

Contributor Profile: The Netherlands

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Active Armed Forces ¹	Helicopters ²	Defense Budget	Uniformed UN Peacekeepers ³	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments ⁴
37,400	Attack: 29	2010: \$11.3bn (1.45% of GDP)	47 (6 female) (31 December 2013)	UNAMA: 1 police	ISAF: 200
World Ranking (size): 72	Multi-Role: 7	2011: \$11.7bn (1.37% of GDP)	Ranking: 81 st	UNMISS: 26 (17 police, 2 milex, 7 troops)	Bosnia-Herzegovina EUFOR: 6
Army: 20,850 Navy: 8,500 Air: 8,050 Marechaussee 5,900	Transport: 21 (13 hvy, 8 medium)	2012: \$7.87bn (1.36% of GDP)	(15 th largest EU contributor and 15 th NATO contributor)	UNTSO: 12 milex	Kosovo Rule of Law EULEX: 37 KFOR: 7
	Anti-submarine warfare: 8				Anti-piracy missions Op. Atalanta (EU) and Op. Ocean Shield (NATO): approx. 400
Defense Spending / Active troop: ⁵ US\$282,135 (compared to global average of approx. US\$67,959)					

Part 1: Recent Trends

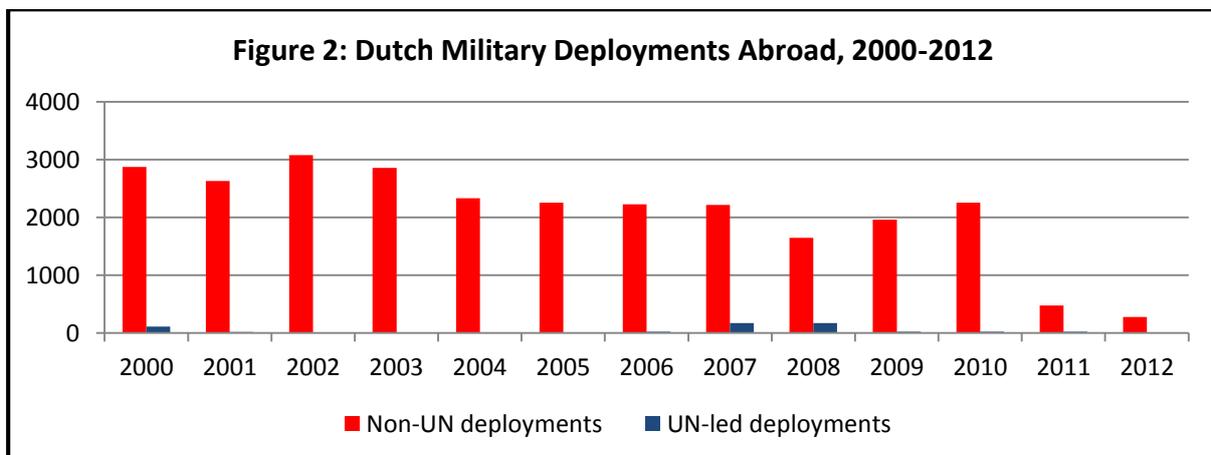
Dutch contributions to UN-led missions have significantly declined in the past decade. Up to the [recent decision to deploy 378 military and police personnel](#), as well as four Apache fighter helicopters to Mali (MINUSMA), the last larger scale contribution on land was in Ethiopia-Eritrea (UNMEE, 2000-01). Token contributions were made to UNTSO, UNMIBH, UNFICYP, UNMIS and UNMISS. This decline is partly attributable to the Dutch Parliament’s trauma over the Srebrenica massacres, mistrust of UN command and control structures, and the hesitance among some political parties to get involved in missions in Africa. Such concerns are exemplified by the fact that the larger Dutch contributions to UNMIL (2003-04) and UNIFIL (2006-08) consisted of a maritime component only. In addition, the previous government of Prime Minister Rutte (Rutte I, 2010-12) was dependent on parliamentary support from the right-wing PVV party, which opposes Dutch contributions to UN missions. Also Rutte’s own party the, liberal VVD, prefers to contribute to NATO operations, and to missions in regions where Dutch interests are at stake, which does not really include Africa. In contrast, the Netherlands has consistently deployed over 2,000 troops to various UN-authorized operations, principally in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet, it appears this trend is being broken. The deployment in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan has particularly strained the Dutch armed forces, which until 2015 are recuperating in a much smaller contribution to ISAF, in Kunduz province. Moreover, the current government, Rutte II (2013-), is a coalition of the VVD and the social democrats (PvdA), which have always been in favor of contributing more to UN missions and operations in Africa, which is reflected in the new contribution to MINUSMA.

