Chapter 6

Strategic Strengthening of the Armed Forces

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6.1 Introduction

Against the background of the profound changes in the Netherlands' security environment and increased instability in the region around Europe and the challenges that need to be addressed by defence policy sketched in the previous chapter, the question is whether the armed forces are capable of adequately performing their tasks. This chapter investigates the state of the armed forces and defence policy and considers what the focus should be and what investments are needed. The discussion centres on the following questions:

- What is the current state of the armed forces? (Sect. 6.2)
- What is the status of defence policy? (Sect. 6.3)
- What investments are needed and where is strengthening required? (Sect. 6.4)
- How can the possibilities for European cooperation be used more effectively? (Sect. 6.5)
- What policy is needed to accomplish that? (Sect. 6.6).

6.2 The Current Armed Forces: Modernised, but with Tight Constraints

The answer to the question about the 'state' of the armed forces starts with the political choice made after the Cold War to make exporting stability a new spearhead of foreign and security policy. Expeditionarity, the deployment of the armed

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forces far from the Netherlands, became the point of departure for the structure of the armed forces. Conscription was suspended; the armed forces would in future consist of professional soldiers who could be deployed on missions and part-time reservists. Their materiel consisted, among other things, of a range of transport equipment including heavy Chinook transport helicopters, Landing Platform Docks (transport and command vessels) and capacity for tactical and strategic air transport. In addition to the modernised F-16 fighter planes, which could in future be refuelled in the air by KDC-10 tanker planes, and air-defence and command frigates and submarines, the Netherlands possessed valuable capabilities for operating at every level in the spectrum of the use of force. This meant that the armed forces could be deployed both for military interventions and combat operations and for stabilisation and peacekeeping missions. The distinction between these types of mission would blur over time, with the Dutch mission in Uruzgan as the tipping point. There was also investment in interoperability, an essential requirement for taking part in international operations, since there was no question of engaging in international operations independently. The Netherlands contributed to EU, NATO and UN operations and joined US-led coalitions.

With this transformation from the 1990s, in combination with continuous contributions to crisis management operations, the Dutch armed forces gained a wealth of experience and earned a good international reputation.¹ The Netherlands became a 'member of the A-team', the small group of countries with interoperable, high-class military capabilities that was a close military and political partner of the US within NATO or as part of a coalition.² In the Netherlands, the armed forces evolved into a structural partner of the civil authorities, for example through the key role played by the Royal Marechaussee in border control, the establishment of the coastguard with a coordinating role for the navy, and the intensification and strengthening of civil-military cooperation (CIMIC/Enhanced CIMIC) in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in 2001. The Air Mobile Brigade was also formed. The cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the directorates-general for foreign trade and international cooperation was intensified with the emergence of the 3D approach, in which the collaboration between Dutch military personnel, diplomats and aid workers in preparing and carrying out crisis management operations grew steadily closer. Beyond the national borders, the cooperation with Germany and Belgium assumed a structural character. The existing naval cooperation between the Netherlands and Belgium in BENESAM was further intensified.³ The deployment of reservists was classified under the Total Force concept, TFC (see *Plan van aanpak uitvoering Total Force concept* [Action Plan for the implementation of the Total Force concept], 13 January 2017).

The changes and the austerity measures, in combination with active deployment, created evident problems for the armed forces, for example in terms of the physical and psychological strain on military personnel, the shortages of materiel for operations and exercises and in arranging the logistics and support for large numbers of troops. Nevertheless, the transformation of the Dutch armed forces into a high-class expeditionary force is generally regarded as a success. Evidence of this is provided by the significant contributions currently being made to crisis management operations, in particular the UN's MINUSMA operation in Mali, the US-led coalition against Da'esh and the EU-led mission to combat piracy around the Horn of Africa. Another

Fig. 6.1 Defence spending in 2014 (in euros). (Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 1988–2015 (1 USD = 0.73 Euro, exchange rate on 30 June 2014))

example is the Dutch contribution to the measures taken by NATO to reassure the eastern allies, including participation in the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and the air policing over the Baltic States.

The modernisation of the armed forces has been accompanied by cutbacks, initially imposed as a peace dividend and later because the targets in the Stability and Growth Pact were not being met. As a result, actual spending on the armed forces fell sharply between 1995 and 2013 (see Fig. 6.1). Expenditure declined by more than 25% in real terms. A number of capabilities were disposed of entirely, including the last two tank battalions (in 2011), maritime patrol aircraft, multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) and air defence systems. The workforce was incrementally reduced by more than half. With these measures, the rapidly escalating operating and investment costs could also be absorbed.⁴ Finally, the long-term deployment of military capacity outside the national territory and under severe conditions generated unforeseen costs, for example due to accelerated wear and tear on equipment,⁵ some of which were covered from the Homogeneous Budget for International Cooperation (HGIS) and supplements to the defence budget. The mission in Afghanistan in 2008, for example, forced additional cutbacks. By spreading the pain as evenly as possible, the individual branches of the armed forces, the army, the air force and the navy, were able to retain high-class capabilities. Reductions in the numbers of systems, platforms and units were accepted, which can be traced back to a large extent to the long-accepted but now formally abandoned formula for the allocation of funds of 50%, 25% and 25% to the army, the air force and the navy, respectively.⁶ The allocation of funds in 2016 is shown in Fig. 6.2.

