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HAGUE 000543

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL, PGOV, NATO, NL, AF

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DAALDER PRESSES DUTCH TO STAY THE
COURSE IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. THE HAGUE 514

B. THE HAGUE 419

Classified By: Ambassador Daalder for reasons 1.5(b,d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO, Ambassador Ivo Daalder, argued for the extension of the Netherlands, military deployment and aid to Afghanistan beyond 2010 during high-level meetings, a speech, press interviews, and a reception in The Hague on September 3, 2009. This cable covers conversations with Development Minister Koenders (paragraphs 2 - 8), FM Verhagen (paragraphs 9 - 13), and senior foreign policy officials (paragraphs 14 - 24). Dutch officials uniformly responded that selling an extended military deployment to the Dutch parliament will be difficult, but that some Dutch involvement in Afghanistan past 2010 is almost certain. Daalder also exchanged views with the Dutch on the NATO strategic concept (paragraphs 13, 24). Paragraph 25 summarizes Dutch participation and reactions at the speech and reception. END SUMMARY.

Development Minister Koenders

2. (U) September 3, 2009; Dutch Foreign Ministry; The Hague, Netherlands.

3. (U) Participants:
United States

Ambassador Hartog Levin
Ambassador Daalder
Jennifer Davis, U.S. Mission to NATO
Eric Falls, Embassy The Hague
Netherlands

Bert Koenders, Minister for Development Cooperation
Ms. Joke Brandt, MFA DG for Development Cooperation
Ms. Godie van de Paal, MFA Task Force Uruzgan
4. (SBU) Ambassador Daalder emphasized President Obama's commitment to success in Afghanistan through cooperative effort with Allies. The new U.S. strategy has two key themes, he said. First, it is more narrowly defined to ensure it is tied to our core interests and to ensure it is achievable. Second, the U.S. is boosting support for the

strategy through regional cooperation, the &3D8 approach of defense, diplomacy, and development, and through rapid build-up of Afghan security forces. Daalder also emphasized our mission in Afghanistan is a combined effort -- forty percent of the troops in ISAF, as well as forty percent of our casualties, are from our non-U.S. Allies.

5. (C) Ambassador Daalder explained that we hope the Dutch will stay in Afghanistan as we value their expertise. He added that we understand that the number of Dutch troops may decline after 2010. Nonetheless, he said we believe there are two key messages that may help convince the Dutch public and parliament to support an extension of the Dutch mission. First, the new U.S. president is extremely popular in Europe and that popularity might result in deeper support for the mission in Afghanistan. Second, the United States depends on cooperation of important Allies like the Netherlands, which has taken a real leadership role in development efforts and relationship-building in Afghanistan.

6. (C) Koenders responded with a review of previous Dutch decisions on Afghanistan and an explanation of the current political situation. The first Dutch deployment was a Qpolitical situation. The first Dutch deployment was a &sensitive8 decision for the Labor party four years ago.

(Background: Koenders is from the Labor party. The Netherlands, current governing coalition includes the Christian Democrats, the Christian Union, and the Labor party, which is the most skeptical member of the coalition regarding Afghanistan. See reftel A, B. End Background.) &I supported the decision, but it was difficult,8 he said.

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The Labor party required a development component to the mission, the &soft approach,8 though he &didn,t think it was soft,8 and he knew troops &would be killed.8 After intensive parliamentary discussions, the party agreed to a two-year deployment, until 2008. The decision to extend the deployment until 2010 was also difficult, with Labor and other parties expressing significant concerns about burden-sharing. The Labor Party was &unhappy8 with the final decision.

7. (C) Looking ahead, Koenders said the Dutch would continue development efforts in Uruzgan -- the Dutch leadership is civilian and the Dutch have been successful. However, the government,s credibility is at stake with any military redeployment. The government will decide whether the military will &leave completely8 or &just leave Uruzgan.8 To make the case to the Labor party, the Dutch parliament, and the Dutch people, Koenders said it would be helpful to show greater burden sharing and more collaboration on development aid. President Obama and the new U.S. Afghanistan strategy are also helpful elements, he added. &The picture has changed completely.8 In addition, there should be &no mission creep for ISAF8 and UNAMA needs a larger role. On selling the new strategy, Koenders said the Dutch people would need to see some element of success and a realistic strategy with a final goal that we can achieve. Koenders wondered whether it made sense for the Netherlands to lead on aid coordination, given its &small8 contributions relative to the United States. However, he said it would be worthwhile to follow up on his good discussions with the previous USAID director, particularly on the disorganized effort in Pakistan.

8. (C) Daalder said that President Obama agrees we need to establish a realistic exit goal by shifting security to Afghanistan itself and show some real progress on the ground within 12-18 months in order to sustain political support. He added we will work on follow-on meetings about development cooperation.

