

Memorandum of conversation
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MINISTER OF DEFENSE¹

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The Hague

Short report of the discussion with David Aaron² on October 22 1979 at 13:30 hours at Valkenburg airfield.³

Aaron began by discussing how the trip had been a good one so far. He was very much impressed with the choice of position of the other allies. That went both for the English [sic] and for the Germans and the Italians. He recalled especially that the Germans had now made their decision in line with the recommendations of both reports,⁴ and that in Italy even the socialists are supportive. As regards Belgium, he was impressed by Simonet's statement.⁵ He said to be aware of our contacts with the Belgians and asked what we knew of their position. Generally therefore, a fairly positive situation has emerged. Brezhnev's letter has not been able to change this.

In my first reply I have not responded to the question about the Belgians but asked the United States response to the points I have raised with Harold Brown⁶. Aaron replied approximately along the following lines: We have discussed and considered the issues raised by the Netherlands very carefully and all the way to the highest level. "We would like"⁷ that the Netherlands will participate in this matter. This is important for the alliance.

To this my side-note that it struck me that this was a fairly weak formulation of the desirability of Dutch participation.

He did here, incidentally, immediately again point to the German position of not being able to act alone.

¹ Dutch Defense Minister Willem Scholten.

² David L. Aaron, Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs.

³ A military airfield, Valkenburg was located slightly to the northwest of the Hague.

⁴ The reports by NATO's High Level Group and the Special Group on TNF modernization and negotiations with the Soviet Union, respectively.

⁵ Foreign minister Henri Simonet.

⁶ U.S. Secretary of Defense.

⁷ Items in quotation marks appear in English in the Dutch memorandum.

The United States want to help the Netherlands with its political problems. We want to be "so helpful" as is possible, but there are limits. There is an "emerging" consensus in the alliance and it cannot be endangered by making important changes in the proposed plans at this stage of the decisionmaking.

For my part I have reacted to this immediately with several remarks along the lines of: Until now there has only been decisionmaking at the level of the experts. Second: Several weeks ago I have delivered in a very clear way a political message to our most important ally, the United States. You yourself have determined the order of your trip through Europe, in spite of our request to do it in another way, this request also caused by the fact that today the Prime-Minister and Foreign Minister are not present. Under these circumstances you cannot say there is an emerging consensus at the political level. I have next added to this, that I absolutely do not want to be placed in a position that through this order and this consultation we would be confronted with established facts.

As regards the separate points:

The connection with SALT II.

Aaron pointed out that an official reservation in the decisionmaking would work extremely counterproductively in regard to the ratification of SALT II.

I have said that if it would reach a positive decision, the Dutch government in any case would do this on the condition that SALT II would have to be ratified, but I still hope, I have added, that this is a non-problem.

Aaron next explained again, following McGiffert,⁸ that there is hope, and also a reasonable expectation that the decisionmaking will be completed this year, or at least early next year.

He understood that the Netherlands would have to make a reservation on this point in its agreement, but, he emphasized again, if that would have to be included formally in the decision document it would be a very difficult matter for the United States.

The Dutch nuclear tasks.

Regarding the ADM and the Neptune-task the United States have no problems.

Regarding the F-16 they do, but after an internal struggle they have accepted it the way we envision it.

The shift-study.

They are in agreement with the implementation of this study, also as concerns the number. They do note emphatically that the Dutch government should realize clearly that the more concessions were made to the Netherlands, this would also have an impact on the decisionmaking in other countries, e.g. in the Federal Republic, and that this too co-determined the American position.

⁸ David McGiffert, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense and chair of NATO's High Level Group.

He believed that we went very far in regard to our nuclear tasks, and that this way we created the danger of undermining our total nuclear position. It is therefore a very difficult step for us, according to Aaron, to agree to this. Therefore, Aaron said, we call on you to help us in turn in the decisionmaking, and this has to happen in regard to the number of 572, because on this point I have to state in all clarity that we cannot accept your proposal to reduce to 50%.

Everyone has agreed to 572 and it would be a fundamental change in the structure of our approach if now we went to 50%. On top of that we do not really understand why you come with it and what is at the basis of your 50% idea.

Why can you not live with the Schmidt formula, and where does this 50% come from? For my part, I have explained why we cannot accept such a high number. I have pointed out, among other things, that this production decision as a starting point basically assumes that the arms control talks with the Russians will have no result. It is not a denial of the value of the expert reports, but it is a political judgment in response to these reports.

In defense of his position Aaron has pointed to two effects. In the first place in regard to the American Congress. He explained that in the American budgetary system permission for a purchase such as this one is given all at once and that the Congress will not release funds in phases.

Next he explained at length why in his judgment a lower level for the production decision will have a very negative influence on the Soviet Union's willingness to make concessions.

And third he pointed out that in his view the President of the United States would lose all respect domestically if he would now come with a decision that was only 50% of what the military experts said it would have to be. The same number as has been proposed is an essential given for the United States.

For my part I have said that I will of course report on this discussion to the Prime-Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, but that I did not expect that this would lead to a different position on the Dutch side. On the contrary, if they were in the country today, I said, I would probably bring the message to breakfast tomorrow that I had been instructed to defend our position with our European allies with double emphasis.

I have also pointed to the connection to MBFR. He reported that the United States would like to get to a simplified MBFR-proposal in order to give an impetus to the MBFR-discussions.

Returning to the number, Aaron also pointed out that in his view the 50% will become a ceiling, and he added: What certainty do we have that, when the conditions will not have been met, a next Dutch cabinet will be willing to participate in a raising of that ceiling.

Aaron asked me how I wanted to proceed. I said that I did not have any concrete ideas about that at this moment, but that, as he knew, in the coming days I will have discussions with my European colleagues.

Aaron emphasized at the end once again that there are limits for the United States which cannot be crossed. It is too far now still to be able to go back. If there was something else with which we could help the Netherlands, we'd be happy to do so. Our negative position on this point, according to Aaron, should not give the impression that we do not appreciate the efforts of the Dutch cabinet to come to a positive solution.

For my part I have concluded the matter by noting that in this way a very difficult situation has emerged.