There are various explanations for the cutbacks on the armed forces. The end of the Cold War marked the end of their exemption from austerity measures. From that time on, the Ministry of Defence had to compete with other ministries for funds. In combination with continuous unexpected shortfalls as a result of escalating operating and investment costs, the result was a dramatic reduction in the size and composition of the armed forces. The so-called ‘differentiated approach’, under which new

Fig. 6.2 Defence spending as % of GDP. (Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Data 1988–2015)

investments in the armed forces were financed from spending cuts, also created the perception that there was always some fat that could be removed from the armed forces. In that context, Relus ter Beek, who was Minister of Defence from 1989 to 1994, compared the armed forces with a lemon. No matter how long you keep squeezing it, some juice will always escape⁷ And indeed the armed forces could be ‘squeezed’ for a long time. The branches of the armed forces enjoyed a large degree of autonomy. That came to an end in 2003, but because of the differentiated approach the idea that there was always room for more cutbacks on the armed forces survived for a long time (see Fig. 6.1). An additional factor was that cutbacks were specifically used to steer the armed forces further in the direction of expeditionarity. The most important explanation, however, was the key position that the desire to make contributions to international crisis management operations occupied in defence policy and the associated level of ambition that had been formulated for the armed forces. That level of ambition could be lowered without major political consequences. Contributions could still be made; the security of the Netherlands was no longer threatened since the end of the Cold War (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Division of expenditure in 2016 and 2017 in millions of euros

	2017	2016
Navy	721,48	689,55
Army	1.251,34	1.137,98
Deployment	325,79	367,89
Air Force	681,68	633,80
Military Police	52,41	319,52
Defence Materiel Organization	830,34	743,89
Central Apparatus	1.580,73	1.595,55
Investments	1.640,54	1.446,20
General	95,72	100,14
Support Command	1.162,45	1.040,57
Secret Expenditure	5,39	5,35
Nominal and Unforeseen		153,48

The Netherlands therefore got its expeditionary force, but ultimately paid a heavy price in the form of far smaller armed forces with a significantly lower level of ambition. In the 1990s, the armed forces were still expected to be capable of participating in four crisis management operations; in 2013, the number was only one. The sustainability of the armed forces, their capacity to contribute to an operation for a lengthy period, also diminished greatly.

Because of a shrinking reservoir of units, capabilities and personnel, in combination with the repeated choice of sparing the operational units – combat strength – as far as possible, missions also started to impose a growing strain on the organisation. Recent letters to the House of Representatives indicate the seriousness of the resulting problems, which affect the army, the air force and the navy: on the issue of the state of readiness of materiel, see the letters of 9 October 2014⁸ and of 26 May 2015.⁹ There are shortages of spare parts, technical personnel and materiel for training. The minister refers in that context to the impact of these constraints on the capacity to carry out simultaneous operations. In its audit of the Ministry of Defence in 2014, the Netherlands Court of Audit was severe in its assessment: “At this moment the organisation is unable to retain sufficient materiel for training and education purposes in addition to the deployment for missions” and “There are tight constraints on the available resources for many of the tasks” (Netherlands Court of Audit, *Resultaten Verantwoordingsonderzoek 2014 Ministerie van Defensie* [Results of the audit of the Ministry of Defence 2014]).

6.3 Defence Policy: Ambitious, but Confronted with Shortages

Against the background of the growing instability around Europe and the current problems facing the armed forces, the question that arises is whether the current defence policy can put an end to the persistent struggle between tasks, ambitions and resources. As Fig. 6.1 shows, since the end of the Cold War successive governments have made deep cuts in defence spending. Relative to GDP, the budget has been more than halved (see Fig. 6.2). The same applies for many of the other allies.

Under NATO agreements every ally is obliged to spend at least 2% of its national income on defence. Many European countries have been failing to meet this target since the fall of the Berlin Wall (see Fig. 6.3). The Netherlands also fell below the threshold in the mid-1990s. In the most recent *Defence Planning Capability Review* for the Netherlands in March 2016, NATO concluded that a higher and more predictable defence budget is essential. The Netherlands currently spends 1.14% of the gross domestic product on defence, which is less than the average of 1.43% for the European NATO members and well below the NATO target of 2%. At the NATO summits in Wales (September 2014) and Warsaw (July 2016), the NATO member states that spend less than 2% of their GDP on defence committed themselves to endeavouring to raise their defence spending towards the target over the next 10 years. A

Note: In September 2014, The European Union's statistics office implemented a new accounting standard as part of the worldwide system of National Accounts. Resulting in an increase in GDP figures for most member countries. The United States implemented these accounting standards in 2013. While the changes in how GDP is calculated have no direct impact on real defence expenditures, the result is a relative decrease in defence expenditures as a percentage of GDP.

Fig. 6.3 European shortfalls. (Source: AIV 2015)

similar agreement was made in relation to the guideline of spending 20% of the total defence budget on investment. Agreements were also made to spend 2% of the defence budget on research and technology.

France and Germany are increasing their defence spending substantially in the coming years (by approximately 18% up to 2020–2021), but even then both countries will remain below the 2% target. A number of eastern NATO member states are also investing more. The United Kingdom has announced that it will maintain its defence spending at the desired level of 2% in the coming decade. The Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) have increased their defence budgets.¹⁰ Sweden and Finland, neither of them members of NATO, have also raised their defence budgets. In the Netherlands, the increase in the defence budget will stabilise defence spending at around 1.1% and, depending on the growth of GDP, possibly 1.2%.

Whether the anticipated availability of additional resources will be sufficient to achieve the desired strengthening of defence capabilities is debatable. Nor will the extensive military cooperation – bilateral, in clusters (groups) or in multinational structures with coordination by the EU and NATO – automatically eliminate the shortfalls. Cooperation also costs money because of the transaction costs. Even many large and medium-sized European countries simply lack the economies of scale and the financial resources required to provide the necessary capabilities on their own. A joint and coordinated approach to making up the European military shortfalls should therefore remain as much of a priority as ever even if defence spending stabilises or is raised slightly.

The annexation of Crimea in March 2014 shed an entirely new light on the decision to reduce the level of ambition for the armed forces at the end of 2013. NATO

responded almost immediately with a series of measures designed to reassure the eastern allies. The Netherlands also contributed to those measures by deploying tanker aircraft, establishing a maritime presence and by promising to bring forward the promised deployment of fighter planes to help in protecting the air space over the Baltic States. It was perfectly clear to the government that the increased demands on the Dutch armed forces would not be merely temporary. Ahead of the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014, the NATO member states prepared a Readiness Action Plan designed to increase NATO's state of readiness. The deterioration in the security environment in Eastern Europe reawakened the debate about the shortcomings of the European NATO allies' defence efforts. The US exerted heavy pressure with a view to sending a powerful signal, to both Moscow and the eastern member states. The mood among politicians and the public had also changed radically.

