

The Dutch ruling elite, its royals, and the war against Iran

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The criminal bombardment of Tehran—an illegal act of aggression orchestrated by the United States and Israel against an oppressed country—has also sent shockwaves through the Netherlands. Far from being a passive observer, the Dutch ruling class stands exposed once again as an active accomplice in the machinery of imperialist war, genocide and plunder.

The eruption of war against Iran, and the rapid and fascistic character in its unravelling course, has demolished any pretence of “neutrality” or “restraint” in Dutch bourgeois politics, revealing how swiftly the new minority cabinet of Prime Minister Rob Jetten, Democrats 66 (D66), aligns itself with the interests of international capital, imperialist powers and their predatory wars.

Public political sentiment in the Netherlands, by contrast, reflects mounting anti-war opposition. A recent *RTL Nieuws* poll revealed that a majority fears the escalation of the war into a third world war involving the Netherlands itself. Yet the Jetten cabinet, taking office just five days before the bombing of Iran, not only signalled support for a war of annihilation against Iran, but has also accelerated its plans to expand the Dutch military.

This dual dynamic—growing mass opposition from below confronted by an almost unanimous warmongering consensus above—reveals the ever-widening and irreconcilable gulf between the working class and the entire bourgeois political establishment as seen internationally.

That gulf already found its striking expression in the mass “Red-Line” demonstrations that filled the streets of Amsterdam and The Hague against the genocide in Gaza. Hundreds of thousands have marched, convinced that official politics, the media, and every established party and their accomplices speak the language of militarism and are utterly alien to the social concerns of the working class. As the social, political and economic repercussions of the war deepen, this movement will inevitably take the widest expression, bringing to bear social and cultural questions as well as the political and economic foundations that have caused it.

During his official visit to Brussels on March 3, where he met European Union leaders António Costa and Ursula von der Leyen to discuss the latest war and its refugees, Jetten told *NOS Journaal*: “It’s actually quite simple. The Iranian regime is a brutal regime that has recently massacred many of its own citizens. That is why the Netherlands has a great deal of understanding for the actions now being taken against Iran.”

Jetten’s assertion that the Netherlands has “a great deal of understanding” for the crimes being inflicted upon Iran—a nation of 90 million people and immense cultural and intellectual heritage, 45 times larger than the Netherlands—was greeted with approval across the political spectrum.

The mounting toll of civilian casualties, the destruction of infrastructure and the immiseration of an already oppressed population due to decades of sanctions, count for nothing in The Hague’s calculations, which are guided by the strategic imperatives of Washington and Tel Aviv. What Jetten cynically presents as “quite simple” is in fact the distilled ideology

of imperialist geopolitics and the former colonial power’s own interest in the scrambles in the Persian Gulf.

Foreign Minister Tom Berendsen (Christian Democratic Appeal, CDA)—one of the most strident anti-Chinese spokespersons in the government—echoed this line in a further interview with *RTL Nieuws*, granting Washington and Tel Aviv a blank cheque: “We understand the risky attacks carried out by the US and Israel, given that the regime in question poses a major threat to the region and much more broadly to the world.” When asked whether these attacks violated international law, Berendsen shrugged: “That’s not for me to judge. I think these are legitimate questions for the US and Israel in particular.”

The new defence minister and acting prime minister, Dilan Ye?ilgöz (People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy, VVD), a law-and-order hawk who served under Mark Rutte as justice minister from 2022 to 2024, praised the war as a liberation: “After decades of oppression by a murderous regime, many Iranians are now breathing a sigh of relief.” She accused Tehran of undermining global security through its nuclear programme, ties to Russia and alleged backing of “terrorist proxies,” adding that “Tehran’s long arm was also felt in the Netherlands.”

Such remarks reveal not only the Dutch government’s unconditional alignment with US-Israeli aggression but also its eagerness to cloak imperialist crimes in the threadbare garb of “moral righteousness.” This hypocrisy is not new. It continues a historical pattern stretching from the 17th-century colonial conquests in Asia, Africa and the Americas to present-day participation in NATO’s wars of “regime change.”

The rhetoric of “freedom” now serves the same function as the old “civilising mission”: to disguise the ruthless pursuit of markets, resources and strategic dominance. Dutch capitalism has repeatedly demonstrated that diplomacy and aggression, hand in glove, are its indispensable instruments of global assertion.

The preparations for wars abroad have advanced in the Netherlands on three interconnected fronts: military, ideological and social. Militarily, the Netherlands is being drawn ever deeper into the logic of great-power confrontation. Already an indispensable link in NATO’s nuclear chain—hosting American nuclear weapons on its soil—the country is now accelerating talks on “nuclear cooperation” with France and the prospect of a “shared” European deterrent. Alongside Britain, Germany, Poland, Belgium, Greece, Sweden and Denmark, it has joined a new “advanced deterrence” strategy for joint operations.

The vocabulary used to describe this process—“cooperation,” “deterrence,” “European security architecture”—seeks to conceal the brutal reality of the Dutch bourgeoisie fusing its fate to the nuclear strategy of European imperialism, transforming the country into a potential staging ground for atomic warfare.

Through collaborations with France, the Dutch military seeks to gain “operational experience” in the planning and execution of nuclear war, despite possessing no arsenal of its own. “This is the role that the Netherlands must play,” Jetten boasted. “We must look for clever

coalitions which serve Dutch interests and strengthen Europe,” he further emphasised.

The drive for a specifically European nuclear deterrent grows more insistent as trade and strategic frictions between Europe and the United States intensify. Each turn of the global crisis pushes Europe’s ruling classes—including the Dutch bourgeoisie—toward asserting their own imperial interests under the misleading slogan of “strategic autonomy.”