FM Verhagen

9. (U) September 3, 2009; Dutch Foreign Ministry; The Hague, Netherlands.

10. (U) Participants:
United States

Ambassador Hartog Levin
Ambassador Daalder
Jennifer Davis, U.S. Mission to NATO
Eric Falls, Embassy The Hague
Netherlands

Maxime Verhagen, Foreign Minister
Mr. Marcel De Vink, Private Secretary to the Minister
Mr. Maarten Boef, Head of MFA Task Force Uruzgan
11. (C) Daalder emphasized the importance of the Netherlands, decision on Afghanistan: if the Netherlands pulls out, he said, we will not be able to convince Canada to reverse its withdrawal decision and we could then lose the UK in a &domino effect.8 The USG wants to help the Dutch government support an extension of Dutch troops, although Daalder said &we won,t tell you what to do,8 knowing that public pressure from the U.S. would be self-defeating. Daalder added we understand the Dutch must withdraw as &lead nation8 in Uruzgan, although with the new ISAF command Qnation8 in Uruzgan, although with the new ISAF command structure that is less relevant. He said the United States hopes the Dutch will maintain troops in the &four figure8 level, including enablers, F-16s, and medical units, adding that lower profile deployments might be helpful in making the case to the public. In addition, he said we are making the shift from a direct security role to partnering with the Afghan National Army (ANA). President Obama,s popularity THE HAGUE 00000543 003 OF 005 and our new strategy are also key arguments.

12. (C) Verhagen responded, &I am ready to defend a new decision8 on the Netherlands, troop deployment, given the new situation in Afghanistan, the new U.S. president, the new U.S. strategy in Afghanistan, broader participation by Allies, and the Netherlands, involvement at the G20. However, he said, these arguments are not sufficient. Verhagen said the Dutch government won the vote in parliament by setting a 2010 timetable for pull-out, and needed to show reduced corruption in Afghanistan, better coordination of aid, and a greater role for German and French troops. Greater contributions from Allies like France and Germany are key for winning votes from the Liberal party (VVD), he explained. Verhagen emphasized that the United States should &invest in the VVD8 and VVD leaders such as Mark Rutte. The most recent meeting with VVD leaders regarding Uruzgan &was not positive.8 (Background: The VVD, or Liberal party, is in the opposition but nonetheless considered essential in supporting an extension, as Dutch governments need to win support of a broad coalition for military deployments. End background.)

13. (S) Daalder concluded with a review of upcoming discussions on NATO,s &strategic concept,8 being headed by former Secretary of State Albright. The group of experts should discuss all issues responsibly, he said; in the past some Allies have hesitated to work on difficult issues. Verhagen welcomed Daalder,s suggestion, noting that a discussion of Article 5 and &out of area8 initiatives would be key. Verhagen said he supports the German proposal to include disarmament efforts as part of the discussion and said he has blocked internal Dutch discussions on the presence of nuclear weapons in the Netherlands because that is a matter for NATO to consider. However, Verhagen said the

Netherlands is open to frank NATO discussions and is sending a delegation to Washington to discuss nuclear posture (Note: MOD Policy Director General Lo Casteleijn will lead the delegation on September 9. End note.) Daalder thanked Verhagen and emphasized that Allied agreements on nuclear weapons in Europe would be indispensable to good transatlantic relations and should include the &Quad,8 weapons-basing countries, and Lithuania, amongst others.

Lunch with Senior Dutch Officials

14. (U) September 3, 2009; Societeit de Witte; The Hague, Netherlands.

15. (U) Participants:
United States

Ambassador Hartog Levin
Ambassador Daalder
Captain Daniel Braswell, Defense Attache, Embassy The Hague
Jennifer Davis, U.S. Mission to NATO
Eric Falls, Embassy The Hague
Netherlands

Mr. Karel van Oosterom, PM,s National Security Adviser
Mr. Pieter de Gooijer, MFA DG for Political Affairs
(Political Director)
Mr. Lo Casteleijn, MOD DG for Policy
Lt. Gen. F. Meulman, Deputy Chief of Defense
Mr. Robert de Groot, MFA Deputy Political Director
Mr. Henk Swarttow, MFA Director of Security Affairs
QMr. Henk Swarttow, MFA Director of Security Affairs
Ms. Erica Schouten, MFA Head of NATO Affairs
Mr. Maarten Boef, MFA Head of Uruzgan Task Force

16. (C) Over lunch, Daalder met with the &Triad8 -- the leading Dutch civilian advisers to the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Minister of Defense -- to emphasize the importance of Dutch contributions in Afghanistan. Daalder emphasized key points from his discussions with Verhagen and Koenders (paras 4, 5, and 11 above).