The structural addition of 100 million euro to the defence budget in 2015, somewhat tentatively announced as a trend break in the Budget Memorandum, therefore came as no surprise, any more than the outcome of the General Political Debate (*Algemene Politieke Beschouwingen*), when the House of Representatives debates government policy following the presentation of the Budget. The SGP submitted a motion, which was also signed by the VVD, the CDA and ChristenUnie, calling for a statement by the government on the necessary level of ambition for the armed forces and the appropriate security strategy in the existing security environment.¹¹ This motion by the leader of the SGP, Kees van der Staaij, gained further momentum with the government's widely-supported decision to send six F-16 fighter planes to join the US-led coalition against Da'esh.¹² With contributions to Resolute Support, NATO's training mission in Afghanistan, and MINUSMA, the UN peacekeeping operation in Mali, the government once again made heavy demands on the Dutch armed forces. The pace of operations would accelerate even further with the anticipated contribution to NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF).

With the measures taken in 2014 and 2015 and the addition of 60 million euro to the International Security Budget, making a total of approximately 0.5 billion euro, important steps can be taken to resolve the most urgent problems facing the armed forces. But restoring capacity in terms of manpower and materiel will require more than the current budgetary impulses. Meanwhile, the multi-year perspective and the steps identified in it illustrate the deep-seated problems facing the Ministry of Defence, as is shown by Fig. 6.4. The planned strengthening of the supporting operational units underlines the fact that even with the measures that have been taken, there is insufficient balance in the armed forces. The reference to the replacement of essential capabilities leads one to assume that the planned investments cannot or not entirely be accommodated within the budget.

Significant efforts, financial and otherwise, will be needed to take the next steps in the envisaged multi-year perspective; the necessary funds have not (yet) been made available.

A more fundamental issue than the affordability of the existing armed forces and the armed forces as envisaged in the current defence planning concerns the future-proofing of defence policy as set out in *In het belang van Nederland* [In the interest of the Netherlands] (2013) and most recently in *Houvast in een onzekere wereld*.

Fig. 6.4 A forward view of defence planning up until 2028. (Source: Netherlands Court of Audit)

Lijnen van ontwikkeling in het meerjarig perspectief voor een duurzaam gerede en snel inzetbare krijgsmacht [A grip in an uncertain world. Lines of development for a sustainably ready and rapidly deployable armed forces] (2017). In light of the profound changes in the Netherlands' security environment, it is time for a new reappraisal of defence policy.

The general points of departure of defence policy have not changed since the drafting of the *Defence Priority Review* (1993). The choice for versatility, for the retention of the widest possible range of capabilities, is based on the principle that a diffuse and unpredictable security environment calls for the widest possible range of options for deployment. Capabilities are not linked to specific threats, but to a series of (potential) risks. These points of departure need to be revised. A new policy and assessment framework for the size and composition of the armed forces is required. In Dutch defence policy, the questions 'what are we planning for?' and 'how much is enough?' are still answered on the basis of the level of ambition, the targets for deployability in relation to the armed forces' second main task and the desire for versatility and diversity in light of threats and risks to security – far from

home. That approach is no longer sufficient, however. In view of the greater instability and insecurity surrounding Europe, the question is no longer which missions to participate in, but what is the Netherlands willing to do for its own security and that of its allies in light of specific threats in and around its own home in Europe? In other words, security is no longer a question of informal – higher or lower – ambition, but of necessity.

In the first place, versatility and diversity are no longer adequate as points of departure for the composition of the armed forces. The future remains unpredictable, but the threats are not diffuse, but specific. The Netherlands is confronted with direct threats – ‘old’ and ‘new’, around Europe and global – and constant demands will be made on the Dutch armed forces in that context. The degree of uncertainty about the future should not be exaggerated; the instability around Europe, its (possible) effects and the negative consequences of globalisation are palpable. Retaining, replacing or procuring capabilities should be matched as closely as possible to the existing and anticipated threats. This means the crucial question is: what range of capabilities can contribute most effectively to countering those threats now and in the future? Answering that question provides the most robust basis for making decisions about the future size and composition of the armed forces.

Secondly, the criteria for the choice of capabilities in the defence planning process in accordance with the current defence policy result in the retention of basic and (as far as possible) niche capabilities. That inevitably leads to the retention and replacement of existing main weapons systems. Consequently, there is, by definition, little scope for new capabilities. The room for innovation and change is further constrained by the (financial) relationships between the operational commands of the army, the air force and the navy and the sequential nature of the major investment programmes. After the purchase of the F-35 fighter planes, the replacement of the navy’s main weapons systems is planned.

A look at the planning overview for the armed forces, assembled in the so-called ‘template’ in the defence budget, does indeed suggest that there will be investment in modernising and replacing main weapons systems, but scarcely any investment in innovation (see Fig. 6.5). The fate of MALE UAV, the unmanned aerial reconnaissance system, speaks volumes. The need to procure the system was recognised as early as 2006, but its purchase has again been deferred for 7 years in order to accommodate the investment in the financial planning. Accordingly, the Dutch contribution to reducing an important military shortfall in Europe remains just a proposal. The scope for investment in the cyber domain is also very limited in the present system when compared with the replacement investments. The same applies for other resources, such as special units to respond to a future in which military conflicts are most likely to take the form of hybrid warfare. At a time when innovations and experiments with new concepts are becoming increasingly important, the chance that the armed forces will in time possess the capabilities required to respond optimally to military-technological developments is declining.

