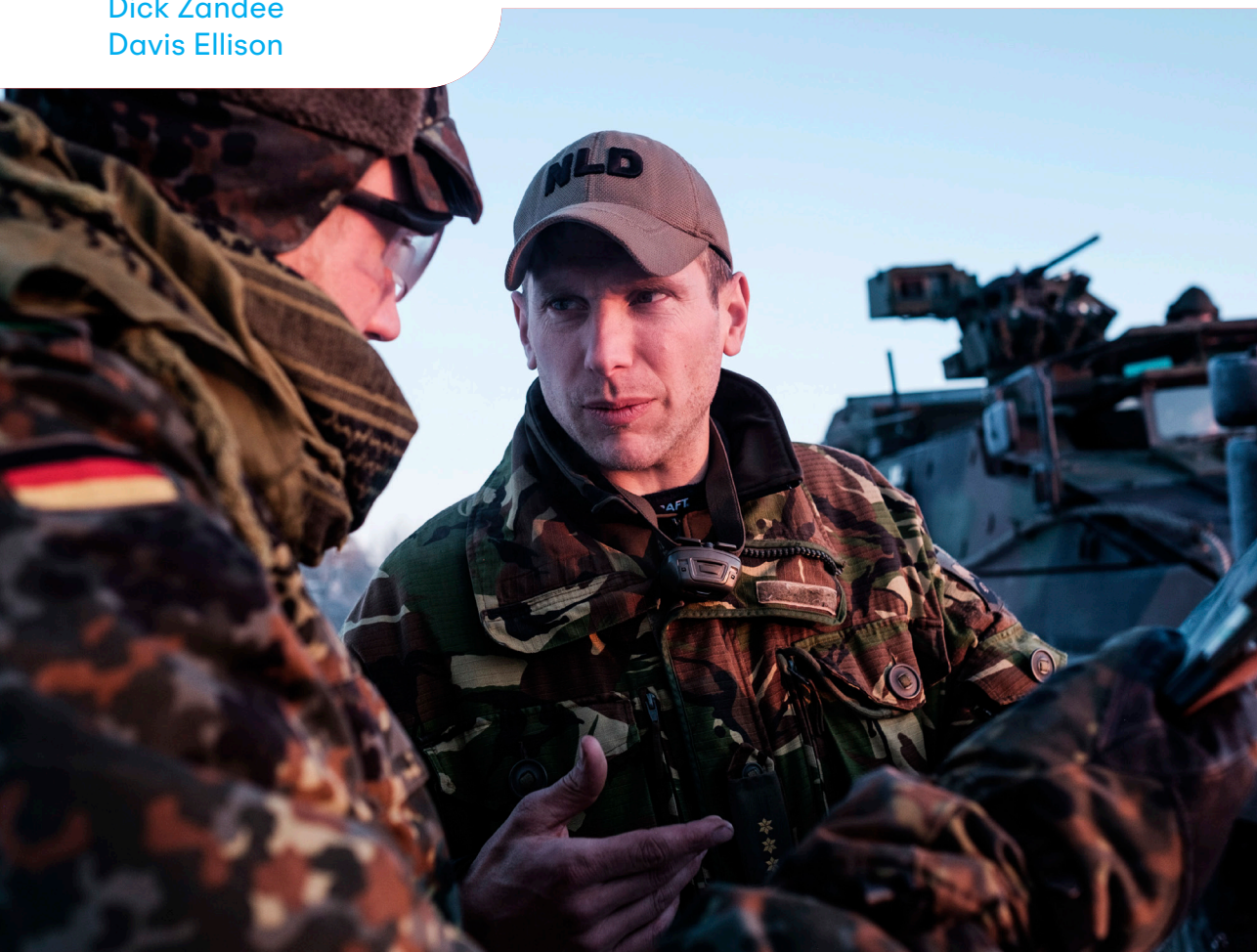


# Germany's *Zeitenwende* and the consequences for German-Dutch defence cooperation

Clingendael Report

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Clingendael Report

January 2024

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**January 2024**

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# 1 Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has led to a paradigm shift in the realm of European security and defence. It triggered an unprecedented wave of defence investments throughout Europe. Ironically, Putin thereby set in motion something that consecutive American presidents could not accomplish: raising defence budgets so that European countries would bear a greater share of the financial burden of Europe's defence.

One of the most remarkable announcements was the *Zeitenwende* speech by the German *Bundeskanzler* Olaf Scholz on 27 February 2022. Russia's invasion of Ukraine represented a watershed moment in post-Second World War European history and, in response, Scholz announced that Germany would invest an additional € 100 billion in defence. The question, however, remains whether this announcement would lead to an actual turnaround in German security and defence policy and whether the investments will have a structural or temporal nature. Moreover, one may ask which output will be realised with the extra money available.

In a similar vein, the question arises what the implications of Germany's *Zeitenwende* are for defence cooperation between Germany and its partners. This applies in particular to the Netherlands, considering the far-reaching integration between the German and Dutch land forces. Germany and the Netherlands have a decades-long history of defence cooperation, bilaterally as well as in NATO and EU operations.

This report addresses the potential consequences of the German *Zeitenwende* for Germany's role in European security, and more specifically for the German-Dutch defence cooperation. After this introductory chapter, chapter 2 is devoted to setting the political-strategic scene. It explains what the *Zeitenwende* entails and explores how Germany will translate this change of direction into its security and defence policy. It will also shed light on the role of the German-Dutch defence cooperation in this context as well as on the relationship between the *Zeitenwende* and the strengthening of European defence cooperation. Finally, it will explore the possibilities for German-Dutch cooperation within the NATO framework, with a specific focus on the enhanced Forward Presence in Lithuania and NATO's New Force Model. Chapter 3 will then delve into more

detail on the German-Dutch defence cooperation, focussing on the question of how the Dutch armed forces could further align themselves with the German armed forces in developing modernised and adaptive military capabilities. Here, emphasis will be put on the integration between the German and Dutch armies, and on the possibilities for further cooperation including between the navies and air forces of both countries. Chapter 4 will draw conclusions from the analysis in chapters 2 and 3. The paper will conclude with recommendations in chapter 5.

The methodology for this report consists of a mix of literature research and interviews with Dutch and German experts. The interviews were conducted under the Chatham House Rule. The authors are grateful for the provision of important and often practical input by the interviewees.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Adája Stoetman contributed to the literature-based drafting of chapter 2 before she was seconded to the Ministry of Defence. Intern Roman de Baedts delivered the results of the literature scan and Mik Dijkman assisted in the planning and conducting of interviews for this chapter. The authors are grateful for their valuable contributions.

## 2 The political-strategic aspects of Germany's *Zeitenwende*

Germany's security and defence policy cannot be explained without assessing the impact of the First and Second World War. The dogma of *nie wieder Krieg* (never again war) has been dominating the country's approach to security and the role of its armed forces therein. Embedding Germany in multilateral organisations has been a key aspect of this approach. Since joining NATO in 1955, (West) Germany's security has been based on its alliance with the United States (US) as the key partner. *Westintegration* was Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's credo for embedding the country in the Euro-Atlantic democratic order with *Westbindung* of the German Federal Republic in the Western security and defence structures in view of the Soviet threat. However, striving for cooperation with the East has been another central element in the country's security policy. Since the mid-1960s, (West) Germany's contribution to collective defence was connected to a policy of cooperation with the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact countries through so-called *Ostpolitik*. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Germany became one of the advocates of strengthening relations with Russia, in particular by increasing trade and importing gas. The German approach was given the label of *Wandel durch Handel* (change through trade) or *Wandel durch Verflechtung* (change through interconnection) – concepts based on increasing cooperation and avoiding confrontation.

The *Zeitenwende* thus represents a game changer in Germany's security and defence policy. In his famous speech three days after the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Chancellor Scholz declared: "We are living through a watershed era. And that means that the world afterwards will no longer be the same as the world before."<sup>2</sup> This has a major impact on Germany's security policy, breaking away from decades-long traditions. For the first time since

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2 The Federal Government of Germany, [\*Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin.\*](#)



the end of the Cold War, Germany recognised that Russia has fundamentally violated peace and security in Europe. This was reiterated in Germany's first ever national security strategy, published in June 2023: "By thus wrecking the European peaceful order, Russia is directly threatening our security and that of our allies in NATO and the EU".<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the war in Ukraine, the priority given to strengthening NATO's collective defence and the *Zeitenwende* have resulted in a geographical shift to the East. German strategic planners are now firstly looking eastward.<sup>4</sup>

With respect to defence policy, a break with decades-long traditions can be witnessed. Since the end of the Cold War, Germany – like many other European countries – has been reluctant when it comes to defence investments and participation in high-intensity crisis management operations, such as in the anti-ISIS air campaign and in NATO's ISAF operation in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> The Russian invasion of Ukraine marked an important turning point: Berlin is seriously investing in defence, has expressed its desire to become "the guarantor of European security"<sup>6</sup> and for the Bundeswehr to act as "a cornerstone of defence in Europe."<sup>7</sup> Berlin is providing (lethal) weapons to a country that is actively at war. All of this on the backdrop of domestic debates, in which the use of force and the military remain controversial topics, or "the Achilles heel for Germany's *Zeitenwende* on military policy."<sup>8</sup> Public support for continued investment in defence is questionable, however. An important segment of the German population holds the view that the special fund of € 100 billion is sufficient to fully modernise the *Bundeswehr*. Furthermore, there is little day-to-day exposure to the military threat of Russia, which was obvious during the Cold War at the inner-German border. Geographically, the Russian threat is felt as more distant

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3 The Federal Government of Germany, "[Robust. Resilient. Sustainable. Integrated Security for Germany – National Security Strategy](#)", June 2023, p. 22.

4 Information from interviews.

5 The anti-ISIS air campaign: Germany contributed, but with limitations (reconnaissance flights). ISAF: Germany did not deploy forces to Southern Afghanistan and its contribution to Northern Afghanistan operated under a set of national caveats.

6 Olaf Scholz, "[The Global Zeitenwende. How to Avoid a New Cold in a Multipolar Era](#)", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 102, No. 1, January/February 2023, p. 22-38.

7 The Federal Government of Germany, "[Robust. Resilient. Sustainable. Integrated Security for Germany – National Security Strategy](#)", June 2023, p. 13.

8 Claudia Major & Christian Mölling, "[No Time to Lose: How Germany's Zeitenwende in Defence can Succeed](#)", *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 5 April 2023.

compared to the situation before 1989.<sup>9</sup> A poll showed that only 38 percent of the German population prefers a stronger engagement of the country in international crises and 76 percent holds the view that, preferably, such involvement should be of a diplomatic nature.<sup>10</sup> *Zeitenwende* is not a solely German phenomenon as the watershed era applies to the whole of Europe. One of the consequences is the recognition of the urgency to invest more in defence. NATO and the EU are adapting strategies and policies to the new environment. In the sections below, first an assessment is given of the *Zeitenwende*'s expectations and implementation with regard to Germany's security and defence policy. This is followed by an analysis of the broader meaning of the *Zeitenwende* for European defence cooperation, as well as the bilateral German-Dutch defence cooperation, also in the context of NATO.

## 2.1 *Zeitenwende*: expectations and implementation

Expectations have been high since Chancellor Scholz gave his famous speech. This has been reinforced by the various statements of, amongst others, former minister of defence Christine Lambrecht (September 2022<sup>11</sup>) and Scholz himself (August 2022<sup>12</sup>). Furthermore, Germany's shift in security policy was long-awaited. Previous major events affecting European security, including the annexation of Crimea, had only limited effect,<sup>13</sup> to the frustration of partners, including the US. This could be seen in the continuation of the commitment to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, it seems that the country has finally woken up to the need for a change of course – a development that was perceived as good news. Germany's partners, including France and Poland, expected – or at least hoped – that Germany's *Zeitenwende* would increasingly align Berlin's policies with

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9 Information from interviews.

10 Körber Stiftung, "[The Berlin Pulse – Of Paradigms and Power Shifts 2023/2024](#)", November 2023.

11 Federal Ministry of Defence, "[Lambrecht: Bundeswehr must be at the heart of German security](#)", News item, 16 September 2022.

12 The Federal Government of Germany, [Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague on Monday, 29 August 2022](#).

