward proposals and building coalitions around them. As a result, the Netherlands is often involved early in policy processes, which increases its ability to exert meaningful influence.

Dutch policy towards NATO and the EU is also relatively well-coordinated. This means that, despite lacking a guiding strategy, the Netherlands speaks with one voice in both organisations. To this end, the Netherlands benefits from 'double-hatted' positions, where the same individuals serve in both the EU and NATO Permanent Representations. This double-hatted approach is only effective when these officials handle the same dossiers in both roles. In addition, it is important that regular Dutch officials working on the same dossiers have regular contact with each other and the relevant ministries. This is not always the case and could be better managed.

Although the Netherlands is usually represented in The Hague and Brussels by competent civil servants and diplomats, its limited capacity to engage on international security issues within the EU and NATO is a handicap. In recent years, the number of working groups and other consultative bodies within the EU and NATO has grown. This has increased the pressure to allocate the available capacities as effectively as possible and to involve the right ministries at the right time in the policymaking process in Brussels. This is particularly important for issues related to resilience and hybrid threats.

The Netherlands should focus more on placing Dutch nationals in NATO and the EU, especially on international security issues that align with Dutch priorities. Indeed, having more Dutch nationals employed or seconded to the EU and NATO would strengthen the Netherlands' intelligence position.

**Sub-conclusion 4. The Netherlands constructively contributes knowledge, manpower and resources to strengthen EU and NATO security policy, but some opportunities are being missed.**

The Netherlands contributes constructively to both NATO and the EU in terms of knowledge, capacity building, military personnel and equipment. However, its ambitions often surpass the concrete efforts it makes to realise them. This evaluation examines (1) efforts to counter hybrid threats, (2) the strengthening of the defence industry, and (3) contributions to military missions and readiness:

Re 1: *To counter hybrid threats*, the Netherlands has helped develop policy instruments and expert teams to assist countries facing acute hostile hybrid activity. In recent years, it has also played a role in establishing sanctions regimes targeting actors involved in malicious cyber activities against EU member states. The Netherlands' contributions through these initiatives are helpful and require additional efforts. For example, the national response framework is not yet fully aligned with international response mechanisms. The Netherlands is also reluctant to share information on hybrid threat incidents in EU and NATO working groups. Strengthening the EU and NATO responses to hybrid threats requires concrete cases on which these interventions can be developed. The Netherlands could contribute more in this area.

Re 2: The Netherlands supports the development of EU policies and programmes to *strengthen the European defence industry*. The Netherlands also seeks to buy defence equipment jointly with other countries where possible. While these initiatives are still limited, they help to reduce the fragmentation of the European defence market. However, strengthening the EU defence industry requires significantly more investments – beyond what is currently available and what the Netherlands is willing to commit. For now, the Dutch government has expressed its desire to reduce financial contributions to the EU and has opposed joint EU loans. While these positions are understandable from a financial point of view, they limit the ability to strengthen the EU defence market. Moreover, it is not only the level of European

defence investment that matters but also the extent to which this investment contributes to more joint development and procurement of weapon systems, as well as improved cooperation between European armed forces.

Re 3: When it comes to *military missions*, the Netherlands actively contributes to the operational capacity of both the EU and NATO. In NATO, our country has lagged far behind in terms of defence investment but now meets the 2% target. However, the Netherlands does not yet provide the agreed capabilities (such as weapon systems and military personnel). That said, over the past decade, the Netherlands has contributed more than its fair share to NATO missions and operations. In the EU context, the Netherlands has been strengthening its military operational capacity since 2020. In addition, the Netherlands has taken steps to help strengthen the EU's military headquarters. For years, its civilian contributions to EU missions and operations fell short of expectations. However, after 2022, Dutch civilian and military contributions in the EU context increased. However, like other EU member states, the Netherlands still contributes too little in absolute terms. Strengthening EU missions is not only important for the missions themselves but also for developing an EU that can conduct military operations independently, reducing reliance on external support.

Both NATO and the EU have rapid reaction forces for deployment in times of acute tension or threat. The Netherlands plays a meaningful role in these forces within both organisations.

The demand for deployable military personnel for missions, operations and rapid reaction forces, including preparatory training, is growing rapidly, particularly from NATO. Meeting the alliance's growing expectations is increasingly challenging. One solution is dual commitments, where the same troops are on standby for both EU and NATO rapid reaction forces. However, if these troops are called up, it could undermine operational readiness and, ultimately, the credibility of the rapid reaction forces.

The report presents five recommendations for strengthening Dutch foreign and security policy concerning the EU and NATO based on these findings. These recommendations are summarised below.

| 7 |

**Recommendation 1: Develop a guiding Dutch strategy to strengthen engagement in the EU, NATO and the broader European security architecture and to promote complementarity between the two organisations.**

- Define strategic priorities for engagement in the EU and NATO, particularly in light of recent geopolitical developments in the transatlantic relationship.
- Commit to a more substantial European role in European security, with independent operational capacity and a European pillar within NATO.
- Develop a constructive vision for EU-NATO cooperation and complementarity and engage in dialogue with other member states.
- Build coalitions and partnerships to advance security policy, not only within the EU and NATO but also with countries such as the United Kingdom, Türkiye, Switzerland, Austria and Canada.

**Recommendation 2: Strengthen the Netherlands' capacity to influence security policy in the EU and NATO.**

- Establish clear working guidelines for the Dutch position in the EU and NATO.
- Assign double-hatted staff from the Permanent Representations of the EU and NATO to work on the same issues in both settings.
- Provide more substantial top-down guidance to encourage knowledge exchange between policy officers across ministries and between The Hague and Brussels.
- Develop an action plan for strategic secondment for key positions in the EU and NATO, aligned with a broader guiding strategy.
- Ensure that Dutch ambitions on hybrid threats, the defence industry, and military missions are better aligned with actual contributions in the EU and NATO contexts.

**Recommendation 3: Continue efforts to strengthen the European defence industry to enhance European security.**

- In addition to committing to increased defence spending, make a clear commitment to increase European defence cooperation.
- Improve alignment between the NATO planning process and European defence investments to develop an assertive European pillar within NATO.
- Advocate for European legislation establishing NATO military equipment and ammunition standards.
- Continue efforts to improve information sharing between the European Defence Agency and the NATO Support and Procurement Agency.
- Develop joint defence projects with like-minded countries, including the production of critical enablers on European soil.
- Explore ways for European defence spending to be counted towards NATO's investment benchmark.

**Recommendation 4: Continue efforts to strengthen international cooperation to counter hybrid threats and enhance resilience.**

- Hybrid threats and foreign interference remain persistent challenges. Therefore, in addition to investing in military defence and deterrence, continue efforts to strengthen the resilience of governments and societies.
- Improve coordination between EU and NATO efforts to enhance resilience and counter hybrid threats.
- Where possible, provide more concrete cases for joint responses in the EU and NATO context.
- Improve inter-service cooperation on international engagement related to hybrid threats and resilience.
- Continue to use the independent Hybrid Centre of Excellence in Helsinki and the NATO Cyber Centre of Excellence in Tallinn as platforms for cooperation.

**Recommendation 5: Continue efforts to strengthen the operational military capabilities of both NATO and the EU.**

- Support a structured transition towards greater European responsibility for Europe's security, including the development of a European pillar within NATO.
- Deepen and expand engagement in the EU context.
- Prevent duplication of commitments to rapid reaction forces.



# Tabel of Contents

Executive summary	4
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1 Central research question and report structure	11
1.2 Scope of this review	12
1.3 Methods used and sources	12
1.4 Limitations	13
1.5 Research team and quality control	14
<b>2 Policy development and choices made</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 Principles of the Netherlands' foreign and security policies	16
2.2 The Netherlands' relationship with NATO	17
2.3 The Netherlands' relationship with the EU in security and defence	17
2.4 Moving towards a dual-track approach	18
2.5 Cooperation and complementarity	19
<b>3 Theory and assumptions under the policy</b>	<b>22</b>
3.1 Reconstructed policy theory	23
3.2 Assessment of underlying policy assumptions	25
<b>4 Dutch influence on EU and NATO policies</b>	<b>32</b>
4.1 Dutch capacity for effective influence	33
4.2 Strategic staffing and secondment policies at the EU and NATO	37
4.3 Dutch influence on the NATO Strategic Concept 2022	38
4.4 Dutch influence on the EU Strategic Compass 2022	40
<b>5 Concrete contributions by the Netherlands to the implementation of EU and NATO policies</b>	<b>42</b>
5.1 Dutch contribution to countering hybrid threats	43
5.2 Dutch contribution to strengthening defence industry	47
5.3 Dutch contribution to military capabilities and missions	53
<b>6 Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>60</b>
6.1 Conclusions	61
6.2 Recommendations	65
<b>References</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Annexes</b>	<b>78</b>
Annex 1 Methodological justification	79
Annex 2 Abbreviations	82



# Introduction

This evaluation by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB)<sup>1</sup> focuses on the Dutch government's policy of contributing to the security and defence efforts of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in the interest of national security. In this evaluation, we examine the policy commitment to support NATO and the policy commitment to support the EU's common security and defence policies both separately and in relation to each other.

For decades, NATO has been the cornerstone of the Netherlands' military defence against external threats. In addition, the EU has assumed a more significant role in security and defence over the past two decades. For example, the EU has strengthened its defence industry, and since 2003, numerous EU civilian and military missions and operations have been carried out, both in Europe and in Africa and Asia.

Moreover, international security is no longer limited to military security. Increasingly, it also involves strengthening societal resilience and addressing the 'hybrid' threats originating from abroad, including sabotage of energy networks, espionage, cyberattacks and the spread of disinformation. As this broader understanding of security takes hold, national security policy increasingly intersects with other policy domains, including areas where the EU holds executive competence. As a result, the EU has become

<sup>1</sup> The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) is the independent evaluation department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

an important actor in Dutch security policy. In 2020, the Dutch government formalised this in a *dual-track approach*, meaning that both NATO and the EU must be strengthened to ensure Dutch security. The underlying premise is that the two organisations can also strengthen each other.<sup>2</sup>

This IOB evaluation covers the period 2020-2024. During this period, the geopolitical situation in Europe and beyond changed significantly. The Netherlands must adapt to an increasingly fragmented world order.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has had a catalysing effect on the functioning of NATO and on EU security and defence efforts. Moreover, with the recent re-election of US President Trump, the transatlantic relationship has come under increased pressure. The relationship between the United States (US) and the EU is undeniably changing, although it is too early to draw definitive conclusions on how this will affect the functioning of NATO. This evaluation assumes that NATO will continue to play an important role in European and Dutch security. In addition, the findings and recommendations are relevant to the Netherlands' engagement in the broader European security architecture.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.1 Central research question and report structure

The central question of this evaluation is:

*What conclusions can be drawn about the effectiveness of Dutch security policy towards NATO, the EU and improving NATO-EU coherence during the period 2020-2024, and what lessons can be learned for future policy?*

We answer this central question in this report as follows:<sup>5</sup>

- Chapter 2 describes the Dutch policy to strengthen EU and NATO security efforts in support of national security and how this policy has evolved over time.<sup>6</sup>
- Chapter 3 evaluates the validity of key policy assumptions using a reconstructed policy theory.<sup>7</sup>
- Chapter 4 analyses the extent to which the Netherlands has been effective in influencing the development of security policy within NATO and the EU.<sup>8</sup>
- Chapter 5 examines the concrete efforts undertaken by the Netherlands to enhance the functioning of NATO and the EU as security actors, and to improve the coherence between the two organisations' security policies.<sup>9</sup>
- Finally, Chapter 6 presents our conclusions and offers recommendations to the government on how to strengthen the Netherlands' integrated foreign and security policies.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>2</sup> MFA, 'Kabinetsreactie op AIV-briefadvies "Europese veiligheid: tijd voor nieuwe stappen"', KST 21501-28-211, 5 October 2020; Rijksoverheid, 'Omzien naar elkaar, vooruitkijken naar de toekomst', 15 December 2021.

<sup>3</sup> WRR, [Nederland in een Fragmenterende Wereldorde](#), WRR report no 109, 11 June 2024.

<sup>4</sup> The European security architecture refers to the sum of the various institutions and security partnerships in Europe, including the EU and NATO, as well as institutionalised organisations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and non-institutionalised partnerships. There are also military alliances, such as the Belgian-Dutch naval cooperation (BeNeSam), the First German-Dutch Army Corps (1Corps) and the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF).

<sup>5</sup> See Annex 1 for a complete overview of the sub-questions.

<sup>6</sup> Sub-question 1: How have the Netherlands' integrated foreign and security policies developed in relation to NATO, the EU and NATO-EU coherence? And sub-question 2: What choices is the Netherlands making regarding its position on the division of roles and cooperation between the EU and NATO, and how coherent is this approach?

<sup>7</sup> Sub-question 1c: What are the key assumptions underlying the policy, and how valid are these assumptions?

<sup>8</sup> Sub-question 3: To what extent has the Netherlands been effective in influencing NATO and EU policy in line with Dutch policy preferences, and what factors have contributed to this?

<sup>9</sup> Sub-question 4: To what extent does the Netherlands contribute to the concrete elaboration and implementation of the agreements reached within NATO and the EU, and what are the implications for the Netherlands?

<sup>10</sup> Sub-question 5: What lessons can be drawn and what recommendations can be made for the future development of Dutch security policy in relation to NATO and the EU?

## 1.2 Scope of this review

This IOB evaluation focuses on the Dutch government's efforts in relation to the EU and NATO within the context of an integrated foreign and security policy. By this, we mean the Dutch government's combined political and military engagement in an international arena to protect our country from military and hybrid threats posed by or orchestrated by state actors.<sup>11</sup>

As indicated, the period under review is 2020-2024. Where possible and relevant, we have also included developments up to and including February 2025.

In line with the above-mentioned *dual-track approach* adopted by the Dutch government in 2020, this evaluation highlights three pillars of the integrated foreign and security policy: (1) strengthening NATO, (2) strengthening the EU's security and defence efforts, and (3) improving complementarity and cooperation between NATO and the EU.

Given the broad scope of the integrated foreign and security policy, this evaluation focuses on a selection of specific sub-themes. As a result, it does not cover all Dutch policy efforts aimed at enhancing security in the EU and NATO context. However, the selected sub-themes represent a substantial part of the policy. We selected them based on their international relevance, their priority within the policy agenda and the fact that they are where most of the policy staff's capacity is concentrated.

The selected subtopics are:

- *Influencing policy development within NATO and the EU.* This sub-theme focuses on the Netherlands' role in shaping two strategic policy documents: (1) NATO's Strategic Concept 2022<sup>12</sup> and (2) the EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence.<sup>13</sup>
- *Hybrid threats.* Both NATO and the EU face hybrid threats. In this sub-theme, we examined the Dutch policy objectives and the Netherlands' engagement within NATO and the EU in countering hybrid threats.
- *Defence industry.* Both NATO and the EU have policy instruments to promote innovation and joint procurement of defence equipment, although the EU, in particular, has recently taken steps to strengthen its policy instruments. This sub-theme examines Dutch policy objectives and the Netherlands' involvement in developing these policy instruments to strengthen the defence industry.
- *Contributions to military operational readiness and deployment.* This sub-theme looks at the Netherlands' contribution to NATO and EU military capabilities, specifically the concrete deployment of (military and civilian) personnel and equipment in missions and operations.

Finally, this evaluation is limited to Dutch policy engagement *within NATO and the EU*. It does not address related issues such as the effectiveness of the Dutch contribution to EU or NATO missions abroad or the effectiveness of the Dutch arms export policy. As a result, we do not make any assessment in this evaluation of potential negative consequences of Dutch military commitments to EU or NATO missions or of Dutch defence equipment production.

## 1.3 Methods used and sources

The study used a *theory-based evaluation method*.<sup>14</sup> This method involves reconstructing the policy to identify key cause-effect relationships and underlying assumptions. These are then assessed for their validity using available evidence, including indications of potential alternative explanations.

<sup>11</sup> By threats 'orchestrated by state actors', we mean military or hybrid actions that one country does not directly undertake against another country, but which it facilitates or encourages by providing money and/or weapons to a non-state party (e.g. a mercenary organisation) acting as a proxy. Although terrorism is also an important security issue for both NATO and the EU, it is outside the scope of this evaluation.

<sup>12</sup> NATO, [NATO 2022 Strategic Concept](#), 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Council of the EU, [Strategic Compass for Security and Defence](#), 2022.

<sup>14</sup> This approach is derived from: H. White and D. Phillips, 'Addressing attribution of cause and effect in small n impact evaluations: towards an integrated framework.' [Working Paper 15](#), International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, 2012.

To evaluate the Netherlands' policy influence in the NATO and EU context, we used the *five core capabilities framework*, or *5-C framework*.<sup>15</sup> This analytical tool identifies five interrelated capabilities: (1) governance with support, (2) policy coherence, (3) relationships and networks, (4) knowledge, manpower and mandate and (5) flexibility. Based on these core capabilities, we mapped the extent to which Dutch efforts meet the conditions for effective policy influence.

We also compared the priorities set by the Netherlands for influencing EU and NATO security policy with the actual outcomes.

Finally, we analysed Dutch influence on EU and NATO policies as perceived (a) by relevant staff and (b) attributed to the Netherlands by others.<sup>16</sup>

In conducting the study, we relied on a combination of written sources and interviews. The written sources included both internal policy documents and publicly available sources, including public policy documents, think tank reports and academic literature. For our analysis of the EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, we relied entirely on a sub-study of the 2023 IOB evaluation of Dutch influence on the European policy process.<sup>17</sup>

We conducted more than 120 interviews, including interviews with staff from the following organisations:

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA);
- The Ministry of Defence (MoD);
- The Ministry of Economic Affairs (EZ);
- The National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV);
- The Dutch Permanent Representation (PR) to the EU
- The Dutch Permanent Representation (PR) to NATO
- The European External Action Service (EEAS);
- The European Military Staff
- The European Commission
- The European Council;
- NATO's International Staff and International Military Staff

We also met with diplomats from other EU member states and NATO allies, as well as think tanks and academics.

A more detailed description of the research methods used can be found in the methodological statement that accompanies this evaluation; see Appendix 1.

## 1.4 Limitations

The following two limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting the results of this evaluation:

1. The wide range of factors influencing Dutch security and the complexity of Dutch policy efforts within the EU and NATO make it impossible to determine with certainty whether the integrated foreign and security policies pursued between 2020 and 2024 have made the Netherlands more secure. However, it is possible to determine whether the policy has *contributed* to this objective. We are also able to draw conclusions about the results achieved *within the direct sphere of influence of the Dutch efforts*.

<sup>15</sup> This framework has also been applied in other IOB evaluations, including: IOB, [Tactical and Practical. Towards a future-proof coordination of Dutch Europe policy](#), 2021; IOB, [Grip door begrip. Evaluatie van de Nederlandse invloed in de Europese Unie \(2016-2023\)](#), 2024; IOB, ['Between paper and practice: Evaluation of Dutch human rights policy in a changing world order \(2017-2022\)'](#), 2024.

<sup>16</sup> For this part of the study, we used the *degree of preference attainment* method and the *attributed influence method*, respectively. See A. Dür, ['Measuring Interest Group Influence in the EU: A Note on Methodology'](#), *European Union Politics*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> IOB, [Grip door begrip, 2024](#); IOB, IOB, [EU Strategisch Kompas. Deelstudie bij de IOB-evaluatie van de Nederlandse invloed op het Europese beleidsproces](#), 2023.



2. The researchers involved in preparing this evaluation report underwent security clearance. This gave them access to classified information. However, the classified information could only be used as background context and may not be cited in the evaluation.

## 1.5 Research team and quality control

This evaluation report was prepared by an IOB research team consisting of Dr Rens Willems (project leader), Dr Trix van Mierlo, Daan Boelens and Dr Sabine Mengelberg (Netherlands Defence Academy).

To ensure the quality of this evaluation, we drew on the input of various experts and stakeholders.

First, we received constructive feedback from a reference group of external experts consisting of Lieutenant General (retired) Jan Broeks (Advisory Council on International Affairs), Professor Sophie Vanhoonacker (Maastricht University) and Dr Niels van Willigen (Leiden University). In addition, we benefited from the comments of several representatives from policy departments involved in the evaluation, including Annemijn van den Broek, Sandra de Jongh, and Bart Beltman (MFA/Security Policy Department), as well as Sander Luijsterburg (Ministry of Defence/International Affairs Department). The research team also benefited from the comments of an internal IOB sounding board group consisting of Koen Sizoo (chair), Rafaëla Feddes, Dr Wendy van der Neut, Paul Westerhof and Dr Alexander Otgaar (quality manager). We are grateful to all reviewers for their helpful comments and constructive criticism.

The Director of IOB approved this report on 14 March 2025. Final responsibility for this report lies with IOB.



# 2 Policy development and choices made

## In this chapter

- This chapter outlines the development and objectives of the Netherlands' integrated foreign and security policies for the period 2020-2024, as well as the choices the Netherlands has made in this respect. It begins by describing the underlying policy principles (§ 2.1).
- NATO has been the cornerstone of Dutch security policy for decades and continues to play that role in the military defence of the territory (§ 2.2). As the EU's role in security and defence has grown in recent decades, so has the Dutch commitment (§ 2.3).
- This gradual shift was formalised through the adoption of a dual-track approach in 2020, in which the Netherlands explicitly committed to strengthening the security efforts of both NATO and the EU (§ 2.4). As part of this approach, the Netherlands also stepped up efforts to improve mutual cooperation and complementarity between NATO and the EU.
- The sub-conclusion of this chapter is that no guiding strategy has been developed yet to shape the intended division of roles and tasks between NATO and the EU and the desired complementarity between the two organisations, on the basis of which the government could set separate priorities and commitments for the EU and NATO (§ 2.5).

## 2.1 Principles of the Netherlands' foreign and security policies

The main policy documents that have guided the Netherlands' foreign and security policies in recent years are the Integrated Foreign and Security Strategy 2018-2022<sup>18</sup> and the 2023 Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the Defence Vision 2035<sup>20</sup> from 2020 and the Defence Memoranda from 2022<sup>21</sup> and 2024<sup>22</sup> were defence policy guiding documents

These strategies share the common objective of creating a 'secure Netherlands' and a 'secure Kingdom', respectively, based on an analysis of the current global security situation.<sup>23</sup> Security analyses show an increasing threat situation over time. The 2013 International Security Strategy already described a shift from a more or less unipolar world, created after the end of the Cold War, to a multipolar order with new geopolitical powers.<sup>24</sup> The subsequent 2018 Integrated Foreign and Security Strategy reported an increase in threats, including the rise of hybrid conflicts.<sup>25</sup> The 2023 Security Strategy did not rule out the possibility of an attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of allied territory.<sup>26</sup>

The various strategies highlight the Netherlands' limited capacity to guarantee its own security and the importance of international cooperation to promote Dutch security interests. For example, the Integrated Foreign and Security Strategy states that the Netherlands 'depends on transatlantic cooperation for its national security' and 'benefits from a well-functioning multilateral system that includes the EU and NATO'.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, in the 2023 Security Strategy, the government acknowledges that the Netherlands 'depends for its security and prosperity on the US and the rules of the game of international law and stability'.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, the above-mentioned strategies and defence memoranda set out the priorities and objectives on which the government is working to ensure the security of the Netherlands. The Integrated Foreign and Security Strategy, for example, lists 13 objectives. These include preventing conflicts in Europe, defending the country's territory, countering cyber threats, strengthening the international rule of law and intensifying international cooperation.<sup>29</sup>

While the 2018 Integrated Foreign and Security Strategy primarily focused on security policy from an international perspective, the 2023 Security Strategy is designed as a whole-of-government strategy to link security in both national and international contexts. In doing so, this strategy addresses a broader range of topics, including the significance of dike protection in light of climate change and the importance of pandemic preparedness.<sup>30</sup> The integrated foreign and security policy objectives continue to focus on investment in a strong armed forces and international cooperation. However, in the 2023 strategy, the government places more emphasis on combating hybrid conflict behaviour and increasing the resilience of society.

In particular, the 2020 Defence Vision 2035, as well as the 2022 and 2024 Defence Memoranda, provide direction for the development of the Dutch armed forces. In Defence Vision 2035, the government outlines its ambition to develop a technologically advanced armed force that is strong in the information domain, keeps society safe and free, and is a reliable partner in NATO and the EU.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>18</sup> MFA, [Wereldwijd voor Nederland. Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022](#), 14 May 2018.

<sup>19</sup> JenV, [De Veiligheidsstrategie voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden](#), 3 April 2023.

<sup>20</sup> MoD, [Defensievisie 2035. Vechten voor een veilige toekomst](#), 15 October 2020.

<sup>21</sup> MoD, [Defensienota 2022. Sterker Nederland, veiliger Europa: investeren in een krachtige EU en NAVO](#), 1 June 2022.

<sup>22</sup> MoD, [Defensienota 2024. Sterk, slim en samen](#), 5 September 2024.

<sup>23</sup> MFA, [Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie](#), 2018, p. 6; JenV, [Veiligheidsstrategie](#), 2023, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> MFA, ['Internationale Veiligheidsstrategie'](#), KST 33694-1, 21 June 2013.

<sup>25</sup> MFA, [Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie](#), 2018, pp. 13-17.

<sup>26</sup> JenV, [Veiligheidsstrategie](#), 2023, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> MFA, [Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie](#), 2018, pp. 7 and 9.

<sup>28</sup> JenV, [Veiligheidsstrategie](#), 2023, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> MFA, [Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie](#), 2018.

<sup>30</sup> JenV, [Veiligheidsstrategie](#), 2023.

<sup>31</sup> MoD, [Defensievisie 2035](#), 2020.



In the 2022 Defence Memorandum, the government explicitly commits to greater European cooperation.<sup>32</sup> It also sets out the direction for strengthening the armed forces in the context of a growing defence budget. The 2024 Defence Memorandum is also dominated by an increased defence budget. The memorandum places great emphasis on the defence industry and technological innovation.<sup>33</sup> In addition, the policy commitment described in this memorandum focuses on making society resilient and on strengthening – in cooperation with NCTV – the ability to respond in hybrid conflicts.

## 2.2 The Netherlands' relationship with NATO

The Netherlands has been a member of NATO since the alliance was founded in 1949. To this day, NATO is the primary organisation for the military defence of Dutch territory. In 2020, the cabinet described NATO as 'the primary security organisation for collective self-defence' and in 2021 and 2023 as 'the cornerstone of our collective defence'.<sup>34</sup> The current government also stated in the 2024 Defence Memorandum: 'The highest priority is cooperation within NATO on credible deterrence and collective defence.'<sup>35</sup> The basis of collective defence and deterrence is Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, which considers an attack on one ally as an attack on the entire alliance. As such, the Netherlands relies heavily on the 'nuclear umbrella' and military capabilities of NATO and particularly the US. Internal policy documents show that, in the interest of Dutch security, the Netherlands aims to contribute to a strong, united and inclusive alliance. For this reason, the Netherlands supports NATO with political and financial resources as well as with military capabilities (i.e. weapons systems and military personnel).

## 2.3 The Netherlands' relationship with the EU in security and defence

The EU's role in security and defence has become increasingly prominent over the past two decades. After the foundations were laid in the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the European Common Foreign and Security Policy has been increasingly developed over time.

With the Treaty of Lisbon, the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU have been substantially amended. Articles 42.7 and 222 introduced an obligation for member states to assist each other in crisis situations, including by military means if necessary.<sup>36</sup> The crisis situations referred to include both internal and external security threats. In this sense, there is a clear distinction from the mutual assistance obligation under the NATO Treaty, which applies only to external threats.