Project description	Project volume	Estimated expenditure in € million							Phasing
		t/m 2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019		
Royal Navy									
Evolved Sea Sparrow Missile Block II: participation in international development process	37,2	35,5	1,7						2015
Maintenance of M-frigates	58,7	53,2	2,8	2,7					2016
Maintenance of Walrus class submarines	96,0	42,2	15,6	9,1	7,6	8,1	6,8		2020
Maintenance of Goalkeeper	34,5	20,5	7,7	6,2					2016
Low Frequency Active Sonar (LFAS)	27,4	22,6	2,5	2,3					2016
Air Defence and Command Frigates	1560,3	1553,8	6,5						2015
Maritime Ballistic Missile Defence (MBMD)	124,6	60,4	22,9	13,0	15,6	6,4	6,3		2021
Patrol ships	529,9	522,7	7,2						2015
Upgrade MK 48 torpedo	71,8	24,0	15,8	16,1	15,9				2017
Acquisition of Joint Logistics Support Ship (JSS)	409,3	379,9	29,4						2015
Royal Netherlands Army									
Army Ground Based Air Defence System (AGBADs)	126,3	126,3							2015
Battlefield Management System (BMS) and Datacommunication for Mobile Deployment (DCMO)	BMS	62,8	2,0	1,8					2016
	DCMO	43,0	39,2						
		30,8	17,0	13,8					
PATRIOT replacement by COMPATRIOT	30,8	17,0	13,8						2017
Large Armoured Fighting Vehicle (GPW, Boxer), production	Productie: 794,4	470,7	132,3	126,9	53,4	11,1			2018
Infantry Combat Vehicle (IGV), production and training	1118,1	1116,6	1,5						2015
Replacement of utility and main battle tanks	90,5	85,	5,4						2015
Royal Netherlands Air Force									
AH-64D Block II upgrade	120,0	41,5	32,5	41,0	5,0				2013-2017
AH-64D weapons upgrade	25,9	2,7	9,6	12,0	1,6				2013-2017
AH-64D self-protection (ASE)	76,1	12,4	25,3	34,4	3,9				2013-2017
Chinook expansion and reinforcement (four + two)	356,2	351,5	4,7						2007-2015
F-16 infrared guided air-to-air missile	31,9	2,3	15,3	14,3					2013-2016
F-16 M5 modification	38,8	36,1	2,7						2015
F-16 mode 5 IFF	39,7	26,4	4,0	9,3					2016
F-16 air-to-ground weapons upgrade, phase 1	59,1	52,7	6,4						2004-2015
F-16 air-to-ground weapons upgrade, phase 2	75,3	25,3							2012-2027
F-16 self-protection (ASE)	82,0	32,5	25,5	24,0					2009-2016
Lengthening F-16 Flight Time – Flight Safety & Airworthiness	37,0	2,4	6,7	7,6	7,3	6,5	3,5		2014-2021
All military branches									
Counter Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED) block 1 & 2	29,6	27,4	2,2						2015
Counter Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED) block 3 (structural embedding)	53,6	6,6	13,7	11,1	5,1	6,6	8,1		2022
Military Satellite Communication, long-term for all branches (MILSATCOM)	132,1	121	9,0	1,8	0,3				2017
Military Satellite Capacity (MILSATCAP)	31,4	16,1	7,5	5,3	1,4	1,1			2018
Modernization of navigation systems	39,0	20,9	3,4	2,5	6,0	2,2	4,0		2019
NH-90	1197,4	964,8	70,9	72,1	64,1	25,5			2018
Expansion of Chemical, Biological-Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN-) capacity in the context of the Intensification Civil-Military Cooperation (ICMS), materiel	60,3	21,3	20,8	18,2					2016

Fig. 6.5 Planning overview for the materiel of the armed forces. (Source: Ministry of Defence)

6.4 Future-Proofing the Armed Forces: The Dilemmas

According to the WRR,¹³ the armed forces need to move from “doing a little of everything” to “focus”.¹⁴ That focus is tightening, gradually. By formulating policy emphases in the International Security Strategy, such as the orientation towards the countries around Europe, more intensive European cooperation, the integrated approach and prevention, a start has been made in the process of setting priorities. However, if prioritisation is also taken to mean the concentration of resources – policymaking, financial, diplomatic, military and otherwise – on the selected policy priorities, there is still a long way to go. Although since 2014 the government has, in light of the worsening security situation and with broad support from the House of Representatives, made additional funds available, rising to 870 million euro in 2021, the measures that have been taken primarily address the most serious problems facing the armed forces. In light of the greater instability around Europe and global developments, politicians are faced with important questions in making the armed forces more future-proof.

Following on from the *Marinestudie* [Navy Study] in 2005, in the last decade the navy has focused more on providing support for land-based operations and, on the assumption that the threat at sea has diminished, has opted for Ocean-going Patrol Vessels (OPV) at the expense of more heavily armed multipurpose frigates. Furthermore, little has come of the planned strengthening of the land-oriented capabilities. In the context of *In the interest of the Netherlands*, for example, one of the tasks of the Joint Support Ship, the function of providing a helicopter platform for the Marine Corps, was abandoned.

A more urgent question, however, is what impact the altered security environment is having on the size and composition of the naval fleet. The ability to control (access to) parts of the seas has become topical again in light of Russia’s greater assertiveness in European waters. At global level, the maritime arms race in Asia stands out. Mine clearance, anti-submarine operations and maritime surveillance closer to home have also become far more important. The purchase of additional maritime capacity seems logical given the increasing importance – also for the Netherlands – of flow security. Combating piracy and protecting the landing points of transatlantic cables and, last but not least, protecting the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom are further important arguments for expanding the navy’s capacity. However, it is extremely doubtful whether even the planned replacement of capabilities with effect from the coming decade, including mine hunters, multi-purpose frigates and submarines, will be possible within the current budgets.

The army has become more mobile. This is appropriate in the context of the requirements of hybrid warfare and smaller crisis management operations, but presumes further steps, such as the further strengthening of the Commando Corps, to meet the growing demand for special forces. At the same time, the return of the threat of conventional war in Eastern Europe requires further strengthening of conventional capabilities, such as the return of a modest number of tanks, albeit in a German tank battalion, which will in turn contribute to the army’s further integration

into the *Bundeswehr*. Quite apart from that, the army in particular faces the task of restoring the balance between combat and support units.