13 Camille Grand, '[The Missing European Dimension of Germany's \*Zeitenwende\*: A View from France](#)', *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 23 February 2023. Confirmed in interviews.

theirs.<sup>14</sup> In France, the Zeitenwende was regarded as “a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring French and German views closer.”<sup>15</sup>

The reality is that such expectations are unlikely to be fulfilled. Germany is more likely “to embrace a more “German” and more assertive mode of leadership in Europe”<sup>16</sup>, one that is more restrained and not necessarily aligned with the interests of partners and allies. With Germany’s attention shifted to the East, Paris will find it more difficult to call on Berlin’s support for military operations in Africa. Moreover, France’s own role in Europe has changed. The war in Ukraine, the departure of French forces from several Sahel countries and increased tensions in the country connected to the war in Gaza have resulted in watering down its leading role in European security. For Berlin, it has become more difficult to follow France in its security policy objectives as they are quite unclear at the moment.<sup>17</sup> The United Kingdom should also lower its expectations, though there is scope for increased bilateral defence cooperation.<sup>18</sup>

In the US, where successive presidents have pushed for European countries to bear a fairer share of the defence burden, the German shift is welcomed. At the same time, the fate of the Zeitenwende, and thus Berlin’s ability to meet its objectives, is in a way tied to the 2024 US presidential elections. President Joe Biden can be regarded as the most pro-European US presidents of this century. But even under a continued Democratic presidency, if Germany fails to step up its efforts and is unable to sustain the 2% NATO target and reform the *Bundeswehr*, American support for the Zeitenwende will likely wither away. It would be illustrative of “deeper ills afflicting the US-EU relationship – like European overreliance”<sup>19</sup>, making it more difficult to sustain the pro-European approach. A Republican victory in November 2024, considering the ‘America First’ and less pro-European attitude of many Republican politicians, might lead to a repetition of the German reaction – under Chancellor Angela Merkel – after Donald Trump

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14 Kristi Raik & Martin Quencez, “[Whose Zeitenwende? Germany Cannot Meet Everyone’s Expectations](#)”, DGAP Policy Brief, No. 17, June 2023, p. 2.

15 Grand, “[The Missing European Dimension of Germany’s Zeitenwende: A View from France](#)”, 23 February 2023.

16 Raik & Quencez, “[Whose Zeitenwende? Germany Cannot Meet Everyone’s Expectations](#)”, June 2023, p. 2.

17 Information from interviews.

18 Christina Kessler, “[The limits of Germany’s Zeitenwende](#)”, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 7 December 2023.

19 Rachel Rizzo, “[Opportunities and pitfalls. A US perspective of Germany’s Zeitenwende](#)”, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 30 March 2023.

entered the White House: the danger of losing its first and foremost strategic partner, thereby creating a tremendous problem for Germany's security and defence policy.

Moreover, expressing big ambitions creates the expectation of big actions. Germany has been criticised for progressing too slowly, both in national defence reforms and in its approach to Ukraine. Nationally, the most frequently heard criticism is that "Germany's bureaucracy is still working in peacetime tempo."<sup>20</sup> Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht resigned, amongst other things, over the critique of her inability to reform and strengthen the *Bundeswehr*. The criticism of Germany's stance regarding Ukraine originates mainly from Central and Eastern European countries, which have claimed that Berlin had been too hesitant about weapon deliveries to Ukraine, referring to them as being "too little, too late."<sup>21</sup> This, however, does not do full justice to the paradigm shift that Germany has undergone, overthrowing the taboo of lethal weapon deliveries to a country at war and becoming the largest donor country after the US in the delivery of weaponry to Kyiv. Chancellor Scholz has announced that Germany will make € 8 billion available in 2024 for delivering military support to Ukraine. On the other hand, it is a fact that when other countries pass the threshold of delivering a new category of weapons to Ukraine – heavy artillery, tanks, long-range missiles – Germany only follows after hesitation and prolonged debate. The latest example is the delay in the delivery of the long-range Taurus missile, while the UK and France are already providing Ukraine with comparable missiles (Storm Shadow and Scalp, respectively). It is mostly Chancellor Scholz who is putting his foot on the brake.<sup>22</sup>

In another vein, Germany has been accused of not having a European enough approach to defence investments.<sup>23</sup> In a speech delivered in Prague, Scholz emphasised the need for more intensified cooperation between Europe's defence

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20 Eskil Jakobsen, Minna Ålander & Øyvind Svendsen, "[Germany's Zeitenwende in foreign and security policy: Domestic developments and alliance dynamics after one year](#)", NUPI Policy Brief, 26 April 2023, p. 4.

21 Jana Puglierin, "[Germany's 'Zeitenwende' and its implications for the European security architecture](#)", Institut für Europäische Politik, January 2023, p. 2.

22 Mattias Gebauer, Marina Korbaki und Gerard Traufetter, "[Darum hält Scholz die Taurus-Waffen zurück](#)", Der Spiegel, 15 September 2023.

23 See for example: Laura Kayali, "[France and Germany clash \(again\) on buying US arms](#)", Politico, 20 September 2023.

industries. But at the same time, Germany is filling its most important capability gaps through buying off the shelf from primarily US companies, which does not benefit the European defence industry.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, urgent capability shortfalls require the fast-track acquisition of weapons systems which are often not available on the European Defence Equipment Market.

In terms of leadership, the appointment of Boris Pistorius as German Minister of Defence in January 2023 has brought remarkable change. He initiated a reorganisation of the German defence apparatus, took major decisions on investment and stepped up the German support to Ukraine.<sup>25</sup> On the eve of the NATO Vilnius Summit, Pistorius surprised everybody – including the *Bundeswehr* leadership<sup>26</sup> – by announcing that Germany would station 4,000 additional troops in Lithuania. He thereby broke away from the 2022 decision that only a brigade headquarters would be permanently deployed to the Baltic states. Pistorius has also become a strong proponent of increasing the European defence effort in response to the Russian threat, referring to a timeframe of “five to eight years in which we have to catch up – in the armed forces, in industry and in society.”<sup>27</sup>

After the initial positive reaction, by the end of 2023 the appraisal of *Zeitenwende*'s implementation is mixed. It is very clear that Germany's security and defence policy has changed direction with regard to Russia. The mantra ‘security with Russia’, built on the conviction that security in Europe would only be possible in cooperation with Moscow, has transformed into ‘security against Russia’.<sup>28</sup> Berlin has made a U-turn by reducing its energy dependency on Russia: the core of the *Zeitenwende* is the *Energiewende*.<sup>29</sup> However, Germany remains reluctant to take on a leadership (*Führung*) role in Europe, in apparent contradiction to what Chancellor Scholz expressed in his *Zeitenwende* speech. This may be due to different interpretations of the German word *Führung*. For countries such as France, the United Kingdom and the US, leadership is

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24 Ibid., p. 3.

25 See for example: Christiana Hübscher, “[Boris Pistorius – der Vorwärtsminister? Warum Boris Pistorius gerade \(fast\) alles richtig macht](#)”, ZDF, 22.04.23.

26 Information from interviews.

27 Carlo Boffa, “[Europe must boost military capacity to counter Russian threat: German defence chief](#)”, Politico, 16 December 2023.

28 Information from interviews.

29 Information from interviews.

connected to power and influence exerted by the leading nation. Germany has another perspective on *Führung*, that of *Verantwortung* (responsibility) which can only be implemented by ensuring the support of Berlin's partners.<sup>30</sup> In other words, Berlin feels comfortable among European partners, not heading them without their explicit support. The *Zeitenwende* is also serving the aim of keeping the US, Germany's key partner for its security, engaged in Europe.<sup>31</sup> This position is reflected in Germany's constant campaign for strong multilateralism (EU, NATO). It has served German interests well.<sup>32</sup>

The first ever German National Security Strategy (NSS) has been welcomed, but has also received criticism: "Germany's new National Security Strategy is not a strategy but a list of good intentions. It lacks priorities, adequate funding, and a sense of change."<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the NSS lists more than 75 initiatives "to do better what the country has already been doing."<sup>34</sup> One argument underpinning the negative comments is that the German Federal Government has failed to establish a National Security Council. Foreign Minister Baerbock clashed over the matter with Chancellor Scholz, with an important factor explaining the "toxic relationship"<sup>35</sup> being the turf battle over the leadership of German foreign policy between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chancellery. With a National Security Council removed from the NSS text, there is now an important prerequisite missing for implementing its integrated security concept.

A wider explanation of the shortcomings of the NSS is that Germany lacks strategic thinking in or a geostrategic approach to security and defence policy.<sup>36</sup> Neither is the next generation of leaders prepared for the fundamental change in mindset that the *Zeitenwende* would require. A change of federal government under CDU/CSU leadership will not lead to a more strategically thinking and acting Germany.<sup>37</sup> Further proof of the lack of strategic thinking is the absence

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30 Information from interviews.

31 Information from interviews. See also: Elanur Alsaç and Aylin Matlé, "[Berlin Needs to Show Washington It Can Do More on Defense](#)", *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 10 October 2023.

32 Information from interviews.

33 Daniel S. Hamilton, "[Can Germany Keep Pace in a Fast-Forward World?](#)", *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 29 June 2023.

34 Ibid.

35 Hans von der Burchard, "[Germany's sharp-tongued Annalena Baerbock rips up the diplomatic playbook](#)", *Politico*, April 24, 2023.

36 Information from interviews.

37 Information from interviews.

of a single chair for strategic studies or security policy at Germany's state universities.<sup>38</sup> In essence, the NSS reflects German society, which remains reluctant to adopt a more assertive security policy. As a former US Ambassador to Germany stated: "It's important to understand the special German road to change. In a nation traumatised by past violent upheavals, voters demand an emotional insurance policy. Future leaders are carefully trimmed to this standard. New ideas must be sold as not really changing anything. Change must be seen as a method of strengthening stability, not as a visionary upheaval."<sup>39</sup> The German Government has made a *Wende*, but the German population has only started to make a turn slowly – a phenomenon that can also be witnessed in other European countries.

#### Box 1: Overview of Germany's defence investment

- €100 billion special fund for the Bundeswehr
  - €33.4 billion for air force procurements
  - €16.6 billion for land force procurements
  - €8.8 billion for maritime procurements
  - €20.8 billion for command capability and digitalization procurements
- Confirmed procurements
  - 35 F-35s
  - Heavy transport helicopters
  - Armoured vehicles
  - 8 Boeing P8 maritime surveillance aircraft
  - Arrow 3 missile defence
- €20 billion on ammunition procurement

While the criticism of the NSS demonstrates that the implementation of the *Zeitenwende* leaves much to be desired, steps are being taken in one of its crucial elements: the revitalisation of the Bundeswehr. In order to achieve this objective, Scholz has announced the creation of a €100 billion special

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38 Joachim Krause, "[Deutschland's strategische Blindheit](#)", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 September 2023.

39 John Kornblum, "[Germany changes but not on election day](#)", *OMFIF*, 23 August 2021.

fund, the *Sondervermögen*, while also pledging to reach the 2% NATO target. The fund is divided as depicted in Box 1.<sup>40</sup> A caveat is the actual military hardware purchasing power. It is expected that out of the € 100 billion approximately € 13 billion is for interest payments on the government loan, leaving only € 87 billion of spendable money.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, a considerable part of the fund will be spent on buying spare parts and filling other gaps resulting from the long period of underspending.<sup>42</sup> Finally, it is expected that Germany will meet the NATO 2% target in 2024. However, this is the total of the German defence budget of € 51.8 billion and an annual slice of the €100 billion special fund – in other words ‘creative accounting’.<sup>43</sup>

Looking at what has been announced so far, Germany will acquire 35 F-35s, 60 Chinook heavy lift helicopters and armoured vehicles; it will upscale its order for Boeing P8 maritime surveillance aircraft from 5 to 8.<sup>44</sup> Germany is procuring the Arrow 3 missile defence system from Israel<sup>45</sup>, thus becoming the first European country with an exospheric missile interception capability. In addition, outside the scope of the € 100 billion special fund, Minister of Defence Pistorius announced that € 20 billion would be spent on ammunition procurement for the period up until 2031.<sup>46</sup>

Although the special fund investments are remarkable and should not be underestimated, the *Zeitenwende*’s implementation continues to face challenges:

1. A sustainable long-term strategic approach that is less reactive and more proactive in addressing international threats and crises is still lacking. As previously stated, Germany’s paradigm shift was caused by external events and not so much by the conviction of its urgency in isolation thereof.
2. Closely connected to the lack of a long-term strategic approach, it appears that the more ambitious spending targets proposed by the Ministry of

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40 The Federal Government of Germany, [100 Milliarden Euro für eine leistungsstarke Bundeswehr](#), 10 June 2022.