Since the end of the Cold War the Netherlands armed forces have been in a continuous process of restructuring and downsizing. Whereas in 1990 there were almost 105,000 troops

focused on the defense of Western Europe, there are currently less than 40,000, which are part of a flexible and expeditionary force participating in missions around the world. The same period saw real defense expenditures decline by 15%. In the last decade the capacity to deploy forces abroad has also decreased. In the 1993 *Prioriteitennota* (priorities note), the Netherlands authorities declared they should be able to deploy up to four battalion-sized (or equivalent) missions simultaneously. In 2002 this level of ambition was reduced to [three battalions](#). Following the economic crisis, in 2011, a new restructuring began wherein the number of personnel was reduced by a further 18% and the defense budget was cut by 9%. The [Minister of Defense affirmed](#) that at least for the time being three simultaneously battalion-sized missions are no longer attainable. The defense budget was subsequently spared in new austerity rounds.



According to UN statistics, in November 2003 the Netherlands deployed 411 uniformed civilian police officers in UNMIK. However, this deployment cannot be verified in Dutch statistics.



2004 excluding one LPD and troops deployed within the context of UNMIL; 2009 excluding one destroyer and troops for operation Allied Protector; 2010 excluding one frigate and troops for Operation Atalanta; 2011-12 excluding one oiler and troops for Operation Atalanta.

In 2010, the interdepartmental working group [Future Policy Survey](#) finished a report in which Parliament was given a choice of policy options for the future profile of the armed forces. [The Cabinet opted](#) for the profile “Agile Force” in which the armed forces are flexible and multifunctional rather than specialized. The [budget cuts](#) are not seen as impeding this choice.

Part 2: Decision-Making Process

The decision-making process for deploying the armed forces abroad follows the “Article 100 procedure.” [Article 100](#) of the Dutch Constitution states: “The [Cabinet] will provide [Parliament] with advance information on the intended use of the armed forces for the purposes of maintaining or promoting the international legal order.” These procedures are described in the so-called [Toetsingskader \(2009\)](#) (Review Framework). This *Toetsingskader* was initially developed before the disaster in Srebrenica (1995), when Parliament decided the decision-making process needed to be improved. It has been updated since and includes both a description of the procedures as well as a review framework which is used by Parliament to assess the intentions and decisions of the government when it considers deploying armed forces abroad. The *Toetsingskader* forces the Cabinet to pay attention to a list of standardized items and questions, and uses as a starting point the understanding that: “Deployment of military units takes place to maintain or to promote international law and order. This includes the prevention and the termination of severe and massive violations of fundamental human rights, as well as the deployment of military units for the purpose of humanitarian assistance during armed conflicts.”

Box 1: International role of the armed forces

[Article 97 of the Dutch Constitution](#)

“The armed forces exist for the defence and protection of the interests of the Kingdom, and in order to maintain and promote the international legal order.”

[Defence White Paper 2000](#)

Article 97 is interpreted as the following three core tasks for the defense organization:

- 1) Protecting the integrity of national and Allied territory, including the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba;
- 2) Promoting stability and the international rule of law;
- 3) Supporting civil authorities in upholding the law, providing disaster and humanitarian relief, both nationally and internationally.

Following the “Article 100 procedure,” after the UN Security Council decides to establish a peacekeeping operation, the ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs jointly formulate policy advice on whether and how to participate. If they consider participating, they inform Parliament and a survey on these questions is started. The focus points for the advice are the items in the [Toetsingskader](#) (see box 2), as well as the modalities of the Netherlands contribution. When the advice is discussed in the Cabinet, the answers to these questions are checked to see if they conform to the political interests of the Netherlands. Although Parliament has no mandate to decide whether to participate or not, the government is obliged to further inform Parliament about the intended mission through the so-called “Article 100 letter,” which denotes the considerations and intended decision of the Cabinet. On the basis thereof, a parliamentary debate is held in order to ensure support for the mission because troop deployments to insecure areas can be politically sensitive and governments tend to require broad support from Parliament. Other relevant issues are the risks and security guarantees for the troops; clear structures of command and control; the participation of at least one major ally in the mission; and, an exit-strategy or relief by a succeeding contingent.