The air force, finally, will at present have fewer F-35 fighter planes than originally planned because of the financial constraints. The changed security environment and the severely reduced sustainability are serious arguments for still considering the purchase of additional fighter planes. There are also good reasons for reconsidering the postponement of the purchase of the MALE UAV (unmanned aerial vehicles). This is a capability that is much in demand and an established military shortfall in Europe. It also seems logical to enhance the possibilities for innovation, in particular with respect to control of the information domain and the militarisation of space.

Do we opt for more F-35 fighter planes? With the number currently planned, only a small number of planes (four) will be available for use in operations. Do we buy extra frigates and submarines? That seems reasonable given the growing concerns about flow security and the navy's greater orientation towards coastal waters and supporting land-based operations. Or do we strengthen the army? After all, there is a need for more firepower, greater mobility and wider capabilities in conventional, irregular and hybrid scenarios. Additional requirements for the armed forces as a whole have also been identified in the domain of intelligence gathering and analysis, cyber and transport (helicopters). NATO has also identified various requirements, some of them the same (NATO Defence Planning Capability Review 2015/16: The Netherlands). The Netherlands also has responsibilities in that respect. Every choice the Netherlands makes or wishes to make will have to be reviewed in consultation with its partners in the EU and NATO. But that does not mean that the Netherlands cannot formulate its own strategy for the national armed forces, which it can very easily do in consultation with the allies and in alignment with the security strategies of the EU and NATO. Major advances can be made in that respect, particularly at European level.

6.5 Investing in Future-Proofing the Armed Forces in the EU

In the official response to the WRR-report (2017) on behalf of the Council of Ministers, the Minister of Defence states: "The Netherlands and Europe are confronted with a complex, diverse and uncertain threat assessment. Our interests and values are therefore at stake".¹⁵ According to the Minister of Defence, "collaboration with the aim of strengthening each other and increasing employability through far-reaching interoperability is part of the collaboration that is being sought".¹⁶ Therefore, "in the European context, cooperation must become the norm and no longer the exception".¹⁷

Progress in expanding and deepening the cooperation within the EU is important for tightening the focus of the armed forces. There is no question of forming a supranational European army or of the complete integration of the European security and defence policy in NATO.¹⁸ But Europe's capacity to act can be enhanced with pragmatic cooperation (*Rapportage internationale militaire samenwerking*

[Report on international military cooperation]¹⁹). Such cooperation could relate to the procurement of weapons systems (Ministry of Finance/IBO 2015) or deployment in specific operations. Other general forms of cooperation are possible, ranging from one-off (such as joint exercises) to permanent integration (for example, the German-Netherlands Corps headquarters). Figure 6.6 presents a brief history of European defence cooperation.

Fig. 6.6 The long road to European defence. (Source: EPSC Strategic Notes, June 2015)

Potential partners are countries whose political/geopolitical strategies are close to those of the Netherlands and that have a similar political culture to the Netherlands (strategic partners), countries with which the Netherlands cooperates within NATO and the EU (allied partners) and other countries that do not fall into either of the first two categories (ad-hoc partners). Research into examples of cooperation has identified a number of success and failure factors.²⁰ It has already been mentioned that Europe is not pulling its weight with its contributions to defence. Figure 6.7 shows what that means for each category of expenditure.

The decline in expenditure on investment and research is particularly worrying for the future. Figures 6.8 and 6.9 provide a breakdown.

Fig. 6.7 Defence spending in the EU, in 2010 euros. (Source: European Defence Agency Data)

Fig. 6.8 Expenditure on investment in the EU. (Source: European Defence Agency Data)

Fig. 6.9 Expenditure on R&T in the EU. (Source: European Defence Agency Data)

Fig. 6.10 Military and civilian personnel in the EU. (Source: European Defence Agency Data)

Knowledge and investment in new weapons systems cannot be seen separately from the personnel requirements (see Fig. 6.10). Demographic developments, the demand for highly skilled personnel and the need to retain personnel are major challenges, which have to be considered in relation to the investments in research.

Fig. 6.11 Lack of integration in EU defence in figures. (Source: EPHS Strategic Notes, June 2015)

As Fig. 6.11 shows, the member states of the EU could collaborate more. It has been calculated that the lack of integration between national military structures and the absence of an integrated defence market costs at least 26 billion euros a year.²¹ The variety of weapons systems causes fragmentation and loss of efficiency due to insufficient economies of scale and weakens negotiating power vis-à-vis manufacturers (see Fig. 6.12). In times of crisis, the absence of uniformity will lead more quickly to shortages of replacement materiel, which is an unnecessary source of vulnerability for European defence.

Fig. 6.12 National and multilateral expenditure in the EU. (Source: European Defence Agency Data)

The actual multilateral cooperation extends to just a small percentage of the total budget (see Figs. 6.12 and 6.13) and the trend is in fact slightly downwards. The Interdepartmental Policy Study entitled *Meer Bang for the Buck [More Bang for the Buck]*²² does argue, however, that bilateral cooperation in the procurement and development of new materiel is often easier than multilateral cooperation.

The larger the number of countries and national defence industries involved, the more the requirements will vary over time and/or substantive differences will arise. And the less mutual trust there is, the greater the chance that the cooperation will suffer at the expense of value for money. This should be an important guideline for future projects.

The Dutch armed forces have a good reputation when it comes to military cooperation within the alliances. As regards the army, the cooperation with Germany has considerable political and military significance. The same applies for the collaboration between the navies of the Benelux countries in BENESAM, in which the Netherlands is the senior partner. Another example of successful cooperation is the joint protection of the Benelux air space. The possibilities for military cooperation are far from exhausted if use is made of joint operational requirements documents, an Interdepartmental Policy Study (IBO) concluded. It further argued that closer military cooperation will facilitate the retention of economies of scale, which is essential when costs are climbing and volumes are falling (cf. *Meer Bang for the Buck*, an IBO on ways of enhancing effectiveness through international cooperation and integrated contracts for weapons systems for the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Finance, The Hague, April 2015).

