

# INPUT BRIEF FOR THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS ON A NEW DUTCH FOREIGN POLICY

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## Purpose

1. This brief aims to make a contribution to the online consultation process about a new Dutch policy in the area of foreign trade and development cooperation. It focuses exclusively on the question of how conflicts and instability throughout the world can be more effectively addressed and how better results can be achieved in this context.
2. The brief advances this objective through a three-step approach: a) a short sketch of the nature of contemporary conflict; b) a brief analysis of four key aspects of conflict that present a durable and coherent set of security challenges relevant to The Netherlands; c) a reflection on how the Netherlands can deal with these issues on the basis of its national interests, which I assume to be a stable, secure and 'as-democratic-as-possible' regional order; open borders and transparent, enforceable rules that enable worldwide trade; and a global society that cares about inequality, the environment and human relations in a respectful and effective manner.<sup>1</sup>

## The nature of contemporary conflict

3. The logic of superpower conflict that was typical of the Cold War period gave way to the messy 1990s when many conflicts took the form of classic civil wars that pitted insurgents against incumbent regimes with either side using brutally violent methods at scale to secure territorial and social control (e.g. Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Kosovo and the Great Lakes wars). In the course of the 2000s, the *trans-/international* and *hybrid* character of such civil wars magnified and stood out in ever starker relief. Contemporary conflicts are protracted in duration, fragmented in terms of their number of conflict parties and multilayered in terms of

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<sup>1</sup> I derive this from the Dutch Coalition Agreement: 'In this spirit we will contribute to the prosperity and welfare of other countries, thus combating the root causes of migration. We will implement the climate agreements made in Paris, and we will continue to work actively for peace and security elsewhere in the world. We will also help innovative Dutch ideas and companies to find their way into the wider world.' Source: <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2017/10/10/coalition-agreement-confidence-in-the-future> (accessed 15 March 2018). However, the Agreement is not sufficiently clear about Dutch national interests to guide this consultation effectively. I therefore infer a more specific formulation.

the local-national-regional-global interests that are at stake (e.g. Syria, Yemen, Libya, Mali, Afghanistan).<sup>2</sup>

4. The *trans- and internationalization* of conflict refers to the fact that most conflicts extend well beyond the national boundaries of the state(s) on whose territory they are fought, both in terms of the parties engaged in these conflicts and in the reach of their consequences. The current Dutch political concern with migration is, for example, in no small part driven by the internationalized Syrian civil war that the same Dutch government largely neglected.

**Policy implications:**

- As the regulatory framework for addressing the ‘dark side of globalization’ remains inadequate - because it is overly securitized (e.g. the war on drugs or the increased focus on border control in response to migration) or incomplete (e.g. arms trade despite the ATT, and trade in security services) – it is in need of greater political/diplomatic efforts if individual conflicts are to be resolved;
- Conflicts in Europe’s vicinity are neglected at our own peril. Inaction is not an option and yet Dutch engagement in Libya, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon is fairly marginal.

5. From a policy perspective, it is useful to briefly review two enabling factors of the trans-/internationalization of many current conflicts:

- *Enabler #1: Greater ease of travel, communication and production across boundaries.* Especially processes of recruitment, arms purchase and the creation of social legitimacy for the purpose of engaging in conflict have been aided by easier communication and transport. For example, Wahhabi ideology, which can be a source of intolerance, social conservatism and sometimes radicalization, used to travel through the Sahel on cassettes and by car. Today it is broadcasted on satellite channels and spreads via social media user groups.
- *Enabler #2: The retreat of the United States from the Sahel and Middle East* has created significant leeway for regional powers such as Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Morocco and Nigeria to assert themselves across their respective areas of influence, including engaging in conflict elsewhere through proxies, sectarianized identities, arms or (petro)dollars. As a result, local fragmentation and cross-border interference have gone hand in hand to produce messy and polarized conflicts with many veto-players as well as existential frames that hinder or block negotiated conflict resolution.