Box 2: Points of attention in the Toetsingskader 2009

- Grounds for participation
- Political aspects of feasibility and desirability
- Attention for development cooperation and reconstruction
- Mandate
- Other participating countries
- Influence of the Netherlands on the decision-making process in the operation
- Military aspects of feasibility
- Risks
- Suitability and availability of Dutch units
- Duration of the participation
- Gender
- Comprehensive approach (Politics, Defense and Development)
- Financial aspects

Since Article 100 of the Dutch constitution came into effect in 2000, Parliament and government have regularly debated the procedures. The first issue is whether the Parliament should have more than just a right to information. Second, although Parliament has no decision-making power, in order to gain enough support, governments have engaged in near-negotiations with political parties. As a result recent “Article 100 letters” have become increasingly vague, compromise documents, and the procedures have become more blurred. Although these tendencies are recognized, solutions have not yet been found. Third, as items in the *Toetsingskader* guide the decision-making process there is a continuous debate on whether new items should be added. One such item could, for example, be protection of civilians.

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Until the new Dutch contribution to MINUSMA, in the past few years, the Netherlands has contributed a relatively limited number of uniformed personnel to UN missions. However, the Dutch participate in a substantial number of NATO and EU missions. The generic importance attached to UN peacekeeping by successive governments is shown by Dutch support for the UN’s policies and assistance for training of African forces and SSR in Africa to stimulate African contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, as well as by the return to UN peacekeeping in MINUSMA.

Political and Security Rationales: Politically, the Netherlands often follows the United States, or contributes when European regional stability is at stake, such as in the Balkan region, or in the Sahel, where the rationale is to fight terrorism and international organized crime. These rationales particularly play a role at the right of the political spectrum. Moreover, as the Netherlands strives towards a comprehensive approach, it prefers to deploy its military in tandem with development cooperation. Therefore, deployment is more likely in countries where the Netherlands is a major donor, particularly the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes region and the Middle East. Similarly, if the armed forces are deployed in an area due to political rationales, Dutch development funds are likely to follow.

Economic Rationales: Economic rationales do not play a significant role in decisions on Dutch contributions. Generally, UN and other operations are not deployed in countries of large economic interest to the Netherlands. In addition, UN compensation does not cover the expenses for the armed forces, and for the moment compensation does not play a role in the

debate. Consequently, there is little economic incentive to participate in UN peacekeeping missions.

Institutional Rationales: Although large sections of the Netherlands security establishment are deeply skeptical about the competency of UN personnel and the lack of appropriate command and control structures, particularly for high-end operations, the development establishment is more favorable to UN missions. There may be more convergence in the future, however, because within the Defense community there is a growing awareness that UN operations may provide an alternative source of legitimization for the armed forces necessary to prevent further budget cuts.

Normative Rationales: The Netherlands has long been known for its idealistic approach to defense. It still claims to be the only country in the world that has incorporated its duty to uphold the international rule of law in its constitution. Such rationales are still very important to the left of the political spectrum. However, in recent years humanitarian and normative considerations have become less important as national interest gains more attention.

Part 4: Barriers for Contributing

Alternative political or strategic priorities: The Dutch contributions in Afghanistan, guided by the need to support its American ally, have been the defense priorities for almost a decade. There is also hesitance among some political parties to get involved in missions in Africa, where the bulk of UN operations are deployed, because such conflicts are not well understood, are considered dangerous, and there are not obvious Dutch interests at stake. This may change after the further drawdown from Afghanistan. After recuperation in 2015 the Netherlands armed forces will have more troops available for international missions. For example, some UN operations in Africa, including those in the DR Congo and the Sudans, have been mentioned by particularly left-wing parties as potential alternatives to the missions in Afghanistan, while others have talked about Syria, Lebanon and Somalia.

Alternative institutional preferences for crisis management: In contrast to the [coalition agreement of the previous government Rutte I](#), the [coalition agreement of the current government Rutte II](#) does not state that NATO is its preferred vehicle for crisis management. This government is more willing to participate in UN missions.