Fig. 6.13 European cooperation, still the exception rather than the rule. (Source: EPSC strategic notes, June 2015)

In that context, it is advisable to make joint procurement and maintenance a condition when replacing capabilities and to abandon the policy of retaining basic and niche capabilities. However, there will still be restrictions. The need to perform national tasks independently and the political desirability of being able to act without a partner or with a different partner if possible are natural constraints in this respect. That in fact applies not only for the Netherlands, but for every European country with armed forces of some size.²³ The risk of surrendering sovereignty is not necessarily an obstacle to this; in 2012 the government embraced the advice of the AIV²⁴ to define sovereignty as the capacity to act and in that light to regard military cooperation as strengthening rather than impairing the Netherlands' capacity to act. However, the Netherlands is by no means in the vanguard when it comes to helping to reduce Europe's identified military shortcomings. In 2008, the Netherlands withdrew from NATO's multinational Air Ground Surveillance (AGS) project. The MALE UAV project (unmanned aerial vehicles with a substantial range) has been

postponed. These and other European shortfalls involve essential instruments/systems that are crucial for strengthening Europe's capacity to act, for retaining US involvement in European security and, equally, the capacity of the Dutch armed forces to act. The Netherlands should make amends and, preferably in collaboration with partners and allies, prepare plans and earmark money for the procurement and operation of these critical capabilities.

6.6 The Path to a Tighter Focus and Additional Investment

Maintaining a high-class expeditionary armed forces and a willingness to continue investing in it are important requirements for sustaining the ability to continue making relevant military contributions to NATO, the EU and the UN and in ad-hoc coalitions. However, the return on these investments, in other words the relevance of future military contributions, will be determined by the extent to which the Netherlands and its allies and partners are able to strengthen NATO and the EU's capacity to act, since, with the exception of national tasks, there is no question of acting alone. Member states can only address the growing instability around Europe together.

Despite NATO and EU initiatives to address the identified shortfalls in a coordinated fashion, the capacity to act jointly, and without the US if necessary, is still under-developed. For example, there is a lack of (adequate) strategic instruments, crucial support capabilities such as reconnaissance equipment, tactical and strategic transport equipment, capabilities for aerial refuelling, the right types and quantities of precision ammunition and sufficient firepower for actions across the entire spectrum of the use of force in general.

In the last few decades the Dutch armed forces have evolved into a professional expeditionary force, with highly skilled personnel and modern capabilities. Their repeated deployment for stabilisation and peacekeeping operations with NATO, the EU and the UN and in coalitions underlines the development of the armed forces into an important instrument of foreign and security policy. However, this process of modernisation has been financed from a shrinking budget, while operating and investment costs and the costs of wear and tear have risen as a result of demanding missions. This approach has caused deep-seated problems. Deployability is under pressure due to shortages of ammunition, spare parts and technical staff and possibilities to provide adequate training for troops. The choice made in the austerity programmes to favour combat strength over support also imposes structural constraints on deployability. Added to the greatly diminished redundancy within the armed forces – the numbers of units and capabilities have declined greatly as a result of the reduction in the size of the armed forces – it is questionable whether the armed forces could respond adequately in the event of additional and simultaneous calls being made on them – in this country or elsewhere. The armed forces must therefore be regarded as insufficiently future-proof.

These problems have taken on a different aspect with the deterioration of the security environment around Europe, the agreements in Wales (2014) and Warsaw

(2016) to strengthen the alliance's defences and increase defence spending and the growing vulnerability of the Netherlands and its inhabitants.

Making the armed forces more future-proof will take more than a phased strengthening. The capacity to respond to the changes in the security environment and military-technological developments is limited at the moment. The current defence planning is dominated by the replacement of existing weapons systems. Too few people and resources are assigned to knowledge, innovation and modernisation of the armed forces. The same applies for reducing the identified European military shortfalls. Up to now, the Netherlands' contribution to addressing these issues has been very limited, despite the crucial importance of these capabilities for Europe's capacity to act. This is not an exclusively financial issue, as *Houvast in een onzekere wereld. Lijnen van ontwikkeling in het meerjarig perspectief voor een duurzaam gereede en snel inzetbare krijgsmacht* (2017) has shown. The defence planning system should adopt a more flexible and focused division between the army, the air force and the navy to facilitate integrated, future-oriented deliberations.

The Netherlands is therefore faced with important questions regarding its security. How can the growing instability around Europe be reduced? What role should NATO and the EU play in that? What specific contributions can the Netherlands make? Which elements will be given priority? And what additional resources can and will the Netherlands free up in light of the deteriorating security environment?

Additional steps are needed to tighten the focus in the deployment of resources. The political debate should create transparency about the detailed choices that the armed forces have to make to tighten the focus. The aim of this book is to stimulate the debate among politicians, policymakers and strategists on this issue. The following closing chapter presents the final conclusions and recommendations in which, to supplement the foregoing analysis, five areas of concern are presented to help determine the necessary focus. These areas of concern create the conditions under which the conclusions and recommendations presented in the concluding chapter should be read:

- (1) a more strategic embedding of defence policy;
- (2) the establishment of greater anticipatory capacity;
- (3) the strengthening of the defence planning process on the basis of a strategic vision;
- (4) guaranteeing a stable multi-year perspective;
- (5) creating more room for knowledge and innovation.

6.6.1 A More Strategic Embedding of the Armed Forces

The choice of capabilities of the armed forces in the context of the cooperation in the NATO and EU alliances requires strategic embedding. The Netherlands always works with partners, but also needs its own strategy. The International Security Strategy and the National Security Strategy currently lack the necessary focus. Strategy documents like the International Security Strategy and the National Security Strategy and coalition agreements invariably contain relevant passages, but

texts that express values and interests in general terms do not automatically compel the making of choices. Vague formulations are not very useful. The AIV, the WRR and the Clingendael Institute have therefore all recently produced more precise definitions of interests and values and incorporated them in an assessment framework.²⁵ Conclusions can also be drawn from the foregoing analysis of strategic trends, threats and risks.

From the perspective of the armed forces, the preferred option is an integrated security strategy that also compels the other ‘client’ ministries to coordinate their priorities and direction. After all, the needs of the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Justice and Security directly affect the targets for the deployability of the armed forces. It also fits in with the steadily expanding interconnectedness of internal and external security.

