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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2017
TAGS: NATO, PINS, PREL, MARR, MOPS, AF, NL
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN/JSF: LABOR PARTY VIEWS ON
DEFENSE AS COALITION TALKS CONTINUE

Classified By: Ambassador Roland Arnall, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. Summary: (C) Labor Party (PvdA) Defense Spokesman Frans Timmermans offered his party's views on the Joint Strike Fighter and Afghanistan within the context of on-going government coalition formation talks. He said that the Labor Party will practically concede defeat in its opposition to JSF, relying on an upcoming third-party independent review of the JSF business case as an opportunity to "save face." On Afghanistan, he said failure is "not an option," and indicated his party's leadership will support additional budget supplementals aimed at bolstering the Dutch deployment in Uruzgan, even if his party opposes increased defense spending. Timmermans discussed these issues with Amb. Arnall on February 1. End summary.

JSF: Past the Point of No Return

2. (C) Timmermans said the Labor Party will "more or less" swallow the GONL's plans to purchase the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). Timmermans, who opposed investing in JSF while State Secretary for Defense during the Wim Kok Cabinet of the early

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nineties, admitted that he still regrets the Dutch decision to participate in JSF. He said, however, that his position on JSF is more nuanced than some give him credit for, and had

been hijacked by others within his party who were unable to articulate a more measured position. For example, he acknowledged that JSF was the best option, and even said for the first time that he "could not imagine" the Dutch buying any other plane.

3. (C) Timmerman's criticism of the program hinges on participation in the investment phases -- in order to justify participation, the Dutch will be compelled to buy a number of planes that exceeds their requirements while limiting leverage to pursue other options, should alternatives become available -- "that is just not smart," Timmermans said. That said, PvdA will push for an independent, third-party review of the JSF business case to be completed by the end of 2007. Should the review go according to plan, Timmermans said PvdA will be able to "save face," and acknowledge that JSF "makes sense." At any rate, Timmermans said the Dutch are "past the point of no return" on withdrawing from JSF program participation.

Afghanistan: Failure is Not an Option

4. (C) Timmermans indicated that as part of the government coalition formation agreement currently under discussion, the new government will likely support two budget supplementals -- 300 million Euros each -- for Defense and Development Assistance aimed at bolstering the Dutch deployment to Uruzgan. He acknowledged that his party will "have problems" with the increase in spending for defense, and the commitment to JSF will certainly put pressure on an already tight budget, but failure in Afghanistan is "not an option" -- the Dutch and NATO must succeed in Afghanistan, even if it means staying longer than the two year commitment. Timmermans admitted he initially opposed the Dutch deployment to Afghanistan, suggesting that the mission was too difficult for Dutch forces. Once the decision was made in favor of deployment, however, Timmermans noted there was "no turning back" in terms of Dutch involvement in Afghanistan.

Comment

5. (C) Timmermans is a direct and honest contact who is well-plugged in to the coalition formation talks. He claims to be currently considering the MFA's EU Integration State Secretary position in the new government, but may instead opt

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to head his party in parliament. He has long opposed the JSF investment case; if he appears ready to concede defeat, then Dutch procurement of JSF is in good shape.

ARNALL