The 2016 European Security Strategy focused for the first time on defence against external threats. This strategy also highlighted the need for enhanced security instruments, including civilian and military missions, measures against cyberattacks and policies to impose sanctions, for example on non-EU actors guilty of cyberattacks, and the development of EU legislation and security and defence policies.<sup>37</sup>

While the EU's role in actual military defence has remained limited since then, it has become an increasingly prominent international security actor. In addition, the EU now plays an important role in policy areas that support military defence or touch on security more broadly,<sup>38</sup> such as the defence industry, critical infrastructure resilience and countering hybrid threats.

<sup>32</sup> MoD, [Defensienota 2022](#), 2022.

<sup>33</sup> MoD, [Defensienota 2024](#), 2024.

<sup>34</sup> MFA, [Kabinetsreactie 'Europese veiligheid'](#), KST 21501-28-211, 2020, p. 4; Kabinet, [Coalitieakkoord 2021-2025](#), 2021, p. 40; JenV, [Veiligheidsstrategie](#), 2023, p22.

<sup>35</sup> MoD, [Defensienota 2024](#), 2024, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> Article 42.7 does explicitly state that for EU Member States that are also members of NATO, Article 5 of the NATO Treaty remains the basis for collective defence.

<sup>37</sup> S. Mengelberg and P. Pijpers, 'Introductie', in S. Mengelberg and P. Pijpers (ed.), ['EU defensiebeleid. Sprookje of bittere noodzaak?'](#), *Nederlandse Defensie Academie*, 122 Research Paper, 2024.

<sup>38</sup> S. Niinistö, [Safer Together – Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness](#), European Commission, 2024.

At the same time as the EU's influence in security and defence has grown, so too has the Dutch political commitment to security and defence issues in the EU context. The overarching goal for the Netherlands in this regard is to strengthen the European Common Foreign and Security Policy, as well as its component, the Common Security and Defence Policy. In this context, the Netherlands was an early participant in various initiatives aimed at strengthening European defence cooperation (see § 5.2). For years, the country has contributed to the European Defence Fund to stimulate the defence industry, and it regularly participates in various EU missions (see § 5.3).<sup>39</sup> In addition, the Netherlands is involved in the EU's efforts to impose sanctions on actors outside the EU responsible for, among other things, terrorism, human rights violations or cyberattacks. The Netherlands also contributes to the development of EU legislation and policy in the field of security and defence.

## 2.4 Moving towards a dual-track approach

For decades, NATO was the cornerstone of Dutch security policy. However, as mentioned, the EU has gradually assumed an increasingly significant role over the past two decades.

External factors and geopolitical changes contributed to the shift towards a *dual-track approach*. For example, under the Obama presidency, the US had increased its focus on Asia, which in the following years led to increasing pressure on European NATO countries to contribute more. These changes triggered a debate in EU member states about the extent to which the EU should seek greater strategic autonomy.<sup>40</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic, the fall of Kabul in 2021 due to the sudden withdrawal of the Americans, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 also gave impetus to this discussion. After Trump took office in January 2025, European countries are being forced to invest in their own security at an increasingly rapid pace. This has also given new impetus in the EU to work towards a more common defence policy.

Internal factors also contributed to the shift in Dutch policy focus during this period. For example, during the coalition period of the fourth Rutte government, political support grew for a stronger EU role in security and defence. Even in the previous cabinet, Defence Ministers Bijleveld (CDA) and Kamp (VVD)<sup>41</sup> had already advocated for this course of action. In 2020, the Advisory Council on International Affairs issued the report *Europese veiligheid: tijd voor nieuwe stappen* (European security: time for new steps).<sup>42</sup> Based on the report's advice, and the IOB evaluation of the Dutch contribution to the Common Security and Defence Policy<sup>43</sup> published the same year, the government decided to adopt a *dual-track approach* from now on. This meant that Dutch security policy would explicitly focus on strengthening both NATO and the EU,<sup>44</sup> based on the notion that 'enhanced military capabilities among European countries will benefit both NATO and the EU'.<sup>45</sup> In this context, the 2021 coalition agreement noted that European countries 'will more often have to resolve conflicts on their own'.<sup>46</sup> Subsequently, Defence Minister Ollongren (D66) built support in the political sphere and within the Ministry of Defence for stronger engagement in EU security policy. Under the Schoof cabinet, however, the political mandate for EU and NATO engagement is less clearly defined.

<sup>39</sup> IOB, [De kloof gedicht? Evaluatie van het Nederlandse beleid ten aanzien van EU civiele en militaire capaciteitsontwikkeling](#), 2020.

<sup>40</sup> D. Zandee et al., [European strategic autonomy in security and defence](#); M. Damen, ['EU strategic autonomy 2013-2023: From concept to capacity'](#), *Think Tank European Parliament*, 8 July 2022.

<sup>41</sup> MoD, [Defensievisie 2035](#), 2020.

<sup>42</sup> MFA, ['Kabinetsreactie Europese veiligheid'](#), KST 21501-28-211, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> IOB, [Pragmatisme voorbij. Het Nederlandse beleid ten aanzien van de rol van het Gemeenschappelijk Veiligheids- en Defensiebeleid in de Europese veiligheidsarchitectuur](#), 2020; MFA, ['Kabinetsreactie op IOB-evaluatie EU GVDB 2016-2019'](#), KST 21501-28-213, 1 November 2020.

<sup>44</sup> MFA, ['Kabinetsreactie Europese veiligheid'](#), KST 21501-28-211, 2020; Kabinet, [Coalition Agreement 2021-2025](#), 2021.

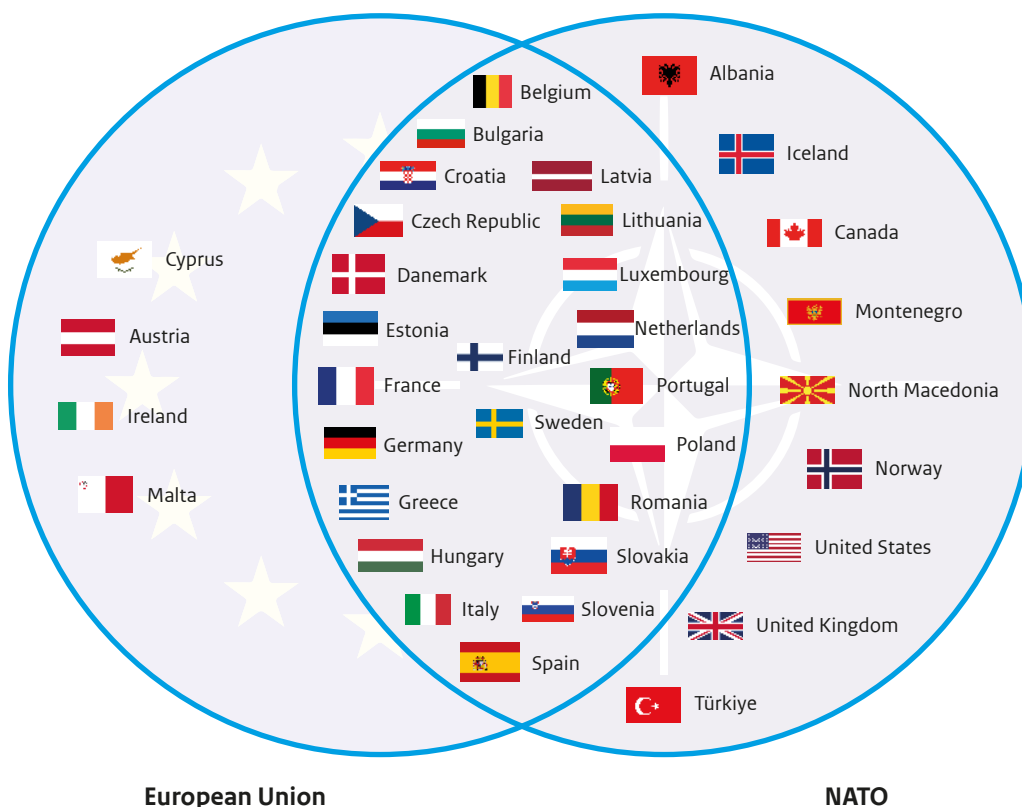
<sup>45</sup> MFA, ['Kabinetsreactie Europese veiligheid'](#), KST 21501-28-211, 2020, p 4.

<sup>46</sup> Kabinet, [Coalitieakkoord 2021-2025](#), , 2021, p 40.

## 2.5 Cooperation and complementarity

The *dual-track approach* in Dutch foreign and security policy has meant not only that the policy focus shifted to strengthening two individual organisations, but also that promoting mutual cooperation and complementarity between NATO and the EU has become an integral part of Dutch policy.

As 23 countries are members of both the EU and NATO, there is considerable overlap between member countries (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Overlap between EU member states and NATO Alliance members

In addition to the overlap between EU member states and NATO members, there is also overlap in the objectives of the two organisations. This has led to long-standing cooperation between them. For example, the 2003 ‘Berlin Plus’ agreement allows EU-led military operations to use NATO capabilities. In 2016 and 2017, the EU and NATO identified several areas for cooperation.<sup>47</sup>

However, there are also obstacles to EU-NATO cooperation. One such obstacle is the Cyprus issue, a frozen conflict between NATO ally Türkiye and EU member state Cyprus.<sup>48</sup> This dispute hampers Türkiye’s engagement with the EU and, conversely, limits Cyprus’ engagement with NATO. As a result, it acts as a brake on broader EU-NATO cooperation.<sup>49</sup> For example, when the Netherlands made repeated high-level efforts between 2022 and 2024 to establish regular consultations between the EU’s Political and Security Committee and NATO’s North Atlantic Council, these attempts faced resistance from other countries due to the ongoing Cyprus dispute.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> NATO, ‘Relations with the European Union’, 2024.

<sup>48</sup> The Cyprus issue refers to the long-running conflict between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot populations, which has divided the island administratively into two parts since 1974. The northern part is recognised as independent only by Türkiye. Since 2004, Cyprus has been a member of the EU.

<sup>49</sup> S. Mengelberg, ‘EU and NATO: Competitive or Complementary? European Strategic Autonomy and the EU-NATO Relationship’, p. 30, in S. Mengelberg and P. Pijpers (ed.), *EU Defensiebeleid – Sprookje of bittere noodzaak*, Faculty of Military Science, 2024.

<sup>50</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the EU PR, EU institutions and representatives of EU member states.

### 2.5.1 Dutch commitment to cooperation

Once it became clear that regular consultations between the EU and NATO were not feasible, the Netherlands focused on promoting cooperation at the practical and operational level between the staffs of the two organisations.<sup>51</sup>

In 2021, the Netherlands and Germany put forward an informal proposal outlining several options to enhance EU–NATO cooperation. The Netherlands then worked with like-minded countries to further develop these ideas.<sup>52</sup> Examples of areas for cooperation, according to the Dutch-German proposal, are political consultations, climate and defence, disruptive technologies, military mobility, interoperability and standardisation, resilience and hybrid threats. The Dutch-German proposal was circulated among NATO and EU member states, and many viewed it as a promising basis for advancing cooperation in areas where alignment between the EU and NATO is feasible.<sup>53</sup> For example, the Netherlands seeks to promote information exchange and cooperation within the EU and NATO on hybrid threats, as well as the joint development of policies and response options.<sup>54</sup> By the end of 2024, the government expressed its intention to ‘commit to streamlining resilience policies between the EU and NATO.’<sup>55</sup>

### 2.5.2 Complementarity to avoid (unnecessary) duplication

As mentioned, the Netherlands’ *dual-track approach* includes not only a commitment to better cooperation between NATO and the EU, but also a commitment to greater *complementarity* between the two organisations. As the 2022 Foreign Affairs Policy Letter states: ‘Complementary cooperation between NATO and the EU, in which the two organisations optimally reinforce each other, is a spearhead of Dutch security policy.’<sup>56</sup> This focus, according to the policy documents, is primarily on ways in which the EU can strengthen NATO; the EU has a broader range of complementary instruments at its disposal, including sanctions, financial resources and legislative capacity.<sup>57</sup> A strong EU role in security and defence should contribute to the future viability of the transatlantic partnership and to a NATO that remains relevant to all allies.<sup>58</sup> Policymakers have considered scenarios in which the US would become a less significant contributor to European security, and policy efforts have been directed at maintaining the US’s involvement as much as possible.

According to the Dutch government, the defence industry is an important area in which the EU and NATO can complement each other.<sup>59</sup> This is because the European defence industry is highly fragmented, resulting in (a) less production than desired and (b) suboptimal interoperability (i.e. the extent to which military equipment can be combined for deployment). A stronger European defence industry can thus contribute to Europe’s self-reliance, which in turn means that EU member states in NATO can make a greater contribution to NATO’s military capabilities.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>51</sup> MFA and Defence, ‘[Geannoteerde agenda bijeenkomst NAVO-ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken en van Defensie op 1 juni 2021](#)’, KST 28676-36 8, 20 May 2021.

<sup>52</sup> MoD, ‘[Agenda informele RBZ Defensie d.d. 1 en 2 september 2021](#)’, KST 21501-28-223, 20 August 2021; MFA and MoD, ‘[Bijeenkomst NAVO-ministers van MFA en Defensie 1 juni 2021](#)’, KST 28676-368, 2021; MoD, ‘[Geannoteerde agenda Raad Buitenlandse Zaken Defensie d.d. 15 en 16 november 2021](#)’, KST 21501-28-226, 2 November 2021.

<sup>53</sup> Interviews with EU Member State representatives and NATO allies.

<sup>54</sup> JenV, ‘[Tegengaan statelijke dreigingen](#)’, KST 30821-72, 18 April 2019 ; MoD, ‘[Geannoteerde agenda VTC Raad Buitenlandse Zaken Defensie van 16 juni 2020](#)’, KST 21501-28-205, 5 June 2020; MoD, ‘[Agenda informele RBZ Defensie d.d. 1 en 2 september 2021](#)’, KST 21501-28-223, 2021; MoD, ‘[Defensienota 2022](#)’, 2022; MoD, ‘[Verslag Raad Buitenlandse Zaken Defensie d.d. 14 november 2023](#)’, KST 21501-28-261, 21 November 2023; JenV, ‘[Veiligheidsstrategie](#)’, 2023; JenV and MoD, ‘[Weerbaarheid tegen militaire en hybride dreigingen](#)’, KST 30821-249, 6 December 2024; Defence and MFA, ‘[Kabinetsreactie AIV-advies Hybride dreigingen en maatschappelijke weerbaarheid](#)’, KST 30821-250, 6 December 2024; JenV and MFA, ‘[Voortgang Veiligheidsstrategie voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden](#)’, KST 30821-251, 6 December 2024 ; interviews with staff from the MFA, the MoD and the NATO international staff.

<sup>55</sup> JenV and MFA, ‘[Voortgang Veiligheidsstrategie](#)’, KST 30821-251, 2024, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> MFA, ‘[Vaststelling van de begrotingsstaat van het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken \(V\) voor het jaar 2022](#)’, 35925V-84, 8 March 2022, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> MFA, ‘[Internationale Veiligheidsstrategie](#)’, KST 33694-1, 2013; MFA, ‘[Kabinetsreactie Europese veiligheid](#)’, KST 21501-28-211, 2020 ; Defence, ‘[Nationale veiligheid](#)’, KST 501-28-237, 11 March 2022 .

<sup>58</sup> Defence, ‘[Defensievisie 2035](#)’, 2020; MFA ‘[Vaststelling begrotingsstaat 2022](#)’, 35925V-84, 2022; MFA and MoD, ‘[Geannoteerde Agenda NAVO-Top 11 en 12 juli 2023](#)’, KST 28676-439, 30 June 2023.

<sup>59</sup> JenV and MFA, ‘[Voortgang Veiligheidsstrategie](#)’, KST 30821-251, 2024.

<sup>60</sup> MoD, ‘[Defensienota 2022](#)’, 2022; MoD, ‘[Defensienota 2024](#)’, 2024; MoD, ‘[Initiatiefnota van het lid Stoffer over Europese en internationale defensiesamenwerking](#)’, 36310-3, 20 April 2023; MoD, ‘[Defensienota 2024](#)’, 2024.

In many other areas, however, there is little concrete elaboration on how NATO and the EU can complement each other. Policy documents on the subject often speak in general terms about the unique competencies and instruments each organisation possesses and how these could, in principle, be mutually reinforcing. For example, a 2022 parliamentary letter from the Minister of Defence states: ‘The current approach, with NATO providing credible deterrence and defence, and the EU providing a robust sanctions package, demonstrates the importance of further promoting complementarity and alignment between the two organisations.’<sup>61</sup>

A notable exception is the government’s concrete efforts to promote complementarity in the area of military mobility. The Netherlands has strongly advocated for the participation of NATO allies – the US, Canada and Norway – in an EU project aimed at improving cross-border military transport within Europe.<sup>62</sup> The project focuses on strengthening bridges, widening tunnels and improving legislation related to the transport of military equipment. In doing so, the project supports NATO’s ability to defend its territory more effectively.

In most other cases, however, the government has interpreted the concept of complementarity as simply avoiding duplication.<sup>63</sup> A key principle in this context is that NATO should remain the primary organisation for collective defence.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, according to the Dutch government, the EU is ‘...realistically not equipped and capable of performing such a task in the near future’.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the Netherlands does not support a role for the EU in the field of nuclear deterrence.<sup>66</sup> Based on the same conviction, the Netherlands has long sought to limit the size and mandate of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), a European military headquarters for directing missions and operations.<sup>67</sup> This headquarters would result in too much duplication with NATO’s military headquarters.<sup>68</sup> The Netherlands adhered to this policy line despite persistent signals, most evident during Trump’s first term in office, that the US wanted to be less involved in security on the European continent. After 2020, however, the Netherlands made a U-turn and the government has come to see the MPCC headquarters as ‘necessary’.<sup>69</sup> Since mid-2023, the Netherlands has even provided the director-general of the MPCC.<sup>70</sup>

| 21 |

Interviews with MFA policy officials suggest that the Dutch position has slowly shifted towards preventing *unnecessary* duplication.<sup>71</sup> However, it is unclear what exactly ‘unnecessary’ means in this context. For example, the Netherlands supports both EU and NATO funds to finance start-ups and stimulate innovation in the defence industry. The Netherlands also contributes to both EU and NATO rapid reaction forces (see Chapter 5).

What is missing, therefore, is a guiding strategy that carefully articulates the Dutch commitment to complementarity between NATO and the EU. The government’s interpretation of the pursuit of complementarity during the period under review was primarily based on what this concept should *not* entail, without explicitly stating what it *should* entail. It has not been clearly articulated how exactly the EU and NATO could complement each other on sub-themes in order to determine which priorities the Netherlands should focus on in which organisation.

<sup>61</sup> Defence, ‘[Verslag van de bijeenkomst van NAVO ministers van Defensie op 16 en 17 februari](#)’, KST 28676-388, 26 February 2022, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> This is a project under the banner of ‘Permanent Structured Cooperation’ (PESCO), one of the pillars of EU defence policy. See IOB, [Pragmatisme voorbij](#), 2020.

<sup>63</sup> MFA, ‘[Kabinetsreactie Europese veiligheid](#)’, KST 21501-28-211, 2020; MFA and MoD, ‘[Geannoteerde agenda NAVO Top van 14 juni 2021](#)’, KST 28676-369, 1 June 2021.

<sup>64</sup> Defence, ‘[Geannoteerde agenda Raad Buitenlandse Zaken Defensie d.d. 6 mei 2021](#)’, KST 21501-28-217, 15 April 2021.

<sup>65</sup> MFA, ‘[Kabinetsreactie Europese veiligheid](#)’, KST 21501-28-211, 2020, p4.

<sup>66</sup> MFA, ‘[Kabinetsreactie Europese veiligheid](#)’, KST 21501-28-211, 2020.

<sup>67</sup> MPCC stands for: Military Planning and Conduct Capability.

<sup>68</sup> IOB, [Pragmatism Beyond](#), 2020; MFA, ‘[Kabinetsreactie op IOB-evaluatie EU GVDB 2016-2019](#)’, KST 21501-28-213, 2020.

<sup>69</sup> MFA, ‘[Kabinetsreactie Europese veiligheid](#)’, KST 21501-28-211, 2020; MoD, [Defensienota 2022](#), 2022.

<sup>70</sup> This is a double post occupied by Lieutenant General Michiel van der Laan; he is also Director General of the EU Military Staff.

<sup>71</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and MoD and with staff from the PRs at the EU and NATO.





# 3

## Theory and assumptions under the policy

### In this chapter:

- Building on our analysis of Dutch foreign and security policies in Chapter 2, this chapter reconstructs the underlying policy theory (§ 3.1). We then test seven assumptions underlying this policy theory.
- Our analysis suggests that these policy assumptions are plausible. In other words, there is a logical connection between the objectives the Netherlands sets, the means chosen to achieve them and the overarching objective of ensuring national security.
- This chapter's sub-conclusion is that Dutch engagement in NATO and the EU has contributed to the Netherlands' security during the period under review. However, in an unstable geopolitical context, continuous efforts are needed to strengthen NATO and the EU in line with Dutch interests.

### 3.1 Reconstructed policy theory

In Dutch security and defence policies, NATO and the EU are the key organisations for international security cooperation. The *dual-track approach* to these organisations reflects the ambition to contribute to: (1) the strengthening of NATO, (2) the development of the EU's common security and defence policies and (3) NATO-EU cooperation.

By cooperating on security in the NATO and EU context, and by helping to strengthen both NATO and the EU, the Netherlands aims to work on the following tasks:<sup>72</sup>

- ensuring military capability to defend its territory (main task 1 of the Dutch armed forces);
- ensuring military capability to advance security interests in missions and operations worldwide (main task 2 of the Dutch armed forces);
- strengthening the defence industry (development of knowledge and material production) to support these military capabilities;
- increasing the resilience of society and the government to military and hybrid threats.

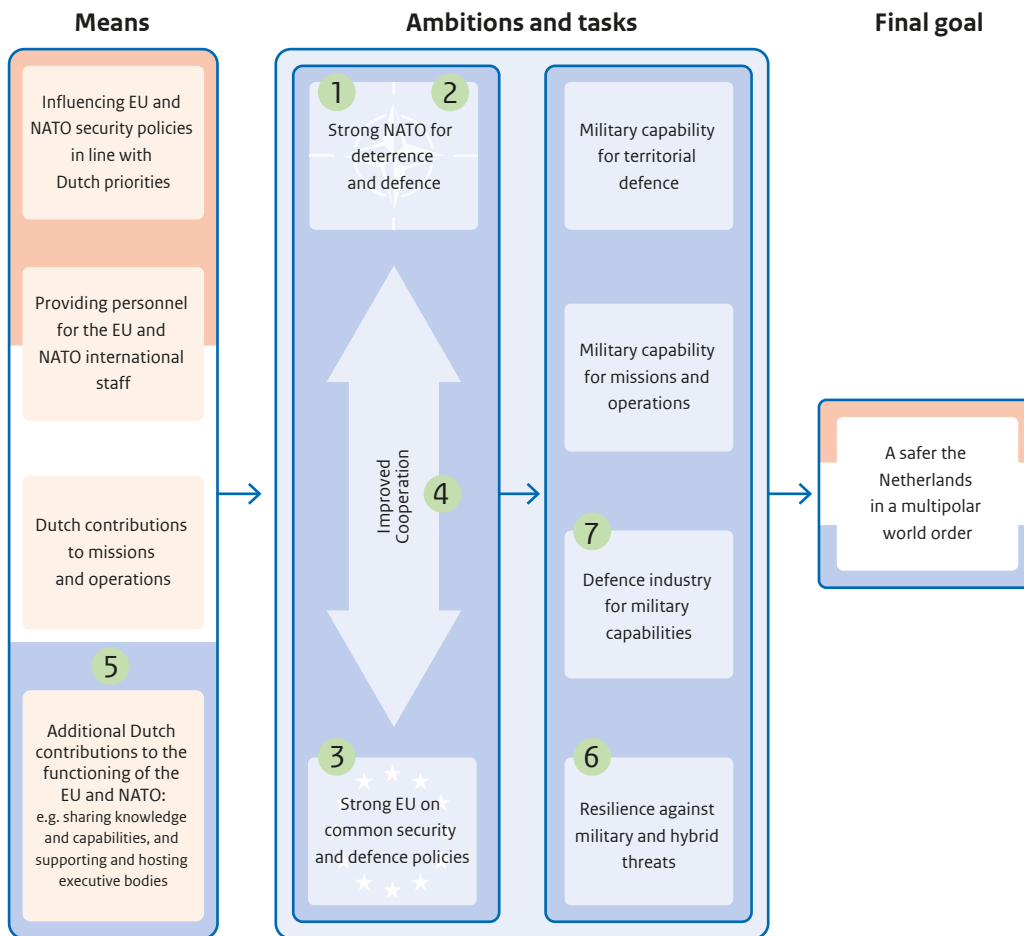
To achieve these objectives, the Netherlands employs a range of instruments: (a) influencing EU and NATO security policies in line with Dutch priorities, (b) providing personnel for the EU and international NATO staffs, (c) contributing civilian and military assets to EU and NATO missions or operations, and (d) offering additional concrete support to the functioning of the EU and NATO, such as sharing knowledge and capabilities, and supporting and hosting executive bodies.

The ultimate goal of these efforts is to safeguard the security of the Netherlands.

We have visualised this reconstructed policy theory in Figure 2. In doing so, we have identified seven assumptions underlying the policy. Based on the available evidence and possible alternative explanations, this chapter provides an assessment of the validity of these assumptions. Given the numerous factors involved in the assumptions and the absence of a counterfactual<sup>73</sup>, it is impossible to establish validity with certainty and thus determine whether the policy theory and assumptions are correct. Our assessment of each assumption is therefore limited to a statement about the 'degree of plausibility'.

<sup>72</sup> This list is based on the sub-themes selected for this evaluation (see § 1.2) and is therefore not exhaustive. However, as indicated, the sub-themes represent a substantial part of the policies implemented.

<sup>73</sup> A counterfactual is a comparable case without the intervention. It is used to determine the effect of the intervention.



**Assumptions:**

1. Dutch NATO membership contributes to the security of the Netherlands.
2. US NATO membership and US solidarity within NATO are essential to its strength and deterrence.
3. Dutch membership of the EU contributes to the security of the Netherlands.
4. NATO and the EU can complement each other, and improved cooperation between them can help strengthen both organisations.
5. A stronger contribution in the EU and NATO (in financial, equipment and personnel terms) increases the credibility and influence of the Netherlands.
6. Addressing hybrid threats requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, as well as international cooperation.
7. Strengthening the European defence industry is necessary for both a more autonomous Europe and a stronger NATO.

Figure 2 Visualisation of reconstructed policy theory



## 3.2 Assessment of underlying policy assumptions

### Policy assumption 1: Dutch NATO membership contributes to the security of the Netherlands

#### Verdict:

This is highly plausible.

#### Comments:

The Netherlands can best promote its security interests through international and multilateral cooperation.<sup>74</sup> As the Netherlands is not a superpower in the geopolitical context, our country therefore benefits from an international system that regulates inter-state relations.<sup>75</sup> NATO offers such a system, providing a platform for exchange and coordination between allies and with countries outside the alliance. In addition, the alliance provides direct security. First, through Article 5 of the NATO Treaty (the agreement that states if an ally is attacked, other NATO allies will come to its aid), and second, through the military capabilities available to all allies through the alliance, which can serve as a deterrent and defence. This has certainly been the case for the period under review. However, it is under pressure from a changing transatlantic relationship (see also policy assumption 2).

