

December 07, 1979
**Memorandum of conversation, Prime-Minister Van Agt –
President Carter (and others)**

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Summary:

Participants in the meeting included President Carter, Minister Vance, MP van Agt and also Min. Van der Klaauw, Zbigniew Brzezinski, David Aaron, Tammenoms Bakker, and Merckelbach. Conversation revolves around TNF modernization and arms negotiation with the Soviet Union. Both parties discuss domestic difficulties shaping how these issues are presented and pursued.

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Report of the discussion between President Carter and min. Vance and MP van Agt and Min. Van der Klaauw on Friday December 7, 1979 in Washington, in the presence of Brzezinski, Aaron, Tammenoms Bakker, and Merckelbach

Pres. Carter has kept himself up-to-date as much as possible on the developments in the Netherlands. The US-government is determined too to achieve further arms control and arms reduction in Europe, both nuclear and conventional. This objective requires that the allies form one front in regard to TNF-modernization and related proposals for negotiations. Only then will the SU agree to realistic negotiations. The US-government aims to seize or create every opportunity for negotiations. One of the first tasks facing speaker is to get SALT-II accepted by the Senate. Also for that it is important that the unity of NATO in regard to the TNF-matter is maintained. The Dutch difficulties with this are known to speaker but he is fully determined to go through with TNF-modernization because otherwise negotiations with the SU will not yield any concrete results. He is fully convinced that the SU will not move to reductions in the SS-20 program if NATO does not reach a joint position in regard to TNF-modernization and the related proposals for talks.

MP Van Agt points out that the Second Chamber has held the latest debate yesterday on the TNF-matter; this will not be the final debate. The outcome of this debate is far from favorable for the government or NATO. The chamber has accepted a motion that in essence says that presently no decision on production or deployment should be taken. In the given situation three options are available to the Dutch government: (1) It can bow its head and recognize that there is a majority ruling from parliament against the production and deployment proposals. The government, however, is not prepared to accept this ruling automatically as a fact of life. (2) On the other hand there is the -- theoretical -- option to ignore parliament's stipulation and to say yes to all of the proposals of the IDD. This would mean political suicide, which in itself does not have to be relevant for the US government, but which will as such have several negative effects for NATO. In the first place it is a bad thing under all circumstances if a government fell because of a NATO-matter. Next it is highly probable that after the fall of this cabinet a new cabinet will come that will distance itself from NATO. (3) A third option is -- and it [is] highly preferable for NATO -- that an in-between position is found between the two extremes just described. Together with the ministers of foreign affairs and defense -- the other ministers have not yet been fully involved with the preparation of the decision -- speaker

¹ By Van Agt's top adviser, J. P. M. H. Merckelbach.

envisions a "commitment to commit" in the sense that this coming Wednesday the Netherlands declares itself willing to decide in 2 years -- this period is not set in stone -- about deployment of GLCMs in the Netherlands if the Dutch cabinet would come to the conclusion then that the negotiations with the SU have yielded no or insufficient result. At that point, this conclusion would not be drawn by the Dutch government alone, but in consultation with the NATO allies.

Min. v.d. Klaauw specifies that in this construction the Dutch government is not bound to decide at that time, but will have to take a decision about deployment.

MP Van Agt says that in any case a new decision will have to be taken at that time. In consultation with the allies the Dutch cabinet will then have to make a judgment on the results of the negotiations with the SU and decide about deployment. Pres. Carter is aware that the Netherlands also has problems with the size of the modernization program of 572 warheads. Following the correspondence on this subject speaker nonetheless feels compelled to raise this here again.

Pres. Carter asks who exactly, after the indicated time period, would have to judge if the negotiations at that point have been adequate.

MP Van Agt replies that legally this will be a national decision, but that it will be taken in consultation with the allies. The Netherlands cannot give up part of its sovereignty. The position now to be taken does make it extremely difficult for the cabinet in power then to reach a conclusion that deviates from that of the allies.

Brzezinski asks if this position means that next Wednesday the Netherlands will not oppose NATO's plans but only delay its own decision.

MP Van Agt replies in the affirmative but adds that the Netherlands will still mount some verbal resistance to the size of the proposed modernization program.

Brzezinski believes that expressing an opinion on the size of the program does not correspond with the delay of one's own decision.

Pres. Carter agrees. Otherwise this would place the other allies in a difficult position. The US will negotiate on behalf of the allies, looking for success. This success will be more difficult to achieve if the Netherlands appears not to be involved with these negotiations by distancing itself -- temporarily -- from NATO's decision. Speaker asks if it can be useful to the Dutch cabinet if the US government confirmed once again in a letter -- for publication -- its commitment to arms control and arms reduction in Europe.

MP Van Agt points out that the in-between position he has outlined goes further than the decision of parliament, which has categorically rejected a production or deployment decision at this time.

Brzezinski asks if it is not possible for the Dutch government just to announce that it wants to postpone its decision in light of the decision by parliament. The SU initially said that in case of a modernization decision by NATO it no longer wishes to negotiate. In the meantime it has become clear that even in that case the SU is willing to open negotiations. This willingness could again be undermined if certain allies cause confusion. The Netherlands should not contribute to that by making critical comments about the modernization program and its size.

Pres. Carter asks if the Dutch government is sufficiently informed about SS-20 deployment.

Aaron replies to this in the affirmative, but this week two more new SS-20 sites have been discovered, bringing the number of SS-20 warheads to 675. This exceeds the proposed NATO program.

Pres. Carter asks to whom the suggested letter should be addressed, perhaps to parliament.

Min. Vance believes that the Netherlands, wanting to postpone its own decision, should refrain from undermining the decision of the other allies.

MP Van Agt would like to point out, without trying to make excuses, that in no other NATO-country there is such an intensive and widespread debate about this matter.

Min. v.d. Klaauw wonders if the letter suggested by pres. Carter could not be counterproductive. The Dutch parliament might feel pressured by this. Speaker will consider this suggestion further and report the outcome via ambassador Tammenoms Bakker.

Pres. Carter confirms again the willingness of the US to take advantage of all opportunities for mutual reduction in the nuclear arsenal. Essential for this is that the SU knows that NATO is determined, and for that a united NATO front is of the utmost importance. He wishes the Dutch government otherwise the best of luck.