41 Ben Knight, [“What happened to the German military’s €100 billion fund”](#), DW, 28 February 2023.

42 Information from interviews.

43 Information from interviews.

44 Information from interviews.

45 Seth J. Frantzman, [“Germany starts funding Israeli Arrow-3 missile defense system procurement”](#), *Breaking Defense*, June 14, 2023.

46 [“Verteidigungsminister Pistorius plant über 20 Milliarden Euro für Munition”](#), *Handelsblatt*, 24 July 2022.



Defence have met with opposition from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>47</sup> Foreign Minister Baerbock wanted to use the *Sondervermögen* also for non-*Bundeswehr* investment, such as for cyber security. She lost this political battle and the special fund will be allocated solely to the German armed forces.<sup>48</sup>

3. The € 100 billion fund will not be sufficient to compensate for the under-funding the *Bundeswehr* had to face over the past decades. An increasing part of the special fund has been directed towards increased operational costs (spare parts, ammunition, etc.) at the expense of equipment investment. For example, fewer P8 maritime patrol aircraft (8 instead of 12) and F126 frigates will be procured. The acquisition of new corvette-type ships (K-130 class) is uncertain.<sup>49</sup> Neither will the special fund solve all German capability gaps. For example, the modernisation of the German minehunter fleet –with ships that are approximately 30 years old – is not included.<sup>50</sup>
4. Although Chancellor Scholz has promised to meet NATO's 2% target, this is only guaranteed for the next few years while Germany's defence budget will be frozen at € 51.8 billion a year. Once the bottom of the special fund is reached, Germany will face a tremendous spending problem. There are only two options: "(..) either the regular defence budget is increased or a Special Fund II is adopted as of 2026."<sup>51</sup> The first solution might require an annual defence budget of € 85 billion per year by the time the special fund expires.<sup>52</sup> This is unlikely to happen, not in the least because such a high German defence budget would account for doubling the French or British defence budgets, raising eyebrows in Paris and London.<sup>53</sup> A second special fund might require an additional financial commitment of up to € 200 billion in order to restructure and modernise the *Bundeswehr* into the 2030s.<sup>54</sup>

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47 Peter Wilke, "[Germany's U-Turns on Commitment to Meet NATO Spending Target Annually](#)", *Politico*, 16 August 2023.

48 Information from interviews.

49 T. Wiegold, "[Nach Rechnungshof-Kritik: Weniger Projekte im Bundeswehr-Sondervermögen](#)", *Augen Geradeaus!*, 28 October 2022.

50 Information from interviews.

51 Dr. Christian Mölling and Torben Schütz, "[Germany's Defense Budget 2024 – The Planned Increase is Not Yet Enough](#)", DGAP Memo, 14 July 2023.

52 Information from interviews.

53 Information from interviews.

54 Léo Péria-Pigné and Élie Tenenbaum, "[Zeitenwende: The Bundeswehr's Paradigm Shift](#)", *Études de l'IFRI*, No. 116, p. 23.

5. After the German *Bundesverfassungsgericht* (Constitutional Court) concluded that the Federal Government had violated the Basic Law by the way in which it proposed to allocate € 60 billion to a Special Fund for climate change<sup>55</sup>, the Federal Government has put the *Schuldenbremse* out of operation for 2023.<sup>56</sup> However, the national debt problem may have an impact on the Special Funds, including for defence, in the future.
6. The *Sondervermögen* will not be used to solve the huge shortages of personnel of the German armed forces. By mid-2023, the *Bundeswehr* employed 180,770 military personnel against a target of 203,000.<sup>57</sup> The ageing of the German population plays a role, but also the reluctance in German society to join the armed forces, which is reinforced by the poor conditions of the infrastructure (barracks and quarters).<sup>58</sup>

Another aspect slowing down German decision-making and its implementation in the defence area is the notorious legal and procedural bureaucracy. For sending a German naval ship to the dockyard for repairs or maintenance, a request has to be made 72 weeks in advance.<sup>59</sup> Outdated national rules and provisions hinder modernisation. For example, buttons have to be turned by hand, thus blocking the acquisition of modern systems with touchscreens.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the *Bundesministerium für Verteidigung* (the German Federal Ministry of Defence) is dependent on other ministries: the Ministry of Interior manages changes in salaries; the Ministry of Economic Affairs is involved in decision-making on procurement and weapon exports.<sup>61</sup> Minister Pistorius himself has argued for speeding up the implementation of the *Zeitenwende* investment and has announced plans to overcome bureaucratic obstacles and to reform the Ministry of Defence and the *Bundeswehr* in response to criticism in the *Bundestag*.<sup>62</sup> One of the measures is the 'Law on Accelerating Procurement in the Defence and Security Sector and Optimization of Award Statistics' that entered into force in early April 2023. According to critical voices, so far it has had little impact.<sup>63</sup>

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55 See: Sabine Kinkartz, "[Was ist die Schuldenbremse in Deutschland?](#)", *Deutsche Welle-DW*, 29 November 2023.

56 "[Duitse regering zet schuldenrem voor 2023 buiten werking](#)", *Duitsland Instituut*, 24 november 2023.

57 Péria-Peigné and Tenenbaum, "[Zeitenwende: The Bundeswehr's Paradigm Shift](#)", p. 28.

58 Ibid, p. 29.

59 Information from interviews.

60 Information from interviews.

61 Information from interviews.

62 "[Verteidigungsminister Pistorius legt Reformpläne vor](#)", *ZDF*, 20 April 2023.

63 Information from interviews.

Recently, Pistorius has claimed some progress in cutting red tape: the order for procuring 18 Leopard tanks delivered to Ukraine was signed in May 2023 instead of by the end of the year.<sup>64</sup>

## 2.2 The *Zeitenwende* and strengthening European defence cooperation

The *Zeitenwende* speech was reflective of the overall spirit of changing times in European security and defence. Indeed, in the speech itself Scholz noted that the change in times was applicable to the entire continent, not just Germany. Defence investment and procurement have increased markedly across the continent, NATO has agreed to a significant increase in its high-readiness forces<sup>65</sup>, and NATO and the EU have worked to better coordinate defence planning.<sup>66</sup> But European countries are aware that they themselves cannot provide all the necessary means and capabilities to defend the continent. In Germany's security and defence policy, NATO remains the key instrument to bind the US to European security. First and foremost, Berlin strengthening the *Bundeswehr* serves the aim of strengthening NATO's deterrence and defence posture.

At the same time, Berlin argues for stronger European defence cooperation as a prerequisite for realising a more efficient way of guaranteeing European security. Eventually, this will contribute to a greater degree of European sovereignty – a concept that was described by Scholz as growing “more autonomous in all fields” and assuming “greater responsibility for our own security.”<sup>67</sup> In his address to the European Parliament on 9 May 2023, Scholz underlined that a ‘geopolitical Europe’ would require “greater coordination of our defence efforts,

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64 Sebastian Matthes, Martin Murphy, and Frank Specht, [“Die Aussetzung der Wehrpflicht war ein Fehler – Pistorius im Interview”](#), *Handelsblatt*, 20 October 2023.

65 Jaap Wolting, [“NAVO Verandert Huidige Force Model”](#), *Landmacht*, 8 July 2022.

66 NATO/Council of the EU, [“Seventh Progress Report on the Implementation of the Common Set of Proposals Endorsed by EU and NATO Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017”](#), 20 June 2022.

67 The Federal Government of Germany, [Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague on Monday, 29 August 2022](#).

and the development of an integrated European defence economy.”<sup>68</sup> Germany continues to support the implementation of the EU’s Strategic Compass that was agreed just after the start of the war in Ukraine. In March 2023, Germany and the Netherlands announced that they will work together in delivering forces for the first rotation of the EU’s Rapid Deployment Capacity, which will reach its operational readiness in 2025.<sup>69</sup> Berlin is also in favour of more flexibility in planning and conducting EU military operations through the use of Article 44 of the Treaty on European Union. This means that within the framework of the decisions adopted in accordance with Article 43, the Council may entrust the implementation of a task to a group of member states which are willing and able to do so.

The war in Ukraine has also laid bare the shortcomings of the fragmented European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). Ramping up defence industrial production now tops the European defence agenda. In his *Zeitenwende* speech, Scholz emphasised the importance of jointly developing future combat systems, such as aircraft and tanks. A few months later, in his speech at Charles University in Prague, the Chancellor provided more detail on what close cooperation should look like. He mentioned joint manufacturing, procurement and closer cooperation between defence companies as key aspects for making “closer coordination at the European level indispensable.” He even offered a Schengen equivalent in the defence realm: the Organisation for Joint Armament Co-operation (Occar)<sup>70</sup> could become “the nucleus of a Europe of joint defence and armament.”<sup>71</sup> Acknowledging that NATO will remain the cornerstone of collective defence, Scholz highlighted that “greater compatibility between European defence structures within the EU” would also benefit NATO,

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68 The Federal Government of Germany, [\*Address by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany as part of the European Parliament's series of plenary debates "This is Europe"\*](#), 9 May 2023.

69 [\*Joint Declaration – Government Consultations Netherlands-Germany\*](#), 27 March 2023.

70 The Organisation for Joint Armament Co-operation (Organisation Conjointe de Coopération en matière d'Armement – Occar) is an international organisation whose core-business is the through life management of complex, cooperative defence equipment programmes. See: [link](#). The Occar Convention members are: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom.

71 The Federal Government of Germany, [\*Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague on Monday, 29 August 2022\*](#); Recently, the Dutch Minister of Defence announced that the Netherlands wants to join Occar. See: Ministerie van Defensie, [\*"Nederland zoekt aansluiting bij internationale organisatie OCCAR"\*](#), 23 November 2023.

an argument that is frequently put forward.<sup>72</sup> The European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI), put forward by Chancellor Scholz, is a concrete example: it is meant to reduce European shortfalls in air defence, to increase European cooperation and to strengthen NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence.

## 2.3 German-Dutch defence cooperation in the context of the *Zeitenwende*

Germany's bilateral defence relationships have existed for decades. From a day-to-day perspective, the *Zeitenwende* has had little impact on Germany's bilateral security and defence relationships. The Franco-German axis continues to have its ups and downs. The Netherlands is a relevant partner for Germany, since the like-mindedness of the two countries enables unique cooperation. In particular, the German-Dutch defence cooperation serves the German political approach on multilateral organisations (EU and NATO). The Netherlands is regarded as a relevant partner in aligning other smaller nations with the EU and NATO agendas.

Over the past thirty years German-Dutch army cooperation has developed its own momentum, which in itself has not been decisively affected by the *Zeitenwende*.<sup>73</sup> However, the strategic context in which the cooperation should be seen has fundamentally changed. Until recently, it was largely driven by the desire to accommodate lower defence budgets. A key example is the 2011 series of budget cuts that forced the Dutch Army to abandon the Leopard 2 main battle tank. Through cooperation with Germany a way was found to retain this capability by combining forces. On the one hand, this was a lighthouse example of how much can be achieved through cooperation sufficiently supported by both governments,<sup>74</sup> but on the other hand it was a poor man's solution.

The post-*Zeitenwende* ambition for further cooperation and integration is not driven – at least not primarily – by a desire to efficiently use defence budgets (inputs) but by a serious need to enhance fielded capabilities (outputs) as a

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72 The Federal Government of Germany, [\*Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague on Monday, 29 August 2022.\*](#)

73 Information from interviews.

74 Elisabeth Braw, [\*"The Military Sharing Economy: Germany and the Netherlands Combine Forces"\*](#), *Foreign Affairs*, 7 March 2016.

result of the changed security environment. NATO's core task of collective defence has retaken a central place in defence planning. Thus, the new requirements for strengthening the deterrence and defence posture – such as higher readiness levels, regionalisation, forward-located combat forces – will now drive cooperation formats, including German-Dutch defence cooperation.<sup>75</sup> Retaining capabilities through bilateral integration under the pressure of budget cuts has been replaced by enhancing war-fighting capacities by combining and modernising combat units in brigades and divisions. Of course, through deepening multinational cooperation, in particular by procuring and operating the same equipment, cost savings can be made in training, maintenance and the acquisition of spare parts.<sup>76</sup> But this is a pay-off instead of a driving factor.