6. The revolutions of the Arab Spring provide an example of what can happen when such enabling factors combine with longstanding grievances in a relatively homogeneous socio-cultural and religious space. The episode produced a chain of conflicts because its protests, issues and responses reverberated through an entire region. But enablers should not be

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<sup>2</sup> Although interstate conflict has remained rare from the end of the Cold War until today, such conflict is gradually becoming more likely in the frontier zones between Europe and Russia, and in the South Chinese sea. These developments are left out of account here.

conflated with causes. The Arab Spring was in itself not a primary driver of conflict, it should rather be seen as a multi-layered response to the persistent nature and social failure of autocracy in the Arab world.

**Policy implications:**

- In the face of a retreating US from regions adjacent to Europe, a greater role for the EU in conflict/crisis management is essential. This requires a larger EU, not a smaller one – but one whose foreign policy instruments are rationalized and streamlined to enable greater speed and effectiveness;
- Reverting to a policy of supporting authoritarian regimes in Europe’s neighborhood – as already is the case for EU migration policy to some extent – would be a grave mistake with both reputational and security consequences for the Netherlands.

7. The *hybridization* of conflict refers to the development that in some places full territorial and/or socio-political control no longer seems to be the ultimate objective of conflict parties. It is rather to maintain revenue-generating-chains of (il)licit activity for commercial profit and/or to develop structures and methods that enable simultaneously cooperation and competition with the state for public power, which can then be (ab)used for group purposes. Think of Hezbollah’s role in the Lebanese state or the dominance of the Badr Corps over the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior.
8. A combined effect of the mix of trans-/internationalization and hybridization of modern conflict is that it has become more difficult to resolve through a classic peace agreement. Such an agreement typically establishes a government of national unity between a few parties on the basis of a divide-the-spoils-of-state logic that is buoyed by aid and peacekeeping support. But the number of interests, veto-players and complexity of local-national-global dynamics make a single overarching agreement, which satisfies enough parties to be durable, hard to reach. This helps understand the failure of the Geneva peace process to date (Syria), the Algiers (Mali) and Shirkat (Libya) peace agreements.

**Policy implications:**

- The classic UN conflict management formula of aid-peacekeeping-mediation that is premised on a clear conflict v. post-conflict distinction is in urgent need of radical overhaul. Yet, this process is developing extremely slowly although a Secretary-General Guterres is creating momentum with his ‘sustaining peace’ reform agenda.
- The international response to conflict is firmly securitized at present, with mobilization or support for military assets being at its forefront. Yet, it is better diplomacy, intelligence and mixed civil-military resources that is required in the short-term, together with a connected and much more politically-oriented approach to longer-term socio-economic development. The joint ‘Pathways for Peace’ study of the United Nations and World Bank will hopefully provide a useful boost to the necessary desecuritization of foreign policies across the globe.

