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The Netherlands: not just a cog in the NATO machine: The strategic importance of the Netherlands for NATO

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The Netherlands: not just a cog in the NATO machine

The strategic importance of the Netherlands for NATO



Bachelor Project – Grand Strategy

BSc Political Science: International Relations and Organisations Leiden University, The Hague

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Chapter I: Introduction

Most of the literature related to NATO or other forms of transatlantic alliance focuses on the strength of the United States opposed to the relative “weakness” of Europe, and the subsequent responsibility the US has to protect Europe. Nearly all authors – likely because many are American themselves – fixate on what European states can gain from their alliance with the US, but rarely on what the US can gain from Europe. Although the United States definitely possesses greater military capabilities than the European member states of NATO combined, it seems somewhat odd that the latter always has to assume an exclusively submissive role, especially as the US would be severely limited in its operating capabilities without the support of the Europeans. Moreover, the questions in the literature have generally been focussed on what the United States or NATO has to offer to its member states, but not on what other member states have to offer to the alliance.

This resulted in the research question: what is the strategic importance of the Netherlands for NATO? The reasons for choosing the Netherlands as a case study will be further expanded upon in the ‘methodology’ section. Moreover, what should be noted is that although the focus is on the strategic relevance of the Netherlands for NATO and not for the United States, many parts of the analysis concentrate on the US as it undeniably is the biggest contributor to the alliance. Although this paper criticises the exclusive focus on American strength/European weakness in the literature, it cannot go unacknowledged that the US is indeed the strongest NATO partner and is thus most relevant in the analysis.

Literature review

Many academic articles have been dedicated to the importance of the United States to its European NATO partners. This literature generally focuses on the relative military weakness of Europe and their subsequent need or desire for US protection, both from each other and from outsiders like Russia. Within this perspective, the role of the United States within NATO can be defined as “the ultimate guarantor that the weak will not be bullied by the strong and that the strong do not need to be overly concerned with balancing militarily against one another.”¹ Mearsheimer and Walt go as far as claiming the US should completely hand over NATO to the European states, arguing it is nothing but a burden on the American budget and that it is not in the country’s interest to maintain its military presence in Europe.²

¹ Robert J. Art, “Why Western Europe needs the US and NATO,” *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 1 (1996): 36.

² John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior US Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 95 (2016): 82.

Others are less condemning, but still criticise the European members for their failure to meet the two-percent norm or the unhinged expansion of the alliance in the post-Cold War era.³ Besides this last critique, Forster and Wallace identify two additional challenges for NATO since 1991: the desire of most European alliance members for an independent European Security and Defence Policy, and the prospected reduction of US military presence in Europe.⁴

Of course, the interaction between the US and Europe is not limited to the military sphere. The two do not only cooperate extensively in the economic domain, but there is also significant social and cultural exchange. However, as the main concern of this study is the military-strategic dimension, only the economic realm will be discussed.

Although in recent years, China has taken over as both the United States' and the European Union's main trade partner, the US-EU trade relationship remains the most integrated in the world.⁵ In 2019, 16.3% of all US exports were destined for the EU.⁶ As both Art and Menon and Ruger identify, NATO plays a central role in sustaining the economic cooperation between the United States and Europe.⁷ This link between the economic and military spheres is not only specific to these two actors, but also applies to alliances in a broader sense. Following the realist school, this makes sense, as "allies trade more than non-allies because states are wary of the security externalities that arise through bilateral economic exchange."⁸ Trading with an adversary is risky, as the resultant economic gains can be invested into military strength. Consequently, trade within alliances reinforces the relationship and helps strengthen all involved parties.⁹

Where the literature remains limited however, is in its analysis of the other side of the coin: the importance of NATO and the European members to the United States. As mentioned, Mearsheimer and Walt define this as basically non-existent, claiming that the US should transition to a grand strategy of 'offshore balancing' and only concern itself with the most urgent issues. They do identify Western Europe as a core region of interest to the US –

³ Rajan Menon and William Ruger. "NATO Enlargement and US Grand Strategy: a net assessment," *International Politics* 57 (2020): 393.

⁴ Anthony Forster and William Wallace, "What is NATO for?" *Global Politics and Strategy* 43, no. 3 (2007): 109.

⁵ "European Commission Directorate-General for Trade." United States - Trade - European Commission. Accessed March 15, 2022. <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/united-states/>.

⁶ "European Union." United States Trade Representative. Accessed March 17, 2022. <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/europe-middle-east/europe/european-union>.

⁷ Art, "Western Europe, the US and NATO," 38; Menon and Ruger, "NATO & US Grand Strategy," 372.

⁸ Joanne Gowa and Edward D. Mansfield. "Power Politics and International Trade," *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 408.

⁹ Andrew G. Long and Brett A. Leeds, "Trading for Security: Military Alliances and Economic Agreements," *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 4 (2006): 433-434.

along with Asia and the Persian Gulf – due to its “industrial power”, but as there currently is no other power that can unilaterally take control of the region, the American interest has been secured and requires little further attention.¹⁰ Writing from the perspective of the immediate post-1991 period, Art’s main concerns were with the potential collapse of stability in Western Europe if the US were to leave. The maintenance of this stability is of interest to America, as its loss could have significant retributions to the common market and thus to the US economy.¹¹ Even more dramatically, Mearsheimer himself in 1990 argued that the stability in post-war Europe stemmed primarily from the interference of the two superpowers and their nuclear weapons. Consequently, Mearsheimer warned that the withdrawal of US forces from the continent would surely cause the emergence of “ganging up and bullying problems,” thus necessitating continued American intervention.¹² Hindsight has supposedly proved this to be superfluous, with Mearsheimer and Walt arguing that Western Europe should no longer be a US priority.¹³

Menon and Ruger are more zealous about what Europe has to offer to the US, and argue that “reliable access to NATO countries’ ports, airfields and intelligence” is critical to the country’s ability to project its military power worldwide.¹⁴ Weinstein offers a more normative defence of the concept of a transatlantic alliance, claiming there is a “deep moral scope” of democracy, individualism, laissez-faire and equality to NATO. Moreover, cooperating with the Europeans provides greater legitimacy and weight to the US’ actions on the global stage through the added multilateral dimension.¹⁵ As the author puts it: “America has to lead, but Europe has to be our partner.” Moreover, European armies are not only sophisticated to the level of the US military, but are also within close proximity of a core region for the United States: the Middle East.¹⁶ Finally, although it must be acknowledged that the US is the strongest power in NATO - contributing over 16 percent of the NATO budget¹⁷ - according to Walt, “the primary purpose of alliances is to combine the members’ capabilities in a way that furthers their respective interests.”¹⁸ Consequently, Washington must get

¹⁰ Mearsheimer and Walt, “Offshore Balancing”, 72, 81.

¹¹ Art, “Western Europe, the US and NATO,” 38.

¹² John J. Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War,” *International Security* 15, no. 1 (1990): 11.

¹³ Mearsheimer and Walt, “Offshore Balancing,” 81.

¹⁴ Menon and Ruger, “NATO & US Grand Strategy,” 372.

¹⁵ Kenneth R. Weinstein, “Why the US needs Europe,” *Aspen Review*. 15 March 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.aspen.review/article/2017/why-the-us-needs-europe/>.

¹⁶ Weinstein, “The US needs Europe.”

¹⁷ Nato. “Funding NATO.” NATO, June 11, 2018. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67655.htm.

¹⁸ Stephen M. Walt, “Why Alliances Endure or Collapse,” *Survival* 39, no. 1 (1997): 157.

something out of its alliance with the Europeans, but there is no consensus on what exactly this is.

Although NATO is the most obvious unit of analysis in the US-Europe military dynamic, it is not the only relevant actor. In recent years, as the European Union has sought to expand its joint military capabilities, it has become an increasingly significant player. As Bergmann argues, the EU can serve a key role in the renaissance of the transatlantic alliance, as “only the EU can integrate and transform Europe’s fragmented and inefficient militaries into a potent pillar of NATO,” and a stronger European contribution to NATO decreases the burden on the US.¹⁹ Besides these comments, however, here too a significant gap remains in the literature regarding what the United States can get out of Europe.