There are also aspects of Dutch NATO membership that may *not* contribute to national security. To begin with, the Netherlands' location makes it a crucial transit point for equipment and troops heading east. As a result, according to some experts, the Dutch military and critical infrastructure could be a strategic target for NATO's enemies in the event of a military conflict.<sup>76</sup>

There are also experts who argue that the contribution of Dutch NATO membership to our national security has diminished since the end of the Cold War, due to NATO's expansion to include former Warsaw Pact countries. This expansion is said to have had a destabilising effect on Europe, as Russia saw this 'NATO move' as a provocation.<sup>77</sup> Others, however, have countered that NATO-Russia relations actually improved in the post-Cold War period until the mid-2000s, despite the fact that the former Warsaw Pact countries sought to join NATO.<sup>78</sup>

A third aspect of Dutch NATO membership that may not contribute to our national security is that the Netherlands may become involved in conflicts of other NATO allies, whereas this would not necessarily be the case without NATO membership. For example, it was through NATO that the Netherlands became involved in the Global War on Terror launched by the United States after the attacks of 11 September 2001.<sup>79</sup>

Due to the lack of a counterfactual, it is not possible to determine exactly how these factors affect NATO's contribution to Dutch security.

Within the current threat landscape, with Russia posing the greatest state threat to Europe, the Netherlands has a relatively secure location compared to other European countries in terms of conventional threats. In addition, the Netherlands is a member of other organisations outside NATO that contribute to the international order and thus to Dutch security: the EU, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the United Nations (UN). Moreover, even if the Netherlands were not a member of NATO, it would still be surrounded by democratic partner countries on the European continent, greatly limiting the conventional military threat. An invasion of Dutch territory

<sup>74</sup> D. Hellema, [Nederland in de wereld: buitenlandse politiek van Nederland](#), Spectrum, 2014; S. Mengelberg and J. Noll, 'Dutch Security and Defence Policy. From Faithful Ally to Pragmatic European', in G. Česnakas and J. Juozaitis (ed.), [European Strategic Autonomy and Small States' Security: In the Shadow of Power](#), Taylor & Francis, 2023; K. Abbott and D. Snidal, 'Why states act through formal international organizations', *Journal of conflict resolution*, vol. 42, no. 1, 1998.

<sup>75</sup> S. Princen, [De herontdekking van de geopolitiek in de Europese Unie](#), WRR Working paper no. 66, 2024, p. 32.

<sup>76</sup> F. Osinga, 'The Netherlands should also consider the possibility of direct confrontation with Russia', *Leiden University*, 2024.

<sup>77</sup> J. Mearsheimer, 'Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 93, no. 5, 2014, p. 77; J. Milano, 'NATO Enlargement From the Russian Perspective', *U.S. Army War College*, 1998; M. Sarotte, [Not one inch: America, Russia, and the making of post-Cold War stalemate](#), Yale University Press, 2021.

<sup>78</sup> R. Person and M. McFaul, 'What Putin Fears Most', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 33 no. 2, 2022.

<sup>79</sup> S. Sloan, 'The War on Terror and transatlantic relations: Reflections and projections', *Atlantic Perspective*, vol. 35, no. 6, 2011; M. van Leeuwen, 'NATO and the War on Terror', *Atlantic Perspective*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2017.

would therefore not be plausible even without NATO membership. However, the broader security and prosperity of the Netherlands are directly linked to the security and stability of its partner countries and of the European continent as a whole.<sup>80</sup> None of the organisations mentioned above is capable of defending territory militarily in the same way that NATO is. By playing a crucial role in the security architecture and maintaining European unity, NATO also contributes to the security and prosperity of the Netherlands.<sup>81</sup>

All in all, we consider it highly plausible that NATO membership contributes to the security of the Netherlands.

### **Policy assumption 2: US NATO membership and US solidarity within NATO are vital to NATO's strength and deterrence capability**

#### *Verdict:*

This is highly plausible.

#### *Comments:*

NATO has traditionally relied heavily on the US. The US has the largest and most capable military force in the alliance and provides the majority of strategic enablers, including airlift capability, intelligence, permanent strategic reconnaissance and satellite communications. NATO's nuclear deterrent also depends primarily on the US arsenal.<sup>82</sup>

However, it is uncertain whether the US will continue to serve as NATO's mainstay in the future. Since the beginning of US President Trump's second term, the possibility of a full or partial US withdrawal from NATO in the foreseeable future has been considered within the alliance. The potential consequences of such a development on the alliance are being openly discussed.<sup>83</sup> While not all scenarios predict the end of NATO, even those that assume a continuation acknowledge that a full or partial US withdrawal would compel the remaining allies to take drastic steps.

At the time of writing, the transatlantic relationship was under considerable pressure; however, it is still too early to draw definitive conclusions about whether its nature has fundamentally changed.

The dependency relationship between the US and the other NATO allies is not necessarily a given. This imbalance has arisen because the US has long been critical of developing a European capability, also known as a 'European pillar within NATO'. European countries, including the Netherlands, have not prioritised this development either, often redirecting defence savings to social spending – a peace dividend. Although the US still provides the lion's share of NATO's military capabilities, a formal ambition was established in 2019, stating that no single NATO member state should provide more than half of the alliance's total required military capabilities.<sup>84</sup> In line with this ambition, the US has been urging European countries to increase their defence spending for several decades. Between 2019 and 2024, the

<sup>80</sup> WRR, [Veiligheid in een wereld van verbindingen: een strategische visie op het defensiebeleid](#), WRR report no. 98, 2017; WRR, [Attached to the world: On the anchoring and strategy of Dutch foreign policy](#), WRR report no. 85, 2010, pp. 28-31; D. Hellema, [Nederland in de wereld](#), 2014.

<sup>81</sup> R. Art, 'Why western Europe needs the United States and NATO', *Political science quarterly*, vol. 111, no. 1, 1996; J. Mearsheimer, 'Why is Europe peaceful today?', *European Political Science*, vol. 9, 2010.

<sup>82</sup> P. van Hooft, 'A United States that is either Unwilling or Unable. The future of European security beyond the 2024 U.S. Elections', *Atlantic Commission*, 2024; C. Grand, 'Defending Europe with less America', *European Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Brief*, 2024.

<sup>83</sup> P. O'Brien and S. Stringer, 'Planning for a Post-American NATO: Europe Must Prepare for a Second Trump Term', *Foreign Affairs*, 2024; J. Puglierin, 'For NATO to Thrive, Europe Needs to Wake Up', *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 2024; D. Zandee and R. de Baedts, 'The US elections and the future of NATO: A scenario analysis', *Clingendael*, 2024; P. van Hooft, 'Deter, Compete, and Engage: Europe's Responsibility within the Arms Control Regime after Ukraine, with or without the United States', in N. Arbatova, G. Perkovich and P. van Hooft, [The Future of Nuclear Arms Control](#), *America Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 2024, p. 75.

<sup>84</sup> This is included in the so-called *Political Guidance*, which translates NATO strategic objectives into military ambitions at the implementation level. See also D. Zandee et al., [European strategic autonomy](#), p. 27.

US share of total NATO defence spending has decreased from 71% to 66%.<sup>85</sup> Improving the balance and strengthening Europe's role within NATO through a European pillar could ultimately benefit both the US and Europe.<sup>86</sup>

On balance, we consider it highly plausible that US NATO membership and US solidarity within NATO are vital for NATO's strength and deterrence.

### Policy assumption 3: Dutch membership of the EU contributes to the security of the Netherlands

#### Verdict:

This is highly plausible.

#### Comments:

As we have indicated in our explanation of policy assumption 1, the security objectives of the Netherlands are best achieved through cooperation in an international and multilateral context.<sup>87</sup> Like NATO, the EU provides a platform in this context from which the Netherlands can benefit. The EU regulates relations between states, thereby increasing the Netherlands' input on the world stage.<sup>88</sup>

We can see that the EU has been successful in its efforts, through economic cooperation, to prevent Western European countries from coming into conflict with each other again after the Second World War.<sup>89</sup> It is for good reason that the EU received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012.<sup>90</sup>

Traditionally, the EU has focused not on external power, but on internal development, especially economic development.<sup>91</sup> As a result, the EU's primary contribution to Dutch security is to prevent conflicts within the EU and to enhance the economic prosperity of EU member states. Nevertheless, with its large internal market, the EU has become an increasingly significant geopolitical actor. This is due to the influence that the EU's legislative instruments have on international companies seeking access to the European market. Consider, for example, the substantial fines that the EU has imposed in recent years on major US technology companies, such as Apple, Google and Meta, for failing to comply with certain EU rules. With the expansion of its security and defence policy, including the 2022 Strategic Compass and its underlying policy instruments, the EU has strengthened its position as an international security actor.<sup>92</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the strategic impact of EU missions and operations is currently limited, as they are mostly modest in scope.<sup>93</sup> The EU's role in military defence is also still limited for the time being.

On issues that support military defence or touch on security in a broader sense, the EU plays a significant role. Moreover, the importance of the EU's role in these areas is increasing.<sup>94</sup> This includes, for example, strengthening the defence industry, increasing the resilience of critical infrastructure and countering hybrid threats.

<sup>85</sup> NATO, ['Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries \(2014-2024\)'](#), 2024.

<sup>86</sup> R. Menon and W. Ruger, ['NATO enlargement and US grand strategy: a net assessment'](#), *International Politics*, vol. 57, no. 11, 2020.

<sup>87</sup> D. Hellema, ['Nederland in de wereld'](#), 2014; S. Mengelberg and J. Noll, ['Dutch Security and Defence Policy'](#), 2022; K. Abbott and D. Snidal, ['Why states act through formal international organisations'](#), 1998.

<sup>88</sup> S. Princen, ['Herontdekking van geopolitiek'](#), 2024, p. 32; A. Wivel, ['The security challenge of small EU member states: Interests, identity and the development of the EU as a security actor'](#), *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2005.

<sup>89</sup> T. Palm, 'Regionale veiligheidssamenwerking: Europese Unie', in S. Mengelberg, G. Frerks and M. Rothman, ['Internationale Veiligheidsstudies: Het vak, de theorie en de praktijk'](#), Leiden University Press, 2024.

<sup>90</sup> The Nobel Prize, ['The Nobel Peace Prize 2012'](#), n.d.

<sup>91</sup> S. Princen, ['Herontdekking van geopolitiek'](#), 2024, p. 11.

<sup>92</sup> S. Biscop, ['European strategy in the 21st century: new future for old power'](#), Routledge, 2018; I. Bond and L. Scazzieri, ['The EU, NATO and European security in a time of war'](#), *Centre for European Reform*, 2022; M. Drent, L. Landman and D. Zandee, ['The EU as a security provider'](#), Clingendael Institute, 2014.

<sup>93</sup> J. van der Lijn et al., ['Assessing the Effectiveness of European Union Civilian CSDP Missions Involved in Security Sector Reform: The Cases of Afghanistan, Mali and Niger'](#), SIPRI, 2024; H. Larsen and B. Lindbo, ['CSDP Missions: Addressing their Limited Reform Impact'](#), *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, vol. 279, 2021.

<sup>94</sup> S. Niinistö, ['Safer Together'](#), 2024.

In the absence of a counterfactual, we cannot determine exactly how much the EU contributes to Dutch security and how much other factors influence it. For example, the Netherlands is also a member of other organisations that contribute to international order, and NATO's presence has helped the EU to focus on internal security and economic cooperation.<sup>95</sup> However, none of this detracts from the fact that the EU contributes to security.

All in all, we consider it highly plausible that Dutch membership of the EU contributes to the security of the Netherlands.

**Policy assumption 4: NATO and the EU can complement each other, and improved cooperation between them can help to strengthen each other**

*Verdict:*

This is plausible.

*Comments:*

The extent to which organisations are complementary depends on how they cooperate. Cooperation may involve little more than keeping each other informed and avoiding interference or duplicating each other's efforts. Cooperation can also be geared towards mutual reinforcement, with organisations drawing on each other's unique competences. In such cases, a division of roles and tasks can emerge, resulting in complementarity. However, cooperation does not automatically lead to complementarity. This depends, among other factors, on (1) the extent to which the organisations' characteristics lend themselves to complementing one another, and (2) the degree to which the organisations are able to act on this potential.

On paper, the EU and NATO have the characteristics of being complementary.<sup>96</sup> After all, they share many member states and traditionally share similar values and interests, but at the same time, each has unique capabilities and competences that the other does not. For the time being, however, EU-NATO cooperation is largely focused on avoiding duplication.<sup>97</sup> One example is the principle that dual-member countries have 'a single set of forces' and that a country's military capabilities are deployable in both organisations.<sup>98</sup>

In practice, therefore, the two organisations only partially succeed in operating in a truly complementary way. Inhibiting factors include: different priorities among members, political obstacles and institutional tensions.<sup>99</sup> In certain areas (for example, the availability of military personnel), there is even the possibility that the two organisations will have to compete with each other.<sup>100</sup>

All in all, we consider it plausible that NATO and the EU can complement each other and that enhanced cooperation could help strengthen both organisations.

<sup>95</sup> C. Grand, '[Defending Europe with less America](#)', 2024; J. Bugajski, '[Only NATO can defend Europe](#)', *European view*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2016.

<sup>96</sup> T. Tardy and G. Lindstrom, '[The Scope of EU-NATO cooperation](#)', in Lindstrom and Gustav (ed.), [The EU and NATO: The Essential Partners](#), EU Institute for Security Studies, 2019; T. Iso-Markku, '[EU-NATO relations in a new threat environment: significant complementarity but a lack of strategic cooperation](#)', Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2024; S. Mengelberg, '[EU and NATO: competitive or complementary? European strategic autonomy and the EU-NATO relationship](#)', *Military Spectator*, 2022.

<sup>97</sup> US Secretary of State Madeline Albright warned of 'duplication, decoupling and discrimination' in 1998, a concern that has been repeated regularly since. See: M. Albright, '[The Right Balance Will Secure NATO's Future](#)', *Financial Times*, 1998.

<sup>98</sup> G. De Maio, '[Opportunities to deepen NATO-EU cooperation](#)', The Brookings Institution, 2021.

<sup>99</sup> T. Aghniashvili, '[Towards More Effective Cooperation? The Role of States in Shaping NATO-EU Interaction and Cooperation](#)', *Connections*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2016; M. Drion, '[NATO and the European Union: The Burden of Sharing](#)', *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, 2023; S. Smith, '[NATO and the EU, a short history of an uneasy relationship](#)', *The Conversation*, 2019.

<sup>100</sup> S. Mengelberg, '[EU en NAVO: concurrerend of complementair?](#)' 2022.

**Policy assumption 5: A stronger contribution in the EU and NATO (in financial, material and personnel terms) contributes to the credibility and influence of the Netherlands***Verdict:*

This is plausible.

*Comments:*

As a medium-sized state, the Netherlands has less influence than the larger members of NATO and the EU. The larger countries often play a dominant role in setting the agenda. Their decisions thus define the boundaries of the Netherlands' room for manoeuvre and influence. However, research shows that small and medium-sized states can increase their influence in international organisations by actively contributing to policy development.<sup>101</sup> As we will discuss in Chapter 4, in practice, the Netherlands regularly strengthens its position of influence by (a) engaging early and actively in policy processes, (b) ensuring that it has strong expertise on both the content and the dynamics of ongoing negotiations, and (c) maintaining effective networks with other countries.

In addition to policy engagement, NATO and EU member states are also expected to contribute in other ways. This includes participation in military operations and missions in support of collective objectives – known as military burden sharing.<sup>102</sup> By contributing troops to EU or NATO missions, a member state can increase its influence both within the mission and within the international organisation itself.<sup>103</sup>

With regard to financial contributions, the Netherlands did not meet the NATO target – agreed in 2014 – of spending at least 2% of gross domestic product on defence until 2024. In recent years, it has also fallen short of delivering the military capabilities it has committed to within NATO.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, the Netherlands remained relatively influential, although, according to internal documents and stakeholders, this influence was occasionally under pressure (see Chapter 4).<sup>105</sup> The fact that the Netherlands now meets the 2% standard and will invest in the capability gaps identified by NATO has, according to stakeholders, had a positive impact on the Netherlands' influence within NATO. The Netherlands' leading role in supporting Ukraine has also played a role.<sup>106</sup>

It is clear that the more the Netherlands contributes to the NATO organisation, the more credibility and influence it is likely to gain as a NATO member. However, a large contribution does not automatically translate into greater actual credibility or influence. It should be noted that the Netherlands' contributions to NATO are substantial in some areas but relatively modest in others compared to other member states.

All things considered, we consider it plausible that a greater contribution by the Netherlands to NATO and the EU (in financial, material and personnel terms) could enhance the credibility and influence of the Netherlands as an ally.

<sup>101</sup> K. Honkanen, 'The Influence of Small States on NATO Decision-Making: The Membership Experiences of Denmark, Norway, Hungary and the Czech Republic', *Swedish Defence Research Agency*, 2002; V. Urbelis, 'The relevance and influence of small states in NATO and the EU common foreign and security policy', *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, vol. 13, 2015, pp. 61-78; A. Wivel, 'Security challenge of small EU states', 2005; S. Nasra, 'Governance in EU foreign policy: exploring small state influence', *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2011.

<sup>102</sup> NATO, 'Troop contributions', 2024.

<sup>103</sup> N. Græger, 'From "forces for good" to "forces for status"? Small state military status-seeking', in B. de Carvalho and I. Neumann (ed.) *Small State Status Seeking. Norway's Quest for International Standing*, Routledge, 2015; J. Massie and B. Zyla, 'Alliance Value and Status Enhancement: Canada's Disproportionate Military Burden Sharing in Afghanistan', *Politics & Policy*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2018.

<sup>104</sup> Defence, 'NAVO-rapport Defence Planning Capability Review over 2023 en 2024', KST 28676-464, 5 August 2024.

<sup>105</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA at NATO.

<sup>106</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the NATO PR and representatives of NATO allies; MoD and MFA, 'Voortgangsrapportage Nederlandse inzet oostflank NAVO', KST 28676-433, 17 May 2023.

**Policy assumption 6: Addressing hybrid threats requires both a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach and international cooperation***Verdict:*

This is highly plausible.

*Comments:*

The wide range of hybrid threats facing the Netherlands requires the involvement of several ministries, agencies and other actors. A ministry-by-ministry approach is not effective, as many hybrid threats are interconnected. Aggressors typically employ a range of methods to destabilise society as a whole (see Chapter 5).<sup>107</sup> Properly addressing hybrid threats therefore requires making the ability to connect the dots between individual incidents and threats across policy areas. The approach to hybrid threats therefore requires an integrated, whole-of-government approach.<sup>108</sup> The involvement of relevant private sector actors and citizens is also crucial for bridging domains and enhancing national resilience.<sup>109</sup>

However, this creates a political dilemma: strong horizontal coordination between ministries and agencies often hinders effective policy implementation.<sup>110</sup> In practice, ‘turf wars’ often emerge between departments. Developing effective policy under such conditions requires substantial expertise and capacity on the part of policy officials.<sup>111</sup> Research also indicates that the broader and more complex policy objectives become, the less likely they are to be achieved effectively.<sup>112</sup>

Cooperation with the EU and NATO provides the Netherlands with access to knowledge and capabilities that it would not otherwise possess, enabling it to respond to threats more effectively. The Dutch commitment to cooperate in both the EU and NATO contexts on hybrid threats, with the aim of increasing common resilience, is logical.<sup>113</sup> But again, cooperation and coordination on hybrid threats are complex in practice. This is because the lines of responsibility are often unclear.

Moreover, in practice, countries are often reluctant to share information on hybrid incidents because the information is sensitive and confidential in nature.<sup>114</sup> However, *not* sharing information is also risky, as the destabilising effects of hybrid attacks on one country can be equally damaging to neighbouring countries.

- <sup>107</sup> D. Lovelace (ed.), [Hybrid warfare and the gray zone threat](#). Vol. 141, Oxford University Press, 2016; F. Hoffman, [Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars](#), Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007.
- <sup>108</sup> G. Treverton et al., [Addressing hybrid threats](#), Swedish Defence Institute, Centre for Asymmetric Threat Studies & HCOE, 2018; R. de Wijk, F. Bekkers and T. Sweijts, [Hybride Dreigingen en Hybride Oorlog: Consequenties voor de Koninklijke Landmacht](#), The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2020; I. Khmyrov et al., [‘International experience of advanced countries in state management of countering hybrid threats’](#), *Revista Jurídica Portuguesa*, vol. 36, 2024; A. Vaseashta, [‘Applying Resilience to Hybrid Threats in Infrastructure, Digital, and Social Domains Using Multisectoral, Multidisciplinary, and Whole-of-Government Approach’](#), *Building Cyber Resilience against Hybrid Threats*, vol. 61, 2022.
- <sup>109</sup> AIV, [Hybride dreigingen en maatschappelijke weerbaarheid](#), AIV Advisory Report no. 126, 2024; A. Aho et al., [Hybrid threats: A comprehensive resilience ecosystem](#), HCOE Report, 2023; O. Borch, Odd Jarl and T. Heier, [Preparing for hybrid threats to security: Collaborative preparedness and response](#), Taylor & Francis, 2025, pp. 269-283; Khmyrov et al., [‘Advanced countries countering hybrid threats’](#), 2024.
- <sup>110</sup> R. van der Veer and B. Verbeek, [Europese autonomie in een multipolaire wereld. Dilemma’s voor \(Nederland in\) de Europese Unie in een fragmenterende wereldorde](#), WRR working paper no. 67, 2024.
- <sup>111</sup> R. Senninger, D. Finke and J. Blom-Hansen, [‘Coordination inside government administrations: Lessons from the EU Commission’](#), *Governance*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2020; Princen, [Herontdekking van geopolitiek](#), 2024.
- <sup>112</sup> K. Browne et al., [‘How does policy coherence shape effectiveness and inequality? Implications for sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda’](#), *Sustainable Development*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2023.
- <sup>113</sup> E. Bajarūnas, [‘Addressing hybrid threats: Priorities for the EU in 2020 and beyond’](#), *European View*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2020; D. Zandee, S. van der Meer and A. Stoetman, [Countering hybrid threats: Steps for improving EU-NATO cooperation](#), Clingendael Institute, 2021; M. Bertolini, R. Minicozzi and T. Sweijts, [Ten Guidelines for Dealing with Hybrid Threats: A Policy Response Framework](#), Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2023, p. 30; R. Thiele, [‘Building resilience readiness against hybrid threats – A cooperative European Union/NATO perspective’](#), *ISPSW Strategy Series: Focus on Defence and International Security*, vol. 449, no. 2, 2016.
- <sup>114</sup> H. Smith, [‘Countering hybrid threats’](#), *Democracy*, vol. 95, no. 2, 2019; M. Wigell, H. Mikkola and T. Juntunen, [‘Best practices in the whole-of-society approach in countering hybrid threats’](#), *European Parliament Coordinator: Policy Department for External Relations*, 2021, pp. 9-10; P. Szymański, [‘Towards greater resilience: NATO and the EU on hybrid threats’](#), *OSW Commentary*, 2020.

All in all, we consider it highly plausible that addressing hybrid threats will require a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, as well as international cooperation. One caveat is that the more complex and integrated the approach to hybrid threats, the more difficult it will be to implement effectively.

**Policy assumption 7: Strengthening the European defence industry is necessary for both a more autonomous Europe and a stronger NATO**

*Verdict:*

This is highly plausible.

*Comments:*

As the EU defence industry has traditionally been highly fragmented, the 27 EU member states use a variety of defence products and weapon systems. Strengthening the European defence industry can help increase interoperability, operational efficiency, and strength, which is necessary if Europe is to defend itself and act independently.<sup>115</sup> The increased influence of EU member states that are also NATO members simultaneously enhances their capacity to contribute to NATO's defence. A stronger defence industry will therefore also strengthen the alliance as a whole.<sup>116</sup> This presupposes that the European defence industry uses NATO standards for military equipment.

However, calls for a stronger European defence industry have been met with criticism in recent years. The US and other non-EU allies have long expressed fears that strengthening the EU's defence industry could lead to duplication with (and subsequent disengagement from) NATO.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, strengthening the European defence industry would run counter to US economic and political interests (see also § 5.2.2).<sup>118</sup>

However, the balance here is precarious. Because at the same time, the US wants European countries to take more responsibility for their own security.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, the US defence industry currently lacks the capacity to fully meet Europe's demand for military equipment.<sup>120</sup> And a stronger European defence industry is also necessary for a European pillar in NATO.

Another criticism sometimes raised is that a stronger European defence industry could contribute to a global arms race.<sup>121</sup> In addition to developing military strength (hard power), the EU should focus more explicitly on the economic and normative strength it already possesses (soft power).<sup>122</sup> However, it is questionable to what extent this makes sense in the current geopolitical context, given the rapidly deteriorating security situation around Europe, which calls for increased resilience and deterrence.<sup>123</sup>

All in all, we consider it highly plausible that strengthening the European defence industry is necessary both for a more autonomous European position and a stronger NATO.

<sup>115</sup> M. Draghi, [The Future of European Competitiveness Part A: A competitiveness strategy for Europe](#), European Commission, 2024; S. Monaghan, [Solving Europe's Defense Dilemma: Overcoming the Challenges to European Defense Cooperation](#), *Centre for Strategic & International Studies*, 2023; E. Letta, [Much more than a market - Speed, Security, Solidarity. Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens](#), Consilium Europa, 2024.

<sup>116</sup> M. Bergmann et al., [Transforming European Defence](#), *Centre for Strategic & International Studies*, 2022; P. Alvarez-Couceiro Fernandez, [Europe at a Strategic Disadvantage: A Fragmented Defense Industry](#), *War on the Rocks*, 2023.

<sup>117</sup> M. Albright, [The Right Balance Will Secure NATO's Future](#), 1998.

<sup>118</sup> M. Bergmann et al., [Transforming European Defence](#), 2022; L. Retter et al., [European Strategic Autonomy in Defence: Transatlantic visions and implications for NATO, US and EU relations](#), RAND Europe, 2021.

<sup>119</sup> R. Menon and W. Ruger, [NATO enlargement and US grand strategy](#), 2020.

<sup>120</sup> Interviews with staff from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the NATO PR, EU institutions, NATO international staff, and think tanks.

<sup>121</sup> M. Akkerman et al., [Fanning the Flames: How the European Union is fuelling a new arms race](#), Transnational Institute, 2022; L. Sédou, M. Akkerman and B. Vranken, [Militaryisation of the European Union: Fresh money for the military industry](#), in J. Calvo Rufanges (ed.), [Military Spending and Global Security: Humanitarian and Environmental Perspectives](#), Routledge, 2020.

<sup>122</sup> N. Ni Bhriain [The EU is wrong to arm Ukraine. Here's why](#), *Open Democracy*, 3 March 2022; I. Manners, [European Union "normative power" and the security challenge](#), *European security* vol. 15, no. 4, 2006; T. Palm, [Normative power and EU strategic autonomy](#), *Hague Centre for Strategic Studies*, 2021

<sup>123</sup> S. Niinistö, [Safer Together](#), 2024.





# 4 Dutch influence on EU and NATO policies

## In this chapter:

- In this chapter, we analyse the extent to which the Netherlands has been effective in influencing security policy within NATO and the EU in recent years. Overall, the Netherlands largely possesses the 'conditional' capabilities for effective influence (§ 4.1):
  - The Netherlands maintains strong networks and relationships, often positioning itself as a pragmatic, solution-oriented partner.
  - The Netherlands has a wealth of knowledge, although high workloads and competing priorities pose challenges to its capacity.
  - The Netherlands is a clear and reliable partner, consistently taking a consistent line in both NATO and the EU.
  - The Netherlands is typically proactive and involved at an early stage in relevant and priority dossiers under study. However, the sometimes detailed instructions received by the EU PR can sometimes limit flexibility.
- We then assess the extent to which the Netherlands can derive a strategic advantage from deploying its own personnel in the EU and NATO. We find that the Netherlands only partially succeeds in leveraging the knowledge position of Dutch personnel stationed in these organisations (§ 4.2).