## **Intra-state conflict: The four horsemen of the Apocalypse**

9. A brief – and necessarily incomplete – scan of the global conflict panorama from a European perspective suggests four key policy priorities in respect of intrastate conflict that can have adverse effects on Dutch national interests. They are briefly analyzed below before turning to the question what the Netherlands can do to (help) address them.
10. The Arab Spring remains a useful overarching interpretative frame because geographic proximity continues to provide a good indicator for the source and gravity of security threats/opportunities to national interests. It is useful to recall here that the Arab Spring triggered a dynamic process of *sectarianization* (increasing social divides in the region on the basis of religious identities), an *authoritarian counter-revolution* (led by Saudi Arabia) and a *fight for regional hegemony* (pitting Turkey-Qatar-Iran-Syria and Saudi Arabia-Israel-US against each other) at more or less the same time. These processes are interlinked.
11. **Syria/Iraq:** In this context, the *conflicts in Syria and Iraq* will either endure (Syria) or face a significant chance of re-igniting (Iraq). In turn, this has the potential of triggering conflict in neighboring Turkey, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine as long as Saudi-Iranian regional rivalry continues to be fought out on the battlefield and in the mosque instead of in UN meeting rooms. While none of these conflicts were initially about sectarian animosities, this has now become the mobilizing conflict logic that has been let out of the bottle and will be difficult to get back in. Serious international leverage is needed to enforce painful concessions, but the US is in retreat, Russia has neither the capability nor the desire while multinational institutions like the GCC, Arab League or UN appear to be in disarray or powerless. The illicit/hybrid security and economic networks that have been created in Syria and Iraq are, together with existing levels of destruction, displacement, memories of violence, grievances and sectarianized identities, likely to quasi self-perpetuate these conflicts.
12. **West Africa/Sahel:** Crime, migration and extremism in *West-Africa and the Sahel region* are similarly likely to remain long-term phenomena because of three underlying developments. To start with, the region's explosive demography, its lack of economic progress and the failure of a number of its states in terms of governance, corruption and quality of education creates a fertile ground for alternative governance, security-providing and revenue generating structures. Add to this the complete implosion or dysfunction of both the Libyan and the Malian states that are surrounded by weak or even exclusionary states like Chad, Mauretania, Niger, Nigeria and Burkina Faso. State structures are empty hulls in some places, in part maintained by decades of ineffective international aid. Finally, the current anti-migration and securitizing policy approaches of the EU and its member states will generate some positive short-term effects but are storing trouble up for the future as they are blocking the valve of a steam vat in which the pressure steadily rises.
13. **United Nations reform:** Turning from actual conflict to actors essential to manage and/or prevent them, it must be observed that the *process of United Nations' reform* continues to develop at a glacial pace despite best intentions and a lot of paper. This cannot just be attributed to the UN as it is in large part a function of its Member State's policies that in turn reflects the world's increasingly antagonistic multipolarity. The effect, however, is that the UN's conflict prevention and management toolkit becomes increasingly difficult to mobilize,

which adds to its obsolescence. For example, the classic aid-peacekeeping-mediation formula is not robust enough to deal with internationalized and hybridized civil wars discussed above as it operates within national boundaries, on short mandates (that are at the same time overly ambitious and overly disabling), as well as with insufficient capabilities. The UN generally provides useful band-aids with the occasional booster vaccination.

14. It remains to be seen what the effects will be of the Secretary-General's current efforts to restructure the peace and security architecture of the UN by strengthening its political pillar (by combining DPA and PBSO, together with elements of DPKO) and balancing it more with the security pillar (mostly DPKO). One of the main challenge is how the UN's development and humanitarian dimensions can be engaged sufficiently in the organization's sustaining peace / conflict prevention agenda. In principle, the SDGs provide a useful enabling framework for such a restructuring, as well as for the required political dialogue on these issues with the Member States.
15. **Role of the United States:** Like it or not, *the United States* remains the only country with global interests and capabilities to impose and enforce some order in the Middle East and West Africa/the Sahel in the short-term. Yet, its interest wanes, its approach has become sclerotic and it is highly securitized. These are not just recent observations but developments with root causes in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq and the need to deal with greater priorities elsewhere (China, Korea). EU foreign policy has remained ineffective to date with EU military force being rather a 'paper topic' despite some positive developments. NATO, it should be added, is a single-issue organization too busy with reviving its original mission in view of the situation in the Ukraine. The consequences are twofold. First, the existing space for regional competition will remain open – and violent. Second, the new alignment between Israel-Saudi Arabia-US brings the already securitized logic of regional competition in the Levant to a wholly new level that risks far worse conflict.

## Pivoting from foreign policy problems to a productive Dutch contribution

16. The preceding discussion suggests that if Dutch foreign policy is to make a contribution to some of the issues that were raised, it needs clear focus, significant resources and appropriate tools. These do not currently seem to be present to a sufficient extent. The broad orientation of Dutch foreign policy suggests that the country's political establishment views it more like a global player in all domains than as a smaller, regional player with global economic and trade interests. This results in a dilution of effort as adequate resources for making a greater difference – either bilaterally or multilaterally – are hard to mobilize.
17. On the basis of this observations, the two tables below outline a strategic approach for making a greater contribution to addressing conflict and instability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