Theoretical framework

The goal of this research is to determine the strategic importance within NATO of a specific actor at the country-level. However, first it must be determined what exactly constitutes “strategic importance” in the context of the alliance. NATO identifies itself as a ‘political and military alliance,’²⁰ and therefore any country that is of strategic relevance to the alliance must meet this criterion in at least either the (geo)political or military sphere. For example, although NATO-Turkey relations have been strained in recent years, the country is a strategic asset for NATO mainly due to its location on the intersection of Europe and the Middle East with access to the Caucasus, and as the controller of the Bosphorus - Russia’s access to the Mediterranean.²¹ Similarly, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Slovakia became a promising potential alliance member as it occupied “key and difficult ground,” as a junction of railway and road networks leading to Poland, Germany and Hungary. Moreover, the country possesses oil fields, zinc, a vast amount of timber resources, and former Soviet military bases that “provide the potential to project Alliance power.”²² An illustration of the utility of the latter: the defensive deployment of the combined German-Dutch PATRIOT surface-to-air missile battery starting in April of 2022, in the context of the situation in Ukraine.²³ Other countries were valuable to the alliance for other reasons, like Slovenia -

¹⁹ Max Bergmann, “The EU is the Military Ally the United States needs,” *Foreign Affairs*. 6 January 2017. Retrieved from

https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2021-01-06/eu-military-ally-united-states-needs?check_logged_in=1.

²⁰ “NATO / OTAN.” What is NATO? Accessed April 25, 2022. <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>.

²¹ Nezihi Çakar, “A Strategic Overview of Turkey,” *Journal of International Affairs*, no. 2 (1998).

²² John Hillen and Michael P. Noonan, “The Geopolitics of NATO Enlargement,” *Parameters* 28, no. 3 (1998).

²³ Rijksoverheid, “Patriot-vuureenheden op weg naar Slowakije,” (Patriot battery underway to Slovakia), April 14, 2022, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2022/04/14/patriot-vuureenheden-op-weg-naar-slowakije>.

which forms a land bridge to Hungary - and Romania, for its natural resources and its access to the Black Sea.²⁴

What must be noted however, is that NATO membership does not automatically constitute unique strategic relevance. Some countries in Eastern Europe do not add anything to the alliance independently, but combined they help increase the reach of liberal democracy and multilateralism in Europe.²⁵ Moreover, according to liberal institutionalists, their collective membership enhances the political stability and prosperity in the region.²⁶ However, this does not negate the fact that some countries, of which Turkey, Slovakia, Slovenia and Romania were just examples, offer unique geopolitical advantages to the alliance, as this paper will argue in the context of the Netherlands.

From these examples illustrated above, we can draw the conclusion that strategic value mainly draws from three distinct factors: access to transport networks, access to natural resources, and the ability to propel NATO power forward. The first of these constitutes railways, roads, and waterways, as is demonstrated by Slovakia's advantages and Slovenia's connection to Hungary. The second refers to assets like oil, timber, zinc - also like Slovakia. The third is especially important and more diverse, and is illustrated by Turkey as the NATO stronghold in the east, Romania on the Black Sea, and in part Slovakia's (former Soviet) military bases.

Methodology: case study

The theory introduced above will be applied to a case study of the Netherlands. There are many valid reasons for analysis of the strategic importance of the small country within NATO and to the US, which will be outlined in the following section. The following section will commence with the background of the Netherlands' participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, followed by a brief overview of the country's strategic importance according to the aforementioned three factors, which will be explored in-depth in chapters two, three, and four. Ultimately, the paper will attempt to assess whether the Netherlands is merely a cog in the NATO machine, or if it has a unique place and function in the alliance.

Firstly, although the Netherlands has failed to meet the NATO two-percent norm since the end of the Cold War,²⁷ it has historically been regarded as a "faithful ally" within the

²⁴ Hillen and Noonan, "Geopolitics of NATO Enlargement."

²⁵ Frank Schimmelfennig, "NATO Enlargement: A Constructivist Explanation," *Security Studies* 8, no. 2-3 (1998): 199.

²⁶ Dessie Zagorcheva, "NATO Enlargement and Security in the Balkans," *Journal of Regional Security* 7, no. 1 (2012): 10.

²⁷ "Military Expenditure (% of GDP) - Netherlands." Worldbank. Accessed March 17, 2022, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?end=2020&locations=NL&start=1960>.

alliance since its origins in the late 1940s.²⁸ This in part stemmed from its three motivations to join NATO: fear of Soviet expansion, protection from potential German or French dominance, and access to American financial aid through the Marshall Plan.²⁹ During the Cold War, the Netherlands actively took part in the alliance through participating in joint military commands such as the naval STANAVFORLANT³⁰ in NATO's flexible response structure.³¹ Moreover, when France withdrew from the NATO military structure in the 1960s, the Headquarters Allied Forces Central Europe were moved to Brunssum, in the south of the Netherlands. This location was also key in maintaining the alliance's communication structure, as well as in its early warning system for enemy aircraft.³²

The Netherlands also proved to be a reliable NATO asset in the immediate post-Cold War period, where the Royal Netherlands Air Force and Army were an eager and adept participant in various international NATO missions.³³ Moreover, as leader and partner in the creation of the European Expeditionary Air Wing - together with Denmark, Norway, Belgium and Portugal - the Netherlands supported ISAF in 2005.³⁴

This active Dutch participation in NATO missions shifted in the early 2010s, when the Davids-committee concluded that there was no appropriate mandate for the American-British invasion of Iraq in 2003³⁵ - which the Netherlands supported - and a dispute arose in the government regarding the continuation of the Dutch mission in Afghanistan. The latter proved

²⁸ Ramses A. Wessel, "The Netherlands and NATO," In *Legal Implications of NATO Membership*, ed. Juha Rainne, 137-168. Helsinki, The Erik Castrén Institute of International Law and Human Rights, 2008: 141.

²⁹ Idem, 142.

³⁰ Standing Naval Forces Atlantic was a NATO joint permanent mission from 1967 until 2005, when it was renamed to Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1). During peacetime, its primary objectives were improving multinational naval teamwork, demonstrating alliance solidarity, enhancing rapid deployment capabilities, and as the basis of the formation of a larger NATO naval force if necessary. In wartime, STANAVFORLANT's main purpose would have been to ensure allied ships carrying reinforcements a safe crossing of the Atlantic, without harassment by Soviet submarines. From: NATO Information Service, "STANAVFORLANT: Welcome Aboard," (1977). Retrieved from https://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/1/3/137697/0319_STANAVFORLANT-WELCOME_ABOARD_ENG.pdf.

³¹ Johannes A. van der Peet, "Out-of-area: De Koninklijke Marine en multinationale vlootoperaties 1945-2001 [Out-of-area: The Royal Netherlands Marine and multinational naval operations 1945-2001]," Utrecht University (2016): 61.

³² Nato. "Netherlands and NATO - 1949." NATO. Accessed May 24, 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_162354.htm.

³³ Such as the RNFLAF in Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia and Kosovo in 1995 and Operation Allied Force in Kosovo in 1999, and the Dutch Army in UNPROFOR in the former Yugoslavia. From: Christian F. Anrig, "The Belgian, Danish, Dutch and Norwegian Experiences", In *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, ed. Karl P. Mueller (RAND Corporation), 269-270; and "United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) en de United Nations Peace Forces (UNPF)," Defensie.nl. Accessed 28 May, 2022, from <https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/historische-missies/missie-overzicht/1992/united-nations-protection-force-unprofor-en-de-united-nations-peace-forces-unpf>.

³⁴ Anrig, "Experiences in Libya," 271.

