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Embassy The Hague

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/25/2019
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, AF, NATO, NL
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: POST-2010 DEPLOYMENT
POSSIBLE BUT NOT IN URUZGAN

REF: A. THE HAGUE 0419
B. THE HAGUE 0092

Classified By: Ambassador Fay Hartog Levin for reasons 1.4 (B, D).

1. (C) This cable continues reporting on post's efforts to get the Dutch to "yes" on a post-2010 deployment in Afghanistan (reftels).

2. (S/NF) SUMMARY: Labor Party leader Bos told the Ambassador in confidence (STRICTLY PROTECT) the Dutch will likely stay in Afghanistan post-2010 but not in Uruzgan. The cabinet will probably not take that decision until the end of the year. Post recommends next steps in our engagement (para 7).
END SUMMARY.

3. (S/NF) At the end of her August 24 courtesy call, Ambassador talked one-on-one with Wouter Bos, the Labor Party (PvdA) leader, Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, about Afghanistan. (COMMENT: Senior Dutch officials had identified the Labor Party and Bos, in particular, as the most reluctant member of the three-party governing coalition to agree on staying in Afghanistan beyond the current 2010 mandate. END COMMENT.) Bos told the Ambassador in confidence the issue of staying in Afghanistan was politically unpopular, especially within his own party. "The Dutch have gone as far as they can go." Two years ago, when the Dutch decided to extend the mission in Uruzgan, everyone agreed that would be the last time. If we now extend again, Bos said, we will be asked every two years to stay on. It is

important to stick to our word and wrap up the mission. This, Bos argued, was the official Labor Party position.

4. (S/NF) Bos then said the Government, with Labor Party support, will be able to stay in Afghanistan after its current mandate expires, but not in Uruzgan. The Ambassador pressed Bos that it was more logical for the Dutch to remain in Uruzgan where they had developed important contacts with local tribes and leaders as well as funded numerous projects. Bos admitted this was true, but did not know if staying in Uruzgan would fly with his party.

5. (S/NF) The Ambassador mentioned the Embassy would be hosting a number of senior USG officials in the near future who would be willing to discuss Afghanistan with Bos (such as USNATO Amb. Daalder and CENTCOM Gen. Petraeus). He said Development Cooperation Minister Koenders was advising him on all issues involving Afghanistan, including how to handle it politically. If Bos is not available to meet with U.S. visitors, he will make sure Koenders is. He also advised the Ambassador the Cabinet would probably not make a final decision on the deployment question until the end of the year, December.

6. (S/NF) COMMENT: Queen Beatrix commented to the Ambassador during her credentialing ceremony on August 19 that finding a way forward on Afghanistan "would be difficult," but must be done. It appears the senior leadership of the body politic agrees. We had heard from other Cabinet members, including Foreign Minister Verhagen, that Bos and the Labor Party would likely agree to extending the Dutch mission in Afghanistan past 2010. Bos's statement, however, was the first time any senior Labor Party leader had made that clear. Although appearing to draw a line in the sand about leaving Uruzgan, Qappearing to draw a line in the sand about leaving Uruzgan, Bos did not seem categorical about that issue. In our engagement, we need to continue to stress the Alliance need for the Dutch to remain in Afghanistan and in Uruzgan, in particular; the progress the Dutch have made in Uruzgan and the need to build upon their stability and development efforts there; the increased U.S. contribution in military and civilian personnel and resources in Afghanistan; and the enhanced contributions of NATO and other partners. A word of caution - the Dutch are concerned Jan Mohammed, the former governor and local warlord, might be re-appointed governor of Uruzgan if Pres. Karzai is re-elected. If that were to happen, everyone, including our strongest supporters, says the Dutch will not/not return to Uruzgan under any circumstances. END COMMENT.

7. (S/NF) ENGAGEMENT PLAN: (A) The Ambassador continues her courtesy calls, seeing Foreign Minister Verhagen and Defense

Minister van Middelkoop August 31. She will raise Afghanistan and extending the Dutch mandate in both meetings. She will also meet with parliamentary leaders in the near future.

(B) USNATO Amb. Daalder visits Sept. 3 and will have meetings with senior MoD and MFA officials. He will meet with Verhagen and we have requested a meeting with Minister Koenders. Amb. Daalder will also give a public address talking about NATO in Afghanistan and will conduct several press interviews.

(C) Defense Minister van Middelkoop plans to meet with Secretary Gates in Washington September 10.

(D) CENTCOM Gen. Petraeus will visit the Netherlands in support of the 65th anniversary of the WWII Market Garden operation ("A Bridge Too Far") in mid-September. He will

deliver three speeches throughout the country, which are expected to get significant media attention. We are working with his staff to identify opportunities for him to meet appropriate ministers and parliamentarians.

(E) We recommend SRAP Amb. Holbrooke call Minister Koenders, whom he met in late March in The Hague, to thank him for the Dutch support of the Afghan elections (8 million Euros contribution to UNDP, long and short-term staffers to the EU election observers mission, 30 military personnel), to discuss the recent Friends of Pakistan conference in Istanbul (they pledged 86.7 million Euros in assistance over three years at the Tokyo conference) and to talk about regional developments. Amb. Holbrooke could offer to visit the Netherlands if Koenders thought it would be helpful.

(F) Finally, we will re-examine our engagement plan at the end of September in light of Gen. McCrystal's strategic review and the results of these meetings.

LEVIN