- Finally, we discuss the extent to which the Netherlands has been able to influence the content of NATO's long-term strategy, renewed in 2022 (§ 4.3), and the EU Strategic Compass adopted in the same year (§ 4.4). Our research indicates that, while the Netherlands has had a reasonable degree of influence on NATO's strategy, it has not been able to achieve all its objectives. The Netherlands had much more influence on the development of the EU Strategic Compass. In this respect, the Netherlands was able to make a more visible mark.
- The sub-conclusion of this chapter is that Dutch diplomatic engagement within NATO and the EU is largely effective, but there are opportunities to increase its influence.

## 4.1 Dutch capacity for effective influence

Although NATO and the EU are different organisations with their own decision-making processes, members of both organisations need the same skills and qualities to influence policy. How successful is the Netherlands in this regard? We examined this question using an analytical framework that breaks down the capacity for effective influence into five core qualities: (1) networks and relationships; (2) knowledge, manpower and mandate; (3) policy coherence; (4) governance with support; and (5) flexibility.<sup>124</sup>

### 4.1.1 Networks and relationships: the Netherlands constructive from a middle position

'Networks and relationships' refers to the extent to which the Netherlands builds and maintains contacts and forms coalitions. This concerns both international and national networks.

#### *International networks*

The Netherlands maintains strong ties with other EU member states and NATO allies. Our country is generally seen as a reliable and constructive partner. Within both the EU and NATO, the Netherlands tends not to adopt strongly divergent positions and rarely blocks decision-making.<sup>125</sup> According to the diplomats we interviewed, the Netherlands' guiding principle is that it always wants to be part of the solution.<sup>126</sup> In practice, this means that the Netherlands often takes a middle position,<sup>127</sup> from which it can actively mediate between different camps.<sup>128</sup> Research indicates that coalition-building and mediation are effective strategies for small and medium-sized countries to advance their own interests.<sup>129</sup>

The Dutch position in the debate on strengthening the EU defence industry illustrates this well. Broadly speaking, positions on this issue range from those advocating an autonomous EU to those prioritizing the transatlantic relationship. Furthermore a country's stance is shaped by the size of its defence industry. The Netherlands has played a relatively influential role as an EU member state, especially between 2016 and 2023,<sup>130</sup> when it consistently promoted a strong transatlantic relationship while also supporting a more capable European defence industry. Because the Dutch defence industry is relatively small compared to countries such as France and Germany, the Netherlands is not seen as acting solely out of economic self-interest.<sup>131</sup> This helps the Netherlands in attempting to bridge opposing camps from its middle position.<sup>132</sup> The Netherlands is therefore seen by other EU member states and NATO allies as pragmatic and solution-oriented.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>124</sup> For a further explanation of how we examined these core qualities, see the methodological justification in Annex 1.

<sup>125</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the PR at NATO, representatives of NATO allies and external experts.

<sup>126</sup> Interviews with EU institutions and with representatives of EU member states and NATO allies.

<sup>127</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and representatives of EU member states and NATO allies.

<sup>128</sup> Interviews with staff from the PR at NATO and the PR at the EU, EU institutions and representatives, EU member states and NATO allies.

<sup>129</sup> K. Honkanen, 'The Influence of Small States on NATO Decision-Making', 2002; S. Nasra, 'Governance in EU foreign policy', 2011; A. Wivel, 'The security challenge of small EU member states', 2005.

<sup>130</sup> IOB, *Grip door begrip*, 2024, p. 5 and pp. 30-33.

<sup>131</sup> Interviews with PR staff at NATO, NATO international staff and representatives of EU member states and NATO allies.

<sup>132</sup> Interviews with staff from the PR at the EU, the PR at NATO, NATO international staff, EU institutions, and representatives of EU member states and NATO allies.

<sup>133</sup> Interviews with staff from NATO's international staff and representatives of EU member states and NATO allies.

Within the EU and NATO, the Netherlands actively promotes a policy of progress.<sup>134</sup> In cooperation with other countries, it regularly organises informal meetings to exchange knowledge and promote cooperation.<sup>135</sup> This helps the Netherlands strengthen coalitions – and, in turn, its capacity to influence EU and NATO policy.<sup>136</sup>

### National networks

Internally, the Dutch contribution to EU and NATO security policy is mainly worked on by staff in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Defence. The policy departments involved are ‘natural partners’ in security dossiers and usually know each other well. The lines of communication are short when it comes to drafting policy proposals and coordinating instructions to Permanent Representations (PRs). The PR at NATO consists of an integrated representation of both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, which further supports mutual contacts between these ministries on NATO issues. Both the PR to the EU and the PR to NATO also use double-hatted staff working for both PRs on specific dossiers, such as resilience to hybrid threats and cyberattacks. In addition, both PRs share a Permanent Military Representative. This also contributes to the liaison between the two PRs. Compared to other countries, the Netherlands is unique in working with double-hatted personnel. The added value of this is recognised by other countries.<sup>137</sup>

However, the quality of the interdepartmental networks for coordinating the Dutch contribution to the policies of the EU and NATO varies by dossier. On the issue of ‘strengthening the European defence industry’, in which the MFA, Defence and the Ministry of Economic Affairs (EZ) are all involved, cooperation is strong. This is partly due to interdepartmental consultative bodies, such as the Interdepartmental Coordination Group on European Defence Cooperation and the Task Force on Production and Supply Security.<sup>138</sup> Effective interdepartmental cooperation has contributed to a swift and clear formulation of principles and priorities for the negotiations on strengthening the European defence industry.<sup>139</sup>

In contrast, coordination is more complex when it comes to hybrid threats and cyberattacks. These issues are cross-cutting and span the portfolios of multiple ministries. This makes interdepartmental coordination difficult. As a result, the appropriate policy departments are not always involved at the right time.<sup>140</sup> Regular contact is also lacking between the staff of the two PRs and the relevant ministries working on the same or related dossiers. Similarly, regular contact with Dutch nationals working in the EU institutions and/or NATO’s international staff is limited.

As the Dutch personnel and secondment policy is an important component of policy advocacy where there is still much room for improvement, we discuss this issue separately in § 4.2.

#### 4.1.2 Knowledge, manpower and mandate: a lot of expertise but a heavy workload

‘Knowledge, manpower, and mandate’ refers to the political mandate for the policy, the qualities of the individual employees, and the available capacity. During the period under review, the Dutch government had a broad political mandate for the *dual-track approach*, the basis of which our country focused on strengthening the security efforts of both the EU and NATO. The increased attention to NATO and the EU’s common security and defence policy is reflected in various policy documents, including the coalition agreements of 2017, 2021 and 2024.<sup>141</sup> Various ministers in the third and fourth Rutte cabinets have also explicitly endorsed a *dual-track approach*, including a stronger European commitment to security and defence.

<sup>134</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the MoD, the NATO PR, the EU PR, EU institutions, NATO’s international staff and representatives of NATO allies.

<sup>135</sup> Interviews with staff from the PR at the EU, the PR at NATO, EU institutions and representatives of NATO allies.

<sup>136</sup> Interviews with staff from the PR at the EU, the PR at NATO, EU institutions and representatives of NATO allies.

<sup>137</sup> Interviews with NATO’s international staff, as well as staff from EU institutions and representatives of NATO allies.

<sup>138</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the MoD and EU institutions.

<sup>139</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the Ministry of EZ, the PR at NATO and EU institutions; MFA, ‘[Fiche: Communication European Defence Industry Strategy and Regulation European Defence Industry Programme](#)’, KST 22112-3919, 28 March 2024.

<sup>140</sup> Interviews with staff from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the PRs at NATO and EU institutions.

<sup>141</sup> MFA, [Geïntegreerde Buitenland en Veiligheidsstrategie](#), 2018; MFA, ‘[Kabinetsreactie Europese veiligheid](#)’, KST 21501-28-211, 2020; MoD, [Defensievisie 2035](#), 2020; Kabinet, [Coalitieakkoord 2021-2025](#), 2021; JenV, [Veiligheidsstrategie](#), 2023.

The number of policy officers working on security issues has increased in recent years, both in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence,<sup>142</sup> as has the number of working groups and other consultative bodies within the EU and NATO. This has led to a heavy workload despite the influx of additional staff. It remains a challenge to allocate the available capacity as effectively as possible.<sup>143</sup>

Policy officers in Dutch ministries are generally known for their knowledge and expertise. Political appointees from other EU member states and NATO allies, as well as NATO and EU international staff, say that Dutch delegations are well-prepared, knowledgeable and persuasive.<sup>144</sup> This contributes to the Netherlands often being involved at an early stage in discussions by other countries, or being asked for advice by NATO or EU international staff. This position increases the Netherlands' ability to influence the security and defence policies of both organisations.<sup>145</sup>

The effectiveness of the double-hatted staff is also worth noting. This arrangement, in which one staff member works for both PRs, was initially introduced for cost considerations, as it was more economical for two PRs to share one employee. However, the main added value lies in the ability of these staff members to follow developments on a given topic across both the EU and NATO.<sup>146</sup> That said, their workload tends to be relatively high, as they receive assignments from two teams and must work at different locations.<sup>147</sup> Other factors that sometimes reduce the added value of double-hatted staff are that they do not always work on the same dossier in both PRs. In addition, double-hatted positions are often held by junior staff, which limits the potential for cross-fertilisation between NATO and EU policies at the senior level.

#### 4.1.3 Policy coherence: good alignment, but little attention to complementarity

'Policy coherence and strategy' refers to the consistency of Dutch engagement in the EU and NATO contexts, as well as to interdepartmental coordination. It is concerned with how clearly the Netherlands defines its objectives (prioritisation) and how it wants to achieve them (strategy). In recent years, the government has sought to establish coherence between Dutch policy contributions to NATO and the EU. To support this, responsibility for both has been placed with the same policy directorates at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. There is also close cooperation between the relevant ministries and the two PRs.<sup>148</sup> This ensures that Dutch representatives in both organisations are on the same page and do not send conflicting messages – something that not all countries with double-hatted structures manage successfully.<sup>149</sup> As noted earlier, double-hatted staff add value in this regard, given their access to information and networks in both the EU and NATO.<sup>150</sup> One result of this coordination is the close alignment of Dutch positions within both NATO's Strategic Concept and the EU's Strategic Compass.<sup>151</sup>

Overall, the Netherlands maintains strong alignment between its commitments to NATO and the EU. This makes the Netherlands a clear and reliable partner for other countries. What is still lacking, however, is active governance towards greater complementarity between the two organisations based on a predefined strategy (see Chapter 2).

A further comment on policy coherence is that the degree of interdepartmental coordination varies by dossier. One consequence is that the whole-of-government commitment to strengthening the defence industry exhibits greater policy coherence than the whole-of-government commitment to resilience against cyberattacks and hybrid threats (see § 4.1.1).

<sup>142</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and EU institutions.

<sup>143</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and the NATO PR; the same conclusion is reached in: IOB, [Grip door begrip](#), 2024, pp. 48-49.

<sup>144</sup> Interviews with staff from EU institutions, NATO's international staff and representatives of EU member states and NATO allies.

<sup>145</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the NATO PR, the EU PR and the international staff of NATO and EU institutions.

<sup>146</sup> Interviews with staff from the NATO PR and the EU PR.

<sup>147</sup> Interviews with staff from the NATO PR, the EU PR and representatives of NATO allies.

<sup>148</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the NATO PR and EU institutions.

<sup>149</sup> Interviews with staff from the NATO PR, NATO's international staff, EU institutions and representatives of NATO allies.

<sup>150</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, NATO's international staff, EU institutions and representatives of NATO allies.

<sup>151</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, MoD, the NATO PR, the EU PR and NATO's international staff.

#### 4.1.4 Governance: early involvement and good preparation

‘Governance’ refers to the extent to which the civil service provides effective direction to influence policy in the EU and NATO. In the key dossiers reviewed by the IOB – such as the development of NATO’s Strategic Concept, the EU’s Strategic Compass for Security and Defence and initiatives to strengthen the European defence industry – the Netherlands was often proactive and involved from an early stage. This early engagement is crucial, as influencing policy is most effective during the agenda-setting or policymaking stages, when an initial proposal for policy or legislation is being developed.<sup>152</sup>

A good example of how the Netherlands exerts influence through proactive engagement is the strategic use of non-papers. These are unofficial documents used to introduce policy proposals and build coalitions. The Netherlands has (co-)initiated numerous non-papers, including on strengthening the European defence industry, countering hybrid threats and improving EU-NATO cooperation.<sup>153</sup> These efforts regularly enable the Netherlands to put its interests and policy preferences on the agenda early in the negotiation process, and to secure backing from other countries through co-signatures. Such non-papers often serve as key inputs to early drafts of negotiated documents. As a result, the Netherlands is viewed by others as a country that often takes the initiative and is a proactive contributor.<sup>154</sup>

Effective strategic influence on EU and NATO policy can also be facilitated by strong official guidance on priorities and deliverables. There is a clear difference in the departmental governance of the PR at the EU and the PR at NATO. The EU PR typically receives extensive and detailed instructions from the policy directorates in The Hague, reflecting the complex and interdepartmental nature of EU policymaking.<sup>155</sup> In contrast, the NATO PR receives less detailed guidance from The Hague, although this has become somewhat more comprehensive in recent years.<sup>156</sup>

Moreover, staff from both PRs indicated that the instructions they receive are not always clear, sometimes arrive relatively late, and/or do not adequately take into account the dynamics within the EU and/or NATO.<sup>157</sup> Nevertheless, the Netherlands is perceived by others as a predictable and constructive member state, known for its solid policy knowledge and good preparation.<sup>158</sup>

#### 4.1.5 Flexibility: difference in latitude between PRs

‘Flexibility’ is the final core quality we identify as a prerequisite for effective influence on EU and NATO policy. It refers to the ability to adjust positions when negotiations require it.

In the case of the NATO PR, there is plenty of room, within a clear bandwidth, to deal flexibly with changing circumstances.<sup>159</sup> The situation is different for the EU PRs. They have to deal with detailed and interdepartmental instructions, which ensure that once adopted, positions cannot easily be adjusted when the course of negotiations within the EU actually demands it.<sup>160</sup>

Moreover, representatives of other EU and NATO member states nevertheless see the Netherlands as a country that can respond quickly. This is partly because staff at the PRs usually know what space they have, because the lines of communication are short and because the PRs and the ministries are usually able to fine-tune any new choices relatively quickly.<sup>161</sup> Overall, therefore, we signal a good balance between steering the PRs on the one hand and flexibility in their actions on the other.

<sup>152</sup> IOB, [Grip door begrip](#), 2024, p. 45.

<sup>153</sup> MFA, ‘[Geannoteerde agenda aan voor de Raad Buitenlandse Zaken van 12 juli 2021](#)’, KST 21501-02-2378, 2 July 2021; Defence, ‘[Geannoteerde agenda van de informele Raad Buitenlandse Zaken Defensie van 15 november 2022](#)’, 21501-28-247, 1 November 2022.

<sup>154</sup> Interviews with international staff from NATO, EU institutions and representatives of NATO allies and EU member states.

<sup>155</sup> IOB, [Grip door begrip](#) 2024, pp. 64-65.

<sup>156</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and the NATO PR.

<sup>157</sup> Interviews with PR staff at NATO and PR at the EU. See also IOB, [Grip door begrip](#), 2024, p. 75.

<sup>158</sup> Interviews with representatives of EU member states and NATO allies.

<sup>159</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the NATO PR and an external expert.

<sup>160</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the NATO PR and an external expert; IOB, [Grip door begrip](#), 2024, pp. 73-74.

<sup>161</sup> Interviews with representatives of NATO allies.

## 4.2 Strategic staffing and secondment policies at the EU and NATO

Dutch nationals are employed within both the EU institutions and NATO's international staff, either in permanent positions or on a temporary basis through secondments. While these individuals do not represent the Netherlands or act on its behalf, holding key positions within these organisations is strategically important. It provides the Netherlands with valuable access to information.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, without compromising their independent roles, Dutch nationals working for the EU or NATO can inform Dutch diplomats about the timing, status or direction of legislative or political processes. Knowledge of such matters can be critical to the effectiveness of Dutch political lobbying and advocacy efforts.

### 4.2.1 More guidance needed on acquiring Dutch positions in the EU and NATO

In recent years, there has been little guidance on the placement of Dutch nationals in NATO and EU security and defence-related organisations. Nevertheless, the Netherlands has successfully secured several influential positions in both NATO and the EU in recent years. At NATO, these include Chairman of the Military Committee (2021-2024), Assistant Secretary-General (2020-2024) and, since October 2024, Secretary-General. At the EU, Dutch nationals have held roles such as Chairman of the Political and Security Committee (since 2021), Director of Security and Defence at the European External Action Service (2020-2024) and Director-General of the EU Military Staff, who is also Director of the MPCC Headquarters (since mid-2023).

However, there have been some personnel changes since then, and it is uncertain whether the strong Dutch representation in the European External Action Service (EEAS) will be sustained. Looking at staffing in the various EU institutions and agencies, we must conclude that the Netherlands has been severely *underrepresented* in recent years.<sup>163</sup> A similar pattern is visible in NATO's international staff, where the proportion of Dutch nationals remains relatively low.<sup>164</sup>

Several factors contribute to the limited number of Dutch nationals working in the EU and NATO. First, the competitive salaries and relatively high quality of life in the Netherlands can make relocating to Brussels less appealing. In addition, the application procedures to qualify for a position on the EU permanent staff are quite complex.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, secondment policies are not always equally favourable across all ministries when it comes to guidance and support on return. For example, not all ministries provide assistance with practical matters such as housing and school choice for children, and job security after the secondment is not always guaranteed.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, according to those directly involved, the added value of the experience and professional network gained abroad is not always recognised upon return. In some cases, there is even the impression that a secondment to the EU or NATO is bad for one's career.<sup>167</sup>

To address this situation, a whole-of-government EU staffing strategy has been developed, supported by an interministerial steering committee to further elaborate and implement it.<sup>168</sup> In addition, in a 2023 posting memorandum, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that postings to international organisations such as the EU and NATO are part of the instruments the ministry uses to achieve its objectives.<sup>169</sup> However, there is room for improvement in two areas. First, there is scope for more active management within the ministry to place Dutch nationals in positions in the EU or NATO aligned with national Dutch priorities.<sup>170</sup> Second, enhanced support for both appointment and reintegration processes could make secondments more attractive and feasible. These measures would help encourage more Dutch professionals to apply for temporary or seconded posts within the EU and NATO.

<sup>162</sup> IOB, [Grip door begrip](#), 2024, pp. 50-52.

<sup>163</sup> IOB, [Grip door begrip](#), 2024, pp. 50-51; European Court of Auditors, [Special Report 24/2024: The EU Civil Service - A flexible employment framework, insufficiently used to improve workforce management](#), 7 November 2024.

<sup>164</sup> Interviews with PR staff at NATO and NATO's international staff

<sup>165</sup> IOB, [Grip door begrip](#), 2024, p. 50.

<sup>166</sup> Interviews with PR staff at NATO; IOB, [Grip door begrip](#), 2024, p. 50.

<sup>167</sup> Interviews with the international staff of NATO and EU institutions; IOB, [Grip door begrip](#), 2024, pp. 51-52.

<sup>168</sup> IOB, [Grip door begrip](#), 2024, pp. 50-51.

<sup>169</sup> MFA, 'Posting note 2023', 1 May 2023.

<sup>170</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA reveal that an initiative to place Dutch nationals in positions of strategic importance for policy on hybrid threats and cyberattacks was recently halted due to a budget cut.

#### 4.2.2 More strategic use of Dutch positions

Dutch nationals working in the EU or NATO are not unanimous in their views on how effectively 'The Hague' uses their insider perspective. Those with a positive assessment emphasised that their insights are increasingly being used, largely because they maintain regular contact with specific colleagues at the PR and in The Hague.<sup>171</sup> One Dutch EU staff member, for instance, mentioned participating in a weekly video call with the EU PR, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other seconded officials noted being invited to annual 'team days' organised by the relevant policy directorates at these ministries.

However, we also heard from seconded staff that they feel 'out of touch' with The Hague. They point out that the initiative for contact always has to come from them and that they are rarely consulted and informed.<sup>172</sup> This is even more the case in NATO than in the EU.

One of the reasons cited for the lack of regular contact with deployed EU and NATO personnel is a lack of time.<sup>173</sup> In addition, the Netherlands has a relatively strict approach to the neutrality of EU and NATO personnel. As discussed above, these staff members are expected to operate independently of their home country and solely in the interest of the organisation.<sup>174</sup> Seconded staff, who are mostly on the payroll of a Dutch ministry and therefore not paid by the EU or NATO, sometimes have more freedom of movement. In general, however, many of our respondents indicate that their knowledge position within the EU and NATO could be used more effectively, without compromising their neutrality.<sup>175</sup> On this point, the Netherlands sometimes seems to behave much more strictly than other countries, like the 'best boy in the class' in a class where everyone cheats from time to time and everyone assumes that the whole class does it. A more strategic use of the insider perspective of Dutch nationals working in the EU and NATO, both employed and seconded, is possible and desirable – also to be able to govern more towards complementary EU-NATO cooperation.

### 4.3 Dutch influence on the NATO Strategic Concept 2022

The NATO Strategic Concept 2022 describes NATO's long-term strategy. The document contains an analysis of threats and outlines the political and military measures needed to counter these threats.<sup>176</sup> The document is reviewed approximately every 10 years, based on global developments and changes in the threat landscape. New guidelines for action are then established based on this assessment.<sup>177</sup>

The process of drafting the Strategic Concept 2022 began in 2019, the year in which French President Macron declared that NATO was 'brain dead'.<sup>178</sup> As a result, it was decided to engage in an internal reflection process and draft the NATO 2030 Agenda to make the alliance fit for the future. One of the action points of this agenda was the drafting of a new Strategic Concept.<sup>179</sup> We examined the extent to which the Netherlands was able to influence the negotiations on NATO's new long-term strategy.

#### 4.3.1 Dutch commitment

Internal documents reveal that the Security Policy Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in consultation with the Ministry of Defence and in close collaboration with the PR at NATO, determined the Dutch positions on various dossiers and issued instructions to negotiators at the PR. For all topics scheduled for negotiation (including Russia, China, EU-NATO cooperation and adherence to NATO's three core tasks), the Dutch position was determined in advance.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Interviews with staff from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and EU institutions

<sup>172</sup> Interviews with staff from NATO's international staff, EU institutions and an external expert.

<sup>173</sup> Interviews with PR staff at NATO, the EU PR and EU institutions

<sup>174</sup> Interviews with PR staff at NATO, the EU PR and EU institutions

<sup>175</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, NATO's international staff and EU institutions.

<sup>176</sup> NATO, [NATO 2022 Strategic Concept](#), 2022.

<sup>177</sup> NATO, ['Strategic Concepts'](#), 2022.

<sup>178</sup> The Economist, ['Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead'](#), 7 November 2019.

<sup>179</sup> NAVO, [NATO 2030: United for a New Era](#), 2020.

<sup>180</sup> Interviews with staff from the MoD, the NATO PR and NATO's international staff.

The Netherlands was aware that the greatest influence could be exerted before the first draft of the Strategic Concept was published. The Netherlands therefore opted for an active role in the agenda-setting phase, including providing one of the members of the independent reflection group.<sup>181</sup> The PR and the prime minister at the time, Mark Rutte, also maintained good relations with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.<sup>182</sup> In addition, Dutch nationals held influential positions in NATO's international staff.<sup>183</sup> As a result, Dutch priorities could be introduced through various channels.<sup>184</sup> The Netherlands also co-organised a seminar on NATO partnerships with Germany and co-authored a non-paper on EU-NATO cooperation that was signed by 20 countries, both NATO allies and EU member states.<sup>185</sup>

This early and proactive influence helped to ensure that the first draft of the Strategic Concept already reflected many of the Netherlands' policy preferences. Accordingly, in its assessment of the first draft, the Dutch government expressed general satisfaction with the text.<sup>186</sup>

We note that, given its size and resources, the Netherlands has had a reasonable degree of influence on the NATO Strategic Concept 2022. To a large extent, therefore, the Netherlands possessed the qualities necessary for effective influence. For example, the Dutch involved had relevant knowledge on various dossiers. There was also good cooperation and communication between MFA officials in The Hague, PR staff at NATO and Dutch personnel among NATO's international staff. In addition, the Netherlands actively sought coalition partners and played a constructive and unifying role in the process.

#### 4.3.2 Results achieved

The final text of the Strategic Concept reflects many of the Dutch priorities and preferences. For example, the balance between NATO's three core tasks was largely preserved; the importance of resilience, cybersecurity and emerging disruptive technologies (think big data and artificial intelligence) is strongly emphasised; and references to countering nuclear proliferation (or non-proliferation) were retained.<sup>187</sup> However, since the Netherlands was often part of the majority or held a middle-ground position on most issues, this outcome can only be partially attributed to Dutch effort.<sup>188</sup>

On EU-NATO cooperation, the Netherlands did not achieve its desired outcome. The Strategic Concept describes the EU as a unique and essential partner of NATO, with which cooperation will be enhanced. This did not weaken the level of ambition of the previous Strategic Concept, but neither did it increase it, as advocated by the Netherlands.<sup>189</sup> However, a more ambitious formulation proved unattainable given the dynamics among member states.

Similarly, in the area of hybrid threats, the Netherlands was not able to fully realise its objectives. The Netherlands would have liked the text to emphasise the importance of situational awareness. In addition, the text did not include provisions for developing common instruments at the NATO level to counter hybrid threats, as the Netherlands would have liked.<sup>190</sup>

<sup>181</sup> K. Cath and C. Hulten, '[De Toekomst van NAVO](#)', *De Veiligheidsdiplomaat*, 6 May 2022.

<sup>182</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and NATO international staff.

<sup>183</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the NATO PR and NATO's international staff.

<sup>184</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and the NATO PR.

<sup>185</sup> These 20 allies included 17 members of both organisations (Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain), one EU member state that was not a NATO member at the time (Sweden) and two non-EU NATO allies (Canada and Norway).

<sup>186</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA; MFA and MoD, 'Kabinetsappreciatie concept Strategisch Concept van de NAVO', KST 28676-408, 8 June 2022.

<sup>187</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, MoD and NATO international staff; NATO, [NATO 2022 Strategic Concept](#), 2022; MFA and Defence, '[Kabinetsappreciatie Strategisch Concept](#)', KST 28676-408, 2022.

<sup>188</sup> Interviews staff from the MFA and the NATO PR.

<sup>189</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA; NATO, [NATO 2022 Strategic Concept](#), 2022; MFA and Defence, '[Kabinetsappreciatie Strategisch Concept](#)', KST 28676-408, 2022.

<sup>190</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and the PR at NATO; NATO, [NATO 2022 Strategic Concept](#), 2022; MFA and Defence, '[Kabinetsappreciatie Strategisch Concept](#)' KST 28676-408, 2022.