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17. (C) MFA Political Director De Gooijer said Afghanistan is the &most pressing issue8 for the Triad and added &our job is to help our bosses8 -- six ministers -- make a decision. (Note: The six key ministers are PM Balkenende, Deputy PM and Finance Minister Bos, Deputy PM and Minister of Youth and Family Affairs Rouvoet, Foreign Minister Verhagen, Defense Minister Van Middelkoop, and Development Minister Koenders. End note.) De Gooijer explained that Dutch leaders are heavily influenced by a clear Afghanistan strategy as well as prospects for success, as well as Dutch domestic politics. He said the Dutch appreciated U.S. sensitivity in letting the Dutch make its &own decision.8 In addition, he noted the Dutch were in a different stage of the decision-making process than the United States: &You have rolled out a new strategy, while we are considering a redeployment; you are engaging in a surge, while we are looking to pull back. We need to bridge this concept. The Dutch press will also want to know how these results benefit the Netherlands,8 he said.

18. (C) Mr. Van Oosterom, the National Security Adviser equivalent, welcomed President Obama,s remarks on Afghanistan and emphasized that the United States should avoid public pressure on the Dutch. He said while Dutch government officials would like to see a quick decision on a new Dutch deployment, the decision process would be complex.

19. (C) MOD Policy Director Casteleijn noted there is tremendous Dutch enthusiasm for President Obama. He encouraged continued emphasis on development aid and a

&broad concept8 for the Afghanistan strategy. He suggested avoiding &NATO-ization8 of the Afghanistan mission through greater involvement by the EU, UN, and other international organizations. Waiting 18 months for good results will be risky for the Dutch, he added, given that some Dutch government officials are trying now to extend the deployment for two years. He also noted there is a perception in the Netherlands that the Dutch have done &their fair share.8 He said promoting greater contributions from some Allies who haven,t &punched in their weight class8 would be important to demonstrate.

20. (C) Lt. General Meulman said the Dutch military had the capacity to support an extension beyond 2010, although it would be difficult to continue at the same level -- 1,800 troops in Afghanistan -- and it would be difficult to leave some elements like several helicopters for much longer. Meulman also urged better coordination among ISAF, the UN, and the GOA.

21. (C) MFA Deputy Political Director De Groot added there is significant mixing of strategies, such as counterinsurgency and development. At the same time, he said we have seen disappointing results in state-building and need an overarching development strategy as well as a new Afghanistan Compact in 2010.

22. (C) Daalder noted President Obama,s strong support for metrics to show results on the ground. He added that McChrystal,s forthcoming assessment of troops-to-task in Afghanistan may provide the Dutch government with a clearer picture of the way forward and improve civilian and military coordination. He said the Netherlands and Canada have been the most thoughtful of the Allies on a comprehensive approach in Afghanistan, so it would be particularly damaging if they leave the coalition.

23. (C) (Note: In a private discussion after lunch, De Gooijer encouraged Daalder to ask Secretary Geithner to tell Finance Minister Bos that the Netherlands would not have a seat in G20 discussions but for its contributions in Afghanistan. Bos is head of the Labor party and key to the Dutch cabinet,s decision on Afghanistan (reftel A, B). End Note.)

24. (C) On NATO generally, Daalder thanked De Gooijer for the choice of former Dutch Shell CEO Jeroen van der Veer as Vice
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Chair of Secretary Albright,s NATO Strategic Concept group of experts. Van der Veer will bring &a breath of fresh air,8 he said, to the discussion. Daalder he added the group should address everything, including points of strong disagreement like nuclear weapons, Articles 4, 5, and 10 of the NATO Treaty, and Russia. On NATO-EU cooperation, Daalder said it was likely not productive to castigate Turkey and Greece as the new SYG had recently done. He suggested that to improve cooperation, NATO and the EU should consider regular, informal meetings to focus the &transatlantic8 discussion and that Sweden,s FM Bildt could help in this role. De Gooijer said FM Bildt could certainly help bring Sweden into NATO, and any successor to Solana should commit to addressing NATO-EU cooperation. Daalder flagged Finland,s joining NATO as a future point of contention with Russia.

Speech, Reception

25. (C) Ambassador Daalder spoke to a full house at the Societeit De Witte on the afternoon of September 3. More than 150 members of parliament, journalists, diplomats, academics, and students attended. Responding to questions for a half hour, Daalder explained the new U.S. strategy and

priorities in Afghanistan. In one question, former Dutch Chief of Defense Berlijn urged the United States to pressure the government of Afghanistan to improve its performance and reduce corruption. The new Dutch representative to NATO, Ambassador Majoor, urged a more integrated approach by NATO to support development and diplomacy. On the evening of September 3, at a well-attended reception hosted by Ambassador Levin, Daalder also engaged a similar audience, including the leading foreign policy or defense spokespersons for the major political parties in parliament.
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