Equally important, given the additional urgency and weight put on European cooperation initiatives, the integration of German-Dutch land forces is an advanced and successful example of bottom-up cooperation that could serve as an inspiration and template for other such projects. Outgoing Dutch Minister of Defence Kajsa Ollongren described the “deep and unique cooperation that the Netherlands has with its strategic partners as an example of the further deepening of European defence cooperation, in order to collectively bear more responsibility for our own security.”<sup>77</sup>

A far-reaching cooperation framework like the one between Germany and the Netherlands has multiple benefits for the two countries involved as well as beyond, and can serve various objectives:

- It strengthens the European contribution to NATO. In turn, this will support the Alliance in providing a credible deterrence and defence posture.<sup>78</sup> This is particularly relevant in a time where collective defence is back at the centre of attention and a credible deterrence and defence posture is crucial for deterring potential adversaries.
- It is considered an example of military cooperation in Europe and in NATO, and may therefore serve as a catalyst for more defence cooperation in Europe.

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75 The consequences will be analysed in more detail in chapter 3.

76 For a further explanation, see: Dick Zandee and Adája Stoetman, “[Specialising in European defence – To choose or not to choose?](#)”, *Clingendael Report*, July 2022.

77 Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, [Kamerbrief over landmacht-samenwerking met Duitsland](#), BS2023004654, 23 February 2023, p. 5.

78 Ibid.

- It can be a stepping stone for cooperation in other areas, such as training and procurement. Integration thereby stimulates joint capability development and cooperation on processing, updating, maintaining and using military equipment.<sup>79</sup> This in turn can have further benefits beyond the military domain, such as in the economic and political areas.<sup>80</sup>
- It contributes to fostering combat power. It paves the way for maintaining knowledge and experience in operating in larger and multinational formations, which is of crucial importance for operating in an EU or NATO context. In particular, German-Dutch land forces' cooperation can serve the new NATO requirements for Enhanced Forward Presence that aims to defend each inch of the Alliance's territory.
- It enhances interoperability, with the end goal of achieving interchangeability.<sup>81</sup> The latter implies that equipment can be shared between the armed forces of two or more countries, which allows for the deepest form of integration. The integration of a Dutch tank company in the 414<sup>th</sup> German Tank battalion is a unique form of defence cooperation, but is only possible because the military of both countries operate the same Leopard 2 tank and use the same command and control system.

There are also challenges and risks related to deepening German-Dutch defence cooperation. The loss of sovereignty is still an issue raised by certain political parties.<sup>82</sup> Interoperability remains a huge challenge as doctrine and rules are not aligned. Even for the evacuation of wounded soldiers, the German *Heer* and the Dutch Army have different procedures.<sup>83</sup> There is still a long way to go before deeper cooperation – let alone integration – can be realised on a larger scale.

The German-Dutch defence cooperation is often taken as an example of how strengthening existing partnerships can contribute to advancing European defence cooperation. In that way, strengthening German-Dutch defence

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79 Ibid.

80 See for example: Zandee & Stoetman, "[Specialising in European defence – To choose or not to choose?](#)".

81 A. Mais & M.H. Wijnen, [Dagorder voor de integratie van 13 \(NLD\) Lichte Brigade in 10 \(DEU\) Panzerdivision](#), 30 March 2023.

82 In its election programme, the Partij Voor de Vrijheid (PVV) of Geert Wilders, the largest political party in the Dutch Second Chamber after the elections of 22 November 2023, argues against the "samensmelting" (melting together; fusion) of the German and Dutch armed forces using the argument that national sovereignty should be maintained.

83 Information from interviews.

cooperation and integration can, indirectly, contribute to fulfilling one of the main pillars of the *Zeitenwende*: fostering European defence cooperation. There is still room for improvement, however, when it comes to the integration of doctrines, the level of interoperability and, eventually, the interchangeability of military systems. Through making progress in these areas, the German-Dutch defence cooperation can further strengthen European defence cooperation, and thus help realise one of the underlying objectives of the *Zeitenwende*. This is further explored in the next chapter.



### 3 German-Dutch defence cooperation: The army case and beyond

The current state of affairs for both the Dutch and German military, as for virtually all European militaries, is that the ability to fight is insufficient. Both the Dutch and German defence ministers have recognised that the services are not able to do their jobs.<sup>84</sup> This implies that serious repair work is needed. But just repairing the old is not good enough. A short(er)-term 'repair' track must be complemented with a modernisation track based on a vision for the long term.

From both a short and a long-term perspective it should be recognised that, although the focus of attention has shifted to collective defence and peer-competitor warfighting capabilities, other types of military operations remain relevant. European states maintain commitments to multilateral missions in the Balkans, Iraq, Central Africa, and the Caucasus, to name a few. The need for expeditionary crisis management operations remains, even while recent experiences have shown that comprehensive (diplomacy, development and defence) efforts to contribute to stability, security and the rule of law in fragile contexts typically have limited overall effects.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the conduct of interstate rivalry in the 'grey zone' between peace and war is clear and present. Although the role of the military in this space is far from being clearly delineated, that role is there and growing in significance.<sup>86</sup> Various modes of confrontation between states tend to blend into each other and may take place simultaneously.

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84 Frank Jungbluth, "[Pistorius: Bundeswehr ist nicht verteidigungsfähig](#)", *Deutscher Bundeswehr Verband*, 1 March 2023.

85 '[Inconvenient Realities: An Evaluation of Dutch Contributions to Stability, Security and Rule of Law in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts](#)' (The Hague: Rijksoverheid Directorate of International Research and Policy Evaluation, August 2023).

86 Chiara Libiseller, "[Hybrid Warfare as an Academic Fashion](#)", *Journal of Strategic Studies* 0, no. 0 (2023): 1–23; Jonathan P. Wong et al., "[New Directions for Projecting Land Power in the Indo-Pacific: Contexts, Constraints, and Concepts](#)", *RAND*, 20 December 2022.; Shuxian Luo, "[Provocation without Escalation: Coping with a Darker Gray Zone](#)", 20 June 2022.; Oscar Jonsson, *"The Russian Understanding of War: Blurring the Lines between War and Peace"* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019).

For defence planning, the old dichotomy between 'warfighting' and 'operations other than war' is a false model. Instead, the concept of a conflict continuum should guide not just a military, but a 'whole of government' approach to security.

The shortfalls in the warfighting capabilities of the Royal Netherlands Army are summarised in the most recent NATO defence planning capability review, highlighting that the 13th and 43rd Brigades "lack the required number of battalions, and there are no Dutch-owned tanks."<sup>87</sup> This has been accompanied by a general decrease in personnel and vehicle fleet.<sup>88</sup> In short: for both Germany and the Netherlands, a lot of repair work and modernisation of the armed forces is essential to meet the challenges the contemporary security environment poses. The two countries do not stand alone in this. As made clear above, the 'Wende' required by the 'Zeit' is not only a German or German-Dutch challenge, but a European-wide one.

### 3.1 German-Dutch formations in the new NATO Force Model

As a result of the war in Ukraine, NATO is strengthening its deterrence and defence posture, including through the expansion of the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) and the adoption of new defence plans. At the Vilnius Summit in July 2023, major decisions have been taken. The two central elements are (1) an increasing number of Allied troops will have a higher degree of readiness; and (2) regionalisation will play an important role in the allocation of forces to NATO. As for readiness, the new NATO Force Model (NFM), adopted at the Madrid Summit in June 2022, contains three layers. In tier 1, over 100,000 troops will have to be ready for deployment within 10 days; in tier 2 around 200,000 within 10-30 days; and in tier 3 at least 500,000 between 30 and 180 days.<sup>89</sup>

Moreover, these forces will be preassigned to three specific regions: Northern Europe (from the Arctic to the Gulf of Finland, commanded by the Joint Forces Command in Norfolk, US), Central Europe (from the Baltics to the Alps, commanded by the JFC in Brunssum, the Netherlands) and Southern

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<sup>87</sup> 'NATO Defence Planning Capability Review 2021/2022: The Netherlands', (Rijksoverheid, 7 October 2022).

<sup>88</sup> Ben Barry et al., "[The Future of NATO's European Land Forces: Plans, Challenges, Prospects](#)", IISS, 2023.

<sup>89</sup> NATO, 'New NATO Force Model, Factsheet'. Deployment means on 'notice to move' (NTM).

Europe (including the Mediterranean Sea, commanded by the JFC in Naples, Italy). Subsequently, for each of these regions a tailor-made approach will be established. This includes training, exercises and required military capabilities to ensure that in case of actual deployment the forces are adequately trained and equipped to fulfil their objectives.

The development of these regional plans has not been happening in isolation. Since 2019, the NATO military authorities have led the development of a new generation of defence and development plans and concepts. Beginning with a new NATO Military Strategy (NMS) in 2018, two implementing concepts were agreed at the head of state and government level to implement it: the Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) and the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC). The new regional plans fall within what is referred to as the DDA 'family of plans', which have given a new direction to large-scale defence within the NATO area. The NWCC has simultaneously worked both to enable the DDA plans through identifying new capability requirements while also building new structures that allow for more structured and longer-term planning. The NMS, DDA, and NWCC were judged valid following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, as the further development of regional specific plans exemplifies.

Much of the current NATO planning remains classified, but the available evidence suggests a much greater scale of commitment and force employment along the alliance's eastern flank.<sup>90</sup> It can be expected that plans for the central region will be particularly relevant for German and Dutch forces, certainly in the land domain. Geographically this makes the most sense, and both countries already have a track record of experience in operating in this area, in particular in Lithuania in the context of NATO's eFP. The Netherlands contributes to the Battlegroup under German command with approximately 270 military personnel.<sup>91</sup> In June 2023, Germany announced that it is preparing to permanently station 4,000 troops in Lithuania for a 'robust brigade'.<sup>92</sup> An important condition is that the necessary infrastructure should

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90 Robbie Gramer and Jack Detsch, "[A \(Mostly Secret\) Revolution Is Afoot in NATO's Military](#)", *Foreign Policy*, 13 July 2023.; Stephen R. Covington, "[NATO's Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area \(DDA\)](#)", *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, 2 August 2023.

91 Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, "[Current Missions](#)".

92 "[Germany to station 4,000 troops in Lithuania](#)", *Deutsche Welle*, 26 June 2023.

be in place to host the German troops, which is currently a work in process.<sup>93</sup> In the meantime, the question may arise what the 'robust brigade' will imply for the Dutch contribution. As Germany transforms the Battlegroup from a trip-wire NATO presence to a combat brigade intended for sustained defensive operations, Berlin might call on The Hague to scale up its contribution from rotating companies of different compositions to a permanently placed (and fully equipped) mechanised battalion or artillery unit.<sup>94</sup>

The implementation phase of the NFM has started, but it will take a considerable number of years, as stated by the Chair of NATO's Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer.<sup>95</sup> The new targets will put a much higher demand on the Allies' contributions, "not only in terms of personnel but equally in operationally ready-to-deploy equipment, enablers (such as transport capacities), and all necessary logistical support."<sup>96</sup> These challenges also apply to the German and Dutch armed forces. For example, both countries are facing important hurdles when it comes to recruiting sufficient military personnel. The *Bundeswehr* is facing a personnel shortage of 18,692 in the active forces.<sup>97</sup> Also in the Netherlands, there are a significant number of vacancies to be filled. It is quite likely that only a mobilised reserve in both countries can achieve the targets of the NFM, requiring an equally urgent look at the readiness of reserve forces.

A certain challenge that NFM implementation will face, and by natural extension the German and Dutch armed forces, is practising and exercising the large-scale forces imagined within the different NFM tiers. Practising the mobilisation of tier one, 100,000 troops, would be over twice the size of the recently conducted *Steadfast Defender*, a SHAPE-led deployment exercise.<sup>98</sup> Such practice would even dwarf Cold War standards, with the *Autumn Forge* series conducted

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93 Peter Wilke & Hans von der Burchard, "[Germany ready to put 4,000 soldiers permanently in Lithuania](#)", *Politico*, 26 June 2023.

94 Dick Zandee, "[NATO's Vilnius summit: the consequences for the Allies](#)", *Atlantisch Perspectief*, September 2023, p. 24.

95 "It is not a switch. That will take a considerable number of years to get there". NATO, Media briefing with Chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer and SHAPE Deputy Chief of Staff Operations, Major General Matthew van Wagenen, 3 July 2023.

96 Zandee, "NATO's Vilnius summit: the consequences for the Allies", p. 23.

97 Deutscher Bundestag, "[Unterrichtung durch die Wehrbeauftragte – Jahresbericht 2022 \(64. Bericht\)](#)", 28 February 2023, p. 46.