6.6.2 *The Establishment of Greater Anticipatory Capacity*

The security strategy must penetrate deep into defence policy to make a real difference to it. The final report of the interdepartmental *Verkenningen: houvast voor de krijgsmacht van de toekomst* [Future Policy Survey. A New Foundation for the Netherlands Armed Forces] (2010) recognised anticipation, defined as preparing for foreseen and unforeseen developments and incidents that may affect the interests of the Kingdom of the Netherlands or the international rule of law, as one of the Dutch government’s strategic security functions. Like the recent French security strategies, the *Livre Blancs* in 2008 and 2013, it emphasised the need for an adequate strategic intelligence position and constant monitoring. The same applies for the importance of knowledge (“maintaining a sufficiently broad and relevant knowledge base”). Dutch priorities relate in particular to the need to draw up scenario analyses and foresight studies in the context of a future-oriented policy and capacity development with which sufficient flexibility, adaptability and resilience in the defence organisation can be guaranteed. In that context, the Future Policy Survey advocated (referring to it as a “policy consideration”) permanently embedding the foresight method in the Ministry of Defence’s regular policy-making process. That proposal was not followed at the time. In contrast to countries such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom, the Ministry of Defence still does not possess such a capability to support the internal policy and capacity development process. The perseverance with strategic foresight studies in the form of the Strategic Monitor is valuable, but is not in itself enough. Updating the regular scenarios and related studies produced by the HCSS and the Clingendael Institute has only limited value as long as the Ministry of Defence lacks the capacity to analyse them and they have no measurable effect on policy and capacity development. Consequently, the Ministry of Defence is failing to take advantage of opportunities to accelerate the pace at which it adapts (or upgrades) operational capabilities in response to the changing environment. The process of strategic foresight should be permanently embedded in the defence organisation in order to transform the Ministry of Defence into a strategically agile organisation.²⁶

6.6.3 *Strengthening of the Defence Planning Process*

The Netherlands can use the strategy formulation process to enhance defence planning. The international coordination, particularly with a view to international cooperation (NATO, EU), could also be improved. In the Defence Materiel Process, the House of Representatives concentrates on the results of the planning process when the choice of a particular capability has been made. The operating costs of the capabilities to be procured receive a lot of attention in that process. After all the cost overruns and shortfalls, the Netherlands Court of Audit also concentrates on that aspect. A lot has been written in the Netherlands about the capabilities the Netherlands should possess, but almost nothing has been published about defence planning. Capabilities are still assessed individually for their usefulness and versatility; there is no integrated review of their relative effectiveness and efficiency in achieving the desired military effects. Added to the requirement that the capabilities must fit in with the financial planning and must not cause displacement effects (must not be at the expense of other capabilities), it is impossible to set priorities in favour of an Operational Command, a joint capability or an established European military *shortfall*.

First of all, there is a need for long-term defence planning that provides insight into future risks, promotes thinking in terms of scenarios and produces strength-weakness analyses in a changing security environment.²⁷ That is also essential for setting priorities.

The current system is inevitably dominated by the replacement of main weapons systems. Long-term defence planning could be further improved by creating anticipatory capacity within the Ministry of Defence.

Secondly, there is a need for close coordination with NATO and the EU, the most important clients of Dutch military capabilities. At present, the NATO Defence Planning Process and the EU's *Capability Development Plan* do not play a significant role in the choice of capabilities. However, by ignoring the identified European shortfalls, the Netherlands could be hurting itself, since they involve so-called support that individual countries cannot afford or maintain themselves. Thirdly, there is a need for strategic guidance of the principal clients of defence products, the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence. The choice of capabilities is primarily a political issue. Other ministries have traditionally been excluded from this process in the Netherlands, in contrast to countries like the United Kingdom, France, Finland, Denmark and Sweden, where parliaments are closely involved in the decision-making.²⁸ NATO's best-practice approach offers various starting points for a reappraisal of the current defence planning system and for refining the point of departure of the Dutch defence planning system, planning on the basis of the possibilities.

6.6.4 *Guaranteeing a Stable Multi-year Perspective*

The strategically enhanced defence planning process for the Dutch armed forces depends on a stable multi-year perspective, which also make provision for sufficient resources to sustain the armed forces in the longer term. However, the long-term orientation is not helped by the way in which the Dutch defence budget is drafted up.

The defence budget is the result of an annual cycle that ends with the passing of the act containing the budget of the Ministry of Defence by the States-General. The budget can also be revised in the course of the year with supplementary budgetary legislation. This flexible budgetary mechanism allowed defence spending – as a percentage of GDP – to be halved in the decades after the end of the Cold War. In 2015, total defence spending came to 1.16% of GDP, which is well below the target of 2% agreed at the NATO summits in Wales (2014) and Warsaw (2016). The investment ratio in particular has suffered under the successive rounds of cutbacks. The actual investment ratio in 2015 was 15%, which is well below the NATO standard of 20% of total defence spending (see the letter from the Minister of Defence to the House of Representatives on the development of the investment ratio of the Ministry of Defence, 14 March 2016).

Although a number of planned cutbacks have been reversed in the last few years and some ‘windfalls’ have been spent on defence, these recent measures confirm the impression of a lack of consistency in budgetary policy. There are therefore growing calls to make the budgetary system less susceptible to political opportunism and fluctuations in the short term (see the motion by Eijssink, Parliamentary Documents II 2015–2016 34,300 x, no. 49, 12 November 2015). Annual fluctuations in the order of 20% of the total defence budget are not uncommon. That makes it difficult to plan and creates uncertainty within the organisation.