## 4.4 Dutch influence on the EU Strategic Compass 2022<sup>191</sup>

The EU Strategic Compass was designed to guide the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in the period 2020-2022. This ambitious document is based on an analysis of the EU's environment. It contains common objectives for EU member states and EU institutions, linked to concrete commitments and deadlines.<sup>192</sup>

The idea to develop the Strategic Compass emerged in 2019, as a reflection on the first three years of the 2016 EU Global Strategy.<sup>193</sup> At the time, it was noted that this strategy did not provide sufficient guidance for the CSDP and did not adequately address existing and future threats to the EU. During this period, the German federal government made a strong case for a new design and approach for the CSDP, putting the topic on the agenda at the Foreign Affairs Council (Defence configuration) on 13 November 2019. A month later, the idea of an EU Strategic Compass was formally presented by the EEAS at the Foreign Affairs Council. After some preparatory work, EU leaders agreed in June 2020 to task the EEAS with initiating the development of the Strategic Compass. The EEAS took the lead in many areas, but the content was left to the member states.

### 4.4.1 Dutch engagement

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Security Policy Department) and the Ministry of Defence (International Affairs Department) jointly led the Dutch positioning and engagement in the development of the Strategic Compass, with input from line ministries on specific sub-themes.<sup>194</sup> These sub-themes were divided between the two lead ministries in close coordination. The PRs at the EU and NATO were closely involved throughout, as were several Dutch nationals working at EU institutions who were connected to this dossier. Cooperation was strong, with agreements on which party would take the lead on various sub-themes.

The Netherlands had formulated positions on all sub-themes of the Strategic Compass in advance. It then sought to incorporate these positions into the first draft of the Compass and preserve them in subsequent revisions. The main Dutch priorities were (1) an EU that assumes greater responsibility in the field of security and defence, (2) further development of EU missions and operations in the field of security and defence, (3) strengthening of the MPCC as a European military strategic headquarters, (4) emphasis on anticipatory action (early warning/early action) and enhanced focus on countering cyber and hybrid threats (including threats to economic security), (5) greater investment in military capacity development, and (6) further improvement of EU-NATO cooperation.<sup>195</sup> A broader goal for the Netherlands was to translate the EU's abstract level of ambition into clear, shared priorities and objectives through the Strategic Compass.

The Netherlands sought to advance these priorities mainly during the policymaking phase.<sup>196</sup> The Dutch positions were initially articulated in six non-papers, all co-sponsored by the Netherlands. These non-papers addressed key issues such as economic security, the development of a 'hybrid toolbox' (a set of policy instruments to counter hybrid threats) and EU-NATO cooperation.

In addition, at an early stage of the policy process, the Netherlands built coalitions with like-minded EU member states, supporting other non-papers aligned with Dutch views.

With six non-papers, the Netherlands ranked among the top three initiators of non-papers. Many of its proposals were incorporated into the draft version of the Strategic Compass. Additional Dutch priorities were included through German proposals – Germany being the initiator of the Compass – many of which aligned closely with Dutch positions. As a result, the initial draft already reflected Dutch objectives on many points. During the negotiations, the Netherlands focused on ensuring that these elements remained intact in the final version.

<sup>191</sup> This paragraph is based entirely on the IOB study, [EU Strategisch Kompas](#), 2023.

<sup>192</sup> EEAS, [A strategic compass for security and defence](#), 2022.

<sup>193</sup> EEAS, [Shared Vision, Common Action: A stronger Europe – A global strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy](#), 2016.

<sup>194</sup> IOB, [EU Strategisch Kompas](#), 2023, p. 11.

<sup>195</sup> IOB, [EU Strategisch Kompas](#), 2023, p. 11.

<sup>196</sup> IOB, [EU Strategisch Kompas](#), 2023, p. 17.



Prior to the negotiations on the Strategic Compass, the Netherlands possessed many of the key qualities needed to exert effective influence. As a constructive and trusted partner within both the EU and NATO, it was well positioned to act as a bridge between more transatlantic and more European-oriented member states on many of the Strategic Compass sub-themes. In this respect, the *dual-track approach* of Dutch security policy proved effective.

The fact that Dutch nationals stationed in the PR and EU institutions had experience in EU policy advocacy and relevant knowledge on various dossiers also worked in the Netherlands' favour. There was good cooperation and communication with the relevant officials in The Hague.

The Netherlands' proactive approach to placing topics on the agenda and mobilising coalition partners further reinforced its influence. Throughout, the Netherlands maintained a constructive and unifying stance toward both EU institutions and fellow member states.<sup>197</sup>

#### 4.4.2 Results achieved

Considering its relatively limited size and resources compared to other EU member states, the Netherlands managed to exert significant influence on the Strategic Compass. This was recognised not only by Dutch officials, but also by representatives of other EU countries, who noted the visible Dutch presence and impact throughout the negotiation process. Several member states praised the Netherlands' approach – both in the preparatory phase and during the negotiations. There was particular appreciation for the Dutch emphasis on translating political ambitions into clear, operational objectives with defined timelines.

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<sup>197</sup> IOB, [EU Strategisch Kompas](#), 2023, pp. 26-27.



# 5

## Concrete contributions by the Netherlands to the implementation of EU and NATO policies

**In this chapter:**

- This chapter looks at how the Netherlands has contributed in concrete terms to NATO and EU security efforts in recent years. It is divided into three sections: 1) engagement on hybrid threats, 2) involvement in the defence industry, and 3) contributions to military capabilities and missions.

- In the area of hybrid conflict management, the Netherlands has played an active role in shaping a shared threat perception, developing response options and strengthening collective resilience within the EU and NATO. However, the country has been reluctant to share information on incidents. Interdepartmental coordination on hybrid and resilience remains challenging at times (§ 5.1).
- Dutch involvement in the defence industry is guided by three pragmatic priorities: 1) strengthening the EU industrial base to enhance capabilities, 2) maintaining sufficient openness to preserve transatlantic ties, and 3) improving opportunities for Dutch industry in the defence market. The Netherlands also supports enhanced cooperation between NATO and the EU on industrial policy (§ 5.2).
- The Dutch contribution to NATO and EU military capabilities is mixed. The Netherlands has only recently reached the 2% threshold and does not meet NATO's capability goals. In the NATO context, however, the Netherlands contributes proportionately to military operations. In the EU, Dutch contributions to civilian missions do not meet agreed levels, though contributions to military missions and operations have recently become more proportionate. The Netherlands continues to contribute meaningfully to NATO and EU rapid reaction forces, though meeting all requests is becoming increasingly difficult (§ 5.3).
- The sub-conclusion of this chapter is that the Netherlands makes a constructive contribution through knowledge, manpower and resources to the implementation and strengthening of EU and NATO policies, yet several opportunities remain underutilised.

## 5.1 Dutch contribution to countering hybrid threats

Like other EU member states and NATO allies, the Netherlands faces hybrid threats on a daily basis. These threats may come from state or non-state actors, including groups acting as proxies for a hostile state.

| 43 |

Hybrid attacks involve a range of tools used to destabilise society in pursuit of strategic objectives. They typically remain *below* the threshold of armed conflict and occur in the grey zone between peace and war.<sup>198</sup> Examples of recent incidents involving hybrid attacks include the Russian sabotage of European satellites in November 2024,<sup>199</sup> the approximately 1,000 cases of GPS signal jamming in air traffic in 2024 by unidentified perpetrators,<sup>200</sup> the 'megahack' of the Dutch police by foreign actors in September 2024,<sup>201</sup> the incidents in September 2024 in which Russian drones violated NATO airspace<sup>202</sup> and the sabotage of fibre-optic cables in the North Sea and Baltic Sea in November 2024 by ships of (presumably) the Russian shadow fleet. Other examples of hybrid threats include military intimidation, espionage, cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns and the use of economic tools.

Strengthening resilience to hybrid threats is primarily a national responsibility. Countries are also primarily on their own to establish response capabilities.<sup>203</sup> Nevertheless, international cooperation in countering hybrid threats is important for the Netherlands. It gives our country access to knowledge about threats and the ability to respond to them that it does not have independently (see policy assumption 6, § 3.2).

<sup>198</sup> BZK, Defence, EZK, OCW, SZW and BHOS, '[Aanpak statelijke dreigingen en aanbieding dreigingsbeeld statelijke actoren 2](#)', KST 30821-175, 28 November 2022; AIV, '[Hybride dreigingen en maatschappelijke weerbaarheid](#)', 2024.

<sup>199</sup> F. Damen, R. Niekerk and A. van der Meer, '[Rusland saboteert zes Europese satellieten, ook Nederlandse tv geraakt](#)', NOS, 15 November 2024.

<sup>200</sup> S. Keukenkamp, '[Nederlandse vliegtuigen bijna duizend keer misleid door gps-sabotage](#)', Trouw, 20 November 2024.

<sup>201</sup> Telegraaf, '[MIVD en AIVD: 'Buitenland achter megahack politie'](#)', 2 October 2024; NOS, '[Minister: zeer waarschijnlijk zit ander land achter politiehack](#)', 2 October 2024.

<sup>202</sup> NIS, '[Opnieuw schenden Russische drones NAVO-luchtruim](#)', 8 September 2024.

<sup>203</sup> European Commission, '[Hybrid Threats](#)', n.d.; NATO, '[Countering hybrid threats](#)', 7 May 2024.

The Netherlands has set a clear goal of strengthening international cooperation on hybrid threats.<sup>204</sup>

Dutch engagement in this area in the EU and NATO context focuses on three main areas:

1. promoting shared threat *perceptions*;
2. developing a joint *response option*, enabling coordinated action following incidents, both for retaliation and deterrence; and
3. increasing collective *resilience* to prevent incidents where possible and minimise their impact.

The following sections outline the Dutch contribution in each of these areas. This is followed by an overview of Dutch efforts to strengthen EU-NATO cooperation on hybrid threats.

### 5.1.1 Promoting shared perceptions

The Netherlands aims to promote a shared perception of hybrid threats within NATO and the EU. When member states exchange information, patterns between individual incidents become easier to identify. This, in turn, enables more targeted efforts to build resilience and develop effective response capabilities.<sup>205</sup>

In concrete terms, the Netherlands supports information and knowledge sharing by organising informal meetings with other countries. One example is the Dutch initiative within the EU to hold periodic cyber envoys meetings and a hybrid envoys meeting, where special envoys in the fields of cyberattacks and hybrid operations meet.<sup>206</sup> These meetings were later taken over by the EU, in this case, the EEAS. Diplomats involved note that these exchanges have increased awareness and preparedness for responding to cyberattacks and hybrid operations.<sup>207</sup>

In 2022, the Netherlands also developed a ‘whole-of-government response framework’ against state-based threats in the EU and NATO, which was presented in EU and NATO working groups as a best practice. This response framework is an interdepartmental coordination mechanism that enables the Netherlands to respond to a hybrid threat. This interdepartmental coordination mechanism enables the Netherlands to respond to hybrid threats. It outlines steps such as: internal government information sharing, mapping response options, identifying opportunities for international coordination, executing a joint response and analysing the impact.<sup>208</sup> With this framework, the Netherlands aims to encourage other countries to develop national structures for joint threat assessments and coordinated responses in the area of cyberattacks and hybrid operations.<sup>209</sup>

The Netherlands does, at times, share information on actual incidents in the EU and NATO context. One example is the 2018 foiled cyberattack on the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague.<sup>210</sup> In 2022, the government announced that it would share information more frequently in the EU and NATO.<sup>211</sup> In practice, however, the Netherlands often remains reluctant to do so in EU and NATO (working group) settings.<sup>212</sup> This is not only true of the Netherlands, however, but also for other countries. There can be various reasons for this. Sometimes a country may consider it contrary to national interests to disclose sensitive information. In other cases, there may be insufficient trust to share sensitive information, or a country may feel that it will be difficult to reach consensus on a response.<sup>213</sup> While these concerns are understandable, this reluctance undermines the shared perception that is essential for developing a timely and coordinated response.

<sup>204</sup> JenV, [Veiligheidsstrategie](#), 2023; JenV, [‘Tegengaan Statelijke Dreigingen’](#), KST 30821-72, 2019; Defence, [Defensienota 2024](#), 2024; JenV, [‘Weerbaarheid militaire en hybride dreigingen’](#), KST 30821-249, 2024; MoD and MFA, [‘Kabinetsreactie AIV-advies Hybride Dreigingen’](#), KST 30821-250, 2024; JenV and MFA, [‘Voortgang Veiligheidsstrategie’](#), KST 30821-251, 2024.

<sup>205</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, MoD, the PR at NATO and EU institutions.

<sup>206</sup> Some (but not all) countries have designated a special ambassador on cyber and hybrid issues. The Netherlands has a special ambassador for cyber.

<sup>207</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and EU institutions.

<sup>208</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and MoD; AIV, [‘Hybride dreigingen en maatschappelijke weerbaarheid’](#), 2024.

<sup>209</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and MoD.

<sup>210</sup> Interviews with staff from the NCTV, the NATO PR, the EU PR and NATO’s international staff; NOS, [‘MIVD: we hebben Russische hack van OPCW in Den Haag voorkomen’](#), 4 October 2018.

<sup>211</sup> MoD, [Defensienota 2022](#), 2022, p. 43.

<sup>212</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and MoD, the NATO PR, the EU PR and EU institutions.

<sup>213</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the NCTV and the MoD.

### 5.1.2 Development of joint response options

The Netherlands is also cooperating in initiatives to develop joint response options within the EU and NATO frameworks and promotes their use.<sup>214</sup> For example, in 2021, the Netherlands made a substantial contribution to the creation of various instruments, including toolboxes, response teams and sanctions regimes.

#### Toolboxes

The 'hybrid toolbox', co-initiated by the Netherlands, consists of (a) agreements on procedural steps that the EU or NATO can follow when a member state faces a hybrid attack or cyber incident, and (b) a set of measures for mitigating impact and enabling an effective response.<sup>215</sup> The Netherlands contributed to the development of the toolbox by organising meetings and facilitating the exchange of knowledge among relevant policy officials and diplomats with their international counterparts. Together with Finland and Denmark, the Netherlands was the driving force behind the creation of the hybrid toolbox.<sup>216</sup>

In addition, the Netherlands contributed to the creation of two more toolboxes: the 'EU cyber diplomacy toolbox',<sup>217</sup> for a joint response to cyberattacks through international diplomatic measures and the 'EU Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference toolbox' for combating foreign information manipulation and interference.<sup>218</sup>

Furthermore, at NATO, the Netherlands helped develop a manual of response options<sup>219</sup> and a toolbox called 'Comprehensive Preventive and Response Options to Counter Hybrid threats'.<sup>220</sup>

#### Response teams

Both the EU and NATO have developed response teams consisting of experts who can be deployed to assist countries in responding to acute hostile hybrid activities.<sup>221</sup> In the EU, the Netherlands contributed to the development of response teams for cyberattacks (operational since 2018)<sup>222</sup> and hybrid attacks (operational since 2024).<sup>223</sup> Similarly, within NATO, the Netherlands supported the establishment of hybrid response teams in 2018, which have since been deployed in countries such as Montenegro and Lithuania.<sup>224</sup> The Netherlands has also provided experts to these teams.<sup>225</sup> Given the relatively low cost of these teams and the benefit of being able to respond to hybrid threats in both EU and NATO contexts, this duplication is not problematic.

<sup>214</sup> MoD, '[Agenda RBZ Defensie d.d. 1 en 2 september 2021](#)', KST 21501-28-223, 2021.

<sup>215</sup> Interviews with staff from the MoD, the NATO PR, the EU PR, EU institutions and think tanks.

<sup>216</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the MoD, EU institutions and think tanks; K. Lassoen, [Realising the EU Hybrid Toolbox: opportunities and pitfalls](#), Clingendael Institute, 2021; MoD, '[Verslag Raad Buitenlandse Zaken Defensie d.d. 15 en 16 november](#)', KST 21501-28-228, 3 December 2021; MFA, '[Geannoteerde agenda voor de Raad Buitenlandse Zaken van 15 november 2021](#)', KST 21501-02-2414, 4 November 2021; MoD, '[Geannoteerde agenda Raad Buitenlandse Zaken Defensie d.d. 17 mei 2022](#)', KST 21501-28-241, 9 May 2022.

<sup>217</sup> Interviews with EU institutions; IOB, [Verbeter de verbinding. Evaluatie internationaal cybersecuritybeleid van het ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken](#), 2021; MoD, '[Agenda informele RBZ Defensie d.d. 1 en 2 september 2021](#)', KST 21501-28-223, 2021; MFA, '[Agenda voor RBZ 12 juli 2021](#)', KST 21501-02-2378, 2021.

<sup>218</sup> BZK, MoD, EZK, OCW, SZW and BHOS, '[Aanpak statelijke dreigingen en dreigingsbeeld 2](#)', KST 30821-175, 2022.

<sup>219</sup> Interviews with PR staff at the EU and the NCTV.

<sup>220</sup> Interviews with staff from the Ministry of MFA, MoD, the NATO PR and the NATO's international staff.

<sup>221</sup> Interviews with staff from the Ministry of MFA, MoD, the NATO PR and the NATO's international staff; BZK, Defence, EZK, OCW, SZW and BHOS, '[Tackling State Threats and Threat Assessment 2](#)', KST 30821-175, 2022; MoD and MFA, '[Geannoteerde agenda Raad Buitenlandse Zaken \(Jumbo\) d.d. 20 maart 2023 te Brussel](#)', KST 21501-02-2622, 6 March 2023.

<sup>222</sup> PESCO Europe, '[Cyber Rapid Response Teams and Mutual Assistance in Cyber Security](#)', n.d.

<sup>223</sup> European Council, '[Hybrid threats: Council paves the way for deploying Hybrid Rapid Response Teams](#)', Council of the EU, 2024; European Commission, '[Commission welcomes the Council approval of the Guiding framework for the practical establishment of the Hybrid Rapid Response Teams](#)', 2024.

<sup>224</sup> See, for example: Ministry of National Defense, Republic of Lithuania, '[NATO's team over experts on countering hybrid threats concludes its work in Lithuania](#)', 2021; J. Dickson and E. Harding, '[Russia Aims at Montenegro](#)', *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2024; Interviews with Ministry of MFA staff.

<sup>225</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and internal documents.



### Sanctions regimes

Unlike NATO, the EU has sanctions instruments at its disposal. The Netherlands played a key role in the creation of the EU's cyber sanctions regime, adopted in 2019.<sup>226</sup> Since then, the Netherlands has actively advocated for the 'listing' of individuals involved in malicious cyber activities against EU member states. The Netherlands is also contributing to the expansion of this tool.

Moreover, the Netherlands supported the adoption of a sanctions regime targeting Russian actors responsible for hybrid attacks in 2024, including through the submission of a non-paper.<sup>227</sup> That said, the international community continues to debate the effectiveness of EU sanctions regimes, including those promoted by the Netherlands.<sup>228</sup>

The Netherlands is widely regarded by other countries as a leader on the 'cyberattacks' dossier and as an active contributor to the 'hybrid threats' dossier.<sup>229</sup> In this context, the Netherlands is also seen as taking a constructive stance and possessing a great deal of knowledge and expertise.<sup>230</sup> The above initiatives, including the Netherlands' own best practices presented in EU and NATO working groups, are cited as examples.<sup>231</sup>

However, like many other countries, the Netherlands remains reluctant to share information about specific incidents. This limits the development and effectiveness of joint EU and NATO response tools.<sup>232</sup> Furthermore, we found that the whole-of-government response framework is not yet sufficiently aligned with international response options. As a result, EU and NATO instruments are not always used.<sup>233</sup>

#### 5.1.3 Increasing joint resilience

The term 'resilience' can refer to the ability to respond in a timely and appropriate manner to hybrid threats of the kind often encountered today. It can also refer to the preparedness of a society in a war situation. These two types of resilience are an extension of each other. The measures required to ensure both types of resilience are also partly similar.

The Netherlands is working on resilience both at the national level and in cooperation with international partners. For example, it has signed a joint declaration of intent on infrastructure protection in the North Sea with Belgium, the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway and Denmark. A working group has been established for this purpose, and both the EU and NATO have been invited to participate.<sup>234</sup> NATO and the EU have also made broader commitments to help strengthen member states' individual resilience.

Within NATO, the Resilience Committee is responsible for implementing seven baseline requirements aimed at ensuring the continuity of vital government services during crises.<sup>235</sup> The Netherlands has incorporated these NATO objectives into a national interdepartmental resilience plan, structured around two pillars: (1) promoting societal resilience and (2) enhancing military preparedness.<sup>236</sup> This plan is set to be further developed in 2025.

Both directives were adopted in 2022 and are currently being transposed into Dutch law via the Critical Entities Resilience Act and the Cyber Security Act. However, during the negotiation phase, the Netherlands focused primarily on domestic policy and joined the European process relatively late. Interdepartmental coordination on the dossier was also difficult. As a result, opportunities were missed

<sup>226</sup> European Union, [Council Regulation \(EU\) 2019/796](#), 17 May 2019; IOB, [Verbeter de verbinding](#), 2021.

<sup>227</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the EU PR and EU institutions; Council of the EU, ['Russia: New sanctions framework against those responsible for destabilising activities against the EU and its member states'](#), 8 October 2024.

<sup>228</sup> A. Borozna and L. Kochtcheeva, 'Assessing Sanctions Effectiveness', in A. Borozna and L. Kochtcheeva (ed.), [War by Other Means: Western Sanctions on Russia and Moscow's Response](#), Palgrave Macmillan, 2024; K. Fouad, ['The Russian Oil Ban: Reassessment of the Effectiveness of Sanctions'](#), *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, vol. 30, 2024.

<sup>229</sup> Interviews with NATO's international staff, EU institutions and representatives of EU member states and NATO allies.

<sup>230</sup> Interviews with staff from EU institutions, think tanks and representatives of EU member states and NATO allies.

<sup>231</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and MoD.

<sup>232</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the EU PR, the NCTV, EU institutions and representatives of EU Member States.

<sup>233</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and the NCTV.

<sup>234</sup> Interviews with Ministry of MFA staff; Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, ['Voortgang Strategie ter bescherming Noordzee Infrastructuur'](#), KST 33450-128, 10 June 2024.

<sup>235</sup> AIV, ['Hybride dreigingen en maatschappelijke weerbaarheid'](#), 2024.

<sup>236</sup> JenV, ['Weerbaarheid tegen militaire en hybride dreigingen'](#), KST 30821-249, 2024.

to align the directives with Dutch preferences. This subsequently also hampered their transposition into national legislation. Consequently, the Netherlands is not expected to meet the two-year implementation deadline.<sup>237</sup>

#### 5.1.4 Strengthening EU-NATO cooperation around hybrid

The Netherlands has long advocated for stronger cooperation between the EU and NATO, including in the area of resilience to hybrid threats. At the end of 2024, the government reaffirmed its intention to actively promote better alignment between EU and NATO resilience policies.<sup>238</sup> For instance, the Netherlands supports the Hybrid Centre of Excellence, an independent, demand-driven knowledge platform of which all NATO allies and all EU Member States are members. This also promotes EU-NATO cooperation.<sup>239</sup> As the knowledge platform is not officially affiliated with NATO or the EU, and the centre only works with public information, the obstacles to EU-NATO cooperation discussed above, such as the frozen conflict between NATO ally Türkiye and EU member state Cyprus (see §2.5 and §3.2), do not apply here.<sup>240</sup>

The Netherlands has also identified several other dossiers on which EU-NATO cooperation would add value.<sup>241</sup> For now, this initiative remains largely at the level of general advocacy. In recent years, the Netherlands has made only limited efforts to promote EU-NATO complementarity on specific policy dossiers.<sup>242</sup>

## 5.2 Dutch contribution to strengthening defence industry

The defence industry consists of a network of knowledge institutes, companies and suppliers that contribute to the development, production and maintenance of defence equipment. As national defence industries have traditionally been closely tied to individual countries' national defence, and governments are usually the only customers, there is much less market competition.<sup>243</sup> As a result, Europe's defence industry remains fragmented.<sup>244</sup> Despite attempts by the EU to promote cooperation between companies in the defence industry, through the European Defence Fund, for example, progress has been limited. By 2023, only 18% of defence equipment investments involved cross-border cooperation.<sup>245</sup>

The lack of substantial cooperation within the European defence industry undermines the interoperability of European armed forces. The use of different equipment (for example, EU member states have 12 different types of tanks, while the US has only one type) complicates joint military operations by different countries.<sup>246</sup> Separate development of equipment in the European defence market also increases costs and slows the pace at which new capabilities can be brought to market.<sup>247</sup> As a result, European countries are often forced to rely on the production capacity of countries outside the EU. Between June 2022 and June 2023, for example, 78% of defence equipment tenders issued by EU member states were awarded to non-European companies.<sup>248</sup> As Mario Draghi concluded in his report on Europe's future competitiveness, such practices risk undermining Europe's own defence industrial base.<sup>249</sup>

<sup>237</sup> Interviews with staff from the NCTV, the EU PR and EU institutions.

<sup>238</sup> JenV and MFA, '[Voortgang Veiligheidsstrategie](#)', KST 30821-251, 2024.

<sup>239</sup> Interviews with staff from the MoD and think tanks.

<sup>240</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and think tanks.

<sup>241</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, MoD and NATO international staff; MoD, '[Agenda RBZ Defence 16 June 2020](#)', KST 21501-28-205, 2020; MoD, '[Agenda informele RBZ Defensie d.d. 1 en 2 september 2021](#)', KST 21501-28-223, 2021; MoD, '[Verslag RBZ Defensie d.d. 14 november 2023](#)', KST 21501-28-261, 2023

<sup>242</sup> Interviews with the Ministry of the PR at NATO, the EU PR and EU institutions.

<sup>243</sup> An important exception is *dual-use* goods that can be used for both military and civilian purposes.

<sup>244</sup> In the years before 2020, more than 80% of procurement and more than 90% of research and technology development took place at the national level. See IOB, '[De kloof gedicht?](#)', 2020, p. 42.

<sup>245</sup> European Parliament, '[European defence industry reinforcement through common procurement act \(EDIRPA\)](#)', *EU Legislation in Progress*, 2023.

<sup>246</sup> M. Draghi, '[The Future of European Competitiveness](#)', 2024.

<sup>247</sup> J. Mejino-López and G. Wolff, '[A European defence industrial strategy in a hostile world](#)', *Bruegel Policy Brief*, vol. 29, 2024.

<sup>248</sup> M. Draghi, '[The Future of European Competitiveness](#)', 2024, p. 56.

<sup>249</sup> M. Draghi, '[The Future of European Competitiveness](#)', 2024.

The Netherlands supports efforts to strengthen the European defence industry. Its approach is based on three priorities:

1. strengthening EU industry to improve capability;
2. maintaining cooperation with non-EU NATO allies in the production of defence equipment;
3. improving production opportunities for the Dutch defence industry.

This section assesses the Dutch commitment to these three priorities, as well as its efforts to promote EU-NATO cooperation in the area of defence equipment production.

### 5.2.1 Strengthening the European defence industry for improved capabilities

In 2022, the Netherlands committed to making the EU ‘more capable, economically stronger and more secure’ in the field of security and defence.<sup>250</sup> One concrete goal in this regard is to increase Europe’s production capacity, thereby improving the security of supply for defence equipment and reducing dependence on outside Europe.<sup>251</sup> A second concrete goal is to counter fragmentation of the European defence market, aiming for greater efficiency, lower production costs and better interoperability of equipment.<sup>252</sup> Along these lines, Europe should become capable of taking (more) responsibility for its own security. This would also enhance NATO’s overall effectiveness.<sup>253</sup>

#### Cooperation for joint procurement

Strengthening the European defence industry requires the EU to adopt joint procurement of defence equipment more consistently. Joint purchasing enables economies of scale, provides order security for manufacturers and promotes interoperability among European armed forces.