98 Alice Hancock, "[Nato to launch biggest military exercise since cold war](#)", *Financial Times*, 11 September 2023.

between the 1970s and 1980s usually involving no more than 20,000 troops from across the allies, the vast majority of which were provided by the U.S. Army. Exercising mobilisation at tiers two and three would require a massive sea change not only in the physical capacity of the armed forces in Europe but also in policy across NATO allies. Again drawing from Cold War precedent, the largest exercise conducted post-1945 was the Soviet *Zapad-81*, which included between 100,000 and 150,000 troops. The gulf between the capacity and ambition of the NFM becomes apparent when it is considered in the context of actually exercising its implementation.

The combined German-Dutch land forces have strong assets, at least in principle. The two German mechanised divisions (10<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Panzer Divisions) each have a heavy and a medium component (tanks and mechanised infantry, respectively) in order to ensure flexibility in the face of different challenges. From 2025 one of these divisions will be declared to NATO.<sup>99</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> German-Netherlands Corps (1GNC) is planned to remain a separate (but not separated) capability offered to NATO and the EU. The third division envisaged for the NFM, the Rapid Forces Division (*Division Schnelle Kräfte* or DSK) serves both as a combined rapid reaction force that can quickly deploy to a given region, as well as providing integrated corps troops assigned to a NATO warfighting corps headquarters. Its assets are accordingly flexible with additional bridging – long-range reconnaissance – and various light infantry capabilities and could be employed in scenarios ranging from non-combatant evacuations to territorial defence. If activated within a NATO context, German-Dutch formations could serve under either a Dutch or German Corps commander (the position rotates within 1GNC), though this is not automatically the case. It is these styles of Corps-level integration efforts that offer the best hope of bridging the ambition-capacity gap within the NFM, as it is simply a question of numerical scale.

### 3.2 Current and emerging cooperation efforts

Germany and the Netherlands have a long tradition of defence cooperation. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and in response defence budget cuts, multinational defence cooperation became a method to maintain capabilities

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99 Col. Nikolaus Carstens, “[Für eine glaubhafte Abschreckung braucht es mindestens eine einsatzbereite Division](#)”, *Deutscher Bundeswehr Verband*, 29 May 2022.

through bilateral integration. In 1995, the Netherlands and Germany decided to amalgamate their national army corps into the 1GNC. In a speech to mark the occasion, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl said “This day shows how far our two countries have covered together as partners in Europe in the last decades” and Dutch prime minister Wim Kok, speaking in German, said “With the inauguration of this corps, Germany and the Netherlands make it clear which political and military role they want to play in a world full of wars and where human rights abuses are part of everyday life”. 1GNC is not based on a simple memorandum of understanding but on a full treaty between both nations. This on its own demonstrates how important both nations found and still find this cooperation.

### The 1<sup>st</sup> German/Netherlands Corps (1GNC)

1GNC was initially established as a merger between two national corps with two divisions each. However, with the reduction of forces, 1GNC quickly became not an Army Corps but a Headquarters capable of commanding the corps level. Command of the HQ rotates between German and Dutch generals, with the standing staff in Münster an integrated multinational staff of officers from the two framework nations and several others.

1GNC developed into a comprehensive headquarters in a time focused on expeditionary operations and ‘grey zone’ challenges. To that end, 1GNC has developed a ‘common effort’ community of over 60 organisations committed to working together in the light of hybrid challenges in modern warfare. At the same time, 1GNC covered territorial defence (1GNC as a NATO High Readiness Forces (Land) Headquarters). 1GNC therefore has experience in exercising a high level of flexibility between tasks without impacting overall readiness for the most challenging scenarios.

The future role of 1GNC is currently under discussion as part of NATO’s regional plans. In extremis, 1GNC could serve as the highest command of the combined German-Dutch land forces. The comprehensive approach ability (knowledge, skills, network) will likely remain a key element in operating in today’s complex environment. From that experience, 1GNC can or should play a key role in the development of operational thinking within NATO and the EU. Corps-level formations are a key mechanism for organising NATO’s ambitious New Force Model.

1GNC also serves as the standing custodian of deepened integration between the German and Dutch armed forces, to demonstrate what is possible and to explore new opportunities. That includes its role as the professional training platform for the Dutch and German military and several other nationalities, as well as civilian audiences through the common effort community.

Subsequently, in 2006, Berlin and The Hague signed an agreement which laid down the foundation of further defence cooperation between the two countries and the integration of their armed forces. Over the past decade, two of the three Dutch army brigades have been integrated into German divisions: in 2014, the 11th Air Mobile Brigade integrated into the DSK and in 2016 the 43rd Mechanised Brigade integrated into Germany's 1st *Panzer Division*. In November 2022, both countries announced the next step for the integration process: the integration of the 13<sup>th</sup> Light Brigade into the German 10th *Panzer Division*, which was eventually realised in March 2023. Since then, all three Dutch brigades are part of the integrated defence cooperation with Germany. The two countries have significant experience in integrating various air and missile defence units, including a short-range air defence task force within the NATO VJTF.

As stated earlier, the example of the Dutch and German armies effectively integrating into a single force might serve as a beckoning perspective / template for other European cooperation initiatives. A European army is perhaps both undesirable and unattainable; but an army of Europeans, working as closely together as possible, is not impossible. Germany and the Netherlands are demonstrating what this cooperation may look like in practice. A steadily deepened integration largely driven from the bottom up, facilitated by shared political commitments that gradually take on real-world substance as the integration progresses, has provided several valuable lessons that may serve as good practices for similar initiatives elsewhere. The next section explores the practicalities of this integration in detail.

### From cooperation to integration

During the Cold War, NATO nations worked together so that the enemy could not make use of the seams between national units and formations. Cooperation at the most basic level means the prevention of blue-on-blue engagements, often done through procedural measures such as the definition of boundaries. The next step is the building of interorganisational relationships. This starts with the exchange of liaison officers or the collocation of headquarters. In the early 1990s the need for more structured cooperation became one of the key reasons for permanent structures intended to foster closely working together. The establishment of a combined German-Dutch corps was the logical consequence of that desire. Cooperation then allows for the more effective sharing of resources and mutual support when needed.

Ultimately today the Dutch and German armies are working towards integration, which means becoming one stronger whole. Elements for (full) integration are selected on the basis of producing more effective output. The process of integration does not happen overnight; that is why various formations, units and even capabilities are at various stages of working together. Some are already fully integrated, such as the 414th tank battalion, others are cooperating as much as possible, such as both artillery schools.

In this paper, the terms cooperation and integration are used to describe as best as possible the current stage of working together. In general, it can be said that all units and formations in both armies are cooperating, and some are further on the road towards (full) integration than others.

#### **3.2.1 German-Dutch army integration in the current timeframe**

What does the integration of the German and Dutch armies look like today and moving forward? In a strictly structural sense, a German battalion serves under a Dutch brigade, which in turn operates under a German division. The Dutch 13<sup>th</sup> Light Brigade, 43<sup>rd</sup> Mechanised Brigade, and 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Brigade are each integrated within a German division. A combined German-French Brigade, headquartered in Müllheim, is included in the 10<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division as well, see Figure 1.



Figure 1 Organigram of German army divisions with Dutch units incorporated



Importantly, this does not mean that the Dutch brigades are commanded by German divisions on a *permanent* basis. Dutch forces remain primarily garrisoned in the Netherlands, and certain tasks (e.g. personnel policy) remain under national control. Both German and Dutch forces remain under national control and constitutional arrangements.<sup>100</sup> It must be noted that changing command relationships, especially at the brigade level and above, is standard procedure within NATO. The fact that units are assigned to higher level formations does not automatically mean that these units cannot be separately deployed. The assignment of brigades and divisions within particular arrangements, be it through NATO (German-Dutch formations have important roles assigned to them in the new NATO plans, see §3.1) or in a German-Dutch context, implies a commitment to provide forces if a decision is taken to use force and an agreement is reached on the activation of the combined command arrangements by the chiefs of defence.

<sup>100</sup> Eric Vrijzen, "Duitse Bundeswehr Slokt Alle Drie Brigades Op: Kamer Buitenspel", *EW Magazine*, 8 February 2023.

### Comparable special operations C2 systems

Even while integrated, differences in approaches and conceptual roles remain for the national contributions to the integrated German-Dutch forces. For example, Germany incorporates the Special Operations Forces (*Kommando Special Kräfte-KSK*) and SOF support under the DSK, whereas in the Netherlands SOF support is drawn from units including the 11<sup>th</sup> Airmobile Brigade, though enablers often come from the wider joint force. The Netherlands does have a separate overarching SOF command at the Chief of Defence level, while Germany does not.

Cooperation and integration is gradually being more and more institutionalised in unit planning; every training event at the Brigade level and above is set up bi-nationally. The main challenges now are seemingly from setting (national) regulations, procedures and/or planning from outside the divisional level that do not include or take into account ongoing deeper integration efforts/projects (e.g. new national regulations on intelligence sharing that make an integrated intelligence cell effectively void, national choices for specific C2 support systems, or restrictive national regulations on the certification of individual specialties).

Some significant, though planned to be temporary, shortfalls remain in the combined force. The German DSK, and relatedly the Dutch 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Brigade, has big gaps between what is required and what is present. Of particular concern are the constraints on the availability of helicopters to move this division quickly with adequate combat power, essentially reducing the division, and the Dutch brigade within it, to a light infantry brigade.<sup>101</sup> The Tiger and NH-90 platforms have a (very) low operational capacity. Furthermore, the allocation of and command over the rotary wing capabilities is organised differently for both nations, with both the German and Dutch forces having to negotiate availability with others in their national systems. This is an area that serves as an example how short-term solutions should be considered in conjunction with long-term ambitions. Medium-term Dutch investments in the AH-64 Apache and CH-47 Chinook helicopters with related basing, maintenance and logistics could reasonably address this gap in the coming years. Also a new German helicopter school, in which the Netherlands could possibly fulfil

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101 'NATO Defence Planning Capability Review 2021/2022: The Netherlands'.

its education and training needs, could alleviate pressure brought on by having numerous airframes and personnel stationed in the US for this purpose.

Another land capability, though not a German-Dutch initiative, is the Franco-German Main Ground Combat System (MGCS), with its initial focus on a jointly developed tank for the two countries. It has faced, however, a serious number of deficiencies and delays, ranging from defining contractor structures for research and technology activities to addressing critical issues such as assigning an overarching System Demonstrator Phase to a sole prime contractor. Balancing the strategic interests of partner nations while navigating budget constraints and adhering to tight timelines poses additional feasibility hurdles. Moreover, potential complications emerge from disagreements among participating contractors and political tensions surrounding the selection of project leadership. These multifaceted challenges underscore the complexity of ensuring the MGCS project's successful progression. This has a bearing on German-Dutch cooperation in terms of the capabilities that will be made available within the German heavy division. Should this project stall or become mired in industrial competition, it may complicate longer-term capability planning efforts.

### The Main Ground Combat System (MGCS)

This Franco-German project, launched in 2017 to replace the Leopard 2 and Leclerc tanks, has been envisioned as the European answer to the American M1 Abrams tank. With full-operational capability currently set for 2040, it is certainly a longer-term project. The project has also considered an expansion to include Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the UK.

MGCS, while previously promising, is beset on all sides from competition and internal pressures. The lengthy development and procurement process has left it at risk of being overtaken by events, as states turn to more immediate solutions to answer the challenges of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Germany, Italy, Spain, and Sweden announced in September 2023 that they were beginning work to identify the successor to the Leopard 2 through a different programme, placing the original logic of the MGCS in doubt. Other states in Europe have also looked towards more rapidly procuring capabilities from other regions, such as Poland's purchasing of 1,000 K2PL Black Panther tanks from South Korea. Such temporary

solutions could easily become permanent, leaving the MGCS without the political backing it would need to see the project through to fruition. This is yet another example where choices must be made between immediate priorities and setting longer-term priorities.