³⁵ "Conclusies commissie-Davids op een rijtje," (Conclusions Davids commission) NOS, 12 January 2010. Retrieved from <https://nos.nl/artikel/128556-conclusies-commissie-davids-op-een-rijtje>.

to be fatal for the cabinet, which abdicated.³⁶ As a result, the subsequent government was hesitant to actively partake in Operation Unified Protector in Libya, and opted for participation with a more supportive, reconnaissance character.³⁷

In the present age, the Netherlands primarily takes part in the logistics of NATO. The Port of Rotterdam - together with the Port of Vlissingen in Zeeland and to some extent Eemshaven in the North³⁸ - plays a key role in NATO military mobility, serving as the hub of American and British military transport to the rest of Europe. *Military mobility* is defined by the Dutch government as ‘the sum of activities within the domain of movement and transportation, logistic support and the condition of related enablers, including infrastructure and rules and regulations.’³⁹ Access to a European port is especially critical for the United States to be able to efficiently and effectively deploy its troops in Europe, and as the Netherlands has a ‘highly efficient infrastructure network’, the Rotterdam Port is a logical ‘Gateway to Europe.’⁴⁰ Although the Dutch military already frequently aids the US military in the deployment of materiel in the context of Host Nation Support, the government of the Netherlands intends to further facilitate this mobility in the near future through the establishment of three national transport corridors.⁴¹

Besides this primary function as a logistics hub, the Netherlands also contributes to the alliances in other, more minor, ways. First of all, the Netherlands is also home to relatively large reserves of natural gas, both in the north of the country and in its territorial waters. Combined, these make the Netherlands first in the EU ranking of natural gas, and second in NATO only behind Norway.⁴² Although these reserves are not inexhaustible, in the current climate of unstable relations between Europe and Russia, the supply of Russian gas is no longer reliable or desirable, and the Dutch reserves could help fill the gap temporarily. Secondly, the Netherlands is also home to a number of US tactical/non-strategic nuclear

³⁶ “Kabinetcrisis 2010: De Uruzgan-Crisis.” (Cabinet Crisis 2010: the Uruzgan Crisis) Parlement.com. Retrieved from https://www.parlement.com/id/vicxczwrt5h4/kabinetcrisis_2010_de_uruzgan_crisis.

³⁷ Christian F. Anrig, “The Belgian, Danish, Dutch and Norwegian Experiences”, In *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, ed. Karl P. Mueller (RAND Corporation), 301.

³⁸ With regard to military transport, the port of Eemshaven is relatively new, with a dedicated location for the Dutch military only being established in 2021. However, the port has been used in the past, e.g. for the transport of 2 Dutch PATRIOT installations to Turkey in 2013. From: “Eigen plek in Eemshaven voor Defensie [Own location in Eemshaven for the military],” *Defensie*, October 6, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2021/10/06/eigen-plek-in-eemshaven-voor-defensie>; and “Patriots travel in convoy to Eemshaven,” *Rijksoverheid*, January 7, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2013/01/07/patriots-travel-in-convoy-to-eemshaven>.

³⁹ Dutch Ministry of Defence, *National Plan Military Mobility*, 2021: 3.

⁴⁰ Idem, 4-5.

⁴¹ Idem, 5-6.

⁴² “Natural Gas Reserves by Country.” Worldometer. Accessed May 10, 2022 from <https://www.worldometers.info/gas/gas-reserves-by-country/>.

weapons (TNWs) at Volkel Air Base.⁴³ Although the Netherlands - along with multiple other nations in which these TNWs are stored - have occasionally voiced their concern over the presence of these weapons in their territory, the American B-61 bombs remain in Europe to this day. NATO in general has reduced its intended reliance on TNWs since 1991, but the alliance has simultaneously made the full removal of these weapons conditional on Russian cooperation.⁴⁴ With the current conflict in Ukraine sparking anxiety in Europe over the potential Russian use of TNWs in the near future, it seems unlikely that the Europeans' reluctance to store the American TNWs will become a pressing issue soon.⁴⁵ In any case, it is likely that instead, the nuclear umbrella of NATO will remain important as a deterrent against Russia, but also as a comfort to European citizens.

Keeping in mind these roles that the Netherlands fulfils within NATO - and for the US - the following (sub-)hypotheses were drafted:

H₁: *The Netherlands is a strategically valuable asset of NATO.*

H_{1A}: *The Netherlands is a strategically valuable asset of NATO as it serves as its primary logistics hub in Europe.*

H_{1B}: *The Netherlands is a strategically valuable asset of NATO as it possesses resources critical for NATO.*

H_{1C}: *The Netherlands is a strategically valuable asset of NATO as it serves as a forward-projecting base of US nuclear power.*

H₀: *The Netherlands is not a strategically valuable asset of NATO, as its contributions can also be fulfilled by other nations.*

H_{0A}: *The Netherlands is not a strategically valuable asset of NATO as its function as a logistics hub can also be fulfilled by other members.*

H_{0B}: *The Netherlands is not a strategically valuable asset of NATO as its resources can be supplied by other members.*

H_{0C}: *The Netherlands is not a strategically valuable asset of NATO as its service as a forward projecting base of US nuclear power can be fulfilled by other members.*

⁴³These bombs – also located in Belgium, Germany, Italy and Turkey – can be delivered by fighter aircraft of the respective nations, but remain in American hands. From: “Fact Sheet: U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe.” Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, August 18, 2021. Retrieved April 28, from <https://armscontrolcenter.org/fact-sheet-u-s-nuclear-weapons-in-europe/#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20it%20is%20estimated,Netherlands%2C%20and%20Incirlik%20in%20Turkey.>

⁴⁴ Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen. “US Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 2011,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 67, no. 1 (2010): 72.

⁴⁵ Gordon Corera, “Ukraine War: Could Russia use tactical nuclear weapons?” *BBC*. March 16, 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60664169>.

In order to test these hypotheses, a thorough case study will be done on the unique capabilities the Netherlands offers its partners in NATO. Although the primary hypotheses are assumed to be true, the fact that there are three different sub-hypotheses leaves room for excluding one or multiple of the factors as constituting strategic importance of the Netherlands. Following the outline the hypotheses naturally propose, the first substantive chapter will discuss the logistical aspect, the second chapter will focus on the resource aspect, and the final substantive chapter will emphasise the Netherlands' ability to aid in projecting US and NATO nuclear power forward. What must be noted however, is that the logistic dimension is not only the first in terms of order, but also in importance, as without adequate logistics, the other two ingredients of 'strategic relevance' can never be achieved. Moreover, with regard to the Netherlands specifically, the mobility dimension is most prominent, and the other two are of secondary importance. However, the choice was made to give all three aspects their own chapter, to keep the research clearly organised and allow for separate sub-conclusions.

The chapters will draw from existing literature, historic evidence, and strategic documents, and through these sources attempt to analyse if the Netherlands has a unique position within the alliance, or whether its role is expendable.

Chapter II: Military mobility - The Netherlands as a transit hub

As Van Creveld claimed, “logistics make up as much as nine tenths of the business of war.”⁴⁶ Defence logistics refers to the process of moving armed forces and subsequently keeping them supplied. It is and always has been a crucial factor in warfare, as it “determines what military force can be delivered to the theatre of operations.”⁴⁷ Despite the increased unpredictability of adversaries and the decline of symmetric, conventional conflict, logistics remains a critical component of war and thus of high concern to an alliance like NATO. This is especially true as a significant part of the alliance’ man- and firepower has to come from overseas - from the United States and to a lesser extent, from the United Kingdom. Consequently, this warrants the creation and maintenance of an efficient and agile transport network; without it, the primary purpose of NATO - “safeguard the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means”⁴⁸ - cannot be achieved.

Logistics are also key in deterrence, and especially in its credibility.⁴⁹ Similarly to how a nuclear weapon is not a credible deterrent if a state does not have the means to deliver it - planes, intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarines, etc. - conventional force is equally unimpressive without the logistic support to back it. Thus, if NATO wishes to deter its adversaries and remain a credible alliance, it must develop and sustain adequate logistical tactics.

The following section will discuss both historic and contemporary NATO mobility and examine the role the Netherlands played with regard to both.

NATO Cold War mobility

During the Cold War, the almost exclusive focus of NATO was on a potential conflict with the Warsaw Pact, which was expected to take place in Central Europe. This meant that NATO regularly trained the deployment of troops towards this theatre of operations, such as Exercise REFORGER.⁵⁰ The predictability of necessary capabilities and the theatre of operations reduced the logistics of the Cold War-going-hot scenario to “threat-based preparation centred on calculations and problem-solving surrounding the large-scale

⁴⁶ Creveld, Martin van. *Supplying War : Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*. Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 1977: 231.

