

**December 7, 1979**

**Memorandum of Conversation between Dutch Prime Minister Van Agt, Secretary Vance, NSA Brzezinski, and Minister Van der Klaauw**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

Memorandum of conversation between Secretary Vance, National Security Advisor Brzezinski, Dutch Prime Minister Van Agt, and Minister Van der Klaauw. The conversation focuses on Dutch domestic sentiment toward TNF modernization and SALT II.

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handwritten memorandum of conversation<sup>1</sup>  
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Report of the discussion between Min. Vance and Brzezinski and MP<sup>2</sup> Van Agt and Min. Van der Klaauw on Friday, December 7 1979 in Washington in the presence of Aaron, Bartholome<sup>3</sup>, Tammenoms Bakker and Merckelbach

MP Van Agt has understood from the preceding conversation with pres. Carter that the US-government would like to see that the Netherlands, if it wants to postpone its own decision for 2 years, does not make any further criticism of the character and the size of the TNF-modernization program.

Min. Vance indeed believes that the Netherlands should limit itself to its "commitment to commit" without further commentary on the proposed program.

Brzezinski argues that it is not the character and size of the program, but the attitude of parliament that is the reason for the position the Dutch government believes it needs to take.

MP Van Agt understands this reaction but points out that parliament no doubt will ask to what number of GLCMs the "commitment to commit" refers; 48 or fewer.

Min. Vance believes that this point can be left open. After 2 years the Dutch government could also decide on the number of GLCMs to be deployed.

Aaron points out that 5 countries are involved in the deployment plan, which is what production is geared toward. Given the position of the Netherlands, speaker sees two possibilities: the Netherlands can be removed from the IDD, or the Dutch share in the deployment can be left open to be determined in 2 years.

Min. v.d. Klaauw remarks that Aaron asks less of the Netherlands than it is willing to do. The Netherlands could subscribe to the IDD, but delay the decision on deployment of GLCMs on Dutch territory. Speaker would want to formulate the following: the Dutch parliament asks the government not to take a decision *now* (a word v.d. Stoel<sup>4</sup> entered into the motion<sup>5</sup>); in other words, later this would be possible. If the government were to follow to the letter the motion accepted by parliament, it will have problems with one of

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

<sup>2</sup> Prime minister.

<sup>3</sup> Reginald Bartholomew, Staff Member at NSC.

<sup>4</sup> Max van der Stoel, foreign policy leader of the social democrats in the Dutch parliament; former and future foreign minister.

<sup>5</sup> Approved by parliament December 6, tying the Van Agt government's hands further (see also Document 11).

the members of the coalition, the VVD<sup>6</sup>, which has always been prepared to subscribe fully to the IDD.

Aaron says that there can be no doubt that the US rather sees the Netherlands mentioned in the program.

Bartholome asks if the Dutch statement regarding delay of the decision to deploy in the Netherlands will be made separately or has to be included with the document itself.

Min. v.d. Klaauw believes the Dutch contribution should continue to be mentioned in the document.

Aaron takes it that the Netherlands therefore wants to remain in the documents with the aforementioned reservation in regard to the deployment in the Netherlands.

Min. v.d. Klaauw needs this for his own party, the VVD.

MP van Agt points out that there is much pressure on the Dutch government to make a clear conditional connection between the decisions of this coming Wednesday and the ratification of SALT II. Speaker is aware of how sensitive this is in the American Senate, but this is such a dogma for many Dutch that the government cannot ignore it. The question is how this condition can be mentioned in the Dutch declaration with as little damage as possible for the handling of SALT II in the Senate.

Min. v.d. Klaauw believes that the Netherlands could declare to expect that SALT II will be ratified in 2 years.

MP van Agt sees besides that the possibility to state that the Dutch decision will be taken 1 year after the ratification of SALT II.

Bartholome says that this would help the TNF-modernization but not the handling of SALT II in the Senate.

Min. Vance adds that a number of senators sees the TNF-modernization as a -- impermissible -- means to win them over for SALT II. On them the second alternative, mentioned by the MP, would have a counterproductive effect.