Based on these considerations, the Dutch government has increasingly prioritised joint procurement of defence equipment in recent years.<sup>254</sup> The 2024 Defence Paper even abandoned the ‘best product for the best price’ mantra in favour of timely availability and a preference for Dutch or European origin.<sup>255</sup> For example, the Netherlands is cooperating with Belgium and France in procuring mine-fighting capabilities<sup>256</sup> and with Denmark and Norway in procuring radar systems.<sup>257</sup> The Netherlands is also participating in European demand pooling for tanks and Boxer armoured vehicles.<sup>258</sup> It has also decided to set up, together with Germany, Spain and Romania, a production line for 1,000 Patriot anti-aircraft missiles in 2024, to be produced under licence in Germany.<sup>259</sup>

The Netherlands also played a leading role in the acquisition of the Multi Role Tanker Transport Capability (MRTT), which consists of a fleet of nine transport aircraft from Airbus Defence and Space that can also be used for in-flight refuelling of other aircraft.<sup>260</sup> Respondents describe this case as a best practice, involving both cooperation between six European countries and cooperation between the EU and NATO (through the European Defence Agency and the NATO Support and Procurement Agency, respectively).<sup>261</sup>

<sup>250</sup> MFA, ‘Fiche: Mededeling Defensiepakket’, KST 22112-3345, 18 March 2022.

<sup>251</sup> Interviews staff from the MFA and the PR at NATO; MoD, ‘Actieagenda productie- en leveringszekerheid munitie en defensiematerieel’, KST 36410-X-93, 7 June 2024.

<sup>252</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, MoD and the PR at NATO.

<sup>253</sup> MFA, ‘Kabinet appreciatie Commissie mededeling naar een meer weerbaar, concurrerend en duurzaam Europa’, KST 22112-3800, 5 October 2023; MFA, ‘Fiche: Mededeling Defensiepakket’, KST 22112-3345, 2022; MFA, ‘Fiche: Verordening versterking Europese defensie-industrie door gemeenschappelijke aanbestedingen’, KST 22112-3487, 2 September 2022.

<sup>254</sup> MFA, ‘Fiche: versterking Europese defensie-industrie’, KST 22112-3487, 2022; MoD, ‘Voortgang structurele versterking van de Europese productie van munitie en defensiematerieel’, KST 36600-X-8, 2 October 2024.

<sup>255</sup> MoD, Defensienota 2024, 2024.

<sup>256</sup> MFA, ‘Fiche: Mededeling EDIS/EDIP’, KST 22112-3919, 2024.

<sup>257</sup> MFA, ‘Fiche: Mededeling EDIS/EDIP’, KST 22112-3919, 2024.

<sup>258</sup> MoD, ‘Voortgang versterking Europese productie’, KST 36600-X-8, 2024.

<sup>259</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and the NATO PR.

<sup>260</sup> These are the Multi Role Tanker Transport units. See MoD, ‘Multinational MRTT Unit (MMU)’, n.d.

<sup>261</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, MoD, the NATO PR and EU institutions.

### Support for new EU plans for joint defence industry

To promote cooperation within the European defence industry, the EU has launched several programmes, with support from the Netherlands. For example, the Netherlands backed the development of the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP)<sup>262</sup> and the European defence industry Reinforcement through the common Procurement act (EDIRPA).<sup>263</sup> These acts involve relatively small budgets. They can therefore be considered as trial balloons for the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS)<sup>264</sup> and the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP),<sup>265</sup> which at the time of writing this report are being negotiated by EU member states and in the European Parliament.

The EDIS is a strategic vision that aims to strengthen the European defence industry over the next decade by encouraging increased, improved and joint investment, while embedding a broader ‘culture of defence readiness’ into European policymaking.<sup>266</sup>

The EDIP programme document operationalises this strategy by proposing concrete financial and regulatory measures. One of its key elements is a proposed €1.5 billion allocation from the EU budget for 2025-2027. The Netherlands supports this ambitious proposal to strengthen the European defence industry.<sup>267</sup> It is also important for the Netherlands that there is room for cooperation with partners outside the EU (see § 5.2.2) and that there is a level playing field within the European defence market, so Dutch companies can also have access to the market (see § 5.2.3).

Before the European Commission drafted these proposals, there were open consultations with EU member states and industry. The Netherlands, like other countries, provided input during that phase. However, as the EDIP programme document is still being negotiated, it is impossible to determine to what extent it will lead to increased cooperation on the development and procurement of defence equipment. Nor is it clear yet what the available budget for defence will be in the new Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028-2034. This is relevant, as the current EDIP budget of €1.5 billion for the period 2025-2027 will only be able to promote cooperation among EU member states to a limited extent, given the size of the total spending of €290 billion on defence by European member states in 2025.<sup>268</sup>

### Critical stance on Eurobonds

The Netherlands – widely known in the EU for its fiscally conservative position – has traditionally opposed the idea of taking out Eurobonds, which would allow member states, including those with high sovereign debt, to borrow at a relatively low interest rate. In its assessment of the European Commission’s proposal for EDIS and EDIP, the Netherlands also explicitly opposed the introduction of Eurobonds, even though it does not explicitly address the issue of borrowing.<sup>269</sup> Nonetheless, international pressure to create shared borrowing mechanisms is growing. As Mario Draghi also argues in his report on European competitiveness, much larger sums will be needed if the EU is serious about significantly boosting defence cooperation.<sup>270</sup> At the time of writing, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has proposed a new €800 billion initiative under the name ReArm Europe.<sup>271</sup>

<sup>262</sup> ASAP: Act in Support of Ammunition Production. MFA, [‘Fiche: Verordening ondersteuning munitieproductie’](#), KST 22112-3720, 16 June 2023.

<sup>263</sup> EDIRPA: European defence industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act. EU, [Regulation \(EU\) 2023/2418 of the European Parliament and of the Council](#), EUR-Lex, 18 October 2023 ; MFA, [‘Fiche: versterking Europese defensie-industrie’](#), KST 22112-3487, 2022.

<sup>264</sup> European Commission, [‘EDIS | Our common defence industrial strategy’](#), n.d.

<sup>265</sup> European Commission, [EDIP Proposal for a Regulation](#), 2024.

<sup>266</sup> European Commission, [‘EDIS | Our common defence industrial strategy’](#), n.d.

<sup>267</sup> MFA, [‘Fiche: Mededeling EDIS/EDIP’](#), KST 22112-3919, 2024.

<sup>268</sup> European Parliament, [‘Briefing EDIRPA’](#), 2023.

<sup>269</sup> MFA, [‘Fiche: Mededeling EDIS/EDIP’](#), KST 22112-3919, 2024.

<sup>270</sup> Draghi, [The Future of European Competitiveness](#), 2024.

<sup>271</sup> European Commission, [‘Press statement by President von der Leyen on the defence package’](#), 2025.

The Netherlands opposes Eurobonds in part because of concerns over potentially being held financially responsible for the sovereign debt of other EU countries through the provision of joint loans. There are also fears that issuing Eurobonds could negatively affect the Dutch credit rating. For these reasons, the Dutch House of Representatives passed motions in 2022 instructing the government not to support Eurobonds.<sup>272</sup>

The firmness with which the Netherlands opposed the idea of Eurobonds has come at a political cost: the Netherlands is now often excluded from informal discussions among other EU member states about the potential use of Eurobonds and the conditions under which they might be introduced.<sup>273</sup>

### 5.2.2 Maintaining cooperation with non-EU NATO allies

The Netherlands is committed to maintaining cooperation with non-EU countries in the production of weapon systems and ammunition.<sup>274</sup> Dutch efforts focus both on strengthening bilateral ties with the United Kingdom and the United States, and on advocating for EU programmes to remain open to participation by non-EU countries.<sup>275</sup>

Countries such as France, Greece and Cyprus *oppose* involving non-EU countries in EU programmes. They argue that investing in the European defence industry is essential to advancing Europe's strategic autonomy. Moreover, they believe that European funds should only benefit European industry, as it is ultimately European taxpayers' money.<sup>276</sup>

While the Netherlands acknowledges this importance, it also recognises that – certainly in the short term – there is a need to continue purchasing defence equipment outside the EU. Currently, European production is simply not sufficient to meet the demand for defence equipment, both for its own defence needs and for ongoing support to Ukraine.<sup>277</sup> Cooperation with non-EU partners is also essential for accessing certain technologies that European companies do not yet possess.<sup>278</sup>

The Dutch government considers it essential that efforts to strengthen the European defence industry complement rather than undermine transatlantic cooperation. With NATO as the cornerstone of European collective defence, strong transatlantic ties remain crucial. To maintain Europe's relevance to the United States, the Netherlands believes it is necessary both to increase the European contribution to NATO and to preserve strong bilateral cooperation with the US. In addition, the Netherlands feels committed to the US because of the nuclear role it plays in NATO with the F-35 and because it uses US equipment to train and educate.<sup>279</sup>

One factor complicating European cooperation with the US is that while the US benefits from a stronger European defence industry (as a contribution to transatlantic defence), it also benefits from an EU that continues to buy from the US defence industry.<sup>280</sup> Thus, in 2021, a US think tank pointed out the 'absurd situation where Washington loudly insists that Europe do more on defense but then strongly objects when [the EU] tries to answer the call'.<sup>281</sup> Notably, agreements were reached in both 2021 and 2023 to improve defence cooperation between the US and the EU.<sup>282</sup> However, under President Trump's administration, US policy is expected to place renewed emphasis on the interests of the American defence industry. Given the current shortage in European production capacity, increased defence

<sup>272</sup> Ministry of Finance, ['Reactie op de moties van de leden Van Haga en Ephraïm over niet instemmen met eurobonds of andere vormen van schuldmutualisering \(Kamerstuk 35925-167\) en van het lid Omtzigt over niet akkoord gaan met een gezamenlijke schuldtoelating voor nieuwe Europese fondsen en projecten \(Kamerstuk 35925-169\)'](#), KST 35925-170, 30 March 2022.

<sup>273</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, EZ and the EU PR.

<sup>274</sup> MFA, ['Fiche: Mededeling EDIS/EDIP'](#), KST 22112-3919, 2024.

<sup>275</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, EZ, NATO international staff and EU institutions.

<sup>276</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, MoD, EZ, the NATO PR, the international staff of NATO and EU institutions.

<sup>277</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, MoD, EU institutions and representatives of EU member states.

<sup>278</sup> Interviews with the Ministry of EZ and PR staff at NATO.

<sup>279</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, MoD, EZ, the NATO PR, the EU PR and representatives of EU member states and NATO allies.

<sup>280</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, the NATO PR, EU institutions, think tanks and representatives of NATO allies.

<sup>281</sup> M. Bergmann, J. Lamond and S. Cicarelli, [The Case for EU Defense A New Way Forward for Trans-Atlantic Security Relations](#), Centre for American Progress, 2021.

<sup>282</sup> EEAS, ['EU-U.S.: Joint Statement by the Secretary of State of the United States of America and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission'](#), 2021.



spending in Europe is likely to result in a higher volume of orders going to US suppliers.<sup>283</sup> On the other hand, the ‘America first’ stance may also strengthen the resolve of European countries to reduce their dependence on the United States and increase procurement from European manufacturers.<sup>284</sup>

### 5.2.3 Level playing field and access for Dutch SMEs

In the maritime sector, the Netherlands has one original equipment manufacturer (OEM) in the maritime field with Damen Shipyards. The rest of the Dutch defence industry consists of small and medium-sized suppliers, approximately 1,000 in total.<sup>285</sup> By comparison, France has seven major OEMs and some 4,000 companies in its defence supply chains.<sup>286</sup>

The Netherlands is making efforts to level the playing field of the European defence market, aiming to give Dutch companies better and more consistent access to the supply chains of OEMs and large defence firms in other EU member states.<sup>287</sup> The argument put forward by the Netherlands is that better market access for Dutch companies not only increases Dutch earning power but also the resilience and technological innovativeness of the European defence industry as a whole, as the Netherlands ranks among the world’s most innovative countries.<sup>288</sup> This emphasis was clearly reflected in the Dutch position during negotiations on the conditions for participation in the European Defence Fund.

The Netherlands views a stronger European defence industry not only as a strategic necessity but also as an economic opportunity for Dutch businesses and knowledge institutions. This is especially true in the field of dual-use technologies (products with both civil and military applications), where Dutch expertise in innovation provides a strong foundation for growth in both the European and global defence industry.<sup>289</sup> To support this, the government established a Security Fund in 2024, allocating €100 million to help start-ups develop innovative dual-use technologies.<sup>290</sup>

To encourage the participation of Dutch industrial companies and knowledge institutions in European defence projects, the Interdepartmental Coordination Group on European Defence Cooperation was established in 2018.<sup>291</sup> This coordination group links (a) Dutch defence capability development needs, (b) knowledge and innovation technology in Dutch industry, and (c) EU opportunities for cooperation and funding from the European Defence Fund. The coordination group also encourages Dutch participation in projects funded by new initiatives at both the EU and NATO, such as the Hub for European Defence Innovation (HEDI) and the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA).<sup>292</sup> In recent years, the coordination group has helped the Netherlands to consistently rank among the top-ten participating countries in European Defence Fund projects.<sup>293</sup> The Netherlands is also well represented in NATO’s DIANA projects. Furthermore, Brainport Eindhoven has been selected as an accelerator site in DIANA. Finally, it is worth mentioning in this context that the headquarters of the NATO Innovation Fund (NIF) is located in Amsterdam. This too helps to stimulate innovations and startups in the Netherlands.<sup>294</sup>

Indeed, the turnover of the Dutch defence industry has grown in recent years from €4.7 billion in 2021 to €7.7 billion in 2023.<sup>295</sup>

<sup>283</sup> SIPRI, ‘[European arms imports nearly double, US and French exports rise, and Russian exports fall sharply](#)’, 2024.

<sup>284</sup> Politico, ‘[Why Trump means good times for Europe’s arms-makers](#)’, 2024.

<sup>285</sup> L. Oh, N. Hageraats and H. Schote, [Nederlandse defensie- en veiligheid gerelateerde technologische industriële basis](#), Berenschot, 2024.

<sup>286</sup> J. Bezat, ‘[France’s defence industry threatened by new competitors](#)’, *Le Monde*, 2024.

<sup>287</sup> MFA, ‘[Kabinetsappreciatie weerbaar Europa](#)’, KST 22112-3800, 2023; MoD, ‘[Actieagenda productie- en leveringszekerheid](#)’, KST 36410-X-93, 2024.

<sup>288</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, MoD, EU institutions and think tanks; EZK and Defence, ‘[Defensie Industrie Strategie in een nieuwe geopolitieke context](#)’, KST 31125-123, 2 November 2022.

<sup>289</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA, MoD, EZ and external experts; MoD, [Nota Defensie Industrie Strategie](#), 2018; MoD, [Defensienota 2024](#), 2024.

<sup>290</sup> MoD, [Defensienota 2024](#), 2024.

<sup>291</sup> Tweede Kamer, ‘[Lijst van vragen en antwoorden over het Fiche: MFK - Oprichting van het Europees Defensiefonds](#)’, KST 22112-27199, November 2018.

<sup>292</sup> Interviews with staff from the MoD, EZ and external experts.

<sup>293</sup> Interviews with staff from the Ministry of EZ, EU institutions and external experts.

<sup>294</sup> Interviews with NATO’s international staff and external experts.

<sup>295</sup> L. Oh, N. Hageraats and H. Schote, [Nederlandse defensie- en veiligheid gerelateerde technologische industriële basis](#), 2024.

#### 5.2.4 Commitment to EU-NATO cooperation

The Netherlands considers EU-NATO cooperation in the production of military equipment important. To support this, it promotes staff-to-staff meetings between EU and NATO officials working in the defence industry. These meetings help both organisations stay informed about each other's activities and prevent misunderstandings. A relevant example is the friction that arose several years ago following persistent rumours that the EU was planning to develop its own military standards separate from those of NATO. This misunderstanding was resolved – at least among staff – through staff-to-staff meetings.<sup>296</sup>

The Netherlands also organises informal meetings with other countries to facilitate EU-NATO dialogue on defence industry cooperation.<sup>297</sup> One key outcome of these discussions was the drafting of a non-paper on EU-NATO cooperation in defence equipment manufacturing. This non-paper set the stage for further cooperation between the organisations.

In 2023, the Netherlands proposed the establishment of a structured dialogue between the European Defence Agency and the NSPA, NATO's equipment acquisition and maintenance agency, to better align NATO planning processes and European defence cooperation.<sup>298</sup> However, this dialogue has not yet materialised, primarily due to the Cyprus issue (see § 2.5), which continues to block the exchange of classified information between the EU and NATO. The Netherlands has previously worked to align NATO's defence planning process with the EU's two main planning tools, the Coordinated Capability Plan (CDP) and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD).<sup>299</sup> This effort led to the EU's CDP now incorporating definitions and information requests from NATO's defence planning process.<sup>300</sup> Still, the EU and NATO processes are not fully aligned. One reason is that NATO member states do not always share with the EU the same information they provide to NATO,<sup>301</sup> while NATO and the EU are also unable to share this information between themselves because of the Cyprus issue.

Another contributing factor is that NATO's defence planning process is structured differently from the EU CDP. In its defence planning process, NATO determines which military capabilities should be acquired or developed on the basis of a long-term analysis of the main threats to the alliance. This results in a division of labour among the allies that determines what each country should provide.<sup>302</sup> In contrast, the EU CDP relies on information (incomplete for the EU) from the NATO defence planning process, supplemented by information from its own future scenarios, trend analyses and lessons learned from EU military missions and operations.<sup>303</sup>

The latest EU CDP from 2023 identified 22 priorities, which serve as the foundation for EU-wide defence investments and planning. Using the annual CARD review, which shows the ongoing and planned defence investments of EU member states, and with the EU capability plan as a guide for the future, the EU tries to encourage defence cooperation among EU member states.<sup>304</sup> However, for NATO members such as the Netherlands, the NATO defence planning process remains the primary guiding framework. Ultimately, defence cooperation between European NATO member states only takes place when those countries individually choose to pursue it.

If budgets are made available for joint capability development under EDIP through the European Defence Fund, the EU can add value to NATO, especially when the projects directly address capability shortfalls identified in NATO's defence planning process.

<sup>296</sup> Interviews with staff from the MFA and EU institutions.

<sup>297</sup> Interviews with staff from the PR at the EU.

<sup>298</sup> In full: NATO Support and Procurement Agency.

<sup>299</sup> Interviews staff from the MFA and the NATO PR; IOB, [De kloof gedicht?](#) 2020, p. 24; MFA, ['Fiche: Mededeling EDIS/EDIP'](#), KST 22112-3919, 2024.

<sup>300</sup> Interviews staff from the MoD.

<sup>301</sup> Information requests in the NATO defence planning process give member states the option, per question, to also share the given information with the EU.

<sup>302</sup> NATO, ['NATO Defence Planning Process'](#), 2022.

<sup>303</sup> EDA, ['Capability Development Plan'](#), n.d.

<sup>304</sup> IOB, [Pragmatisme voorbij](#), 2020, p. 15; EDA, ['Coordinated Annual Review on Defence'](#), n.d.

## 5.3 Dutch contribution to military capabilities and missions

The ability of NATO and the EU to act effectively depends on the contributions of their member states. Both organisations expect the Netherlands to share this burden by investing in military capabilities and by deploying them when member states collectively decide to conduct a military operation.<sup>305</sup> This section assesses the extent to which Dutch contributions meet these expectations.

### 5.3.1 Dutch contribution to NATO capabilities

Within NATO, allies' contributions are referred to in terms of cash, capabilities and contributions. Cash refers to a country's annual defence spending; capabilities refers to the extent to which those investments generate the military capabilities identified through NATO's defence planning process; and contributions refers to the size of a country's contributions to NATO missions and operations.

In 2006, NATO allies agreed that each member should spend at least 2% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defence. This 2% norm was repeatedly endorsed by the allies thereafter, including by the Netherlands.<sup>306</sup> However, for many years, the Netherlands did not meet this benchmark. Internal documents show that Dutch policy officials sought room to manoeuvre, downplaying the cash component while highlighting Dutch efforts in terms of capabilities and contributions. By 2020, however, the Dutch government recognised the need to make a credible contribution to strengthening NATO and set the goal of reaching the 2% norm by 2024.<sup>307</sup> The Headline Agreement of May 2024 included the intention to enshrine the norm in law.<sup>308</sup> In 2024, the Netherlands met the 2% target for the first time.

As a result of under-investment in defence in recent years, the Netherlands has not only failed to meet the cash norm, but it has also fallen short of NATO's capability goals. As noted in § 5.2.4, NATO makes agreements with each member state on required investments in military capabilities through its defence planning process.<sup>309</sup> NATO's planning process is intended as a benchmark for the choices a NATO member state makes about defence procurement.<sup>310</sup> However, NATO's assessment of progress shows that the Netherlands has not met all its targets in recent years. Despite the upward trend, there are significant shortcomings in the Netherlands' development of the required capabilities.<sup>311</sup>

In addition, the Netherlands fulfils a nuclear sharing task within NATO. To carry out this role, it has acquired F-35 fighter aircraft. These are dual-capable aircraft, which can not only perform conventional air force functions (such as daily airspace surveillance), but can also be used for the operational deployment of nuclear weapons in a military conflict.<sup>312</sup> Through this, the Netherlands contributes to NATO's nuclear deterrent.

### 5.3.2 Dutch contribution to NATO missions

NATO's main task is the defence of its territory. In addition, after the end of the Cold War, NATO increasingly focused on missions and operations beyond its borders, including in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq. However, with Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014, the focus gradually shifted back towards territorial defence.

<sup>305</sup> Notably, neither the MFA nor MoD has a complete overview of the missions to which the Netherlands has contributed in recent years. Nor is there clarity on the precise nature and scale of the Dutch contribution to those missions. This lack of overview makes it difficult for the government to steer towards a fair share.

<sup>306</sup> NATO, '[Funding NATO](#)', 2024.

<sup>307</sup> MFA, '[Kabinetsreactie Europese veiligheid](#)', KST 21501-28-211, 2020; MFA, '[Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie](#)', 2018; MoD, '[Defensievisie 2035](#)', 2020.

<sup>308</sup> Kabinetsformatie, '[HOOP, LEF EN TROTS - Hoofdlijnenakkoord 2024 – 2028 van PVV, VVD, NSC en BBB](#)', 16 May 2024; NOS, '[Kamermeerderheid voor wettelijk vastleggen NAVO-norm](#)', 8 October 2024.

<sup>309</sup> Given the scope of this review and the confidentiality of NATO defence planning information, we cannot comment on the extent to which the requested capabilities are based on a realistic threat assessment.

<sup>310</sup> For example, in line with the NATO defence planning process, the government has recently invested in deep precision strike capabilities within both the land and maritime domains, in anti-aircraft systems, in upgrades to CV-90 infantry fighting vehicles, in Fenek reconnaissance vehicles and in F-35 fighter aircraft. MoD, '[Reactie op het verzoek van het lid Fritsma, gedaan tijdens de Regeling van Werkzaamheden van 15 november 2022, over het bericht dat het kabinet zware kritiek van de NAVO op de Nederlandse Defensie-inzet niet met de Kamer heeft gedeeld](#)', KST 28676-421, 15 November 2022; MoD, '[Nationaal Plan NAVO](#)', KST 28676-450, 26 January 2024.

<sup>311</sup> NATO, '[NATO Defence Planning Capability Review 2023/2024 The Netherlands](#)', 2024; MoD, '[NATO Report DPCR 2023 and 2024](#)', KST 28676-464, 2024.

<sup>312</sup> MFA, '[Integrated Foreign and Security Strategy](#)', 2018; MoD, '[NAVO-rapport DPCR 2023 en 2024](#)', KST 28676-464, 2024.

The Netherlands also contributes personnel and equipment to NATO training and missions. The largest Dutch personnel contribution in the defence of NATO territory is the contribution to the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Lithuania since 2017 and in Romania since 2022.<sup>313</sup> The Netherlands has also been regularly contributing fighter aircraft to NATO's air policing missions for years, including over the Benelux, Poland, Bulgaria and Estonia.<sup>314</sup> The Netherlands also contributes to the Standing Naval Forces, which provide the alliance with a permanent, ready-to-deploy maritime capability in times of crisis or heightened tension.

As part of crisis management operations (mainly conducted outside NATO territory), the Netherlands has contributed to NATO missions in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Iraq over the past decade.<sup>315</sup> The Netherlands has also been providing military capacity to NATO's rapid reaction force for many years (see §5.3.4).<sup>316</sup>

Within NATO, it is agreed that member states contribute personnel to missions and operations in proportion to the size of their armed forces.<sup>317</sup> As the Dutch armed forces represent roughly 1% of NATO's total military strength, the Netherlands is expected to contribute approximately 1% of total personnel deployed in NATO missions.<sup>318</sup> However, when it comes to missions beyond NATO territory, the Dutch personnel contribution has typically fallen below this fair share of 1% (see Figure 3).

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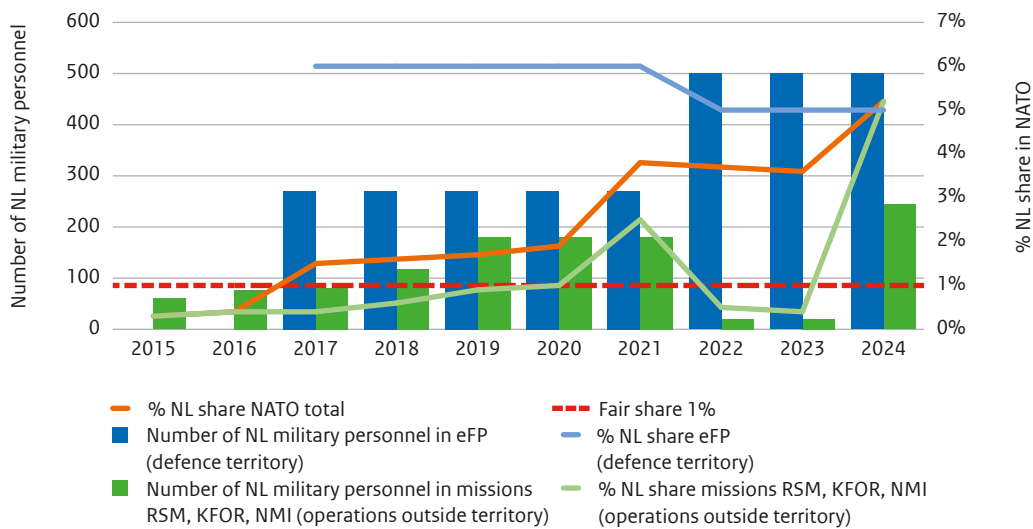
<sup>313</sup> MoD, '[Rapportage internationale militaire samenwerking 2020](#)', KST 33279-32, 18 December 2020; MFA, '[Vaststelling begrotingsstaat MFA voor 2022](#)', KST 35925V-84, 2022; MoD and MFA, '[Nederlandse bijdrage aan NAVO Battle Group in Roemenië](#)', KST 28676-404, 20 April 2022; MoD & MFA, '[Voortgangsrapportage Nederlandse inzet oostflank NAVO](#)', KST 28676-433, 2023.

<sup>314</sup> MoD, '[Update nationaal plan NAVO en Nederlandse militaire bijdrage aan NAVO Air Policing](#)', KST 28676-425, 22 December 2022; MoD and MFA, '[Voortgangsrapportage Nederlandse inzet oostflank NAVO](#)', KST 28676-433, 2023. MFA, '[Internationale Veiligheidsstrategie](#)', KST 33694-1, 2013.