⁴⁷ Matthew Utley and Christopher Kinsey. “The Role of Logistics in War.” In *The Oxford Handbook of War*. Oxford University Press, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199562930.013.0028>.

⁴⁸ NATO, “NATO’s Purpose.” NATO, July 11, 2018. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_68144.htm.

⁴⁹ Elbridge Colby and Jonathan Solomon, “Facing Russia: Conventional Defence and Deterrence in Europe,” *Global Politics and Strategy* 57, no. 6 (2015): 40.

⁵⁰ REFORGER (Return of Forces to Germany) was an exercise conducted annually from 1969 until 1993, in which NATO practised the deployment of mostly American troops to Germany in a hypothetical conflict scenario. From: Peter Schmitz and John Rausch, “Operational Logistics in NATO,” *Air Force Journal of Logistics* 24, no. 1 (2000).

movement of troops and materiel in Western Europe.”⁵¹ This resulted in NATO Cold War logistics being largely reduced to two central concepts: ‘flexible response’ and ‘forward defence.’ Although the former mainly depended on capacity that was already present and operational, the latter - which referred to the proactive NATO push into East Germany to the river Elbe - was heavily reliant on external forces and a continued supply of fuel and ammunition from the harbours on the North Sea to the lines in the East.⁵²

The role of the Netherlands

As a potential conflict between the two superpowers in the European theatre demanded significant logistical preparations as outlined above, the Netherlands’ geographical location made it into an important player. The Netherlands’ contribution to NATO logistics during the Cold War mainly revolved around the context of Host Nation Support to the United States. Peacetime HNS consists mainly of allowing US access to the host’s facilities, whereas wartime HNS takes a wider variety of forms: nuclear-biological-chemical decontamination, base air defence, recovery and logistics.⁵³ During exercises, this last wartime purpose was frequently practised for. For example, in REFORGER ‘76, the Dutch port of Vlissingen was used to disembark American materiel, together with the ports of Ghent and Bremerhaven.⁵⁴ During REFORGER 79, both the port of Rotterdam and of Amsterdam - together with the German Bremerhaven - were utilised for incoming- and outgoing movement.⁵⁵ Exercises like these demonstrate the importance of the Netherlands in the NATO logistics chain during the Cold War, and their success indicates that the Netherlands provided adequate HNS.

Besides personnel and materiel, fuel also needs to be transported towards the frontlines of a potential conflict. Although this can be transported through air, or over water, rail or road, a more efficient method is through (underground) pipelines, such as through the Central European Pipeline System (CEPS).⁵⁶ Transport through pipelines is also more reliable and less susceptible to Russian Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) systems,⁵⁷ making it not merely a viable but also a necessary option. The CEPS is a cooperative network of fuel

⁵¹ Utley and Kinsey. “Logistics in War.”

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Caspar W. Weinberger, “Report on Allied Contributions to the Common Defence,” *Department of Defence*. April 27, 1988: 48. Retrieved from <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA192414.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Harlan K. Holman et al., “Analysis of MTMC Participation in the Reforger 76 Exercise,” *Military Traffic Management Command* (1976): 49, 139.

⁵⁵ Gary R. Bill et al., “Analysis of MTMC Participation in the REFORGER 79 Exercise,” *Military Traffic Management Command* (1979): 78.

⁵⁶ Defensie Materieel Organisatie, “Defensie Pijpleiding Organisatie: Fueling your Wings - Corporate Brochure,” June 1, 2016: 4. Retrieved from <https://www.defensie.nl/downloads/brochures/2017/06/01/corporate-brochure-dpo-fueling-your-wings>.

⁵⁷ Dominik P. Jankowski, “The NATO Pipeline System: A forgotten defence asset,” *NATO Defence College* (2020): 2-3.

pipelines between the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg, supported by the United States as the primary consumer.⁵⁸ In this system, the majority of fuel arrives through the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp, with the Netherlands being the main route for this fuel on its way to (US) air bases in Germany. Additionally, the Netherlands is home to multiple large depots that can hold a significant amount of fuel that could supply the hinterland in case transport or production is hindered.⁵⁹ Thus, it is a most vital part of NATO's supply lines, both in peace- and in wartime.

Current NATO mobility

When the Iron Curtain fell, a shift had to occur in NATO strategic and logistical thinking. Marked by a now more diverse range of deployments in varying regions of the world, the alliance' militaries changed from 'threat-based defensive postures' to 'capability-based expeditionary forces.' As the Russian threat subsided, logistic priorities shifted and the nearly exclusive focus on the conceptual war on its Eastern flank disappeared. Simultaneously, NATO began expanding its controversial reach eastward and into former Warsaw Pact territory, with its easternmost borders shifting past Poland and Hungary in 1999, and to Bulgaria, Romania and the Baltics in 2004.⁶⁰ Highly criticised in the literature, this last development put NATO right on Russia's doorstep, increasing tensions.⁶¹ As another state on Russia's borders - Ukraine - also sought rapprochement with the West, this expansion of the alliance ultimately culminated in the breakdown of relations between Russia and the West over the Crimean crisis in 2014 and finally the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁶²

This renewed hostility between NATO and Russia demanded a renaissance of the logistic plans from the Cold War. According to Colby and Solomon, in relation to the state of NATO logistics planning: "logistics units are probably the type of ground forces in direst need of reinforcement on the continent."⁶³ However, the aforementioned expansion of the alliance eastward also warranted not only the inclusion of more parties within the logistic strategy, but also shifted the theatre of operations towards Eastern Europe - meaning different geostrategic factors and challenges, such as the Suwalki Gap.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, if NATO wishes to remain a

⁵⁸ Jankowski, "NATO Pipeline System," 2-3.; NSPA, "Central Europe Pipeline System." Accessed May 3, 2022, from <https://www.nspa.nato.int/about/ceps>.

⁵⁹ DMO, "Defensie Pijpleiding Organisatie," 4-5.

⁶⁰ NATO, "Member Countries." NATO, March 30, 2020. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52044.htm.

⁶¹ Menon and Ruger, "NATO & US Grand Strategy," 373.

⁶² NATO, "NATO-Russia Relations: The Background," March 2020. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/4/pdf/2003-NATO-Russia_en.pdf.

⁶³ Colby and Solomon, "Conventional Defence and Deterrence," 40.

⁶⁴ The Suwalki Gap refers to the 110- to 150 kilometres wide corridor that separates the Russian enclave Kaliningrad and Belarus. If it is closed off by Russia in the event of a conflict, it would separate the NATO

credible alliance and to deter Russia from spreading its influence in Eastern Europe, the Cold War plans for a conflict on the alliance' Western flank are once again relevant.⁶⁵

As a result, NATO has heavily invested in its logistics in cooperation with the European Union, in the shape of a project called 'Military Mobility' - a fancy term for combat-related logistics.⁶⁶ The concept of military mobility relies on two principles: speed of assembly and speed of engagement. Over the last 100 years, the pace and reach of mobility has rapidly increased as a result of technological advances, from "the pace and range a regiment or unit could walk, to rapid air mobility."⁶⁷ In order to sufficiently prepare for such an operation, it is crucial to establish "secure military movement corridors through which forces must pass to exploit their mass and to maintain speed of command and action."⁶⁸ This is precisely the goal of the CEPA-conceived, joint NATO-EU *military mobility* project, which seeks to overcome the two barriers that the included states face to optimal logistics: infrastructural - maximum carrying capacities of roads and bridges, tunnel heights, etc. - and bureaucratic limits - regulatory and procedural issues.⁶⁹

In order to combat these problems, the EU launched the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) project Military Mobility in 2018, intended to see completion in 2025.⁷⁰ As aforementioned, several parties are involved in the greater context of this project, besides the EU: NATO's JSEC and SJLSG, and independent policy bureau CEPA, which credits itself with finding the project.⁷¹ Moreover, in addition to the 25 participating EU members, the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom also partake in the project. Although the EU also benefits from the defence cooperation between its member states - especially in the context of strengthening the European wing of NATO and the development

forces in the Baltics from the rest of the alliance. "It is not only about nations, it is also about NATO as a credible security organisation ready to defend all its members in whatever circumstances." The geostrategy of the gap, as well as geographic features are subsequent required tactics are outlined in: Leszek Elak and Zdzisław Śliwa, "The Suwalki Gap - NATO's Fragile Hot Spot," *Zestyty Naukowe* 103, no. 2 (2016): 24-40.