Brzezinski believes that any conditional connection between TNF-modernization and the ratification of SALT II a bad thing. The US-government wants to achieve both; that is why the first alternative is the best. Speaker furthermore points out that the Belgian government too has gotten into difficulties because of the developments in the Netherlands. Against that background the US-government can accept that the Dutch government postpones its decision for 2 years, but it must then remain in the document and make no further criticism of the TNF-modernization program.

Min. Vance will underline extra the importance of a rapid ratification of SALT II in his press conference in Brussels.

Min. v.d. Klaauw would prefer to state in the Dutch declaration that the Netherlands will take a decision at the December 1981 meeting, instead of in 2 years. In that case it neither has to criticize the size of the program nor make a reservation with regard to the ratification of SALT II.

Brzezinski believes that especially the reason for the Dutch delay -- the decision of parliament -- needs to be stated clearly. Speaker asks if the formulation will be "after or within 2 years."

MP Van Agt prefers "no later than 2 years."

Bartholome proposes "in December 1981."

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<sup>6</sup> Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie—center right party.

Aaron asks whether it would also be acceptable to leave the communique unchanged and have the Secretary-General explain the Dutch position separately to the press.

Min. v.d. Klaauw thinks this less practical because the Netherlands would then still be associated with all proposals. How the passages in the IDD and the communique, where countries are mentioned by name, have to be adjusted to the Dutch position would have to be considered further in Brussels.

Brzezinski again points to the possible reactions in Belgium, especially in response to the developments in the Netherlands.

MP Van Agt wants, in that light, to delay the decision by the Dutch cabinet as long as possible. Thanks to this visit to the US it has become possible for speaker to have the discussion in the council of ministers in any case only after the weekend. This is now envisioned for Monday evening or Tuesday.

Aaron has understood from premier Martens that he has agreed with MP Van Agt to take the decision at the same time.

MP Van Agt confirms this, but can imagine that, if the situation in Belgium develops favorably, it would be better for the Belgian cabinet to decide earlier.

Aaron asks if one envisions another debate in parliament before Wednesday.

Min. v.d. Klaauw believes it important also for this reason to have the cabinet's decision at the very latest moment.

MP Van Agt asks in connection with the preparations for the debate in parliament following the decision, how the government could best respond to questions about the relationship between the TNF-modernization and option 3 in the MBFR.

Aaron believes that the US has to follow through on its offer unilaterally to withdraw 1000 warheads from Europe now that the SU too is willing to withdraw 1000 tanks. In addition, the entire specter of TNF on both sides should be available for negotiations. This is why it is not wise once more to refer to the initial nuclear offer in option 3.

Bartholome points out that a explanatory note has been drafted in the interest of the public discussion of these issues.

Min. v.d. Klaauw has understood before that option 3 is dead. He does think it of great importance that there will be new proposals quickly for the second phase of MBFR.

Aaron says that these proposals already are being dealt with in the "silent procedure."

MP Van Agt asks the view of the US-government on the proposals of Min. Scholten regarding the reduction of the current nuclear tasks of the Dutch military, which he has discussed also with Min. Vance and Aaron. Some aspects have not yet been resolved.

Min. Vance replies this can always be discussed.

Bartholome points out that so far the US has responded to these proposals in the context of a Dutch participation in the TNF-modernization.

Aaron remarks that the US, also separately from the TNF-issue, has little difficulty with the proposals of Min. Scholten. Only the timing of the implementation of some of them needs to be looked at further. Speaker next makes several suggestions for the presentation of the current discussions to the press, to which the Dutch officials agree.

MP Van Agt finally remarks that he and Min. Van der Klaauw have tried to give a view of the approach they will present to the Dutch cabinet. The remarks made by the US-side will be integrated with that. The US-government should however be aware that it is not 100% certain that the entire cabinet will agree to this approach. The first risk speaker runs prior to next Wednesday is a permanent difference of opinion within the cabinet. Next

there is the risk of a rejection by parliament of the position the Dutch cabinet will take next Wednesday in Brussels. In that case speaker will consider himself obligated out of solidarity with the allies to force a vote of confidence. However, it is by no means certain then either that the cabinet will be able to survive.