Culturally, integrated German and Dutch army formations function quite well. Commonly understood standards of professionalism and motivation are particularly supportive of this. This would indicate that, if the Netherlands were to invest in a native Dutch tank battalion (a NATO shortfall), it would make sense to put that Dutch tank battalion in a German brigade – a mirror image of the German 414<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion being part of the Dutch 43<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. However, as is highlighted below, this comes with serious frictions that argue against a further integration of this type. One friction noted in past research is differences in command cultures, with the German attitude being described as ‘robust’ and more top-down and the Dutch being more ‘flexible’.<sup>102</sup> A further recommendation is to stick to a single operating language – English – rather than a mix of German and English across unit levels.<sup>103</sup>

Experience indicates that deep integration within battalions poses a range of additional, mostly practical, issues and challenges, requiring a much greater amount of time and effort by both leadership and personnel to adjust to new organisations, procedures, and command styles than initially foreseen.<sup>104</sup> Command cultures are a particular area of friction at the tactical level, where the procedure-heavy order writing process for the Bundeswehr comes into tension with a more flexible, initiative-driven culture in the Netherlands. For smaller-scale operations or for experimentation and training such mixing at the battalion level and below may be useful as soldiers cooperate to solve practical issues in the field. On a larger scale, however, it is a risky business.

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102 Frederik Wermser et al., [\*Final Report: Cultural Interoperability in Project TAURUS\*](#), (Groningen: University of Groningen, 2020).

103 Ibid.

104 P.J.M.D. Essens and Frank Bekkers, ‘Cost Benefit Analysis Strategic Cooperation (COBASCO): Case Study Deep Integration’, *Cost Benefit Analysis Strategic Cooperation (COBASCO)*, (The Hague: TNO, 2014).

### The challenges in the integration of the 414<sup>th</sup> battalion

Communication is key, especially in a multinational setting. This is not a new phenomenon, an open door even, especially as both nations and armies have gained extensive knowledge and experience working in international staff and multinational units. But the challenge is especially true for matters of (national) prioritisation of tasks, as 'unity of command' is a much cherished principle between military units as much as 'sovereignty' is between the political leadership of nations. The synchronisation of multiple sets of national priorities requires a huge effort, often at different levels above the integrated forces.

Nationally imposed regulations, qualifications, and certifications require 'opt-out' clauses to enable the creation of workable solutions to deepen integration. Procedural and legal roadblocks also create unnecessary roadblocks for working together towards integration and interoperability more than that they ensure the profits of due diligence by strictly enforcing them.

Simple language differences can cause challenges below the battalion level, a barrier that cannot be overcome with technical solutions. Rapid spoken communication is essential for battlefield success at the tactical level, and if integrated units are slowed by linguistic difficulties they will be exposed to an undue level of risk.

Another feasible way of combining forces would be through the development of a modular force catalogue. A prerequisite is a common communication backbone that works with all modules operating either integrated or detached. Modules can then be easily be attached or detached ('plug-and-play') and, as long as the entire array of enablers are available with adequate redundancy, most scenarios could be covered. The ability to easily detach units is required so any single nation may act unilaterally – take for example the potential need for the Netherlands to protect Curaçao. To make this feasible, careful consideration is required of how such national decisions play out on the modularity of the construct as a whole. If, for example, a nation needs to utilise its artillery in a national or ad hoc operation of the willing, it should be possible to take a battery out of a battalion. Some capabilities might not be part of the construct at all because nations decide to keep them national. Furthermore, a single nation's capabilities may not become the single point of failure for the entire structure.

### 3.2.2 German-Dutch naval cooperation in the current timeframe

Between the respective navies, some efforts have been ongoing. The German Seebattalion has been affiliated (not integrated) within the Netherlands' Korps Mariniers since 2018, and the Ministries of Defence previously committed to jointly developing next-generation air-defence frigates, the F127, though this cooperation is facing ongoing complications.<sup>105</sup> At both the capability and personnel levels, the stage is increasingly set for further integration. Mixed crews for jointly procured ships could well be in the future running as a part of deepened naval cooperation. Experimentation with such crews within NATO has a history dating back to the early Cold War.<sup>106</sup> The Netherlands already has an integrated naval staff with Belgium through the BeNeSam (*Belgisch-Nederlandse Samenwerking*) arrangement, through which the commander of the Royal Dutch Navy is also the 'Admiral Benelux' in command of the combined staff.<sup>107</sup>

#### Maritime industrial cooperation and German-Dutch integration

German-Dutch integration at sea has been plagued by challenges related to finances, the choice of onboard systems, and questions in both Berlin and The Hague about transparency. Efforts in this area have been focused primarily on two projects: the F126 and F127 multipurpose frigates.

The F126, a German project supported with Dutch research and development funding, is being built by Damen Shipyards at German facilities and four ships are in production. Designed as multipurpose frigates, the ships can operate globally, in all areas (including the Arctic) and are capable of performing a variety of operations, ranging from anti-submarine warfare to humanitarian support operations.

However, a planned expansion of this programme was cancelled by the previous German defence minister out of concerns of transparency and cost overruns. This cancellation was a part of broader criticism levelled

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105 Klaus-Heiner Röhl, Hubertus Bardt, and Barbara Engels, [\*A New Era for the Defense Industry? Security Policy and Defense Capability after the Russian Invasion of Ukraine\*](#) (Cologne, Germany: German Economic Institute, 3 February 2023).

106 Andrew Priest, *In Common Cause: The NATO Multilateral Force and Mixed-Manning Demonstration on USS Claude V. Ricketts, 1964-1965*, *Journal of Military History* 69, no. 3 (2005): p. 759–88.

107 [\*'Benelux-Verklaring over Samenwerking Op Defensievlak'\*](#) (Rijksoverheid, 19 April 2012).

against the German Defence Ministry by the National Court of Auditors (*Bundesrechnungshof*) that the special €100 billion *Sondervermögen* lacks transparent oversight. The F126 was specifically singled out as violating budgetary regulations. The criticism stemmed primarily from the auditors' view that the Special Fund's relationship to the federally approved defence budget remained unclear.<sup>108</sup>

Additionally, some tension arose over the onboard anti-air defence radar systems to be placed on board the new F126 frigates. At Dutch insistence, the frigates host *Tacticos* systems from Thales, rather than the U.S.-made Aegis air defence system. Germany's preference was for the Aegis, though the Thales system was ultimately selected.<sup>109</sup>

The F127, a newer project only approved by the German procurement authorities in February 2023, would develop a separate air-defence frigate that is capable of defence against a broader range of threats than the F126. As of the time of this writing, the project remains a German-only project, with the Netherlands remaining outside of the deal, despite expressed signs of interest in joint procurement. The F127 will host the Aegis air defence system.

At sea then, from a joint procurement perspective, larger platform integration between the Netherlands and Germany is lacking, due to both defence-industrial interest and German regulations regarding defence spending. Maritime defence cooperation, particularly on new frigates, remains an example of where structural barriers have yet to be overcome despite the changes of the *Zeitenwende* era. Not improving this cooperation poses a long-term risk as companies can only continue with predictable outlooks and consistent strategies. This is especially the case for the naval industry, with long-term projects, capital-intensive installations, and long research and development times.

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108 Peter Carstens, "[Rechnungshof kritisiert Sondervermögen als „Sonderschulden“](#)", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 31 August 2023.

109 Johannes R. Fischbach, "[Europe's navies and the return of the cruiser](#)" *IISS Military Balance Blog*, 5 May 2023.

There are a number of other ongoing and forthcoming naval cooperation initiatives, with the *Seebatallion* considered to be an 'integration' project. This type of integration is not of the same type as seen in the army, due in no small part to differences in tasking between the *Seebatallion* and the *Korps Mariniers*. Since 2016 a common effort has been made to develop a shared secure military sealift capability. Currently, this effort has been realised through the shared use of the Dutch *Zr.Ms. Karel Doorman* joint support ship for amphibious operations. In 2022, elements of the *Seebatallion* actually served as a portion of the *Karel Doorman*'s boarding party. This ship, however, is the only one in its class and neither Germany nor the Netherlands have current plans to develop additional ones. Cooperation in this joint development remains limited, due in part to a larger Dutch focus on cooperative efforts with the British Royal Marines.

Possible forthcoming projects include a joint logistics command ship, littoral assault crafts, and naval mine countermeasures. However, these remain in the speculative stage and no substantive steps have been taken to realise these projects. Overall, while the German and Dutch navies cooperate closely, the extent of this cooperation has not been at the same level as the land forces. This is perhaps explained by the competing Dutch-Belgian cooperation at sea, or by the industrial challenges experienced during the development of the F126. Regardless, room remains for more initiatives.

### **3.2.3 German-Dutch air force cooperation in the current timeframe**

Between air forces, there is a large amount of multilateral cooperation which includes both Germany and the Netherlands. This includes the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program (ENJJPT) and the NATO Multinational Multi Role Tanker Transport Unit based in Eindhoven. Some ongoing bilateral projects give signs for reinforcing this multilateralism. Project APOLLO, wherein a German air force ground-based air and missile defence unit has been integrated into the Dutch Joint Ground-based Air Defence (GBAD) Command, opens the door for further cooperation, though the German unit will return to national command in 2024. APOLLO has a variety of other cooperation measures, including a combined Patriot air and missile defence task force (which was successfully deployed to Slovakia in 2022), joint education initiatives, and coordinated procurement.<sup>110</sup> Elements of this binational cooperation will evolve as both the Netherlands

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110 Ministerie van Defensie, "[Apollo - International Cooperation](#)", (Ministerie van Defensie, February 26, 2016).



and Germany adapt their GBAD authorities and command structures, though cooperation remains deep through APOLLO. How this cooperation fits in the future European Sky Shield Initiative (more below), spearheaded by Germany, remains to be seen.

Another opportunity comes from Germany's approved procurement of the F-35 fighter aircraft, placing both Germany and the Netherlands within the US-led F-35 programme and its use of the Multifunction Advanced Data Link (MADL) network.<sup>111</sup> This opens the door for shared maintenance (on engines, for example) within the wider F-35 user group. The respective air chiefs have already expressed such an intent in a 2022 joint letter.<sup>112</sup> A real change, however, would be to rethink cross-servicing between F-35 users, to include Germany and the Netherlands in particular as both are dual-capable (i.e. nuclear capable) aircraft nations. The growing co-basing of aircraft and joint use of some shared logistics at both Dutch and German airbases could be enhanced by improved maintenance services. This would, of course, require the approval of U.S. authorities from whom the F-35s have been procured. Some headway is being made in this area with the initiative of NATO's Air Command (AIRCOM). This is especially important when considering the credibility of NATO's air-delivered nuclear deterrent.

Some challenges may emerge in air cooperation as NATO states move towards sixth-generation aircraft. The FCAS project will face competition, particularly as the United States has begun its development of the sixth-generation Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) platform. Alongside many other NATO states using and further procuring the F-35, this means that the place for an independent European platform in Europe's own defence market is shaky. Similar pressures will continue as states continue to look to the US for major air platforms. The nascent UK-Italian-Japanese sixth-generation Global Combat

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111 ['Global Enterprise'](#), Lockheed Martin, n.d.; ['Germany Approves 10 Bln Euro F-35 Jet Deal with U.S.'](#), Reuters, 14 December 2022.

112 Lieutenant General Ingo Gerhartz and Lieutenant General Dennis Luyt, "Letter of Intent between the Chief of the German Air Force on behalf of the Federal Minister of Defence of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Commander of the Royal Netherlands Air Force on behalf of the Minister of Defence of the Kingdom of the Netherlands on the further Enhancement of the Bilateral Relations in the Air Domain," (Letter of Intent, Berlin, 24 June 2022).

Air Programme (GCAP) will also assuredly come into competition with the US NGAD project.<sup>113</sup>

Beyond specific air platforms, the multinational forum leading the multi-layer air defence European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI) will be an important programme for joint air force development. Given that decisions have already been taken on which systems will be selected (the European-made IRIS-T SLM for medium range, the American-made Patriot for long range, and the Israeli-made Arrow 3 for exo-atmospheric range),<sup>114</sup> some political hurdles have already been overcome. Importantly, ESSI is seen as a contribution to enhancing the NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence System (NATINMADS).<sup>115</sup> However, some challenges remain. The exo-atmospheric element (the Arrow 3), is being procured by Germany for homeland defence purposes, rather than wider European defence. Furthermore, France has developed its own forum for missile defence cooperation to examine French-made technical alternatives to those identified within the largely US-developed ESSI options.<sup>116</sup> Given the cooperation between German and Dutch air defence units, it would seemingly be logical that the German and Dutch contributions to this would be similarly coordinated, offering the possibility to improve interoperability and share costs in acquisitions across the layers of systems.

Another area for possible future growth is in the area of jointly procured unmanned air systems (UAS). In early 2022, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain approved a contract to develop the European Medium Altitude Long Endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (MALE RPAS), or Eurodrone.<sup>117</sup> The Eurodrone offers an important opportunity to reduce future reliance on U.S.-developed systems, namely the MQ-9 Reaper. Currently, the Dutch armed forces have relied upon the MQ-9 as an important off-the-shelf capability given that the Eurodrone

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113 Valerie Insinna, [“The US Air Force Has Built and Flown a Mysterious Full-Scale Prototype of Its Future Fighter Jet”](#), *Defense News*, 15 September 2020.