In the official response to the WRR-report (2017), the Minister of Defence states that the percentage of GDP that is spent on Defence will increase from 1.17% in 2017 to 1.26% in 2021. The Council of Ministers is aware that spending on Defence is far from 2% of GDP and that the European average has not yet been achieved. The Council of Ministers aims to put in place “longer-term measures” [*“langere lijnen naar de toekomst”*] that are required for stable financing and reinforcement of the armed forces during this cabinet period. The Council aims to do so in the light of the NATO agreement of 2014 to move defence spending towards the NATO standard of 2% GDP in 10 years. It includes step-by-step growth in the context of these longer-term measures in order to achieve the capacity objectives of NATO in the review of the Defence Memorandum. This is planned for 2020. A possible extra follow-up step during this term of office will be examined in the light of the development of the security situation, the government-wide priorities and within the agreed budgetary frameworks (Parliamentary Documents II 2017–2018, 33 763, No. 141, 28 March 2018: 5).

Agreements on defence spending for periods of 5 or 6 years – separate from the sitting government’s term of office – could create greater continuity and certainty. That is also important in view of the long-term investments that have to be made to

ensure the defence forces are properly equipped in terms of personnel and materiel. But the discussion does not have to be confined to the question of whether or not a multi-year budget should coincide with a government's term of office (in other words, either 4 years or 5 or 6 years). A pragmatic approach is also an option, for example by working towards meeting the 2% target in 2024, 10 years after the agreements in Wales (2014), from the start of the new government's term of office.

Some countries already have experience with this type of multi-year agreement that fixes defence spending for a number of years. These agreements vary in terms of the period adopted, the degree of flexibility and the nature of parliamentary involvement. The Netherlands could in particular learn from the experiences in Denmark and Sweden (Drent en Meijnders, *Multi-year Defence Agreements. A Model for Modern Defence?*, Clingendael 2015; Bakker and Drent, *Meerjarige Defensie Akkoorden in Nederland* [Multi-year Defence Agreements in the Netherlands], Clingendael 2016). Creating an investment fund covering a period of 15–20 years – similar to the Delta fund or the Multi-year programme for Infrastructure, Space and Transport – could also help to create greater financial stability.

Successive cutbacks and under-investment have led to a reduction in the deployability and sustainability of the armed forces. The available resources are not even sufficient to meet the now greatly reduced ambitions (see Netherlands Court of Audit, *Resultaten verantwoordingsonderzoek 2015 Ministerie van Defensie* [Results of the audit of the Ministry of Defence 2015], May 2016; see also Schramade 2016). That is worrying in a drastically altered national and international security environment. Defence is, after all, the collective good *par excellence*. That special character justifies a certain depoliticisation of the defence budget, although the decision to do that is actually a form of self-policing and can only be a political decision. In short, multi-year defence agreements are essential for future-proofing the Dutch armed forces. They would also demonstrate to the international community the Netherlands' commitment to a course in which its own choices are naturally dictated in part by shortcomings in the alliance. Such agreements could therefore also contribute to the defence cooperation within NATO and the EU.

6.6.5 *Creating More Room for Knowledge and Innovation*

The Ministry of Defence will have to steadily accelerate the pace of innovation to keep pace with the dynamic in security challenges and to be able to effectively respond to technological and social developments (see Ministry of Defence, *Strategische Kennis-en Innovatieagenda 2016–2020* [Strategic Knowledge and Innovation Agenda 2016–2020], October 2016). The changing security environment and, more generally, the increasingly rapid pace of technological and social changes, call for innovations in the operational, doctrinaire, personnel and technological domains. The armed forces, and in particular the navy, have a good reputation for incremental innovation. However, replacing and upgrading platforms do not provide sufficient assurance of being able to keep pace with technological and operational developments in the long term. The possibilities of joining in new and pos-

sibly groundbreaking developments, such as nano technology and 3D printers, are very limited at the moment and therefore need to be expanded. The same applies for efforts to develop and test central concepts, methods and resources more quickly and more cheaply within the armed forces.²⁹ However, successful innovation still depends on a robust knowledge base and structure within the Ministry of Defence. The litmus test for successful innovation remains the choice of new weapons systems, technologies and concepts in accordance with the chosen strategy.³⁰ The explanation for this is that armed forces rely heavily on available and proven capabilities when it comes to the deployment of troops.³¹ Most armed forces, including the Dutch, are no exception to that rule. They concentrate on incremental innovation. There is therefore less chance of more radical or even disruptive innovation. However, in the longer term the availability of new capabilities could be decisive for gaining the upper hand in conflicts.

The changes that defence policy has to address and the necessary strengthening of the armed forces must reflect the changes in the nature of warfare and make better use of the possibilities for European cooperation, bearing in mind the primacy of the framework of the NATO alliance. A sharper focus and increased investment are needed, however. The five steps set out above indicate the policy path to achieving that.

Endnotes

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- 20 Zandee, D., Drent, M. & Hendriks, R. (2016).
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- 24 AIV. (2012).
- 25 In 2010, the WRR concluded that Dutch foreign policy consists of “a broad range of aspirations, viewpoints and activities” and that “in the middle of this range there is little to connect the various elements”. The report compared Dutch foreign policy with a “doughnut”. There was a risk that “policymakers and policy followers will not be able to see the wood for the trees, with all the negative consequences this will for the results, for legitimacy, for areas of expertise and for internal and external authorities”. That called for a transparent assessment framework and the setting of priorities. In 2013, in a study into the armed forces of the future, experts from the Clingendael Institute distinguished four interests: (1) influence in the international community; (2) preservation of prosperity and economic development; (3) enhancing security and stability; and (4) promoting human rights and humanity. They suggested an appropriate armed forces for each of these interests: (1) an air-based intervention force, (2) a maritime force, (3) a robust stabilisation force and (4) a supporting peace force (Colijn et al. 2013). The experts submitted all four options to the politicians, with interest 3 (promoting security and stability) and option 3 (a robust stabilisation force) as their own preferred choices. The policy document In the interest of the Netherlands shows that the second Rutte government chose neither of these options, but continued to follow the course taken by previous governments, that of versatile deployable armed forces.
- 26 Bekkers, F. & Spiegeleire, S. de (2010).
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- 28 The Ministerial Committee on the replacement of the F-16 was specially established to make a final assessment of the plans for the replacement of the F-16 and the calculations of the affordability of the 29 main weapons systems of the armed forces.
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