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Multinational Force Ukraine Series

The Netherlands: Unyielding support with some uncertainty

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Political will

The Netherlands is a strong supporter of Ukraine. It is a large donor in absolute terms (8,7 billion euro by September 2025) and in relative terms. The support consists of political, legal, humanitarian, financial and military aid. Part of the support is multilateral via NATO and the EU. In addition, there are bilateral initiatives such as the delivery of Patriot air defence systems. The Netherlands is also part of several ad hoc coalitions which provide specific assistance to Ukraine, such as the F16 training coalition (as a co-leader), the international tank coalition, the drone coalition, the IT coalition and the shadow fleet expert group.

Dutch support can be explained by the recognition of Ukraine as a sovereign state, the commitment to upholding international law, and deep concerns about European security. The government argues that Russia's aggression has an impact beyond Ukraine and that a Russian victory would send a signal to autocratic leaders that aggression is rewarded. Furthermore, the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 on 17 July 2014 by separatists in the Donbas region – for which Russia was held responsible by a Dutch court and the European Court of Human Rights – resulted in 196 Dutch casualties and created a special bond between the Netherlands and Ukraine. It also started a reorientation in its foreign policy towards Russia, but the real watershed moment came after the large scale invasion in February 2022.

On 29 October 2025 snap elections were held in the Netherlands and these resulted in a victory of the social liberal D66 and the right-wing populist PVV. Having slightly more votes, D66 has the initiative to form a governing coalition. There is a chance that a coalition will be formed by political parties in the middle of the political spectrum, but experience from the outgoing government suggests that even a right wing coalition, containing one or more populist parities, would probably continue to support Ukraine.

The Netherlands also participates in the political consultations and in the military planning process of the coalition of the willing for a potential military support mission in Ukraine. The decision to participate would depend on specific conditions, including the precise conditions of a cease-fire/peace agreement, the content and scope of the rules of engagement, and the conditions under which monitoring of the cease-fire/peace agreement would take place.

In case the government decides to participate in the mission, it would strive to gain a broad parliamentary support (including as much opposition parties as possible). Even though Dutch Parliament does not have a formal right of approval, finding broad parliamentary support for decisions to send troops abroad (through the so-called article 100 procedure) is a well-established practice in Dutch politics.

Until now, Dutch participation in military coalitions of the willing has consistently been contingent on the

involvement of the United States, particularly with regard to leadership and operational capabilities. The key question going forward is whether the Netherlands is prepared to provide a military contribution in the case when the United States does not fully and unambiguously support the coalition. At this point it remains unclear, for example, if political support or very limited military support from the US would be sufficient for the Dutch.

Military capabilities

There are also uncertainties regarding available military capabilities. Like many European countries, the Netherlands is recovering from years of budget cuts on defence. Having underinvested for years, the Dutch reached 2,49 percent of GDP on defence spending in 2025. While preparing to host the NATO summit in June 2025, the outgoing government promised to support the new NATO defence spending target of 3,5 percent (and 1,5 percent of defence related spending). The increased financial resources are intended to help the Netherlands meet NATO capability targets and recover from years of underinvestment in defence. If the Netherlands were asked to contribute substantially to a robust military support mission, it could negatively impact its ability to fulfill these commitments.

Some scenarios would be easier for the Netherlands to contribute military to than others, but all would be a challenge of some sort. For example, a partial SkyShield over Ukraine, operated from air bases within the EU, would perhaps be doable. The Dutch air force has ample experience with sky policing (for example as part of NATO's territorial deterrence and defence). However, it would still demand substantial capabilities and the political will to actually enforce the shield. A full SkyShield, operated from within Ukraine itself, would be a greater challenge to contribute to as it would involve a larger mission demanding more troops. It would also be a much more complicated mission, because of the need for more deconfliction measures with the Ukrainian air force. The most difficult mission to contribute to would be a robust military support mission with a significant land component. Not only would it involve more risk, but also a large contribution from the Dutch army to provide boots on the ground. Like the air force and the navy, the land force is still recovering from the era of budget cuts.

All scenarios would demand a cease-fire of some sorts and the application of the assessment framework for military deployments. This framework serves to improve the quality of the decision-making on military deployments and includes (among others) criteria referring to the political aspects, the legal basis, the feasibility of the mission and security risks. It also requires that participation happens only with reliable partners, meaning both the quality of the coalition of the willing and the credibility it brings are factors in their own right. Depending on the direction of the discussions, this could entail a demand to have US security guarantees.

Concluding; the Netherlands has positioned itself as a large and reliable provider of support to Ukraine on all dimension. At the same time, the government coalition negotiations, the restraints in terms of available military capabilities, and the unpredictable outcome of the assessment framework complicate any forecasts about Dutch participation.

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In the *Multinational Force Ukraine series* of policy briefs leading experts from allied countries assess key factors for participation in the Multinational Force Ukraine. This includes the political willingness of allies to deploy troops—on the ground, in the air, or at sea—to establish a military presence in or around Ukraine. They also examine the conditions for such deployments to occur (before, during, or after peace negotiations), the roles these forces would be expected to perform (defensive or offensive), the red lines imposed by national governments, and the specific capabilities each country could realistically contribute.

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