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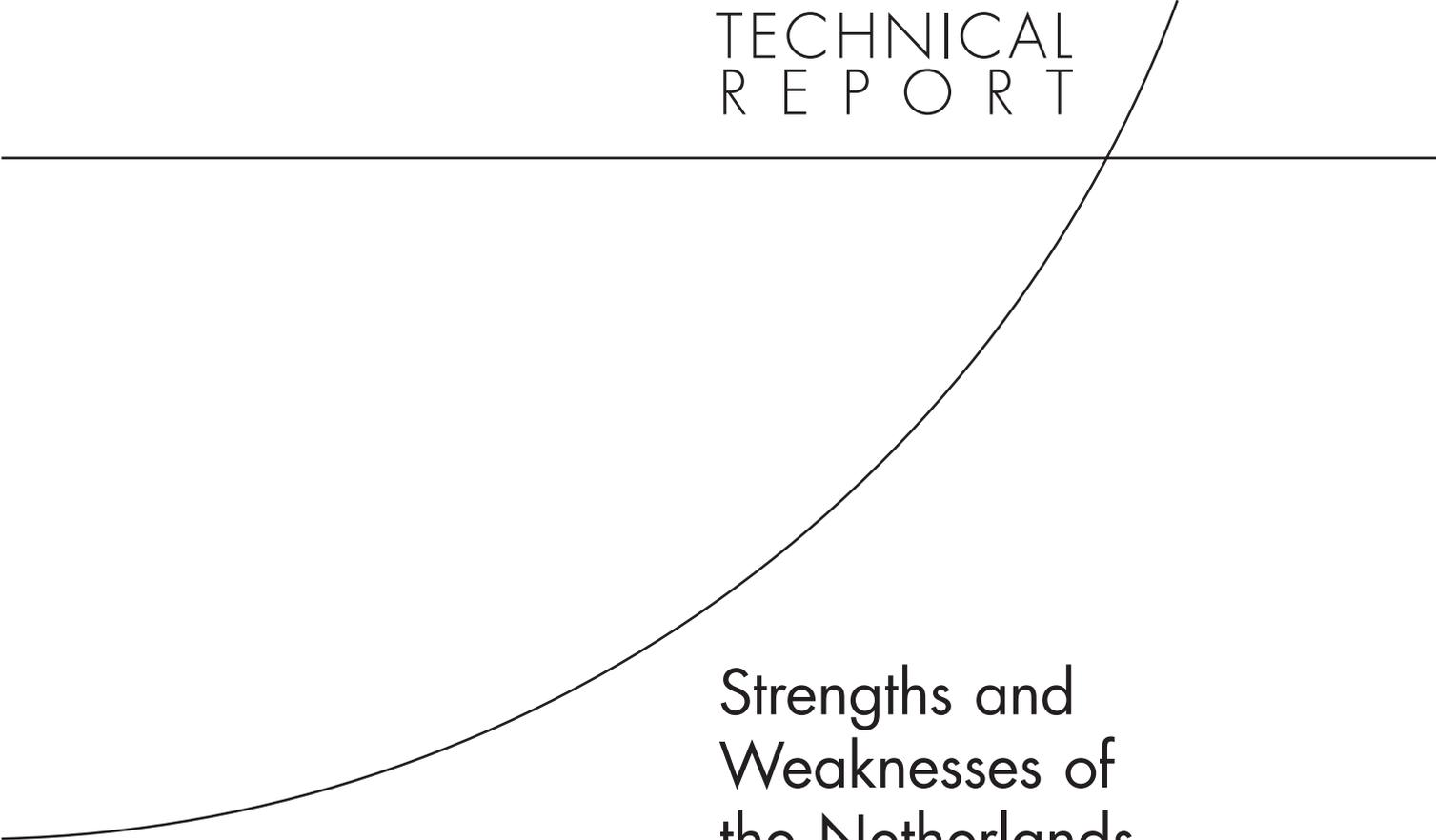
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Strengths and Weaknesses of the Netherlands Armed Forces

A Strategic Survey

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Sponsored by the Netherlands Ministry of Defence

The research described in this report was prepared for the Netherlands Ministry of Defence.

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Published 2010 by the RAND Corporation
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Summary

Study context and scope

The Netherlands Ministry of Defence (NL MOD) commissioned RAND Europe to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Netherlands armed forces, asking RAND Europe to focus on recent deployments of Netherlands armed forces relative to the deployments of other countries' armed forces. This study is therefore not a root-and-branch consideration of the Netherlands armed forces, but a comparative study of several different armed forces to illustrate contrasts and similarities with those of the Netherlands.

The study was conducted within the context of the NL MOD's Future Policy Survey, which is a review of the Netherlands' future defence ambition, required capabilities and associated levels of defence expenditure. The overarching aim of the Dutch Future Policy Survey is to provide greater insight into how to exploit and enhance the potential contribution of the Netherlands armed forces.