At his weekly press briefing, as the Dutch frigate HNLMS Evertsen departed to “protect” a French aircraft carrier to the Gulf without full cabinet approval, Jetten warned of potential casualties: “The Dutch frigate is well capable of intercepting projectiles from the air.” In plain terms, the Netherlands is prepared to engage Iran militarily—placing itself on the front line of this widening war.

Facing widespread public opposition—and in many quarters open hostility—toward its plans to expand the armed forces from 80,000 to 122,000 personnel, with possible expansion to 200,000, the Jetten government has turned recruitment for war into a spectacle. In coordination with the Ministry of Defence, the corporate media have launched a nationwide recruitment campaign to glorify the military, with the monarchy playing a starring role.

Only weeks before the bombardment of Iran began, Queen Máxima announced she had enlisted as a reservist in the Royal Netherlands Army. At 54, she appeared in camouflage, trading silk and ceremony for khaki and combat drills. The Ministry of Defence claimed this was a personal response to new “security concerns”: “Because the security of the Netherlands can no longer be taken for granted, Máxima has decided to become a reservist.”

Her choreographed appearances—grinning from armoured vehicles and drilling with soldiers—are not just pompous publicity stunts but acts of calculated political theatre. A Defence Ministry spokesman boasted, “We are very proud that she is doing this and hope other people will think, ‘Hey, this is something I could do.’”

In a society where confidence in parliament, its affiliated institutions, the established political parties, affiliated trade unions, and its pseudo-left appendages—part and parcel with the corporate media—has all but collapsed, the monarchy functions as one of the ruling class’s last refuges of manufactured legitimacy. The ruling elite, in turn, safeguards the monarchy as a vital ideological instrument. It alone can drape nationalist chauvinism and militarism in the language of “unity, tradition and home-grown virtue.”

Thus, the wars abroad serve not only geopolitical ends but also a vital capitalist ideological extension to mitigate the class war at home. By mobilising the crown in war traditions last seen during World War II, the ruling elite seeks to divert social anger—born of deepening inequality and stringent austerity—into nationalist channels.

The Dutch war policy, as seen elsewhere in Europe and internationally, corresponds directly with an assault on the living standards and rights of the working class. Under the slogan “Getting to Work—Building a Better Netherlands,” the coalition pact codifies a programme of permanent war, hand in hand with austerity and state repression. At its centre stands the *Vrijheidsbijdrage*—the so-called “freedom contribution”—a cynical euphemism for a war tax imposed on working people, given that a majority is anti-war.

This levy, marketed as a “shared national effort,” is projected to raise €5 billion annually, every euro earmarked for the military and security apparatus. The media and trade unions echo the government’s refrain that “security has a price,” while the real aim is to transfer wealth from labour to capital.

Among the most regressive measures is an increase in the retirement age, justified by “demographic pressures” but designed above all to force workers to toil longer, while savings from delayed pensions are redirected to defence spending. Unemployment and disability benefits are to be

tightened under the very same logic.

The message is unmistakable: the working class must surrender more years of life and a larger share of its income, let alone larger sums of the wealth it generates, to fund the geopolitical ambitions of Dutch and European imperialism. Foreign and domestic policy are fused into a single class strategy—the same state that wages war abroad is conducting an economic offensive at home against wages, social rights and democratic freedoms.

The policies of the Dutch government are one link in the global chain of capitalist crisis. The transformation of the Jetten cabinet into a de facto war government, as seen at other European centres, expresses the logic of European capitalism as a whole. Confronted with stagnation, intensifying inter-imperialist rivalry and growing social unrest, the bourgeoisie turns outward—to militarism—and inward—to repression.

These measures are already arousing anger among workers and youth. Strikes and protests originally centred on wages, housing and climate issues are acquiring a consciously political, anti-war character. Yet this mass opposition collides with the absence of revolutionary leadership. The so-called “Dutch left”—PvdA, GroenLinks, Socialist Party and the trade-union bureaucracy—long ago integrated themselves into the state and NATO’s command structure. Their hollow appeals for “dialogue” and “diplomacy” merely disguise their acceptance of imperialist policy.

The leaders of the main trade union confederations—such as FNV, CNV, as well as VCP—have met with cabinet ministers, warning that strikes will be unavoidable unless plans to delay retirement and cuts to unemployment benefits are withdrawn. Their own statements, however, underscore the volatility of the situation: mass demonstrations are again expected in The Hague and in Amsterdam, the same cities where hundreds of thousands rallied against the genocide in Gaza.

The Socialist Party, for its part, differs from government policy only in tone. It condemns Tehran for “human rights abuses” while remaining silent on the far greater crimes of imperialism. The SP functions to contain and defuse genuine opposition to the war.

The US-led war against Iran is the latest chapter in a 35-year trajectory of imperialist interventions across the Middle East, carried out to control energy routes, strategic chokepoints and resources as part of a broader strategy to contain Russia and China. It forms part of a global plan for US hegemony, using the Middle East’s resources as tools of coercion against both rivals and its “allies” in Europe.

The workers and youth of the Netherlands must draw the necessary political conclusions from this political reality and from their historical experiences. Genuine opposition to war is inseparable from opposition to the capitalist system that breeds it. The struggle against the bombardment of Iran, NATO’s drive toward nuclear confrontation with Russia, and the social attacks at home must be waged as a unified fight—through the independent mobilisation of the Dutch working class as part of the European and international working class under a socialist programme.

Oppose the imperialist war of extermination against Iran!

Turn the opposition to war into a political fight for socialist internationalism!

Build a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in the Netherlands.



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