⁶⁵ Colby and Solomon, "Conventional Defence and Deterrence," 40; Netherlands Ministry of Defence, "National Plan Military Mobility," 12.

⁶⁶ European Parliamentary Research Service, "Military Mobility: Infrastructure for the defence of Europe," February 2020. Retrieved from

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/646188/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)646188_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/646188/EPRS_BRI(2020)646188_EN.pdf).

⁶⁷ Heinrich Braus, Ben Hodges, and Julian Lindley-French, "The CEPA Military Mobility Project: Moving Mountains for Europe's Defence," *Center for European Policy Analysis*, March 2021: 18. Retrieved from <https://cepa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CEPA-Military-Mobility-Report-web-5.21.21.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ European Commission, "Military Mobility," Retrieved from

https://ec.europa.eu/defence-industry-space/eu-defence-industry/military-mobility_nl.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ The EU-NATO mobility project is in part based around the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), a network of infrastructure spanning the European Union. As civilian and military transport largely overlaps, some of the necessary infrastructure is already in place and simply needs to be adjusted to the needs. From: Braus, Hodges, and Lindley-French, "Military Mobility Project," 4-7.

of a European Defence Union - the main reason it funds the PESCO project is the dual-use nature of most of the measures the plan proposes. Reportedly, there is a ninety-three percent overlap between necessary civilian and military transport improvements, meaning that the improvements made in the context of military mobility also benefit the civilian sector.⁷²

NATO's Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC) and the Standing Logistics Joint Support Group (SJLSG) are tasked with the supranational command-aspect of the mobility project. Together, they are responsible for "enabling the reinforcement and sustainment of forces" in the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's Area of Responsibility.⁷³

The role of The Netherlands

The Netherlands plays a key role in the European Military Mobility project. The Netherlands is arguably the most advanced nation when it comes to logistics, due to its civilian expertise in this field.⁷⁴ Consequently, it leads the PESCO project, and is the first involved country to draft its respective *National Plan Military Mobility*, which was published in 2021. This plan also presents the Netherlands as a transit nation, as is the title of the report. It further emphasises three goals of its participation and for spearheading the project: upholding NATO credibility and deterrence, increasing its own strategic value "as a reliable security partner," and upholding NATO commitments.⁷⁵ In order to implement the PESCO project within its own borders, the Netherlands has committed to the establishment of "three multimodal corridors" for both European and NATO Host Nation Support activities.⁷⁶ Three is the magic number here, as it means one route is available for outgoing traffic, one for incoming, and one for civilian evacuation purposes or in case another route becomes obstructed.⁷⁷ Implementing such measures is not a giant feat for the Netherlands, as its infrastructure has been demonstrated to already largely be in compliance with the requirements.⁷⁸

⁷² Braus, Hodges, and Lindley-French, "Military Mobility Project," 48.

⁷³ Jurgen Knappe and Sergei Boeke, "JSEC: NATO's New Reinforcement Command," *Atlantisch Perspectief* 45, no. 4 (2021): 33.

⁷⁴ The Netherlands has consistently been a leader in logistics, ranking second globally in terms of transport infrastructure and outclassing the rest of the world in port infrastructure. Source: World Economic Forum, "World Economic Forum: Dutch once again have best infrastructure in Europe," October 18, 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.portofrotterdam.com/en/news-and-press-releases/world-economic-forum-dutch-once-again-have-best-infrastructure-europe>.

⁷⁵ Netherlands Ministry of Defence, "National Plan Military Mobility," 12.

⁷⁶ Idem, 5, 7.

⁷⁷ Idem, 5.

⁷⁸ Idem, 7; and Rob Leeuw van Wenen, Arnaud Burgess, and Jan Francke, "Study on the implementation of the TEN-T regulation - The Netherlands case," *Transportation Research Procedia* 14 (2016): 490-492.

In terms of the larger picture of the military mobility project, the Netherlands is a key geostrategic player as a result of its air- and seaports. As shown in the Appendix, the country is directly home to three civilian TEN-T corridors: one to the Baltic, one to the Mediterranean, and one through the Alps. All three of these have the Netherlands as at least one of their points of origin, from which resources, troops, and material can be moved towards the east. Moreover, not only is the North Sea-Baltic Corridor one of the three direct routes to NATO's easternmost borders, the Dutch ports also connect to other important routes that take equipment across the continent. Of course, the TEN-T is primarily civilian-oriented, but as has been previously established, there is significant overlap with military purposes.

Large-scale movements across established transport corridors are increasingly being trained for by the alliance, such as in Exercise Trident Juncture in 2018, when over 40,000 troops were moved towards Norway in a hypothetical scenario of an article 5 breach. Some of this movement was done through the Netherlands, providing insight into which areas need improving most.⁷⁹

Of course, the Netherlands' ports are not the only access points to Europe for troops coming in from overseas. Other options still include Germany's Bremerhaven⁸⁰ and Belgium's ports of Zeebrugge,⁸¹ Antwerp, and Ghent. However, as mentioned earlier, for a proper logistics system, it is crucial to have multiple transport corridors available - preferably three: for incoming movement, outgoing movement, and one as a backup. Therefore, the Netherlands' participation in NATO's military mobility is imperative.

The Central European Pipeline System that transported fuel from harbours on the North Sea and Atlantic towards the German hinterland during the Cold War are still operational today, and the Netherlands provides the same role. Since the end of the East-West rivalry, the NATO Pipeline has been expanded, but the CEPS remains the largest element⁸²

⁷⁹ Margriet Drent, Kimberley Kruijver, and Dick Zandee, "Military Mobility and the EU-NATO Conundrum," *Clingendael* (2019): 12.

⁸⁰ Bremerhaven has been used both to bring materiel from the United States to Europe and vice versa. From: "Defender-Europe 20: Anlandung des Materials," *Bundeswehr*, February 27, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/organisation/streitkraeftebasis/aktuelles/defender-europe-20-anlandung-des-materials--186164>; and "Atlantic Resolve: Material auf dem Rückweg in die USA," *Bundeswehr*, December 1, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/organisation/streitkraeftebasis/aktuelles/atlanctic-resolve-material-auf-dem-rueckweg-in-die-usa-4801374>.

⁸¹ The port of Zeebrugge/Bruges was used in 2017 to facilitate the transport of 80 American helicopters to Europe. From: Frank Crebas, "Host Nation Support voor US Army," *Onze Luchtmacht*, October 30, 2017. Retrieved from <https://onzeluchtmacht.nl/binnen-en-buitenlands-nieuws/buitenlands-nieuws/host-nation-support-voor-us-army/>.

⁸² Jankowski, "NATO Pipeline System," 4.

and one of only two multinational pipelines.⁸³ Although the current CEPS does not stretch all the way to Eastern Europe, the network nonetheless plays a vital role in the logistical structure of NATO, carrying (mainly jet) fuel from the ports of Belgium, France, but mainly the Netherlands to Germany, from where it can be transported further east through other means.

Conclusion

When it comes to logistics or ‘military mobility,’ the Netherlands is and has always been a critical player within EU and NATO structure due to its geostrategic location on the North Sea, which has historically fostered the development of adequate transport infrastructure. Its ports of Rotterdam, Vlissingen and Eemshaven are transport hubs for civilian and military cargo alike, and together make a significant contribution to the movement of troops and materiel towards the east. The Netherlands is a point of origin of not only international rail- and road networks, but also of the Central European Pipeline System. As logistics are crucial in ensuring NATO’s credibility and deterrence - especially in the context of the renewed Russia-NATO hostility - the Netherlands is a critical player in this regard.

⁸³ “NATO Pipeline System,” NATO. Accessed May 27, 2022, from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56600.htm.

Chapter III: Resources - The Netherlands as an oil and gas source

Not only logistics are of importance to conflict, but the material and supplies it is concerned with must also come from somewhere. This is where natural resources come in.