Study approach

The principal methodology employed in the study to meet this objective was the use of international benchmarking. The RAND Study team used qualitative and quantitative methodologies to benchmark the Netherlands air, land and maritime forces against those of selected NATO countries and Australia.

As the Future Policy Survey team were particularly interested in coalition partners' perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of the Netherlands deployments, interviews with representatives of coalition partners and an analysis of media reports were included in our approach.

The RAND Study team structured its research along five key dimensions:

- resources and deployments
- strategic posture: the role of defence
- deployability
- sustainability
- equipment platforms.

For each dimension, we considered quantitative and qualitative data, gathered through a literature review, and perception-based data, gathered through interviews and a media analysis. Our key findings are presented below.

Summary of study findings: implications for the Netherlands

- **The Netherlands armed forces have deployed significant force elements in a stressing operational environment:** The Netherlands' operations in Afghanistan are widely respected by NATO and EU partners, and the Netherlands has demonstrated its ability to deploy and support forces on an ongoing expeditionary operation.
- **Following Afghanistan, the Netherlands will require a 'rest' period:** It is likely that the Netherlands will need to plan for, and more importantly invest in, a period of rehabilitation, recapitalisation and refurbishment for key elements of its armed forces following withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2010. This is particularly true for the 'pinch points' in terms of people, equipment and materiel that have been stretched in recent years. The Netherlands may also need to revise its personnel strategy to meet operational and social realities, including harmony guidelines, the role of reservists, and the armed forces' recruitment and retention strategy.
- **The Netherlands must ensure that its defence ambitions are aligned with resourcing:** With this in mind it will be essential for the Netherlands to critically evaluate current defence spending, understand the cost of maintaining and operating existing force structures and the capabilities it will require to deliver its policy objectives in the long term.
- **There is a need for better communication regarding the role of the Netherlands' defence activities:** Many of the interviews we conducted and the media articles we consulted suggested that the NL MOD faces particular challenges in communicating the role of defence to the public, both in terms of operations in Afghanistan and more widely over the longer term. In terms of Afghanistan, this miscommunication is most likely a result of the changing mission requirements on the ground.
- **The Netherlands faces a strategic challenge regarding its capability mix:** In common with many other countries, the Netherlands needs to develop a coherent set of force elements to meet the requirements of both territorial defence and contingent expeditionary operations. Ultimately, this presents a trade-off between maintaining limited capabilities across all/most capability areas and focusing on particular strengths.

Summary of study findings: relative strengths and weaknesses of the Netherlands

- **Relatively low defence spending; relatively high GDP per capita:** Analysis of the data available suggests that, when compared with its peers, the Netherlands has a relatively low defence budget, committing less than 2 per cent to defence, and only 15 and 17 per cent of its overall defence budget on investment spending in the period 2001-2006, but a relatively a high GDP per capita at US\$ 40,431 in 2009. Comparatively,

Australia has a GDP per capita at US\$ 37,299 in 2009 and defence spending at over 2 per cent.¹

- **Relatively strong on quantity and quality of recent operations:** Interviewees indicated a high degree of respect for the Netherlands' contribution to recent missions, in particular the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Interviewees commented on the increased wear and tear on equipment and personnel as a result of operating in highly volatile areas such as Afghanistan's Uruzgan province; and the financial implications concerning the recapitalisation of equipment and the replenishment of stocks and materiel expended during operations.
- **Relatively strong focus on expeditionary operations:** The Netherlands has a relatively strong focus on expeditionary operations compared with the selected countries (Germany, Australia, Canada, etc). At the same time, the Netherlands has a lower requirement for territorial defence (such as maritime patrols and defence of airspace) due to its geographical size and location in Europe, and therefore may have more scope to enhance operational deployability, for example, by dedicating capabilities, including personnel and materiel, to contributing to expeditionary activities.
- **Relatively strong on technical interoperability:** The majority of interviewees indicated that the Netherlands was strong on technical interoperability, including areas such as English language skills, personal communication, etc. We were unable to obtain sufficient data to indicate any strengths or weaknesses in strategic interoperability.
- **Similar to all high-operational-tempo countries in the area of sustaining troops in theatre:** When interviewees commented on personnel pinch points affecting the Netherlands, two themes stood out in particular: operations tended to soak up the same crews repeatedly, and the rate of recruitment of new personnel was low. However, these issues are no different to those facing other countries operating in high-operational-tempo environments. For instance, in 2008, the United Kingdom reported significant operational pinch points across a number of military trades.

¹ GDP per capita estimates for the Netherlands and Australia are derived from purchasing power parity (PPP) calculations. World Economic Outlook Database – April 2009, *International Monetary Fund*. Accessed April 20, 2009