

handwritten memorandum of conversation<sup>1</sup>  
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Very Secret

7 pages

Report of the discussion between First Minister [EM] Martens and Prime-Minister van Agt and Min. Van der Klaauw on Tuesday December 4, 1979 Brussels, in the presence of their advisers Thuysbaert and Merckelbach.

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PM gives a picture of the possibilities, impossibilities, and risks for the Dutch cabinet in the TNF matter. Between Belgium and the Netherlands at least this parallel exists, that the possibilities of an integral acceptance of the draft decisions submitted to the NATO council of December 12 -- the "IDD" --<sup>2</sup> are becoming more limited by the day. The situation in the Netherlands can be summarized as follows. The left parties do not want a decision other than the announcement of a moratorium, that is to say that the proposal is made to the Soviet Union to stop further deployment of new systems and to start negotiations. D'66 too<sup>3</sup> -- strongly on the rise according to the most recent opinion polls - - has chosen this course during its party congress last Saturday. Of the parties supporting the cabinet the VVD<sup>4</sup> will accept the IDD\* unconditionally, just like several small right-of-center parties, together 30-35 seats out of 150 in the Second Chamber.<sup>5</sup> The other governing party, the CDA,<sup>6</sup> straddles both sides and is hopelessly divided: 2 of the 49 CDA-delegation members are, as principled atom-pacifists, against any modernization decision whatsoever; they want to see all nuclear weapons removed from the Netherlands. On the other side 10 to 15 CDA-members of parliament believe that the

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<sup>1</sup> By Prime-Minister Van Agt's top adviser, J. P. M. H. Merckelbach.

<sup>2</sup> Integrated Decision Document, combining the outcomes of NATO's High Level Group and Special Group studies of, respectively, TNF modernization and arms control.

<sup>3</sup> A center-left party in the Dutch parliament.

<sup>4</sup> A center-right party, and member of van Agt's government

\* that is to say, what one believes to be in the IDD. [note in original]

<sup>5</sup> Second Chamber = lower house of parliament. Unless noted otherwise, "parliament" or "members of parliament" refers to this lower house.

<sup>6</sup> Christen Democratisch Appel: Christian Democrats, containing both left and right-of-center members.

IDD\* will have to be accepted unconditionally, a position, therefore, taken altogether by maximally 50 members of parliament. The other CDA-members (32 to 37) hold the key. For many among them the position to be taken has not yet been determined, but it is certain that they will not accept an unconditional yes to the IDD. In light of this situation it is impossible for the cabinet -- which, with the support of the right-wing parties, will only be able to do without 5 or 6 CDA-votes -- to accept the IDD unconditionally. This would be political suicide. The situation can deteriorate further. The discussion in the Netherlands has reached a state of frenzy the last couple of days displaying parapsychotic characteristics, thus making it practically uncontrollable. The cabinet would be willing to commit political suicide if this would benefit NATO, but the opposite is the case. A new coalition undoubtedly will distance itself further from the IDD and with it from NATO membership. According to the latest opinion polls the Netherlands would have a left majority (PvdA<sup>7</sup> + D'66) for the first time in an election now -- albeit a narrow one -- even without the support of the extreme left parties.

Against that background the PM does not feel bad at all about trying to preserve the cabinet no matter what and to make the best of it vis-a-vis the NATO-allies. The cabinet will not let itself be forced to a rejection of the IDD; in that case it will maintain its integrity and resign. An unconditional acceptance of the IDD is, as said, not a realistic possibility either. The point is to find a middle way that deviates as little as possible from the IDD.

FM remarks that the situation in Belgium has become very complicated because -- aside from the normal contradictions -- through the change of the guard a number of prominent officials from the recent past (Tindemans, v.d. Boeynants, Cools, de Clerk) are playing their own part in parliament. As regards the TNF-matter, the Flemish socialists have already taken a position that does not differ much from the position of the P.v.d.A. The Wallonian socialists -- led by Simonet who in regard to NATO continues the tradition of Spaak -- do not share this position so far. They will have a party council meeting about this next Saturday. The Christian Democrats in large majority are in favor of a decision that follows the IDD; a minority, especially on Flemish side, is against this. The opposition -- the liberals -- are in favor. The problems, caused especially by the attitude of the Flemish socialists perhaps followed by the Wallonian socialists, therefore are especially within the coalition and within the cabinet which is under threat anyway as a result of the usual Flemish-Wallonian contradictions. Some speculate that the Flemish socialists will not take risks in the TNF-matter in the interest of a solution of the general internal problems. This is not certain, however. How the Flemish Christian-Democrats will position themselves depends especially on the attitude of Tindemans who, although thusfar always strongly pro-NATO, now takes a more reserved position. Of the 56 Flemish Christian-Democrats 10 are expected to have reservations. The problem for the cabinet lies particularly with the Flemish socialists who will be against the IDD en masse. EM has understood from PM that the Dutch cabinet does not want to respond with no to the IDD and cannot respond with yes, but that it looks for a middle way that approaches the IDD as closely as possible. That has been considered in Brussels too, with the result that the suggestion has been put to EM to accept the IDD on December 12, but to

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<sup>7</sup> Partij van de Arbeid: social-democratic party.

postpone implementation -- also the production decision -- by six months. In that period arms control talks should get underway and offer reasonable prospects.