Natural resources have always been a key tool of leverage, whether it be water and fertile soil in developing countries, or gas and oil in the developed world. The power of the latter became painfully apparent during the oil crisis of 1973, which “demonstrated West European vulnerability to Arab use of oil as a political weapon.”⁸⁴ Moreover, critics of the United States’ foreign policy often claim that many American-fought wars in the last decades revolved around oil, especially those in Iraq.⁸⁵ The other energy resource, gas, is also of particular concern to NATO, as nearly 50% of gas consumed in Europe is imported from Russia alone.⁸⁶ Even prior to the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Soviet Union was already a main supplier of gas for European households, especially in Germany, where “by the time the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, the Soviet Union accounted for around one-third of all gas demand in West Germany.”⁸⁷ Shea and Gallis both foresaw that the European dependence on Russian gas could pose a significant issue in the future,⁸⁸ but eight years later when Moscow annexed Crimea, the alliance had failed to work on decreasing its dependence. Another eight years later, when Russia invaded Ukraine, Europe was still just as reliant on Russian gas to warm its households.⁸⁹

However, not only strained diplomatic relations are a risk to NATO’s energy security. As previously underdeveloped regions of the world continue to industrialise, the demand for energy increases exponentially.⁹⁰ As energy insecurity can also become a source of political unrest, it is important that the alliance is prepared. Another threat to NATO’s energy security is the fact that the majority of energy resources - and especially oil - are in the hands of authoritarian and somewhat unstable states. Not only Russia, but also Middle Eastern countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia possess significant oil reserves on which the alliance

⁸⁴ Lt. Col. Henrik O. Lunde, “North European oil: Implications for NATO nation,” *US Army War College* (1976): 87.

⁸⁵ Jeff D. Colgan, “Oil, Conflict, and US National Interest,” *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs* (2013). Retrieved from <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/colgan-final-policy-brief-2013.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Jamie Shea, “Energy security: NATO’s potential role,” *NATO Review*, September 1, 2006. Retrieved from <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2006/09/01/energy-security-nato-s-potential-role/index.html>.

⁸⁷ Arthur Sullivan, “Russian gas in Germany: A complicated 50-year relationship,” *Deutsche Welle*, March 9, 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/russian-gas-in-germany-a-complicated-50-year-relationship/a-61057166>.

⁸⁸ Shea, “Energy security: NATO’s potential role”; Paul Gallis, “NATO and Energy Security,” *Congressional Research Service*. March 21, 2006. Retrieved from <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA473481.pdf>.

⁸⁹ Sullivan, “Russian gas in Germany.”

⁹⁰ Shea, “Energy security: NATO’s potential role.”

relies. This does not only make these resources potentially unreliable, but also provides these authoritarian states with significant leveraging power over the West.⁹¹

As these threats demonstrate, it is important that the alliance works on decreasing its dependence on external energy sources and instead focuses on the resources its members possess. This is not only of concern for the stability of NATO's members internally, but also strategically, as it makes the alliance less vulnerable to leverage from uncooperative but resource-rich states.

Dutch gas and oil

This is where the Netherlands can play another critical role within the alliance. Especially in terms of gas reserves, in which the small country is number one within the European Union. Within NATO, it is only surpassed by Norway.⁹² The gas field in the Dutch province of Groningen is the ninth largest in the world,⁹³ and it was mainly this field that supplied thirteen percent of European-consumed gas in 2013.⁹⁴ The exploitation of the Groningen gas had been controversial for a while before, when the amount of minor earthquakes in the region skyrocketed, which led to public outcry from the local population. Consequently, from 2013 onwards, the extraction was scaled back significantly. However, in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022, two-thirds of inhabitants of the region supported the extra extraction of gas if necessary.⁹⁵ Although Groningen is the largest gas field in the country, the Netherlands is home to over two hundred other locations where natural gas is extracted, many of which are located in its territorial waters.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Gallis, "NATO and Energy Security."

⁹² "Natural Gas Reserves by Country." Worldometer. Accessed May 10, 2022 from <https://www.worldometers.info/gas/gas-reserves-by-country/>.

⁹³ Samuel Boerma, "Dit zijn de tien grootste gasvelden van de wereld. Zit Groningen er ook bij? Check de kaart. [These are the ten largest gas fields in the world. Is Groningen among them? Take a look at the map.]," *Dagblad van het Noorden*, March 10, 2022. Retrieved from <https://dvhn.nl/groningen/Waar-liggen-de-grootste-gasvelden-Van-wie-zijn-ze-En-hoe-hoog-staat-Groningen-All-es-wat-je-moet-weten-over-de-top-10-27524815.html>.

⁹⁴ Jesse Frederik, "De ongemakkelijke waarheid: Europa heeft nú Gronings gas nodig [The uncomfortable truth: Europe needs gas from Groningen right now]," *De Correspondent*, March 8, 2022. Retrieved from <https://decorrespondent.nl/13187/de-ongemakkelijke-waarheid-europa-heeft-nu-gronings-gas-nodig/7933470499-13-30f406fe>.

⁹⁵ Petra Klapwijk, "Gaskraan Groningen mag verder open, vindt twee derde: 'Crisissituatie met Rusland vraagt om uitzondering' [Gas extraction in Groningen can increase, say two-thirds: 'Crisis with Russia calls for exceptions'," *EenVandaag*, February 26, 2022. Retrieved from <https://eenvandaag.avrotros.nl/panels/opiniepanel/alle-uitslagen/item/gaskraan-in-groningen-mag-verder-open-vindt-twee-derde-crisissituatie-met-rusland-vraagt-om-uitzondering/>.

⁹⁶ Staatstoezicht op de Mijnen, "Olie- en gaswinning [oil and gas extraction]," Accessed May 10, 2022, from <https://www.sodm.nl/sectoren/olie--en-gaswinning#:~:text=Naast%20het%20Groningen%20gasveld%20telt,de%20Noordzee%20en%20de%20Waddenzee>.

The renewed use of Dutch gas is in no way a full, nor permanent solution, it can temporarily help NATO become more independent in terms of energy, and make the alliance less susceptible to leverage from states, especially Russia.

Similarly, another source of energy - oil - can also be found in Dutch territorial waters. By itself, it is quite insignificant, but when combined with the oil in Norwegian and British waters it can make a contribution to NATO's energy security, and "provide insurance against political blackmail such as in 1973."⁹⁷

Conclusion

By itself, the contribution the Netherlands can make to NATO's energy security is relatively limited. Additionally, the only long-term solution to fix the issues the alliance currently faces with regards to fossil natural resources is the development and employment of sustainable energy sources. Only these means can make NATO resilient against political leverage. However, the large gas fields of the Netherlands can help NATO bridge the gap in the meantime, especially considering the increasingly strained relationship between the alliance and Russia - Europe's main source of gas.

⁹⁷ Lunde, "North European Oil," 92.

Chapter IV: Projecting power forward - The Netherlands and US TNWs

As this chapter concerns tactical nuclear weapons, which are limited in range, and this is a case study of the Netherlands, the primary “adversary” regarded here will be the Soviet Union/Russia, as other states with which NATO is not allied with are not relevant for the range that TNWs launched from the Netherlands cover.

The NATO nuclear umbrella in the Cold War

American nuclear weapons have been deployed in Europe since the late 1950s, when they were placed there “to offset a perceived Soviet conventional superiority in the region.”⁹⁸ These nuclear weapons consisted of both ground-based missiles that could be fitted with nuclear warheads, and gravity bombs that required delivery via aircraft. These weapons were mainly tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs), rather than strategic. Foradori establishes two factors that set TNWs apart from their strategic counterparts: short range⁹⁹ and function - which for non-strategic nuclear weapons constitutes “winning a single battle rather than (...) the entire war.” The second part is slightly vague and context-dependent, and consequently, the author adopts a definition by exclusion, in which all non-strategic nuclear weapons are classified as tactical.¹⁰⁰ The first part of the definition of TNWs regarding their range is also somewhat problematic, as this does not impact those delivered by aircraft. Nonetheless, a critical factor in the successful employment of TNWs and nuclear weapons in general - and thus to make them a credible deterrent - is limiting the adversaries’ ability to intercept.¹⁰¹ Therefore, it is vital that the opportunities for interception are limited, which can partially be ensured through short distances to the intended target. Consequently, the main methods of delivery for tactical nuclear weapons include ships, submarines and aircraft. With respect to the third of these options, aircraft, geographic proximity of the location of departure also limits the chances of interference. When it comes to the purpose of TNWs, Suchy and Taher identify five distinct uses: as a “deterrence by denial capability;” to deter TNW use by

⁹⁸ Sverre Lodgaard, “The nuclear umbrella revisited,” *The Nuclear Ban Treaty: A Transformational Reframing of the Global Nuclear Order* (2020): 3.