<sup>316</sup> The NRF consists of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force that can be deployed within two to three days, the Initial Follow-on Forces Group that can reinforce this task force at short notice, and the Follow-on Forces Group with no defined response time.

<sup>317</sup> MoD, '[Reactie op kritiek van de NAVO op Nederlandse Defensie-inzet](#)', KST 28676-421, 2022; MoD, '[Reactie op verzoek commissie over de bevindingen over de Stand van Defensie voorjaar 2023](#)', KST 36410-X-6, 19 September 2023.

<sup>318</sup> This is calculated based on 33,600 active military personnel excluding reserve troops in the Netherlands and 3,222,335 active military personnel excluding reserve troops of the 32 NATO allies combined. Source: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, '[The military balance 2024](#)', 2024.



**Figure 3 Dutch personnel deployment in NATO missions in Afghanistan (RSM), Kosovo (KFOR), Iraq (NMI), Lithuania and Romania (eFP)<sup>319</sup>**

However, the Dutch contribution of personnel to the defence of NATO territory itself is well above the benchmark, amounting to 5%-6%, which also puts the total Dutch contribution well above the fair share of 1%.<sup>320</sup> In addition, the Netherlands has also made a substantial *equipment* contribution to NATO missions in recent years, including the provision of Chinook helicopters, Patriot air defence systems, MQ-9 drones and F-35 fighter jets.

Interviews with policy officials at the Ministry of Defence and military personnel reveal a strong preference for military deployment in missions and operations in a NATO context over military deployment in an EU context.<sup>321</sup> Familiarity plays a role here: the Dutch armed forces have been operating in NATO missions for decades and are trained according to NATO standards. Respondents also indicated that they view NATO as the key institution for safeguarding territorial integrity. Moreover, they consider it important that NATO military deployments contribute to NATO defence preparedness. In short, NATO is described as being ‘in the DNA’ of the Dutch armed forces.

### 5.3.3 Dutch contribution to EU capabilities

As outlined in § 5.2.4, the EU Capability Development Plan does set priorities for the development of military capabilities, but unlike NATO, the EU does not make binding agreements with individual member states on the specific military capabilities they are expected to maintain. For EU member states that are also NATO members, such as the Netherlands, the NATO defence planning process therefore remains the primary guiding framework.

<sup>319</sup> Source: SIPRI database of multilateral peace operations ; Defence, Evaluatie bijdrage aan missies en operaties en voortgangsrapportages [2015](#), [2016](#), [2017](#), [2018](#), [2019](#), [2020](#), [2021](#), [2022-2023](#); [2023-2024](#); MFA and MoD, ‘Voortgangsrapportage over de bredere veiligheidsinzet in Irak 2023-2024’, KST 27925-967, 15 May 2024; MFA, ‘Aanvullende artikel-100 brief over de verlenging van de Nederlandse force protection bijdrage aan NAVO Missie Irak’, KST 27925-980, 22 November 2024; MoD and MFA, ‘Nederlandse bijdrage aan NAVO-luchtruimactiviteiten in Estland en verlenging bijdrage enhanced Forward Presence in Litouwen’, KST 29521-481, 6 May 2024; NAVO, ‘Factsheet: NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence’, [October 2020](#), [February 2021](#), [February 2022](#), [June 2022](#), [November 2022](#).

<sup>320</sup> These figures exclude commitments to air policing missions over Benelux and the eastern flank, and the stationing of Patriots on the eastern flank. No complete overview of the total NATO deployment is publicly available, so it is not possible to give an opinion on Dutch contributions.

<sup>321</sup> Interviews staff from the MoD and the NATO PR.



In recent years, however, the Netherlands has actively supported the strengthening of the MPCC as a European military-strategic headquarters in Brussels.<sup>322</sup> Although the Netherlands initially opposed the establishment of such a European command centre, for fear of duplication with NATO, since 2020 our country has started to play a constructive role in the further development of the MPCC.<sup>323</sup> For instance, the Netherlands was one of the first member states to provide staff to the headquarters and, since mid-2023, the Netherlands has also provided the director general (and thus the executive head) of the MPCC.<sup>324</sup> In addition, the Netherlands contributes financially to EU missions on a voluntary basis.<sup>325</sup>

### 5.3.4 Dutch contribution to EU missions

The EU has been conducting missions and operations, which can be either civilian or military, since 2003. These missions and operations focus primarily on capacity building, crisis management and conflict prevention.

#### 'Fair share' calculation

As there are no formal agreements in the EU on what each country's fair share of military missions constitutes,<sup>326</sup> we use the same benchmark in this report as for NATO. We therefore assume that a country's personnel contribution should be proportional to the size of its armed forces relative to the size of all armed forces combined. The size of the Dutch armed forces compared to all EU armed forces combined is 2.5%.<sup>327</sup>

In the case of civilian missions, the EU does not maintain official metrics for the size of each member state's personnel contribution. In this report, we assume that member states' personnel contributions are proportional to the relative size of their GDP. For the Netherlands, this means that a contribution of 6% would be *fair*.<sup>328</sup>

#### Actual contributions

The size of the Dutch personnel contribution to EU military missions has fluctuated in recent years:

- In the period 2015-2017, the Netherlands contributed more than 3% of the total EU military personnel, providing slightly more than the fair share of 2.5% in terms of personnel and/or equipment identified in this report (see Figure 4). This contribution consisted mainly of the deployment of four Dutch naval vessels to an EU mission to prevent and combat piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast (Operation Atalanta) and to an EU military operation against people smugglers in the Mediterranean (Operation Sophia). These ships carried between 50 and 200 military personnel and were deployed for between one and five months.
- In the years 2018-2022, on the other hand, the Dutch contribution to EU military missions and operations dropped sharply, with only 13 to 16 military personnel participating, well below 1% of the total military in the EU context.
- The Dutch contribution returned to fair share levels with contributions to an EU training mission in Ukraine in 2022 and the deployment of 150 marines to the EU peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina from October 2023.
- In 2024, the Netherlands' contributions to EU military missions exceeded the fair share benchmark, driven by the continued commitment to the Bosnia mission and the deployment of the logistics support ship Karel Doorman to the EU mission in the Red Sea, targeting Houthi rebel threats.

<sup>322</sup> MoD, 'Van der Laan vanaf medio 2023 nieuwe hoofd EU Military Staff', 2022; MFA, 'Kabinetsreactie "Europese veiligheid"', KST 21501-28-211, 2020; Tweede Kamer, 'Verslag van een commissiedebat, gehouden op 17 maart 2022, over hoofdlijnen Defensiebeleid', KST 35925X-60, 6 April 2022; MFA, 'Kabinetsreactie op IOB-evaluatie EU GVDB 2016-2019', KST 21501-28-213, 2020; Defence, 'Defensievisie 2035', 2020; MoD, 'Agenda RBZ Defensie 16 juni 2020', KST 21501-28-205, 2020; Cabinet, 'coalitieakkoord 2021-2025', 2021; Defence, 'Defensienota 2022', 2022.

<sup>323</sup> Interviews with PR staff at the EU and EU institutions; IOB, 'Pragmatisme voorbij', 2020.

<sup>324</sup> Interviews staff from the MFA, the EU PR and EU institutions.

<sup>325</sup> Interviews with PR staff at the EU.

<sup>326</sup> MoD, 'Reactie op bevindingen over Stand van Defensie voorjaar 2023', KST 36410-X-6, 2023.

<sup>327</sup> Based on 33,600 active military, excluding reserve forces in the Netherlands, and 1,329,300 active military, excluding reserve forces in the 27 member states combined: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 'The military balance 2024', 2024.

<sup>328</sup> This percentage is calculated based on the Netherlands' GDP of USD 1,118 billion and the EU's total of USD 18,349 billion. See: World Bank Group, 'GDP (current US\$)', n.d.

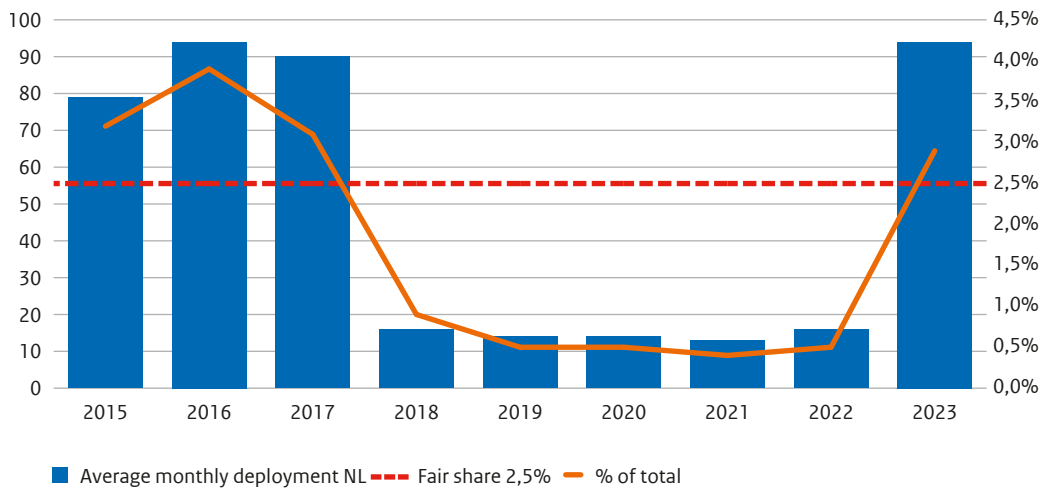


Figure 4 Dutch military deployment in EU missions and operations<sup>329</sup>

The Dutch personnel contribution to EU *civilian* missions remained relatively stable over the past decade but consistently fell short of the 6% benchmark based on the Netherlands’ share of EU GDP. From 2022 onwards, the Netherlands began to meet this fair share (see Figure 5). It is worth noting, however, that in the same year, EU member states agreed to increase their contributions to civilian missions – an ambition that no country has yet fulfilled.<sup>330</sup> We therefore conclude that, while the Netherlands performs reasonably well in relative terms, it still contributes too little manpower to civilian missions in absolute terms, just like the other EU member states.

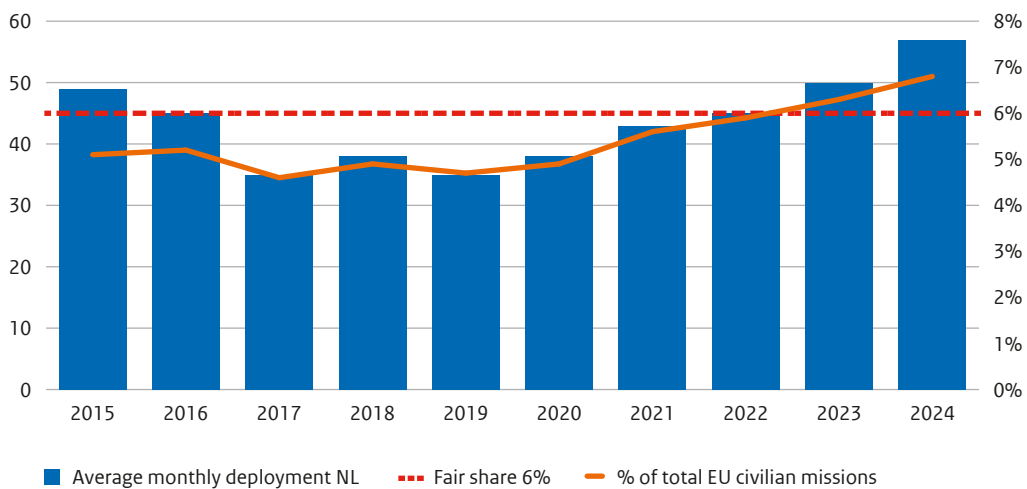


Figure 5 Dutch civilian deployment in EU missions and operations <sup>331</sup>

<sup>329</sup> Source: SIPRI peacekeeping missions database; MoD, [Mission and Operations Evaluation 2015, 2016](#); MoD, [Evaluatie bijdrage missies en operaties 2016, 2017](#); MoD, [Evaluatie bijdrage missies en operaties 2017, 2018](#); MoD, [bijdrage missies en operaties 2018, 2019](#); MoD, [Kleine missiebijdragen 2019, 2020](#); MoD, [Kleine missiebijdragen 2020, 2021](#); MoD, [Kleine missiebijdragen 2021, 2022](#); MoD, [Overige Missiebijdragen 2022 t/m 2023, 2023](#); MoD, [Overige Missiebijdragen mei 2023 t/m april 2024, 2024](#).

<sup>330</sup> EEAS, [Civilian CSDP Compact. Towards more effective civilian missions](#), 2022.

<sup>331</sup> Source: SIPRI database of peacekeeping missions; Defence, [Evaluatie bijdrage aan missies en operaties 2015, 2016](#); MoD, [Evaluatie bijdrage missies en operaties 2016, 2017](#); MoD, [Evaluatie bijdrage missies en operaties 2017, 2018](#); MoD, [bijdrage missies en operaties 2018, 2019](#); MoD, [Kleine missiebijdragen 2019, 2020](#); MoD, [Kleine missiebijdragen 2020, 2021](#); MoD, [Kleine missiebijdragen 2021, 2022](#); MoD, [Overige Missiebijdragen 2022 t/m 2023, 2023](#); MoD, [Overige Missiebijdragen mei 2023 t/m april 2024, 2024](#).

### 5.3.5 Rapid reaction forces: increasing demand

In addition to missions and operations aimed at crisis management and conflict prevention, both the EU and NATO maintain rapid reaction forces that are kept on standby for swift deployment in times of acute tension or threat.

#### *EU rapid reaction force*

In 2022, the EU's Strategic Compass stated that the EU would develop a rapid reaction capability that could be deployed at any time inside or outside European territory. This rapid reaction force has been partially operational since January 2025. It consists of 5,000 military personnel on standby.

Under the third and fourth Rutte governments, the Netherlands supported the creation of an EU rapid reaction force. The idea was to provide the EU with an instrument for crisis management operations.<sup>332</sup> The Netherlands has committed a company from the Air Mobile Brigade (150 soldiers) to the first rotation, led by Germany.<sup>333</sup> With this contribution – around 3% of total personnel – the Netherlands is delivering its fair share to the EU's rapid reaction force.

#### *NATO rapid reaction force*

NATO has maintained its rapid reaction force, the NATO Response Force, since 2002. Unlike the EU's force, the NRF has been designed not only for crisis management but also for the collective defence of allied territory.

In 2018, NATO adopted the NATO Readiness Initiative (NRI). This set the goal of having 30 mechanised battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 battleships ready for deployment within 30 days by 2020 to complement the existing rapid reaction force.<sup>334</sup>

At the Madrid Summit in 2022, NATO decided to restructure and scale up the entire force, eliminating the rapid reaction force. The new NATO Force Model was subsequently introduced in 2024. Under this model, NATO has three stages of readiness: stage 1 consists of 100,000 soldiers deployable in 0 to 10 days; stage 2 consists of 200,000 soldiers deployable in 10 to 30 days; and stage 3 consists of 500,000 soldiers deployable between 30 and 180 days. In addition, NATO maintains a small, highly deployable Allied Reaction Force for immediate response.<sup>335</sup>

The Netherlands has contributed (more than) its fair share to NATO's rapid reaction forces discussed above in recent years.

#### *A single set of forces in NATO and EU*

The demand for contributions of personnel and equipment from EU and NATO member states has increased significantly in recent years. Relative to the size of its armed forces, the Netherlands currently needs to have 125<sup>336</sup> military personnel consistently available for EU deployment at short notice, and 3,000<sup>337</sup> for NATO. This means that over 9% of the total 33,600<sup>338</sup> military personnel on active duty at the Netherlands' disposal must be on standby, in addition to those already deployed in missions and operations.

The demand for military personnel deployable for missions, operations and rapid reaction forces, as well as for pre-deployment training, is likely to increase in the coming years.<sup>339</sup> Meeting the various expectations of allied partners is therefore becoming an increasingly complex puzzle.

<sup>332</sup> MFA, '[Geannoteerde agenda van de raad Buitenlandse Zaken van 21 maart 2022](#)', KST 21501-02-2467, 11 March 2022; MoD, '[Geannoteerde agenda Raad Buitenlandse Zaken Defensie van 23 mei 2023 te Brussel Defensieraad](#)', KST 21501-28-253, 10 May 2023.

<sup>333</sup> Interviews staff from the MFA, EU institutions and EU member state representatives. Tweede Kamer, '[Verslag van een schriftelijk overleg over de geannoteerde agenda Raad Buitenlandse Zaken Defensie 14 november 2023](#)', KST 21501-28-60, 20 November 2023

<sup>334</sup> NATO, '[NATO Readiness Initiative](#)', June 2018.

<sup>335</sup> J. Deni, '[The new NATO Force Model: ready for launch?](#)' NATO Defence College, May 2024.

<sup>336</sup> 2.5% of the total 5,000 deployable in 20 days.

<sup>337</sup> 1% of the total 300,000 deployable in 1 month.

<sup>338</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies, '[The military balance 2024](#)', 2024.

<sup>339</sup> T. Jungholt, '[Nato fordert 49 weitere Kampftruppen-Brigaden](#)', *Welt*, 6 October 2024.

Like other EU member states that are also NATO allies, the Netherlands maintains a single set of forces that can be deployed for different purposes. Those involved in both the EU and NATO indicate that this challenge can be partly addressed through dual commitments to rapid reaction forces, with troops on standby for both the EU and NATO. These dual commitments would have to take into account both shorter and longer reaction times. For example, a soldier who must be deployable within 30 days for the EU Rapid Reaction Force could also be on standby for NATO deployment within 180 days.<sup>340</sup>

However, this approach has its limitations. Indeed, double-committed standby troops deployed to one reaction force are no longer available to the other reaction force. This directly affects the deployability and credibility of the second force.

According to those involved, NATO deployments are likely to take priority in practice. NATO is, after all, the organisation responsible for the collective defence of allied territory.<sup>341</sup> Indeed, defence of one's own territory (main task 1) takes precedence over missions and operations taking place outside this territory (main task 2). Another factor is that military personnel often have a strong operational preference for deployment under NATO command, as discussed above, given the long-standing familiarity with NATO standards developed through decades of cooperation and training (see § 5.3.2). As a result, the risks of double commitments undermining reliability and deployability are higher for the EU than for NATO.

Nevertheless, the Netherlands is committed to strengthening the EU's role in security and defence, including efforts to reinforce the MPCC headquarters and operationalise the EU rapid reaction force.<sup>342</sup> This requires both equipment and personnel investment. In this context, double commitments pose a risk to EU capabilities, as noted above. On the other hand, they also make possible the deployment of EU forces that might otherwise not be available.

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<sup>340</sup> Interviews staff from the MoD, the NATO PR, the EU RP and EU institutions; D. Zandee and A. Stoetman, 'Realising the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity: opportunities and pitfalls', *Clingendael Institute*, 2022.

<sup>341</sup> Interviews staff from the MFA, MoD, the NATO, EU institutions and external experts.

<sup>342</sup> MFA, [Staat van de Unie 2022](#), 2022, p. 19; MFA, [Staat van de Europese Unie 2024](#), 2023, p. 15.





# 6 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter provides an overall assessment of the Netherlands' integrated foreign and security policies in relation to the EU and NATO. Based on the response to the main question of this review, we present our main conclusion, which is further elaborated through four sub-conclusions in § 6.1. Subsequently, in § 6.2, we offer five recommendations for the government to strengthen the integrated foreign and security policy in the context of the EU and NATO.

This evaluation was completed when the transatlantic relationship came under pressure and was undergoing significant change. However, as of mid-March 2025, it is still too early to draw definitive conclusions about NATO's future role based on current developments. The conclusions and recommendations presented here are made under the assumption that NATO will continue to play a vital role in Dutch security. At the same time, it is clear – at the time of writing – that Europe must take significant steps to ensure its own security. The evolving geopolitical landscape presents not only risks but also strategic opportunities for the Netherlands and Europe. Moreover, the lessons learned from 2020-2024 remain highly relevant for the Netherlands' commitment to partnerships in the broader European security architecture.



## 6.1 Conclusions

The central question of this evaluation was:

*What conclusions can be drawn about the effectiveness of Dutch security policy towards NATO, the EU and improving NATO-EU coherence during the period 2020-2024, and what lessons can be learned for future policy?*

This evaluation study finds that the Netherlands' efforts in the NATO and EU context have been effective but that there is room for improvement in several areas. This is reflected in the main conclusion:

*During the period under review, the Netherlands' engagement in NATO and the EU has contributed to the country's security. The diplomatic efforts and the knowledge, manpower and resources provided by the Netherlands have strengthened NATO and the EU. However, opportunities are still being missed. During the period under review, the Netherlands lacked a clear guiding strategy to inform decision-making on its NATO and EU commitments.*

This conclusion is further elaborated in the study in the four sub-conclusions summarised below.

*Sub-conclusion 1. The Dutch commitment to NATO and the EU contributed to the security of the Netherlands during the period under review. However, in an unstable geopolitical context, continuous effort is required to strengthen NATO and the EU in line with Dutch interests.*

It is difficult to determine precisely how much the EU and NATO contribute to the security of the Netherlands, but their impact is likely to have been significant. In international power politics, the Netherlands has limited means to defend its position independently. It is therefore in the country's best interest to pursue its security objectives through international and multilateral partnerships. By cooperating with other countries in NATO and the EU, the Netherlands can influence the international context in which it operates. These organisations also give the Netherlands access to knowledge and opportunities to respond to external threats.

International partnerships are crucial to the Netherlands, especially as geopolitical instability and external threats increase. NATO is considered the most important alliance for military defence. The Netherlands is highly dependent on the NATO alliance for its military defence – and within that alliance, particularly on the US. However, the US appears increasingly reluctant to commit unconditionally to Europe's security. Moreover, the transactional approach of the current US president is likely to create unexpected situations that put further pressure on Europe and the Netherlands. As a result, constructive US participation within NATO is no longer a given.

What makes the situation precarious is that the EU is currently not in a strong position on several fronts. Europe faces economic pressures, has limited military capabilities and suffers from a fragmented defence industry. In 2025, Europe faces major challenges, including a war on the continent in Ukraine. The challenges facing Europe directly impact the Netherlands' security position. Therefore, the Netherlands must use the available resources and manpower for foreign and security policy as strategically as possible, with a long-term vision for strengthening the European security architecture and the role that the EU and NATO should play in it.

*Sub-conclusion 2. During the period under review, the Dutch government did not develop a guiding strategy to shape the division of roles and responsibilities between NATO and the EU, nor to enhance their complementarity, on the basis of which our country could determine distinct priorities and commitments for each organisation.*

Security in international relations has become an increasingly broad policy area in recent years. Whereas the focus was once primarily on conventional military threats, current risks and technological developments have brought new themes into the scope of security policy, such as hybrid warfare, cyberattacks, economic coercion and terrorism.

In response to this expanding risk landscape, both NATO and the EU have begun to address a wider range of security issues, including cybersecurity and critical infrastructure protection. In addition, the EU has ambitions to become a geopolitical security actor, conducting both civilian missions and military missions and operations. The EU has also increasingly focused on strengthening the European defence industry.

NATO and the EU, whose memberships largely overlap, are increasingly active in the same or adjacent policy areas. Both organisations aim to safeguard the security of their member states based on shared democratic values. This overlap, however, also introduces a risk of competition between them. However, both organisations have distinct capabilities. For example, NATO provides a nuclear deterrent and strong military and operational capacity, while the EU has legislative powers and far greater financial resources. This suggests potential for closer EU-NATO cooperation. Both organisations could reinforce each other if cooperation were more complementary – that is, if their mutual cooperation were more explicitly focused on combining their respective strengths.

In this context, the Netherlands' decision in 2020 to broaden its foreign and security policies, through a *dual-track approach* aimed at reinforcing both NATO and EU security efforts, seems a well-founded choice.

However, during the period under review, the Netherlands did not develop a guiding strategy on how the EU and NATO can complement each other on sub-themes to determine which priorities the Netherlands will pursue in each organisation. Instead, it focused on outlining what each organisation should *not* do in order to prevent unnecessary duplication of activities. What NATO and the EU should do individually to complement each other has not been specified.

During the 2020-2024 period, the Netherlands adopted a constructive and pragmatic approach to strengthening cooperation between the EU and NATO. These efforts primarily led to improvements in *informal* cooperation between the two organisations. Contacts between the international staff of NATO and EU institutions have intensified, facilitating the exchange of unclassified information. These closer staff-level contacts have improved mutual understanding and coordination, for example, regarding the timing of public statements. The Netherlands' pragmatic approach has thus contributed, albeit modestly, to improving EU-NATO cooperation.

62 |

However, the assumption in Dutch policy that improved cooperation automatically leads to greater complementarity does not always hold. Even if NATO and the EU have a shared understanding at the staff level of what they want to achieve, this does not necessarily translate into coordinated goals at the Member State level to promote mutual complementarity. In practice, the individual countries, as the organisations' members, ultimately determine the extent to which the EU and NATO can genuinely complement each other. The Netherlands' pragmatic approach to improving EU-NATO cooperation has yielded results, but it has also exposed the limitations of what is possible at the staff level. Formal coordination is needed among EU Member States and NATO allies to truly advance EU-NATO complementarity and cooperation. However, certain political obstacles, such as the frozen conflict between NATO ally Türkiye and EU member Cyprus, remain outside the Netherlands' direct influence.

The current shifts in transatlantic relations are further constraining the scope of EU-NATO cooperation. The level of complementarity and cooperation between the EU and NATO that is possible – and in the interest of Dutch security – will partially depend on how the US positions itself within NATO. Now more than ever, a clear Dutch strategy is needed to guide its engagement with the EU and NATO and shape the future of EU-NATO cooperation.

With the recent appointments of a new Secretary-General at NATO, a new European Commission and a new High Representative at the EU, there seems to be some scope for improved EU-NATO cooperation. The Netherlands could take advantage of this opportunity. As a founding member of the EU and a NATO ally from the start, our country enjoys a good reputation in both organisations. With The Hague set to host a NATO summit in June 2025, the Netherlands is well-positioned to play an encouraging role in further EU-NATO cooperation.

*Sub-conclusion 3. The Netherlands' diplomatic efforts within NATO and the EU are generally effective, but there are opportunities to exert more influence.*

The policy choices made within NATO and the EU are always the result of the combined input of the allies and/or member states. The results achieved by the Netherlands are therefore by definition dependent on the efforts of other countries. Our evaluation shows that, within the space available, the Netherlands is predominantly effective in exerting influence on policy.

One of the Netherlands' key strengths is its ability to take a middle-ground position in policy negotiations and to seek constructive, pragmatic solutions through coalition-building. As a result, many countries see the Netherlands as a constructive partner. Dutch diplomats also remain easily accessible to other countries and the international staff of NATO and the EU. This contributes to the Netherlands' ability to influence policy effectively.

The Netherlands also has other capacities to effectively influence EU and NATO security and defence policies in other ways. For example, the Netherlands is generally well-prepared and brings relevant expertise to discussions. It also often takes the initiative in policy development, for example by putting forward proposals and building coalitions around them. As a result, the Netherlands is often involved early in policy processes, which increases its ability to exert meaningful influence. Dutch policy towards NATO and the EU is also relatively well-coordinated. This means that, despite lacking a guiding strategy, the Netherlands speaks with one voice on 'both sides of the city of Brussels', where the headquarters of the EU and NATO are located. To this end, the Netherlands benefits from double-hatted positions, where the same individuals serve in both the EU and NATO Permanent Representations. This double-hatted approach is only effective when these officials handle the same dossiers in both roles. Indeed, this allows them to link certain developments across the two organisations. It is equally important that regular NATO and EU staff working on the same dossiers stay in close contact – both with each other and with the relevant ministries. This is not always the case and could be better managed. That said, coordination between ministries is generally strong.

