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Dutch Become First NATO Members to Leave Afghanistan

With Canada and Poland Already Planning Pullouts, a Rush to the Exits?

By Jason Ditz

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It took political wrangling that eventually toppled their government in February, [but the Netherlands has finally, officially, become the first NATO member nation to end its ties to the Afghanistan War, withdrawing their nearly 2,000 troops from the nation.](#)

The war's massive unpopularity in the Netherlands set the pullout in motion back in 2007, when then-Deputy Prime Minister Wouter Bos pledged to see the end of Dutch involvement in the war. This was supposed to happen in 2008.

It didn't, of course, and after significant pressure from NATO they promised to push it back to 2010, but made it clear that this would be a firm date for ending their role. At the time, the 2,000 troops made the Netherlands one of the bigger contributors to the war.

But in February NATO Secretary General came calling again, and Prime Minister Balkenende answered, attempting to press through the continuation of the war in parliament. [This led his coalition partners to abandon him, and toppled the government, forcing new elections which cost his party nearly half their representation.](#)

But while the Netherlands are the first, they won't be the last, as both Canada and Poland already have plans to follow suit with pullouts. Though NATO officials are downplaying

the significance of the Dutch pullout, it seems they may prove a test case for other NATO members, as the war is no more popular in many other nations. Though it is too soon to predict a rush to the exits, this certainly cannot be ruled