⁹⁹ “Within the US–Soviet (Russian) context, the category of tactical weapons includes land-based missiles with ranges of less than 500 km and air- and sea-launched weapons with ranges of less than 600 km.” From: Paolo Foradori, “Tactical Nuclear Weapons and Euro-Atlantic Security,” *Studies in European Security and Strategy* (2013): 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰¹ This is demonstrated by the United States’ development of (ballistic) missile defence systems since the end of the Cold War, and today particularly in the context of China. More about this in: Fiona S. Cunningham and M. Taylor Fravel, “Assuring Assured Retaliation: China’s Nuclear Posture and US-China Strategic Stability,” *International Security* 40, no. 2 (2015): 7-50.

adversaries; as a “usable” nuclear weapon; as a bridge between nuclear and conventional warfare; and as a symbol of political commitment.¹⁰²

As mentioned, geographic proximity to potential targets is an advantage for a state intending to deliver a nuclear weapon, be it a gravity bomb or a submarine - or ground-launched missile. This made Western Europe the perfect location for the United States to deploy their non-strategic nuclear weapons. Moreover, these TNWs did not only serve as a direct part of the US’ extended deterrence to its European partners, but also as reassurance to the Europeans of the credibility and reliance of this deterrent.¹⁰³

The other side of the argument for placing American nuclear weapons in Europe was to keep the Europeans from developing their own nuclear capabilities - over fear of Soviet aggression and fear of limited US commitment - and subsequently using them on each other. Although nuclear weapons are a great deterrent, this fear was based on the assumption that a multipolar system is inherently more prone to conflict than a bipolar one.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, with the Second World War still fresh in mind, the United States was weary of a reemerging Germany. Some of these fears were not entirely ungrounded, with West-Germany committing to the development of its own nuclear program. Although this plan was quickly halted by the US and UK, any further intentions of other smaller NATO members to develop their own nuclear arsenals were curbed by the deployment of US nuclear weapons to Western Europe.¹⁰⁵

The Netherlands was the first European NATO member to have US TNWs stationed on its territory in 1957. This deployment was in line with the reputation of the Netherlands: as loyal NATO ally. The presence of American nuclear weapons on Dutch soil remained an uncontested matter until the mid-sixties, when traditional party and religious allegiances subsided. Anti-American, anti-capitalist, and pacifist sentiments became mainstream and the Dutch parliament disagreed over the US missiles and bombs.¹⁰⁶ Although the Dutch government never conceded, this in part contributed to a rise in critical views of the Dutch

¹⁰² Petr Suchy and Bradley A. Taher, “Weapons as political symbolism: the role of US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe,” *European Security* 23, no. 4 (2014): 511-512.

¹⁰³ David S. Yost, “Assurance and US extended deterrence in NATO,” *International Affairs* 85, no. 4 (2009): 755.

¹⁰⁴ Mearsheimer, “Back to the future,” 13-15.

¹⁰⁵ The Kennedy administration originally proposed to create a multilateral force (MLF). The MLF would “ingrate national nuclear arsenals under a single command within NATO.” The idea was eventually rejected due to concerns over proliferation, both from the Soviet and the American side, eventually culminating in the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) in which the states vowed against nuclear sharing. From: Nuno P. Monteiro and Alexandre Debs, “The Strategic Logic of Nuclear Proliferation,” *International Security* 39, no. 2 (2014): 42-47.

¹⁰⁶ Maarten Huygen, “Dateline Holland: NATO’s Pyrrhic Victory,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 62 (1986): 169.

military and its contribution to NATO.¹⁰⁷ Still, the amount of American nuclear weapons in the Netherlands steadily grew throughout the 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁰⁸

A main concern of the Dutch population with regard to the nuclear weapons that were placed in their country was the fear that it might make the Netherlands a more likely target in the event of a Soviet pre-emptive strike.¹⁰⁹ This worry became increasingly prominent in the debate when in 1979, the United States intended to place cruise missiles with nuclear warheads at the Dutch military base of Woensdrecht. The public feared that instead of “blowing up the Soviet Union, [the missiles] will blow up the Netherlands.”¹¹⁰ The government voiced its intention to remove the US nuclear bombs that were already in its territory after the new cruise missiles had been installed, hoping to calm some of the opponents’s nerves. However, these American cruise missiles served a wholly different purpose than the tactical nuclear weapons that were already present; as a political token of US commitment to defending Europe, rather than the almost purely military value of the gravity bombs.¹¹¹ After persistent backlash from the Dutch population, these missiles were never actually placed in the Netherlands - in contrast to West-Germany, the UK, Italy, and Belgium.¹¹² Nonetheless, the worry that the presence of these new missiles in the Netherlands would make the country a target of a Soviet first-strike were somewhat misplaced, as it was already likely to be targeted due to its importance in the logistics of NATO.¹¹³

Although the focus of both the public’s criticism and the literature has been almost exclusively on the nuclear bombs and missiles in the Netherlands, during the Cold War, the Netherlands was also home to ADMs - Atomic Demolition Munitions. These were mainly

¹⁰⁷ The Dutch army of this time period was also disapproved of by various prominent magazines from allied states like the US, France and the UK. Besides the perceived low willingness of the Dutch population to defend their country and their morals, the presentation of the Dutch troops was also a point of critique; e.g. long hair, low discipline, untidy uniforms, etc. More about this in: C. C. van der Heuvel, “Verdedigingsbereidheid in Nederland [Willingness to defend in the Netherlands],” *Atlantische Tijdingen*, no. 209 (1975): 2.

¹⁰⁸ Huygen, “Dateline Holland,” 170.

¹⁰⁹ Idem, 183.

¹¹⁰ Idem, 173.

¹¹¹ Idem, 182.

¹¹² Idem, 167.

¹¹³ A now unclassified document from the US Directorate of Intelligence (1983) outlines the targets of Soviet tactical nuclear strikes: surface-to-surface missile units, nuclear storage sites, airfields, command and control sites, surface-to-air missile units, ground force combat units; but especially “rear elements of the enemy’s logistics system, particularly depots and materiel support airfields.” It is logical to assume that this would include both Schiphol airport and the Port of Rotterdam due to their vital role in NATO logistics, both during the Cold War and now. From: Directorate of Intelligence, *Soviet Planning for Front Nuclear Operations in Central Europe* (1983): 9. Retrieved from <https://www.archives.gov/files/declassification/iscap/pdf/2012-090-doc1.pdf>.

intended for A2/AD: make critical terrain inaccessible, slow down the adversary, or channel them into predetermined columns to increase vulnerability.¹¹⁴

TNWs and contemporary NATO nuclear strategy

Following the end of the Cold War, the United States drastically reduced the numbers of tactical nuclear weapons it had placed in Europe: from around 4000 in 1990, to 480 in 2001, to roughly 200 in 2007.¹¹⁵ Since then, this number has allegedly remained stable. The TNWs are dispersed over five countries: the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Turkey, with the bulk being deployed in the two latter.¹¹⁶ These weapons deployed in Europe make up over half of the total US TNW arsenal of approximately 230, and are “all bombs for tactical fighter aircraft.”¹¹⁷

The five aforementioned objectives of TNWs are still relevant today, albeit with the emphasis on different factors. The US technological advances in conventional weapons in the last decades have reduced their deterrent nature. However, citing the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, Suchy and Taher do not completely write off this role. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine further intensifies this particular purpose.¹¹⁸ Moreover, the American technological superiority is slowly being eroded by its adversaries - especially China - through (cyber)espionage. With regard to the second role - deterring TNW use by adversaries - these weapons remain relevant today. Both the US and Russia have reduced their non-strategic arsenals since the end of the Cold War, but as the Soviet Union always had superior numbers, this unequal balance is maintained today. When it comes to the third and fourth objective - filling the gap between more “usable” conventional weapons systems and generally “unusable” nuclear weapons - there is still an unfilled niche, thus necessitating the continued deployment of US TNWs in Europe. Suchy and Taher (2014) ascribe the majority of the continued importance of non-strategic weapons in Europe to political reasons: as “a symbol of US commitment in an era of weakened European militaries and reduced obligations to NATO.”¹¹⁹ To summarise, TNWs remain of strategic importance to NATO today, and having European air bases to station them in and potentially deploy them from is still essential.