114 Elie Tennenbaum and Leo Peria-Peigne, [“Zeitenwende: The Bundeswehr’s Paradigm Shift”](#), *IFRI*, September 2023.

115 “Concerning the Strengthening of the European Pillar in NATO’s Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) Through the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI),” (Letter of Intent, Brussels, 13 October 2023).

116 Elise Vincent and Phillipe Ricard, [“France outlines counter-offer to Germany’s anti-missile defense project”](#), *Le Monde*, 19 June 2023.

117 Lorenzo Buzzoni, Laure Brillaud, and Nico Schmidt, [“The Eurodrone: An industrial project fuelled by politics”](#), *Investigate Europe*, 31 March 2022.

will only become available after 2030. Future Dutch involvement could offer opportunities should the Eurodrone offer a new capability vis-à-vis the MQ-9. Shared air-based ISR, based on European systems, could take important steps not only for a more modern military system, but also to politically hedge against any future changes in U.S.-supplied support.

### **3.2.4 Integrating German-Dutch enabling systems**

Perhaps more critical than new 'hard' capabilities and integrated force structures is the integration of 'backbone' systems. Combat enablers in almost all areas such as logistics, medical, air defence and engineers are scarce. ISR and communications systems, areas in which both the German and Dutch forces are highly dependent on the United States, should be prioritised. Ideally, this would be in the form of a German-Dutch push for a common European solution to develop a 'backbone network' that various national systems can plug into. There is, of course, the risk that such a system becomes duplicative of NATO efforts. Due consideration would be needed not only of how such a network would technically work, but also in how it could serve both an independent European role and effectively support European states as a pillar within NATO. ISR, already identified as a significant shortfall for European forces, would naturally rely on such a backbone network for its functioning. However, independent assets themselves will require development as simply procuring US systems requires connectivity to a US-owned network.

There has been some level of experimentation in this area within the German-Dutch context, most specifically in the Dutch 13<sup>th</sup> Light Brigade, detailed further below. CIS, and IT modernisation within European armed forces in general, is greatly lagging behind due to long timeframes for digital transformation (into the 2030s), the lack of progress in crucial procedural components (including procurement and budgetary alignment), challenges around data sovereignty and accessibility, and persistent underinvestment in digital capabilities in general.<sup>118</sup>

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118 Simona R. Soare, "[Digitalisation of Defence in NATO and the EU: Making European Defence Fit for the Digital Age](#)" IISS, 10 August 2023.

### Command and control experimentation within the Dutch 13th Light Brigade

In light of a growing 'battlefield transparency', future operating concepts focus on highly mobile and well dispersed disposition of forces. That this poses additional challenges for Command and Control (C2) is evident. With this in mind, several experiments to create secure, sturdy and robust combat networks have been undertaken, and have been successful in localised areas. The 13th Medium Brigade's CIS-LITE focuses on (and provides) specifically that: providing the ability to have continuous high quality secure C2 connectivity whilst on the move.

Following the success of CIS-LITE, further steps that are being taken that are actualising new command post concepts, namely: driving towards distributed command cells backed up by control elements (five Boxer armoured personnel carriers to create multiple command capability nodes that are continuously providing digital satellite communications on the move as well as persistent data exchanges, chat, file sharing).

Another effort is in creating workable digital network interoperability, with the higher-level German 10th Panzer Division working with the current capability set. Since both units are to be ready to fulfil their part in the upcoming NATO Force Model Tier 2 cycle for 2025-2026, extensive interoperability field testing is scheduled for Q1 2024. Staying in tune with current developments and lessons identified from the ongoing war against Ukraine, the project incorporates and evolves through constant testing and challenging with the latest electronic warfare findings. This includes reducing the detectable digital/electronic footprint within the electromagnetic spectrum to less than 200 metres of proximity, whereas radio-based communications create bubbles detectable for up to 50 kilometres away.

Overall, however, communications interoperability remains insufficient. Connectivity between some of the most vital nodes, such as forward command posts to the brigade staff, are often inadequate. These current efforts are commendable as they take steps in the right direction, though they remain only a step. For Germany to develop its Division 2025 for NATO, this will require special attention for this type of communications development as well as shared battle management systems (BMS), so that it can in fact operate as a cohesive division with integrated Dutch brigades.

Important to stress about such enablers is that joint procurement from the beginning will be vital. Interoperable communications systems between smaller European armed forces is necessary to break away from both US network dependency but also to ensure battlefield effectiveness. The pressures of the contemporary battlefield do not allow for a long period of time to be spent connecting incompatible national communications systems. Interconnectivity by design is the new rule of the game in European CIS for defence.

Some initiatives in connecting forces are already underway. The Connecting Restricted IT-Services (CRIS) and Tactical Edge Networking (TEN) projects have aimed to connect basic communications functions between the two armed forces. CRIS connects the basic MULAN (Dutch) and Hercules (German) IT systems so simple functions up to the confidential level can be shared and communicated.<sup>119</sup> Such connectivity's role in deconflicting any number of logistical and support functions cannot be understated. The TEN programme combined the German and Dutch digital transformation initiatives to modernise field communications (including radios) to ensure sufficient battlefield connectivity.<sup>120</sup> By coordinating these projects at the outset, underlying software and hardware differences that may otherwise hinder secure communications can be avoided.

### **3.2.5 Associated requirements for bilateral and European defence industry**

Much like the armed forces themselves, the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) was cut to historically low levels as policymakers took advantage of the post-Cold War dividend. Continued cooperation and integration of European forces should be accompanied by industrial and technological consolidation. Revisiting how private-public partnerships are built for ensuring sufficient capacity in defence, not only efficiency and low-cost, will be a generational shift in both industry and ministries. The challenges here, however, are less about practical military issues, but about money, rules, and politics.

The development of a strong EDTIB has taken on a new urgency following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. From munition stockpiles to weapons platforms, European states faced the reality that they would be unable to sustain the type of

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119 Evert Brouwer, "[Hallo Duitsland! – CrIS verbindt](#)", *Ministerie van Defensie*, October 20, 2020.

120 "[D-LBO \(Digital Landbased Operations\)](#)", *Thales Group*, accessed 1 November 2023.

combat Russia and Ukraine have faced, even collectively. These gaps are in no small part due to Europe's fractious defence industrial sector.

### Stockpiles and the challenge of high-intensity war for Europe

The battlefield in Ukraine demonstrates the famous dictum "In war, amateurs talk strategy, but professionals talk logistics". It is not the number of ordnance that mostly limit the Ukrainian military, it is the shortage of ammunition and other consumables such as spare parts. Early this year the EU, for the first time ever, decided to support Ukraine with 1 million ammunition shells by March 2024. Joseph Borell rightly called this decision a "historic agreement". This has, however, been undermined by the announcement by German defence minister Boris Pistorius that the EU will miss this deadline.<sup>121</sup>

The big question is how to sustain support for Ukraine, while at the same time filling the largely empty depots in most European NATO countries, including Germany and the Netherlands. Should the Netherlands reopen the old Hembrug ammunition factory or build a new one? Should NATO nations build up large stockpiles, or should we think about modern "on call" contracts?

It is evident that (small) nations cannot overcome this challenge alone. The European consortium MBDA is currently serving as an important link in several Transatlantic and European joint venture initiatives to expand existing production lines (e.g. MBDA with Raytheon for PATRIOT missiles). There are also new initiatives to maximise the opportunity from open architecture systems (e.g., MBDA, KMW, Kongsberg, Elbit & Nexter) to develop and produce several variants of long-range missiles for the recently or soon to be acquired PULS systems.

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121 Veronika Melkozerova, "[German defense minister announces €1.3B weapons package during visit to Kyiv](#)", *Politico*, 21 November 2023.

The defence industry within Europe has been fractured for decades, only exacerbating the lack of public-private coordination.<sup>122</sup> National protectionism has resulted in several political issues between EU members, particularly when it comes to the sale of new weapons systems. A noteworthy division has been between the German-led Airbus and France's Dassault over the Indian government's purchasing of fighter aircraft. The Indian government ultimately chose Dassault's *Rafale* fighter over Airbus's *Eurofighter Typhoon*, causing tensions between Paris and Berlin. The identification of some capabilities as 'key national technologies', such as national developed tanks, makes consolidation difficult. Competition between national industries is only one, relatively manageable tension, however.

The real challenge caused by the fractured EDTIB is the economic inefficiency caused by duplication. As of 2019, 17 different main battle tanks, 29 destroyers/frigates, and 20 fighter aircraft were in existence within EU states. Each has its own respective logistics 'tail', maintenance, and training needs. Some duplication is desirable, to make up for the lack of mass across many forces and to provide the flexibility to act in and adapt to different operational conditions. However, in their current extreme form duplicative efforts limit the ability for the European industrial base to be an effectively scaled economy. Notionally shared munitions would reduce the impact of this duplication; however, even this remains a hurdle despite decades of NATO efforts at standardisation.

A separate issue occurs when out of the desire to urgently repair capability shortfalls, choices are made that in the long term could become problematic. Both the German and Dutch defence ministers have made clear that something must be done to repair the military quickly. However, especially in that transition period smart solutions are needed. If all European militaries suddenly start buying tanks, that will not solve the most critical shortfalls. It would be wise to look at who can fill what gap while, as an alliance, keeping an eye on the bigger picture. For example, if Germany cannot keep operating the Tiger, the gap in the light division might be filled with Dutch AH-64 Apache helicopters. This frees up money and energy that can be spent on other capabilities that are needed to move a division quickly. In the field of logistics and training smarter solutions can prevent the creation of *faits accomplis* while ensuring that serious gaps are filled.

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122 Raluca Csernatoni, "[The EU's Defense Ambitions: Understanding the Emergence of a European Defense Technological and Industrial Complex](#)", Carnegie Europe, 6 December 2021.

The same applies to the building of a robust communications backbone. Short-term gap fillers are unavoidable but that should not hamper the overall alliance effort to build a working network.

Solutions appear upstream of the procurement pipeline, where the coordination of private actors' R&D, product planning, and public-private interactions occur. Integration on the industrial side between normally competing national corporations can produce significant efficiencies. A clear example is the various mergers that have created MBDA, a joint European venture that has largely consolidated the European missile production sector into a single organisation. While remaining flexible enough to accommodate certain bilateral developments, such as MBDA Deutschland's cooperation with Saab to build the Taurus KEPD 350 missile, the venture provides systems to most European forces.

#### MBDA as a model for further defence-industrial cooperation?

MBDA was created in December 2001 after the merger of the main missile system companies in France, Italy and the United Kingdom. It later acquired the German missile development subsidiary of EADS, now Airbus, and some Spanish assets as well. It is organised as a joint European defence company with different national divisions in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Some facilities are also located in the United States. Major products include the *Storm Shadow* air-to-surface missile, the *Exocet* anti-ship missile, and the *MILAN* anti-tank guided missile. MBDA has been included in the development of the Future Combat Air System, developing the Unmanned Systems Remote Carrier to be paired with a sixth-generation fighter aircraft. This is intended to supply French, Spanish, and German air forces. MBDA is also leading the development of the Joint Fire Support Missile, a ground-launched cruise missile intended to be fired from the US M270 MLRS system.

Whether in platforms, munitions, or investments in emerging and disruptive technologies, the European (or even Dutch-German) DTIB should be able to produce capabilities with sufficient quality and mass for the most demanding planning scenarios. Deeply integrating upstream capability development is a demanding task that requires significant political and even legal capital; however, the alternative is perpetual dependency on a partner with continually divergent security interests. Past development has shown promise, however, and



with the current Zeitenwende sweeping into the minds of both defence planners and policymakers, there is capital to be spent.