Financial costs: The economic crisis and recent budget cuts have made financial costs an extra barrier to contribute to peace operations, including those deployed by the UN. On the other hand, although the UN's compensation payments only cover a small portion of the costs of contributions, Dutch forces deployed on EU or NATO operations are not compensated at all.

Discomfort with the expanding UN peacekeeping agenda: This is not relevant. The Netherlands has over the last decade been very supportive of the expansion of UN peacekeeping.

Exceptionalism: This is partly relevant, as many Dutch politicians and military prefer to portray the armed forces as competing in the global "premier league of armed forces." Thus the Netherlands armed forces are perceived as best deployed in high-end or specialized operations, not as bulk infantry.

Difficult domestic politics: The current cabinet has focused on austerity and Dutch internal and external security interests. If packaged as dealing with such security interests, UN peacekeeping may be seen as a potential outlet for deploying the armed forces. Although debates in Parliament only rarely involve peacekeeping in general, missions play an important role in Dutch politics. Since 2000 two Cabinets fell over peace operations: Srebrenica and the mission in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan.

Damage to national reputation: The failure of Dutch troops to prevent the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 is still deeply engraved in the collective mind. According to many politicians, UNPROFOR abandoned the Dutch battalion during the genocide and accordingly it was neither capable nor allowed to use force to end the killings. Lack of trust in the UN as a peacekeeping institution remains a major barrier to contribution.

Resistance in the military: While strong supporters of UN peacekeeping can be found in the Dutch military, in general the UN suffers from an image problem. Particularly with regard to high-end operations, the Dutch military generally feel UN command and control structures as well as security measures are insufficient. Moreover, in the Ministry of Defense, UN operations are often seen as ineffective. This critique stems from the history of Srebrenica and also outdated information, but there is also increasing critique based around the difficulty of cooperating with partners in UN missions. The military often prefer to operate in a NATO context, in which the command and control structures are regarded to be better, where they feel familiar with their partner countries, and in which they perceive the troops and equipment of partner countries to be superior. They regard this as increasing the chances for success of missions.

Legal obstacles and lack of fit with legislative, procurement and operational timelines: Although there are no legal obstacles to participation in UN operations, the framework of the “Article 100 procedure” does not fit UN timelines. Not only is the decision-making process time-consuming, the *Toetsingskader* also requires a major ally to participate as well. Therefore the Netherlands may wait for the decision-making process in other countries. The [current coalition agreement](#) states that the Netherlands may contribute to missions mandated under international law or which address a humanitarian emergency.

Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues

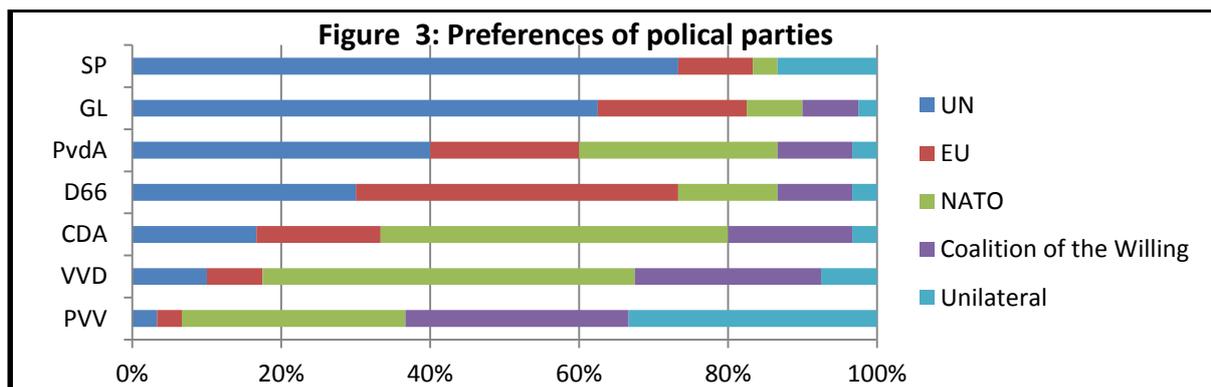
The overall sentiment concerning UN operations in Dutch politics has become less positive. UN missions increasingly have an image problem. The financial crisis and subsequent budget cuts have also resulted in significant reductions and restructuring in the army, navy, and air force. Capacities for peacekeeping operations are thus decreasing and may decline further. In addition, Dutch politics and public generally have become more inward looking, and therefore the traditional Dutch focus on *international* security is shifting more towards *national* security. Partly as a result of the deployment in Afghanistan, public support for international missions is declining. Lastly, officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense see NATO as a more efficient and professional framework for cooperation than the UN.