As the concept of security continues to broaden, effective national alignment and coordination between different ministries, on the one hand, and between The Hague and the PRs in Brussels, on the other, will become increasingly challenging. Although the Netherlands is usually represented in The Hague and Brussels by competent civil servants and diplomats, its limited capacity to engage on international security issues within the EU and NATO is a handicap. In recent years, the number of working groups and other consultative bodies within the EU and NATO has grown. This has increased the pressure to allocate the available capacities as effectively as possible and to involve the right ministries at the right time in the policymaking process in Brussels. This is particularly important for issues related to resilience and hybrid threats.

63

Finally, the Netherlands could also take a more strategic and proactive approach in using the insider perspective of Dutch nationals working in the EU and NATO. In the past, Dutch nationals have held influential roles on the international staffs of NATO and EU institutions and benefited from them. However, this has often occurred without a predefined strategy. There is room to steer more deliberately towards placing Dutch nationals in positions aligned with Dutch priorities, particularly in the field of international security. Indeed, having more Dutch nationals employed or seconded to the EU and NATO would strengthen the Netherlands' intelligence position. While individuals working at the EU or NATO are not tasked with representing national interests, their expertise can still be drawn upon without compromising their neutrality.

In short, there is room for improvement, particularly in terms of timely participation in working groups and more strategic use of secondments. Here too, a more explicit strategy for the Netherlands' commitment to a European security architecture could provide valuable direction.

*Sub-conclusion 4. The Netherlands constructively contributes knowledge, manpower and resources to strengthen EU and NATO security policy, but some opportunities are being missed.*

For EU and NATO international security policies to effectively contribute to the Netherlands' security, the ambitions outlined in EU and NATO policy documents must be translated into concrete actions. This translation depends on what member states can offer in terms of knowledge, capacity building, military personnel, equipment and defence cooperation. The Netherlands contributes constructively to both NATO and the EU in terms of knowledge, capacity building, military personnel and equipment. However, its ambitions often surpass the concrete efforts it makes to achieve them. This evaluation examines (1) efforts to counter hybrid threats, (2) the strengthening of the defence industry, and (3) contributions to military missions and readiness:

### *Countering hybrid threats*

The Netherlands has helped develop toolboxes with policy instruments to counter hybrid threats. The Netherlands has also helped develop response teams with experts who can assist countries with acute hostile hybrid activities. In recent years, it has also played a role in establishing sanctions regimes targeting actors involved in malicious cyber activities against EU Member States.

The Netherlands' contributions through these initiatives are helpful and require additional efforts. For example, the national response framework is not yet fully aligned with international response mechanisms. The Netherlands is also reluctant to share information on hybrid threat incidents in EU and NATO working groups. In some cases, this caution is justified. It could involve sensitive information that must not be leaked. Or it may be clear in advance that it will be difficult to reach a consensus on a response. However, limited information sharing also has clear downsides: it hampers the development and deployment of joint response options. Strengthening the EU and NATO responses to hybrid threats requires concrete cases on which these interventions can be developed. The Netherlands could contribute more in this area.

### *Strengthening the defence industry*

The Netherlands supports the development of EU policies and programmes to strengthen the European defence industry. The Netherlands also seeks to buy defence equipment jointly with other countries where possible. While these initiatives are still limited, they help to reduce the fragmentation of the European defence market.

The question is what role the Netherlands can play in the future to more effectively contribute to a stronger European defence industry. This involves financial considerations, such as the level of Dutch financial contributions and the extent to which Dutch companies and knowledge institutions can access European defence markets and subsidies. It also involves geopolitical interests, including the degree to which European countries seek greater strategic autonomy in security and defence, while maintaining defence cooperation with partners outside the EU. For now, the Netherlands' pragmatic approach – balancing efforts to strengthen the EU defence industry with a continued willingness to cooperate with non-EU allies such as the US and the UK – appears to be effective. However, strengthening the EU defence industry will clearly require significantly more investments – beyond what is currently available and what the Netherlands is willing to commit. For now, the Dutch government has expressed its desire to reduce financial contributions to the EU and has opposed joint EU loans. While these positions are understandable from a financial point of view, they limit the ability to strengthen the EU defence market. Moreover, it is not only the level of European defence investment that matters but also the extent to which this investment contributes to more joint development and procurement of weapon systems, as well as improved cooperation between European armed forces.

### *Contributing to military missions and preparedness*

The Netherlands actively contributes to the operational capacity of both the EU and NATO. In NATO, our country has lagged far behind in terms of defence investment, but now meets the 2% target. However, the Netherlands does not yet provide the agreed capabilities (such as weapon systems and military personnel). That said, over the past decade, the Netherlands has contributed more than its fair share to NATO missions and operations. In the EU context, the Netherlands has been strengthening its military operational capacity since 2020. In addition, the Netherlands has taken steps to help strengthen the EU's military headquarters, the MPCC. However, civilian contributions until 2021 and military contributions between 2018 and 2022 to EU missions and operations still remained below the fair share that can be expected from the Netherlands. After 2022, Dutch civilian and military contributions in the EU context increased. However, like other EU member states, the Netherlands still contributes too little in absolute terms.

Strengthening EU missions is not only important for the missions themselves but also for developing an EU that can conduct military operations independently. This military capability should be further developed to reduce the EU's reliance on external support.

In addition to missions and operations, NATO and the EU have rapid reaction forces for deployment in times of acute tension or threat. The Netherlands plays a meaningful role in these forces within both organisations. However, the demand for military personnel deployable for missions, operations and rapid reaction forces, as well as for pre-deployment training, is growing rapidly, particularly from NATO.

Meeting the various expectations of allied partners is therefore becoming an increasingly complex puzzle. One solution is dual commitments, where the same troops are on standby for both EU and NATO rapid reaction forces. However, if these troops are called up, it could undermine operational readiness and, ultimately, the credibility of the rapid reaction forces.

## 6.2 Recommendations

*Recommendation 1: Develop a guiding Dutch strategy to strengthen engagement in the EU, NATO and the broader European security architecture and to promote complementarity between the two organisations.*

It is currently in the interest of Dutch security to rely on a stronger EU and a stronger NATO. The two organisations already collaborate on several issues and share overlapping areas of focus. In a context of limited capacity, efficient engagement requires strategic choices – made even more urgent by the rapidly shifting geopolitical landscape. The cabinet should therefore develop a guiding strategy for the Dutch commitment to strengthening the European security architecture, supported by a clear vision of the roles of the EU and NATO. This strategy should be flexible enough to respond to volatility, yet provide clear direction for making informed decisions to achieve defined goals. To support the development of such a strategy, we make the following concrete recommendations:

- **Define strategic priorities for engagement in the EU and NATO, particularly in light of recent geopolitical developments in the transatlantic relationship.** This includes separate consideration of: (1) institutional cooperation between the EU and NATO, given their potentially complementary capabilities, (2) the relationship between European NATO members and the US, (3) the impact of that relationship on the functioning of NATO, and (4) the impact of that relationship on the scope for EU-NATO cooperation in relation to Dutch security. Also consider possible future scenarios, both desired and undesired, for the transatlantic relationship, and regularly reassess the assumptions underpinning current policies.
- **Commit to a more substantial European role in European security, with independent operational capacity and a European pillar within NATO.** The declining US interest in contributing to European security makes it essential for European countries to take greater responsibility. The cabinet should commit to a structured plan for this transition. At the same time, it is important to keep non-EU partners, especially the US, closely involved in European security and defence cooperation, while safeguarding Dutch and European interests. Dutch embassies in the US could play a role in explaining to American counterparts how EU security and defence activities complement NATO's role. However, while maintaining a strong transatlantic relationship remains important, strengthening European security and defence cooperation must be a priority. This need not rule out collaboration with the US or other partners. But European defence cooperation should not be undermined by bilateral arms deals that bypass collective efforts.
- **Develop a constructive vision of EU-NATO cooperation and complementarity and engage in dialogue with other member states.** In recent years, promoting complementarity between the EU and NATO has largely focused on avoiding duplication. However, given recent developments in the transatlantic relationship and Europe's growing responsibility for its own security, avoiding duplication is no longer a priority. What is needed now is a forward-looking narrative based on a *dual-track approach*. In this forward-looking narrative, the Netherlands should articulate clearly how their respective strengths of these two organisations complement each other and how this complementarity serves Dutch security. These include:
  - joint military capability planning, using NATO's planning capabilities aligned with European defence investments and based on common standards (see also recommendation 3);
  - mutual reinforcement of resilience in the context of Article 5 by aligning NATO planning capabilities with EU policies on societal resilience and critical infrastructure protection (see also recommendation 4);
  - coordinated responses to hybrid threats through better alignment and use of EU and NATO instruments (see also recommendation 4).

- **Build coalitions and partnerships to advance security policy, not only within the EU and NATO but also with countries such as the United Kingdom, Türkiye, Switzerland, Austria and Canada.** When developing a strategy for Dutch engagement in the EU and NATO, take into account the interests of non-EU NATO allies and non-NATO EU member states. Form coalitions with like-minded countries to promote initiatives and broaden support for deeper cooperation. In doing so, also consider European interests outside the EU and NATO frameworks, and include countries such as the UK, Türkiye, Switzerland, Austria and Canada.

**Recommendation 2: Strengthen the Netherlands' capacity to influence security policy in the EU and NATO.**

This evaluation found that the Dutch capacity for policy advocacy needs strengthening in several areas. Our main recommendations in this regard are:

- **Establish clear working guidelines for the Dutch position in the EU and NATO.** Building on the strategy proposed above, negotiators at both the EU and NATO PRs should be supported with clear framework instructions. These should enable them to develop Dutch positions on both political and military aspects of policy proposals in a timely and consistent manner.
- **Assign double-hatted staff from the Permanent Representations of the EU and NATO to work on the same issues in both settings.** Using double-hatted positions only adds value if the staff handle the same issues at both the EU and NATO, enabling them to follow developments closely at both organisations and draw meaningful conclusions between the two policy processes.
- **Provide more substantial top-down guidance to encourage knowledge exchange between policy officers across ministries and between The Hague and Brussels.** Effective coordination requires that staff working on the same or related dossiers are aware of each other's activities. While initiatives such as recess consultations are valuable, opportunities for the exchange of knowledge remain limited outside these settings. More deliberate steering is needed to encourage regular contact between the staff of relevant ministries, between the staff of the two PRs in Brussels, and between PR staff and their counterparts at ministries in The Hague.
- **Develop an action plan for strategic secondment for key positions in the EU and NATO, aligned with a broader guiding strategy.** Based on the strategy proposed above, a targeted secondment plan should be drawn up to place Dutch nationals in strategic postings within EU institutions and NATO's international staff. Importantly, each staff member should have designated points of contact in The Hague and at the PR from the outset, along with clear agreements on objectives and regular communication.
- **Ensure that Dutch ambitions on hybrid threats, the defence industry, and military missions are better aligned with actual contributions in the EU and NATO contexts.** The Netherlands often expresses ambitious positions in the EU and NATO context on countering hybrid threats, strengthening the defence industry and contributing to military missions that often go beyond the concrete deployment that the Netherlands subsequently delivers. The actual implementation of stated ambitions is an area for improvement.

**Recommendation 3: Continue efforts to strengthen the European defence industry to enhance European security.**

The Netherlands supports the development of a stronger European defence industry that also reinforces NATO. This evaluation has described the Netherlands' efforts to contribute to this objective in recent years. To continue these efforts effectively, we offer the following recommendations:

- **In addition to committing to increased defence spending, make a clear commitment to increase European defence cooperation.** The focus should not only be on increasing (national) defence budgets, but in particular on strengthening and improving cooperation in equipment development and procurement. This would help reduce fragmentation in the European defence industry and improve interoperability and operational cooperation between European armed forces.
- **Improve alignment between the NATO planning process and European defence investments to develop an assertive European pillar within NATO.** We recommend exploring targeted ways to improve the alignment between NATO's defence planning process and EU instruments such as the CARD overview of ongoing and planned European defence investments, the European Defence Industry Programme, and spending under the European Defence Fund. Aligning these efforts could help ensure that European investments strengthen both European military capabilities and address capability gaps identified in the NATO planning process. The guiding principle should be that European programmes focus on capability gaps identified by NATO that also, in line with the EU's Capability Development Plan, contribute to European security and to a 'European pillar within NATO'.



- **Advocate for European legislation establishing NATO military equipment and ammunition standards.** In addition, maintain scope for European standards in the case of *dual-use* and promote EU-NATO cooperation on standardisation.
- **Continue efforts to improve information sharing between the European Defence Agency and the NATO Support and Procurement Agency.** As described in this evaluation, the Netherlands previously proposed – but was unsuccessful in establishing – a structured dialogue between the European Defence Agency and the NATO agency NSPA to better align EU and NATO defence planning. Despite this, the Netherlands should continue seeking ways to overcome existing obstacles, including those related to the Cyprus issue.
- **Develop joint defence projects with like-minded countries, including the production of critical enablers on European soil.** As defence industry investments currently come from national budgets, the Netherlands should actively pursue joint projects with other European countries. Given the political will required, it is important that Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Economic Affairs seek opportunities with their counterparts from other countries. Examples include:
  - A flagship project involving the procurement of a joint military capability by both NATO and EU countries;
  - a European co-production of systems, similar to the German Patriots co-production;
  - joint European development of critical enablers such as strategic reconnaissance, satellite communications, air defence and missile defence.
- **Explore ways for European defence spending to be counted towards NATO's investment benchmark.** In cases of joint European defence investments, it should be examined whether and how these expenditures can be counted towards NATO's investment guideline, which is currently set at 2% of GDP. A possible condition is that these joint investments directly address capability gaps identified in NATO's defence planning process.

**Recommendation 4: Continue efforts to strengthen international cooperation to counter hybrid threats and enhance resilience.**

In addition to investing in military defence and deterrence, it is important to continue strengthening societal resilience against hybrid threats and foreign interference. Hybrid conflict is already a reality in Europe and may intensify in the near future. When investing in countering hybrid threats and improving resilience, the following actions are recommended:

- **Improve coordination between EU and NATO efforts to enhance resilience and counter hybrid threats.** Both the EU and NATO are constantly developing their knowledge on hybrid conflict conduct and response capabilities. Both organisations have their own areas of specialisation. NATO has a great deal of knowledge about building societal resilience and the civilian support needed for military operations in an Article 5 situation (e.g. to move troops and equipment or to support hospitals). The EU has budgetary and legislative means to support member states, for example, protecting critical infrastructure. The EU can also impose sanctions and has defensive trade instruments. Beyond aligning positions, the EU and NATO can better coordinate their public communication and strategic messaging. For instance, following the recent sabotage of communication cables in the Baltic Sea, clearer communication could have shown how NATO's military presence complements EU legislative measures on critical infrastructure and possible sanctions. The government should therefore support a more structured EU-NATO dialogue on resilience and promote the development of joint action plans.
- **Where possible, provide more concrete cases for joint responses in the EU and NATO context.** This evaluation found that EU and NATO cooperation on hybrid threats is complex in practice, partly due to countries' reluctance to share information on hybrid incidents. Advancing the joint EU-NATO approach will require more casework to test and refine existing tools. We urge the government to give greater weight to the goal of strengthening the joint response toolbox when deciding whether or not to share information on incidents in the EU or NATO context.

- **Improve inter-departmental cooperation on international engagement related to hybrid threats and resilience.** Responding to hybrid threats and improving the resilience of society requires a whole-of-government approach. While the Nationwide Response Framework and the interdepartmental consultations on hybrid threats are helping, international engagement is not yet sufficiently coordinated, and instructions to PRs are still often ad hoc. Departments other than the MFA, Defence and NCTV are still not fully involved. To improve coordination, it is important to broaden knowledge within the government on security, resilience, hybrid threats and emerging disruptive technologies. There is also a need for greater knowledge of EU and NATO policymaking processes. In addition, greater capacity is needed within the government to share highly classified information.
- **Continue to use the independent Hybrid Centre of Excellence in Helsinki and the NATO Cyber Centre of Excellence in Tallinn as platforms for cooperation.** Both centres offer valuable opportunities for substantive cooperation with NATO and EU member states. The Hybrid Centre of Excellence, in particular, serves as an effective intermediary between the two organisations due to its independent status and ability to engage with both NATO and the EU.

*Recommendation 5: Continue efforts to strengthen the operational military capabilities of both NATO and the EU*

The Netherlands actively contributes to the operational military capabilities of both the EU and NATO. In this context, we make the following recommendations to the government:

- **Support a structured transition towards greater European responsibility for Europe's security, including the development of a European pillar within NATO.** NATO is the most important alliance for the military defence of the Netherlands. The Netherlands depends heavily on other countries within NATO for its military defence. However, with the United States showing declining interest in European defence, European countries, including the Netherlands, must take on greater responsibility. A structured plan is needed to guide this transition to greater responsibility, including investment in critical enablers developed on European soil.
- **Deepen and expand engagement in the EU context.** Dutch political ambitions in European security and defence require a greater contribution to the EU's operational military capability. It is in the Dutch interest that the EU has the military capability to stand up independently for European security interests. European politics will continue to develop independently of Dutch involvement. But by actively contributing to it, the government can help shape that policy in line with its own priorities. Increasing demands from NATO should therefore not be at the expense of Dutch contributions to the EU's military capabilities.
- **Prevent duplication of commitments to rapid reaction forces.** Double commitments of rapid response forces should be avoided wherever possible, as they risk undermining the credibility and operational readiness of both EU and NATO forces.



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## Photography

Front cover: © Rens Willems

*NATO and EU flags above the fictional world map of a strategy board game.*

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*Meeting of the North Atlantic Council on 17 October 2024 in Brussels.*

H2: © Alexandros Michailidis - Shutterstock

*Officials hang EU and NATO flags in the European Council building.*

H3: © Ministry of Foreign Affairs

*NATO flags at the Hofvijver in The Hague.*

H4: © European Council

*High Representative Kallas at the European Council.*

H5: © Ministry of Defence

*Lithuania - Dutch military personnel work and train with colleagues from other countries.*

H6: © Ministry of Defence

*HNLMS Tromp and F-35s in the Baltic Sea in response to hybrid threats.*

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*Dutch flag on military uniform*

# Annexes



# Annex 1

# Methodological justification<sup>343</sup>

## Research questions

The central question of this evaluation is:

*What conclusions can be drawn about the effectiveness of Dutch security policy towards NATO, the EU and improving NATO-EU coherence during the period 2020-2024, and what lessons can be learned for future policy?*

The central question was further explored through the following sub-questions:

1. How have the Netherlands' integrated foreign and security policies developed in relation to NATO, the EU and NATO-EU coherence?
  - a. What were the main objectives and priorities?
  - b. How is the policy being implemented?
  - c. What are the key assumptions underlying the policy, and how valid are these assumptions?
2. What choices is the Netherlands making regarding its position on the division of roles and cooperation between the EU and NATO, and how coherent is this approach?
3. To what extent has the Netherlands been effective in influencing NATO and EU policy in line with Dutch policy preferences, and what factors have contributed to this?
  - a. How is influence exercised in the EU and NATO context?
  - b. To what extent was the Netherlands involved in the different phases of agenda-setting, policymaking and decision-making?
  - c. To what extent were the conditions in place for effective Dutch policy influence?
  - d. What are the main results, and to what extent did the Netherlands contribute to achieving them?
4. To what extent does the Netherlands contribute to the concrete elaboration and implementation of the agreements reached within NATO and the EU, and what are the implications for the Netherlands?
  - a. What concrete actions and commitments (resources and personnel) are being undertaken?
  - b. How do these actions and initiatives relate to stated policy priorities on the division of roles and cooperation between the EU and NATO?
  - c. To what extent does the implementation of agreements and initiatives benefit the Netherlands?
5. What lessons can be drawn and what recommendations can be made for the future development of Dutch security policy in relation to NATO and the EU?

<sup>343</sup> The evaluation follows the research questions and research methods set out in the *Terms of Reference*. See IOB. [ToR - Dutch security policy towards NATO and EU](#). 2024.

## Research methods used

### Theory-based evaluation

This study uses a theory-based evaluation approach, following the steps below:<sup>344</sup>

1. Reconstruct the policy in context;
2. Identify key cause-and-effect relationships and underlying assumptions, including possible alternative explanations;
3. Assess the relevance of identified cause-effect relationships and assumptions for the policy;
4. Gather available evidence for cause-effect relationships and assumptions;
5. Assess the plausibility of the assumed cause-effect relationships and assumptions.

Chapter 2 addresses step 1 of this methodology by reconstructing the integrated foreign and security policies in relation to NATO and the EU. Chapter 3 reconstructs the policy theory with its cause-effect relationships and related assumptions. It assesses the validity of the cause-effect relationships and assumptions based on available evidence and evidence of possible alternative explanations. Chapter 3, therefore, addresses steps 2 to 5. Steps 3 to 5 also form the basis for Chapter 5, which discusses the Netherlands' concrete commitment beyond policy influence (i.e. how the Netherlands contributes to the implementation of policy agreements). For this purpose, we looked specifically at engagement on hybrid threats, the defence industry and military operational capabilities.

### 5-C framework

The principal methodology used to evaluate policy influence, the subject of Chapter 4, is the *five core capabilities framework*, or *5-C framework*. This methodology is designed to identify an organisation's core capabilities.<sup>345</sup> The framework has been used in several IOB evaluations to assess the extent to which the Netherlands has the capabilities to be in the best possible position to influence negotiations and policy-making processes in an international organisation.<sup>346</sup> The model distinguishes five interrelated core qualities: (1) governance with support, (2) policy coherence, (3) networks and relationships, (4) knowledge, manpower and mandate, and (5) flexibility. The model is helpful in analysing the conditions under which policy advocacy is most likely to be effective. For this evaluation, we used the following indicators within these five core qualities:

- Networks and relationships:
  - Building and maintaining contacts within The Hague, between PRs and The Hague, with other member states, with EU and NATO institutions, and with other relevant state and non-state actors (such as think tanks and interest groups)
  - Coalition building with other member states based on substance, relationships, pragmatism and a constructive approach
  - Image and reputation management, preferably by taking a connecting middle-ground position
- Knowledge, manpower and mandate:
  - Adequate mandate of actors involved in influencing
  - Personal qualities and expertise of negotiators and policy officers
  - Sufficient staffing (FTEs) and budget

<sup>344</sup> This approach is derived from: H. White and D. Phillips, '[Addressing attribution of cause and effect in small n impact evaluations: towards an integrated framework. Working Paper 15](#)', *International Initiative for Impact Evaluation*, 2012.

<sup>345</sup> The basis of the model is explained in H. Baser and P. Morgan (2008) [Capacity, Change and Performance: Study Report](#). Maastricht: ECDPM. After the Ministry of MFA made the model mandatory for NGO reporting in a capacity building grant framework, we asked the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) to further elaborate the model in a guide on how to use the framework appropriately. See: E. Spierings et al., [Bringing the invisible into perspective: Reference document for using the 5Cs framework to plan, monitor and evaluate capacity and results of capacity development processes](#). Maastricht: ECDPM, 2011; [IOB Facilitating resourcefulness](#). *Synthesis report of the evaluation of Dutch support to capacity development*. IOB Report no. 336, 2010.

<sup>346</sup> IOB, [Tactisch en Praktisch](#), 2021; IOB, [Grip door begrip](#), 2024; IOB, [Tussen papier en praktijk](#), 2024.

- Policy coherence:
- Unanimity in NATO and the EU regarding the degree of alignment between policy towards the Permanent Representation to the EU and the Permanent Representation to NATO
  - A clear political-strategic framework for EU, NATO and EU-NATO coherence, including Dutch priorities (*what to achieve*) and strategy (*how to achieve it*)
  - Effective interdepartmental coordination of NATO and EU policies between relevant ministries
- Steering:
  - Early steering and proactive engagement on priority dossiers
  - Adequate and timely instructions for those involved in negotiations
- Flexibility:
  - Room and capacity to adjust positions when negotiations require it\

### *Degree of preference attainment and attributed influence*

To assess Dutch influence, we used the *degree of preference attainment* method and the *attributed influence method* in addition to the 5-C framework.<sup>347</sup> The *degree of preference attainment* method compares the Netherlands' initial positions (its commitments) with the final policy outcomes. The *attributed influence* method analyses both the influence that Dutch officials believe they had (self-attributed) and the influence external experts attribute to the Netherlands.

### *EU Strategic Compass case*

For the assessment of influence on the EU Strategic Compass, we drew on a previously conducted IOB study.<sup>348</sup> This study applied both the 5-C model described above and the *degree of preference attainment* and *attributed influence* methods. In addition, it used *process tracing*, which examines causal links between presumed causes and outcomes by identifying causal processes or mechanisms.<sup>349</sup>

## Interviews

### *Conducting interviews*

The IOB research team conducted the interviews for this evaluation. Two IOB staff members generally attended the interviews: one led the interview, while the other took notes. Most interviews were held with a single respondent, partly for confidentiality reasons. In the few cases where multiple people were interviewed simultaneously, this was done at the initiative of the respondents and with their explicit approval.

### *Confidentiality and informed consent*

All interviewees received information about the study when invited to participate. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. They were also told that participation in the study was voluntary, that the interview notes would be securely stored in a protected digital environment and that the interviews were confidential.

To safeguard confidentiality, respondents' names are not included in this report. Furthermore, none of the findings are traceable to individuals, and no direct quotes from interviewees are used. The report presents only general findings, drawn from multiple sources.

### *Semi-structured qualitative interviews*

The interviews generally lasted one to one-and-a-half hours and were semi-structured. This means that the research team prepared a list of topics and questions in advance, but the exact content of each interview could vary depending on the respondent's expertise.

Because not all respondents were asked the same questions, the interviews do not allow for quantitative analysis (e.g. '80% of interviewees thought X'). For this reason, the report does not indicate how many respondents made a particular statement.

<sup>347</sup> Dür, ['Measuring Interest Group Influence in the EU'](#), 2008.

<sup>348</sup> IOB, [EU Strategisch Kompas](#), 2023.

<sup>349</sup> H. White and D. Phillips, [Addressing attribution of cause and effect in small n impact evaluations: towards an integrated framework](#), 2012; Dür, ['Measuring Interest Group Influence in the EU'](#), 2008.

# Annex 2

## Abbreviations

AIV	Advisory Council on International Affairs
ASAP	Act in Support of Ammunition Production
GDP	Gross domestic product
BHOS	Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
BZK	Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations
DIANA	Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic
eFP	enhanced Forward Presence
CAR	Coordinated Annual Review on
CDP	Coordinated Capability Plan
CER	Critical Entities Resilience
EDA	European Defence Agency
EEAS	European External Action Service
EDIP	European defence industry programme
EDIRPA	European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act
EDIS	European Defence-Industry Strategy
EU	European Union
EZ	(Ministry of) Economic Affairs
EZK	(Ministry of) Economic Affairs and Climate
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
HEDI	Hub for European Defence Innovation
IenW	(Ministry of) Infrastructure and Water Management
IOB	International Research and Policy Evaluation Directorate
JenV	(Ministry of) Justice and Security
KFOR	Kosovo Force
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MPCC	Military Planning and Conduct Capability
MRTT	Multi Role Tanker Transport
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCTV	National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security
NIF	NATO Innovation Fund
NIS2	Network and Information Security Directive
NMI	NATO Mission Iraq
NRF	NATO Response Force
NRI	NATO Readiness Initiative
NSP	NATO Support and Procurement
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturer
OCW	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PR	Permanent Representation
SZW	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America