### **3.3 Prospects for further German-Dutch cooperation: a speculative list**

While a number of speculative areas for further cooperation have been highlighted above, they are explored in greater depth here. These nine, specific ideas cut across all domains, and are drawn from examples both from within Europe and elsewhere. They are especially sensitive to the structural and capacity limitations between the German and Dutch armed forces, such as personnel shortages, and take these into account. They are:

1. Improving F-35 cross-servicing and information sharing. In this concept, Dutch and German F-35s could leverage shared basing with better maintenance access between F-35 partners. Such cooperation arises with the German procurement of the F-35 and is lowering operating costs through increased cross-servicing and possibly the initial sharing of Dutch air force airbases until German bases have been brought up to standard for F-35 operations. This increased communality, interoperability, and the wider availability of main operating bases and support services across NATO also gives greater operational flexibility during large-scale combat operations and in support of a credible, air-delivered nuclear deterrent.
2. The same applies to the German procurement of CH-47F *Chinook* transport helicopter models. Two nations utilising a similar platform creates possibilities for certain economies of scale through synchronizing cross-servicing. While some efforts in this are ongoing, strengthening such a programme is especially critical for the German DSK/Dutch 11 Air Assault Brigade due to its lack of vertical lift capabilities.
3. Shared multi-role future vertical lift platforms. Work is ongoing within the EU to improve Next generation rotorcraft technologies (NGRT), and increased bilateral investment in these programmes would pay dividends for both Germany and the Netherlands. Given the importance of equipped rapid reaction forces, not only within the bilateral context but within NATO and the EU, this requirement cannot be understated. Given the current state of integration between the German DSK and the Dutch 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Brigade, shared platforms with deconflicted command arrangements would be an ideal effort to consider.

4. Shared facilities and officer exchanges within the respective cyber and space domain efforts. Dutch civilian space actors are well organised and positioned under SpaceNed, but militarily Germany seems to have taken a step ahead with the *Weltraumkommando der Bundeswehr* (WRKdoBw). The WRKdoBw itself is closely aligned with the *Kommando Cyber- und Informationsraum* (KdoCIR). Closer cooperation between the Dutch air force and the Cyber Command, including honouring the German invitation to exchange liaison officers, should be relatively easy pickings for finding opportunities to fill existing enabling capability shortcomings or redundancies.
5. One of the biggest recognised capability gaps is (ground-based) air defence. Multiple cooperations already exist in various forms to overcome the shortfalls in the system, e.g. the German-led European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI), where the Netherlands has been a participant from the early stages and already shares a lot of experience with Germany on one of the ESSI's main systems (Patriot). Most urgent seem to be both extremes of the spectrum, with very short-range, close-in defence or counter-unmanned systems (low-cost, high volume, close-in targets) and in exo-atmospheric theatre missile defence. The Netherlands has a chance to synchronise and share costs fulfilling the ESSI's capability needs together with Germany on both ends of the capability spectrum and so narrowing the overall European gap. Project Apollo is an existing mechanism for such interoperability.
6. A joint, German-Dutch Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF), modelled on the US 2<sup>nd</sup> MDTF based in Wiesbaden, Germany. MDTFs are an American model designed to serve as a brigade-sized theatre-level deep precision strike unit with integrated ground-based air defence capability. However, combining both key capabilities (current capability gaps) could be an ideal structure in which to channel both ongoing cooperation in point air defence and similar procurements of ground-launched long-range missiles, and so providing an autonomous theatre-level capability. This naturally includes integrated conceptual and doctrinal work on multi-domain operations (MDO).
7. Closer integration between the German *Seebataillon* and the Dutch *Korps Mariniers*, modelled on the integration of the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Brigade into the German DSK. The similarity of some mission sets and the mutually reinforcing capabilities of both forces makes deeper integration in this area highly logical. Naturally this should be balanced with the ability to 'unplug' and conduct nationally-specific missions where the other has no interest.
8. Ongoing discussions are being held within the Dutch government about the protection of infrastructure in the North Sea, wherein some role for defence and the navy in particular is likely. The full spectrum of requirements, also

in relation to the Coastguard, has yet to be determined. Close coordination between the Netherlands and Germany, as well as Denmark, Belgium, the UK and possibly Norway, on matters of jurisdiction, capability requirements, and procurement will be required to ensure there are no seams in protection measures that can be exploited.

9. A common German-Dutch communications backbone infrastructure, that could also extend to other European allies. Both as a part of NATO's digital transformation initiative and to build on the ongoing efforts to harmonise communications equipment, a shared network infrastructure would offer a more efficient and effective means by which to ensure a 'plug and play' capability across services and domains.

Besides these specific capability areas, deepening German-Dutch cooperation and integration will be found in classrooms, conference rooms and staff headquarters by creating career possibilities for the mutual exchange of personnel. For the Netherlands this would mean a wider, well-coordinated, array of postings with German units and most of all higher staff. This is especially important to build familiarity with the operation of German divisions. This extends to staff positions with the responsibility for the synchronisation and coordination of force planning decisions. For this the current system and structure of high-level steering groups across services needs to be deepened so that they can inform decision-making for further cooperation measures such as those identified above.

# 4 Conclusions

## 4.1 The meaning of the *Zeitenwende*

The *Zeitenwende* set in motion a breakaway from Germany's post-Second World War security and defence policy. This policy was based on a certain amount of cooperation with Russia as a means of helping to secure peace in Europe. But Russia's invasion of Ukraine has resulted in a paradigm shift in Germany's security policy: from 'security with Russia' to 'security against Russia'.

In essence, three elements define the German *Zeitenwende*. Firstly, it was set in motion by a 'disruptive change'. This implies that the policy shift was not a path that was deliberately chosen, but one the German government felt it was forced to take due to external events, in this case the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Secondly, there is indeed a deep divide between Berlin's approach to Russia before and after 24 February 2022. A clear expression is the *Energiewende*, radically reducing Germany's dependency on Russian gas. Thirdly, Russia's policy and its corresponding actions are posing a fundamental challenge to Germany's security and defence policy: how to respond to the return of war in Europe and to the urgency of defending borders against autocratic revisionism?

These three elements explain the mixed bag of the impact of the *Zeitenwende*. Responding to Russia's invasion has not been accompanied by defining a long-term strategic perspective for Germany's security and defence policy. Strategic goals could – or should – have been stated in the first-ever German National Security Strategy (NSS), released in June 2023. However, the NSS offers an extensive menu of aims, objectives, instruments and methods rather than providing strategic direction and setting priorities. In the same vein, it is unlikely that Berlin will aim for playing the role of a leading European country in security policy. The country will continue to promote the use of multilateral organisations – primarily the EU and NATO – as well as defence partnerships with neighbouring countries. For Berlin, *Führung* does not mean 'leading the pack based on its own strategy', but *Verantwortung* – providing a framework so as to ensure that partner countries are 'on board' to pursue together the same security and defence policy objectives.

The boost for German defence spending through the € 100 billion Special Fund (*Sondervermögen*) and the subsequent reform of the *Bundeswehr* is the primary expression of the *Zeitenwende* in Germany's security and defence policy. The annual slices of the Special Fund in combination with the defence budget of almost € 52 billion result in Germany's realisation of the NATO 2% GDP target for defence spending in 2024 and the years immediately thereafter. However, for the *Zeitenwende* to succeed in the security and defence realm, long-term investment that goes beyond the current timeframe of the € 100 billion fund (up until 2026-2027) is a key requirement. At the moment, this is uncertain. Public support for a sustained increase in Germany's defence budget is not guaranteed due to the deep-rooted *nie wieder Krieg* mentality of the German population.

The *Zeitenwende* has to be seen in the wider context of strengthening European defence cooperation, including through improving European defence capabilities, and through reinforcing NATO's deterrence and defence posture. Bilateral formats, such as the German-Dutch defence cooperation, must be viewed in the same context of increasing cooperation and integration serving the wider goal of strengthening European capabilities. Indeed, Berlin regards the bilateral defence cooperation with the Netherlands (also) as an instrument to promote multilateralism by bringing – via The Hague – other smaller countries 'on board'.

To a very large extent, the NATO requirements will guide the direction of German-Dutch defence cooperation. The new readiness requirements, the regionalisation of the Alliance's defence plans and the German intent to scale up its enhanced Forward Presence in Lithuania to a combat brigade, including personnel, are the key drivers.

## **4.2 The meaning for German-Dutch defence cooperation**

Europe's new ambitions in defence, including the as yet unrealised leap forward in German investments, do offer renewed optimism about the future for armed forces continent-wide. As has been recognised for years prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the abilities of the German and Dutch armed forces, among others, to fight and sustain a war in Europe are deficient. Critical shortfalls persist across the services of both countries. From a military perspective, the conclusion

remains that German-Dutch cooperation and some limited areas of integration can offer tangible military advantages.

Integration and cooperation measures have been taken that seek to jointly address capability shortfalls while also sharing costs to avoid the political costs of further significant defence budget increases. In order to build a credible force of European allies to face contemporary security challenges, strengthening bilateral, minilateral or multilateral forms of military cooperation between European nations is a necessary condition. Cooperation between the two very like-minded countries of Germany and the Netherlands is a prime example of this, but structural difficulties between different services, different national industries, and ways of operating between German and Dutch forces impose a limit on how deep such cooperation and integration can go. The challenge of right-sizing these efforts is vital; both shallow coordination only and ever deeper integration do not appear to be the most appropriate means to cooperate.

The example of the integrated German-Dutch 414<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion operating under the Dutch 43<sup>rd</sup> Mechanised Brigade is indicative. While the cost-sharing measure of Dutch soldiers operating German-funded tanks has helped the Netherlands to fill an important training shortfall in its army structures, this model has not proven ideal for replication. Differences in command cultures, language abilities, and concepts for operations create barriers that no level of new fiscal investment will solve. While being a useful experiment, and no doubt a mechanism to maintain Dutch skills in armoured warfare, it cannot be scaled across services and into other areas.

For the air and naval forces, the challenge is at the opposite end of the spectrum. Challenges of defence industrial politics have until now largely slowed projects, like the F126 frigate and new helicopters, that could prove an ideal capability and capacity-building measure for both forces. Additional projects, like the cooperation between the Dutch and German marine forces, is an ideal model that can be seen replicated in the integration of the Dutch 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Brigade into the German DSK. Looser in configuration and sensitive to different operational concepts, these structures can more readily act as rapid response forces in the national, binational, and EU or NATO contexts.

Other opportunities for defence cooperation exist outside of the purely binational context. For the air forces in particular, filling critical capability gaps in air defence will be met through both German and Dutch involvement within the

European Sky Shield Initiative. Structurally, however, German-Dutch military cooperation can offer a model for other states looking to share the challenges of regional air defence, given the integration of German forces into the Dutch joint air defence command. For states that share heavily congested airspace, it is a natural practical outcome. Binational defence cooperation must recognise this wider European context in which it takes place. NATO in particular will be an important factor, as both states' cooperative efforts fall within the context of a new generation of alliance-wide plans that include a concrete regional focus on the central region around which to plan.

## 5 Observations and Recommendations

In light of the analysis in this report and the conclusions in the previous chapter, the Netherlands should take the following observations and recommendations into account in the further development of its security and defence policy.

- On the input side, the Netherlands and Germany should ensure that the NATO Vilnius target of spending a minimum of 2% GDP on defence should be assured in the longer term as both countries run the risk of not fulfilling this target in the years to come.
- Improving European defence capabilities requires sustained investment and not a one-off special fund. Both Germany and the Netherlands are in need of a longer-term, rolling defence investment fund, covering at least the next ten years in order to meet the new NATO requirements.
- A political-strategic framework should be developed for guiding the further development of the German-Dutch defence cooperation, connected to the aims of strengthening European defence cooperation and contributing to the new NATO requirements.
- Structurally, the German and Dutch armed forces can continue to *loosely* integrate forces in the following areas:
  - integrated F-35 cross-service maintenance and basing;
  - developing a joint, German-Dutch Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF), a brigade-sized theatre-level deep precision strike unit with integrated ground-based air defence capability;
  - broader cooperation between the German *Seebataillon* and the Dutch *Korps Mariniers*, drawing on lessons from the integration of the 11th Air Assault Brigade into the German DSK.
- Joint capability procurement, development, and maintenance should continue to be emphasised, for the following high-cost systems in particular:
  - joint CH-47F *Chinook* transport helicopter procurement;
  - in support of the MDTF unit above, and division-level strike units more broadly, jointly procure GBAD and ground-based deep-precision strike capabilities (e.g. HIMARS armed with Precision Strike Missiles);
  - shared multi-role future vertical lift platforms to replace the German NH-90;



- o shared facilities and officer exchanges within the respective cyber and space domain capability investments and staff elements;
- o leveraging Project APOLLO's integration to share ESSI costs: shared planning and cost-sharing in undersea infrastructure protection by the Navy, likely including the Danish and Norwegian as well; and a common German-Dutch communications backbone infrastructure, that could also extend to other European allies.