



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on February 22, 2010

Dutch Government Collapses Over Afghanistan Withdrawal

Following a heated debate and the collapse of the Dutch government over the issue, Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende announced Sunday that the Netherlands' troop contingent will begin leaving Afghanistan in August.

The decision to reject a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) request to extend the Dutch presence in the war-torn nation beyond 2010 was reached after 16 hours of discussions. When no agreement was arrived at, the Labor Party, part of the ruling Parliamentary coalition, resigned from government and the 12 cabinet posts it held.



Labor demanded that Dutch troops be withdrawn as planned, while the prime minister's Christian Democrat party and the other ruling-coalition party, the Christian Union, did not agree.

"A plan was agreed to when our soldiers went to Afghanistan," explained Labor chief and Deputy Prime Minister Wouter Bos. "Our partners in the government didn't want to stick to that plan, and on the basis of their refusal, we have decided to resign."

The official resignation was [presented](#) to the Queen on Monday, and she will have to decide whether to reject it or call for a new election. Meanwhile, the nation will be governed without the Labor Party, which means it will not be able to make any important decisions.

"Unfortunately, I have to conclude there is no fruitful path to allow this cabinet ... to continue," said prime minister and head of the Christian Democrat party Jan-Peter Balkenende in a statement. "When there is a lack of trust, an attempt to come to an agreement about content is doomed to fail. It could only be an overture to new controversy in the future." Balkenende has led four governments since 2002, none of which served the full four year term.

In addition to his concerns over the collapse of the government, Balkenende also worried about the international repercussions of the Dutch withdrawal from Afghanistan. "People don't understand what we're doing," he said. "When the Netherlands now becomes the first and only country to say 'no' to any [Afghan military intervention] activities, that will lead to question marks abroad."

The Dutch military is leading NATO efforts in Uruzgan province, with almost 2,000 of its troops there now. So far, over 20 have died in the conflict. Australia also has most of its troops in Afghanistan stationed in the province, but the foreign minister said Australia had no plans to take lead there.

"Australia has made it clear to NATO and to the international security assistance forces that Australia is not in a position to take up the lead in Uruzgan province," Foreign Minister Stephen Smith told reporters on Sunday. "It's a matter for NATO to resolve the leadership issues in Uruzgan province and we're confident that particular issue is in hand."

The questions and the planned withdrawal have the provincial governor very worried, since abandoning



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the province could allow the Taliban to re-establish control there. "We need the Dutch force in Uruzgan. The Dutch are very active in reconstruction, and strengthening the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police," provincial Gov. Asadullah Hamdam told the [Associated Press](#). "The Afghan army and police are not enough.... Our force is still not standing on their own feet. We are requesting the Dutch to stay."

But despite the governor's pleas, it does not look like the Netherlands is going to budge at the moment. Dutch backing for the war has continued to plummet, with a recent defense ministry poll revealing that only 33 percent of the population support the mission. The Labor party has been gaining popularity in the wake of the government collapse because of its strong stance against prolonging Dutch involvement.

And other parties are ready to take up the slack as well. "What was long awaited, finally came, the flag can be hoisted," said Geert Wilders, the opposition Freedom Party leader. "The worst cabinet ever, didn't deserve to rule one more day."

In addition to the Netherlands, NATO officials had been hoping to [persuade](#) Canada's government to remain beyond the previously agreed deadline for withdrawal in summer of 2011. But so far, that too looks unlikely.

Meanwhile, U.S. troops levels in the "[graveyard of empires](#)" are steadily increasing under Obama's "surge." Analysts are nearly unanimous in their predictions that the U.S. military will be forced to take over where the Dutch left off in Uruzgan province.

But absent a declaration of war, there is no constitutional authority for the presence of U.S. troops in Afghanistan or any other foreign land. Eventually the U.S., like all other powers that have tried to occupy Afghanistan, will be forced to withdraw. And the longer it takes, the further in debt the nation will be and the more lives the conflict will claim. So now is as good a time to leave as any, and unfortunately, the results will be the same no matter how many more years the inevitable is postponed.

The planned Dutch withdrawal represents a perfect opportunity for Americans to re-examine U.S. involvement in the war and to decide whether a hundred thousand U.S. soldiers should be put in harms way, at great cost in life and treasure, to "spread democracy" or any other such goals. If the Dutch can say no, so too can Americans.

Photo of Dutch Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende: AP Images



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