MP remarks that the Dutch cabinet is being moved to a position that does not differ from the EM's suggestion in a fundamental way, although it does in a procedural one. About the six month term the CDA will without doubt note that the negotiations will not be able to develop in such a short time period. On the other hand the decision to deploy will not have to be postponed until 1983 for the CDA if the actual deployment can begin.

EM points out that his suggestion also means that the implementation of the production decision will be postponed for six months. This differs fundamentally from the Danish idea to postpone the decision itself for six months and to negotiate first. In the preliminary Belgian view the decision would have to be implemented automatically if after six months the negotiations have not begun or have progressed insufficiently. This will stimulate the SU quickly to start negotiations and to conduct them seriously.

MP believes that a postponement of the implementation can only apply to the production because the deployment can only begin in 1983. In the IDD therefore there only is talk of a decision in regard to deployment; the decision about production is not mentioned there. This follows from the fact that the European NATO-countries do not decide about production. This exclusively an American decision which is fully an American responsibility. PM is happy with this because in the Netherlands there also exist major objections to the large number of 572 warheads. The formulation chosen in the IDD simplifies the political problem for the Dutch cabinet somewhat because it no longer has to rail against the large number. With that, one of the friction points with NATO has been removed. On the other hand this formulation does complicate the preliminary Belgian view.

EM argues that a decision for deployment does imply a decision about production. If Belgium agrees to the deployment of 48 GLCMs<sup>8</sup> on its territory the US will produce, otherwise it will not. As known, for political reasons the Federal Republic does not want to take a positive decision about deployment alone. Militarily it makes no difference if 48 GLCMs are deployed in Belgium or whether 48 extra go to the Federal Republic; the issue is the political spread of the deployment. EM has no idea of the intentions of the US if NATO would not be able to come to a positive decision.

PM acknowledges that politically there does indeed exist a clear connection between the production and deployment decisions.

EM repeats that he is positively inclined toward the suggestion made to him to take a decision now but delay implementation for some time. The six-month term he mentioned is negotiable. EM notes that also in the argument of the PM the objective should be a nuanced decision that approaches the IDD as closely as possible and does not affect the cohesion of the alliance.

PM believes that for the best possible end-result the procedure from now on is of the greatest importance. It is in everyone's interest to guard against one government getting into even greater difficulties through premature statements by another. It cannot be that a partly negative position of country A influences the positioning of country B or country C, and vice versa. This is why governments which have difficulties with the IDD have to

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<sup>8</sup> Ground Launched Cruise Missiles.

air these as late as possible. PM has understood that the Belgian cabinet will determine its position next Sunday. He ask if this could also be Monday.

EM confirms that the Belgian cabinet is scheduled to meet next Sunday but adds that technically it is possible only to take the decision on Monday. A practical problem here is that the party boards tend to meet every Monday and afterwards issue communiques.

That problem can be met by having the cabinet decide on Monday morning. It has already been announced that the cabinet will decide on Sunday and that day there also is a large demonstration in Brussels with participation also from the Netherlands.

PM thinks it is highly preferable for both to decide in the course of Monday.

EM agrees and would like to agree also, now or later, to do so at the same hour.

PM would most like to see the decsions be taken Monday evening, but he fully understands that this causes problems for EM in connection with the party board meetings.

EM agrees that both cabinets decide Monday evening without making this known ahead of time. EM asks if there can be further contact about the contents of the position to be taken.

PM Supports this. This could happen by telephone or in a new meeting like now. Both agree that Thuysbaert and Merckelbach will keep in contact about this.

EM points out that the core cabinet meets tomorrow to discuss a text being prepared by Min. Simonet. The suggestion EM made is not yet known to the cabinet.

PM remarks that in the Netherlands only ministers v.d. Klaauw and Scholten are aware of all developments. Both agree only to inform the ministers of F.A.<sup>9</sup> and Def. about the content of this discussion.

EM receives the suggestion to organize a meeting of the five directly involved heads of government before December 12. This would have to be a secret meeting, for example in the neighborhood of Aachen. Should Mrs. Thatcher be present too?

PM expects that Schmidt will want this because Mrs. Thatcher has the firmest position vis-a-vis TNF-modernization. It appears to him virtually impossible to keep a meeting of five heads of government a secret. MP certainly does not want to reject the suggestion by EM, but he does want to consider it further and discuss it with the Ministers of F.A. and Def. He will also put the suggestion to colleagues Cossiga and Mrs. Thatcher on Thursday.

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<sup>9</sup> Foreign Affairs