The Rutte II government is more outward looking than Rutte I. National and economic interests and international “responsibility” largely determine the Dutch contribution to peace operations. The military itself may prefer participation in UN operations to no international deployments at all. Participation in UN missions is likely to maintain the legitimacy of the armed forces, while non-deployment strengthens those who argue for further defense cuts.

Nonetheless, the Netherlands will have to overcome a psychological hurdle if it is to deploy larger infantry contingents to UN operations. It is more likely that the Netherlands provides specialist niche capabilities and enablers.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

The major political parties in the Dutch Parliament are divided on which organization the Netherlands should commit its forces to. Generally, the left-wing parties favor the UN while the right-wing parties favor NATO. Centrist parties tend to support the European Union. As such the Socialist Party (SP) champions the UN; also the Labor Party (PvdA) appears to favor UN over EU and NATO operations; the Green Party (Groenlinks) prefers either UN or EU operations; Democrats 66 (D66) mostly supports EU missions; the Christian Democrats (CDA) are inclined to EU or NATO operations; the Liberal Party (VVD) is more decided on NATO; and the right-wing PVV only backs NATO operations and only if these clearly support Dutch interests and national security. As the Netherlands has coalition governments and the parties constituting the government need to reach a consensus, a left-wing government is likely to focus on the UN, a right-wing government on NATO, and a center government, such as the current administration, needs to appease both sides. As such a government including the PvdA increases the chances for Dutch contributions to UN operations.



This figure should be regarded only as a rough illustration of the different preferences of the political parties as these cannot be precisely measured.

With an overall critical tendency towards UN missions, vocal proponents are scarce. The current SRSR in the Mali, Bert Koenders (PvdA), is a former Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation and a strong UN supporter. Former UN military advisor Patrick Cammaert is also a UN champion, while former UN military advisor and current senator Frank van Kappen tends to be more critical of the UN. The NGOs [IKV Pax Christi](#) and the [United Nations Association of The Netherlands \(NVVN\)](#) are the most vocal supporters of UN operations. Most lobbying by NGOs tends to be country specific rather than for UN missions in general. The [Clingendael Institute](#) is the primary think tank researching peace and stabilization missions.

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats

In spite of the exhausting campaign in Afghanistan and the current downsizing, the Netherlands armed forces remain a motivated and professional force capable of participating in demanding operations. There is a large potential of specialized and high-technology capabilities in such areas as logistics, enabling units (such as hospitals), attack helicopters and intelligence-gathering. Also the *Marechaussee* (military police) is a valuable capability in robust peacekeeping. Two of the focus areas in in defense policies are security sector reform

and establishment of the rule of law, and the Netherlands increasingly participates in training and police missions. The Netherlands also has a relatively high ratio of female military personnel and is working to increase this percentage further.

The Netherlands does not have many Francophone staff or civilian police available. In addition, the Netherlands request a lot of attention for the security of its forces, and the *Toetsingskader* explicitly focuses on the assessment of risks involved and the participation of a major ally in the mission. Although The Hague finds the UN command and control structures problematic the Dutch do not have caveats in this field.

Part 8: Further Reading

[Netherlands Defence Doctrine](#) (Ministry of Defence, 2005).

[Summary and Conclusions Future Policy Survey: a new foundation for the Netherlands armed forces](#) (2010).

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise stated, data is drawn from IISS, *The Military Balance 2013* (London: IISS/Routledge, 2013).

² Additional source: the [Dutch Ministry of Defence](#).

³ Additional source: the [UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations](#).

⁴ Data received from the different missions on 30 September 2013, within the context of the [SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database](#).

⁵ Armed Forces Spending is a country's annual total defense budget (in US dollars) divided by the total number of active armed forces. Using figures from IISS, *The Military Balance 2013*.