<b>FOCUS</b>
Strictly on the basis of this analysis, it makes sense to prioritize the MENA and West-Africa (including the Sahel) as key areas of foreign policy engagement for the next 10-20 years. The direct risk that the conflicts in these regions pose to stability in Europe and Dutch national interests - in terms of extremism, corruption, migration and criminal activity - are greater than those that emerge from other regions like conflict Afghanistan-Pakistan, the Great Lakes region or the Horn of Africa (excepting maritime passage), let alone by conflict in Latin America or Central Asia. The frontier area between Europe and Russia obviously is another matter as indicated above.
<b>Possible initiatives</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advocating for the securitized stop-migrants-in-transit-and-at-origin EU migration policy to be complemented with a long-term political approach to development in key West African/Sahel countries that benefit from substantial EDF resources - but improve the speed and focus of their mobilization</li><li>• Support the UN Secretary-General's reform agenda for the peace and security architecture. Focus on bringing in the development and humanitarian pillars through targeted engagement in e.g. the UNDP Board</li><li>• Working with Germany and Austria, restore diplomatic relations with Turkey and appeal to its neo-Ottoman ambitions to develop it into a more positive player in the Levant, without overly supporting its authoritarianism.</li><li>• Starting up a track 1,5 or track 2 mediation effort between Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran and the US in a bid to prevent regional conflict conflagration.</li><li>• Substantially increase Dutch diplomatic, trade and development presences in Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iraq, as well as Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Libya and Mali with a view to long-term engagement, on the basis of a clear strategy and ongoing analysis.</li></ul>

<b>TOOLS</b>		
<p><b>A. United Nations, World Bank and European Union</b></p> <p><b>Context</b> Neither fit-for-purpose alliances nor existing collaborative mechanisms effectively address modern conflict.</p> <p><b>To do</b> Increase the Dutch financial contribution and political push to revamp the United Nations, World Bank (IDA 18) and European Union peace and conflict management capabilities/architecture.</p> <p><b>Justification</b> This fits well with the general spirit of the Coalition Agreement, the dependency of the Netherlands on other countries to achieve foreign policy successes and the positioning of The Hague as global city of justice.</p> <p>The UN can be the kind of foreign policy amplifier that a mid-sized country like the Netherlands should be embracing. The same argument is easily made for the World Bank and EU.</p>	<p><b>B. Innovative, new alliances</b></p> <p><b>Context</b> But 'waiting for multilateralism' in a multipolar world can also amount to an avoidance of responsibility and a lack of action where needed.</p> <p><b>To do</b> Develop a higher level of ambition and a clearer framework for more bilateral and/or like-minded action. This requires greater focus in Dutch foreign policy and more concentration of resources</p> <p>Build wholly new alliances outside and in addition to existing frameworks to address particular conflict challenges.</p> <p><b>Justification</b> Dutch initiatives can accelerate, reinforce and be combined with European Union longevity by cleverly leveraging EU membership at appropriate points in time.</p>	<p><b>C. Smart deployable civil-police-military assets</b></p> <p><b>Context</b> The management and resolution of aspects of modern conflict – such as reducing the leeway of terrorist or and criminal groups does at times require coercive intervention. Yet, military force alone falls well short of the mark, and may worsen the original problem.</p> <p><b>To do</b> Create standing units under civilian command that consist of military, police and civilian components with adequate linguistic skills and an adequate deployment period (min 2 years) that can be used in multilateral or bilateral frameworks and that are deployable on a modular basis.</p> <p><b>Justification</b> This could push the international agenda in terms of creating forces capable of dealing with modern conflict and boost UN peacekeeping with a rare asset.</p>
<p><b>Possible initiatives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulate cross-pillar engagement within the UN at scale through targeted funding for key arrangements (such as the Global Focal Point for Police, Justice and Corrections, the joint UNDP-DPA program for Peace and Development, and the UN Peacebuilding Fund)</li> <li>• Support UN-World Bank collaboration by engaging deeply in the implementation of the Pathways for Peace study</li> <li>• Develop practical alternatives that can enable an effective diplomatic advocacy effort to make EU migration policies more effective in the long-term</li> <li>• Develop new alliances with key actors in the Sahel like Algeria and Morocco in a bid to better connect the current patchwork of security and development initiatives</li> <li>• Link the development of mixed units in the Netherlands with the <i>force conjointe</i> of the G5 so that a toolkit innovation also becomes a twinning experiment and generates immediate practical results</li> </ul>		