¹¹⁴ Daan Sanders and Jan Hoffenaar, “Going nuclear, but how? The Netherlands Army and Tactical Nuclear Warfare in Europe, 1953-1968,” *International Journal of Military History and Historiography* (2021): 16.

¹¹⁵ Norris and Kristensen. “US TNWs in Europe, 2011,” 64-65.

¹¹⁶ Idem, 65-66.

¹¹⁷ Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, “Tactical nuclear weapons, 2019,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 75, no. 5 (2019): 252. DOI: 10.1080/00963402.2019.1654273.

¹¹⁸ Suchy and Taher, “Weapons as political symbolism,” 513.

¹¹⁹ Idem, 514.

With regard to these locations, during the Cold War, West-Germany, Belgium, Italy, Turkey and the Netherlands were about the closest the United States could get its nuclear weapons to Warsaw Pact territory. Although Denmark and Norway are closer, these two countries always profusely refused to have American nuclear weapons deployed.¹²⁰ However, as the borders of NATO shifted significantly eastward, theoretically the opportunity to deploy these weapons closer to Russia exists nowadays. And theoretically, Poland would most likely be willing to accept these TNWs on its soil due to its perception of the Russian threat - especially in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.¹²¹ However, this decision would undoubtedly be met with intense backlash from Moscow,¹²² and consequently worsen the already poor Russia-NATO relations. Consequently, Büchel air base in Germany, Volkel air base in the Netherlands, Kleine Brogel in Belgium, and Aviano and Ghedi air bases in Italy are the closest the US can realistically get to Russia in Western Europe. ‘Coincidentally’, all these bases are located equally close to Moscow, at around 2100 kilometres.

Although NATO could perhaps miss one of these bases, having its tactical nuclear capacity dispersed over multiple countries is beneficial in more than one way. Firstly, having these bases spread out decreases the likelihood of an adversary - Russia in this case - successfully annihilating the entire tactical nuclear capability of the alliance. Secondly, as the population in most of these countries, but especially in the Netherlands and Germany, is not overly enthusiastic about nuclear weapons on their soil, if the TNWs are removed from one, it could cause a domino effect and necessitate the removal of these weapons from more locations, weakening NATO’s and the US’ strategic posture in Europe.¹²³

Conclusion

Although tactical nuclear weapons serve less of a strategic purpose than they did in the Cold War, they nonetheless remain relevant in NATO strategy. The Netherlands by itself is not

¹²⁰ Huygen, “Dateline Holland,” 183.

¹²¹ Katarzyna Kubiak, “Playing Warsaw against Berlin on nuclear weapons,” *European Leadership Network*, June 1, 2020. Retrieved from

<https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/playing-warsaw-against-berlin-on-nuclear-weapons/>.

¹²² The 2020 discussion over hypothetically relocating American TNWs from Germany to Poland already caused frustrations in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which said this would “constitute a violation of one of the key provisions of the 1997 Russia-NATO Founding Act” - a political agreement in which NATO committed to not adding “substantial combat forces” in the area that was previously part of the Warsaw Pact. From: Alexandra Brzozowski, “Debate to relocate US nuclear weapons to Poland irks Russia,” *Euractiv*, May 20, 2020. Retrieved from

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/debate-to-relocate-us-nuclear-weapons-to-poland-irks-russia/>.

¹²³ Constanze Stelzenmüller, “Nuclear weapons debate in Germany touches a raw NATO nerve,” *Brookings*, November 19, 2021. Retrieved from

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/11/19/nuclear-weapons-debate-in-germany-touches-a-raw-nato-nerve/>.

an indispensable asset when it comes to the extended deterrence of the alliance, but it does play a vital role in the structure of the European nuclear wing. Not only is it part of NATO's nuclear 'ring of fire' surrounding Moscow, but if it were to put an end to the presence of these American weapons on its territory, it could cause the larger nuclear deployment structure to break down, significantly damaging the alliance's credibility.

Chapter V: Conclusion

In conclusion, the Netherlands has indeed proved to be a strategically valuable asset to NATO, in line with the main hypothesis. With regard to the sub-hypotheses, the Netherlands is more important in some areas than in others. Although the Netherlands has some gas resources, its potential role as a supplier of natural resources can be fulfilled by other European alliance members, like Norway. However, the gas reserves that the small country does have should not be completely disregarded, as they can play a part in the energy security of NATO before sufficient sustainable alternatives are achieved. When it comes to the extended deterrence that the US nuclear arsenal provides for the European, non-nuclear members of the alliance, the Netherlands is important once again, but not unilaterally. It shares its function as a storage location of American TNWs with three other European states, but it is imperative that this nuclear capability remains spread out and that the burden it comes with continues to be shared by multiple members. Moreover, this function cannot be adopted by ‘newer’ members of the alliance, as this would increase Russian hostility. The strategic aspect where the Netherlands truly excels however, is logistics or “military mobility.” The presence of an adequate logistics system is not only important in wartime, but also plays a critical role in peacetime alliance credibility and deterrence. The Netherlands is not only leader of the EU’s PESCO military mobility project, but its ports also play a major role in the transport of troops, fuel and materiel from overseas to the European hinterland for military exercises and general US presence. Taking not only this dimension, but also the two other dimensions into account, it can be concluded that the Netherlands is more than just a small cog in the machine of NATO.

This analysis of the strategic value of the Netherlands in NATO has filled a fraction of the gap in the literature, which has generally only considered the contribution of the United States to the alliance. Despite its limited implications as a result of the research design as a case study, the assessment of strategic value on the basis of logistics, resources, and benefit in projecting power forward do provide a solid foundation for future case studies on the contribution other European members make to NATO.

Hypothesis	Conclusion
<i>H₁: The Netherlands is a strategically valuable asset of NATO.</i>	Yes.
<i>H_{1A}: The Netherlands is a strategically valuable asset of NATO as it serves as its primary logistics hub in Europe.</i>	Yes, although there are other options (e.g. Germany, Belgium), the Netherlands is most accessible.
<i>H_{1B}: The Netherlands is a strategically valuable asset of NATO as it possesses resources critical for NATO.</i>	Somewhat; the Netherlands has a decent amount of natural gas that can partly replace the gas imported from Russia. However, this is not sustainable long-term, nor is the Netherlands alone in the possession of natural gas within NATO.
<i>H_{1C}: The Netherlands is a strategically valuable asset of NATO as it serves as a forward-projecting base of US nuclear power.</i>	Yes, but not independently, as it is part of a larger coalition. However, in this coalition the Netherlands' presence is imperative.
<i>H₀: The Netherlands is not strategically valuable for NATO, as its contributions can also be fulfilled by other nations.</i>	No.
<i>H_{0A}: The Netherlands is not a strategically valuable asset of NATO as its function as a logistics hub can also be fulfilled by other members.</i>	No, there are other options available (e.g. Belgium, Germany), but it is critical to have multiple logistics corridors, and the Netherlands is most accessible.
<i>H_{0B}: The Netherlands is not a strategically valuable asset of NATO as its resources can be supplied by other members.</i>	Yes, this function can be/is mostly fulfilled by Norway. However, the Netherlands still makes a minor contribution.
<i>H_{0C}: The Netherlands is not a strategically valuable asset of NATO as its service as a forward projecting base of US nuclear power can be fulfilled by other members.</i>	Theoretically, yes, this function could be fulfilled by “new” members of NATO, e.g. Poland. However, this would increase Russian hostility.

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Appendix A

