



February 27, 1986

Brussels to Department of External Affairs (Canada), 'Zero Option and the Europeans'

Citation:

"Brussels to Department of External Affairs (Canada), 'Zero Option and the Europeans'", February 27, 1986, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) [Ottawa, Ontario, Canada], RG 25, Vol. 28672, File 27-4-NATO-1-INF, Part 11.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/134873>

Summary:

Canadian officials warned of disagreement to come between the Europeans and the Americans over the "zero option," the longstanding proposal to reduce both US and Soviet INF to zero. This dispatch from Brussels reported "substantial unhappiness" amongst the Europeans that the United States and the Soviet Union would discuss disarmament "even if neither of them believed in it." Nuclear deterrence had prevented war in Europe for the preceding four decades, and US-Soviet discussions of disarmament only made it even more difficult to convince public opinion of deterrence's continued importance

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

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ACTION
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ACC	REF	DATE
FILE	27-4-NATO-1-1NF	
COSSIAK		# 33

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FM BRU ZVGR0242 27FEB86

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INFO BNATO CNAMILREPNATO WSHDC MOSCO GENEV PARIS LDN BONN ROME
HAGUE STKHM/SCDEL VMBFR PRMNY WSAW ATHNS ANKRA PEKIN TOKYO
OSLO COPEN MDRID LSBON

TT NDHQOTT/DM/ADMPOL/PPP/CORAE/DNACPOL/DSTRATA/CIS/CAF/ DE CAF
DISTR MINA MINT MINE USS IFB IDD RGB RBD RBR ILRA IDRL

IDA IDAO IDAV IDAN IDX RGX UGB URR CPD CPP RCR JLO ETN INP IND

REF YOURTEL IDR0567 21FEB

---ZERO OPTION AND THE EUROPEANS

CONVERSATIONS WE HAVE HAD THIS WEEK WITH POLITICAL DIRECTOR AT MFA
(DE SCHOUTHEETE) AND MFA ADVISOR IN PMS OFFICE CONFIRM BELGIAN
SCEPTICISM ABOUT ZERO OPTION. ACCORDING TO BOTH MEN, OTHER EUROPEANS
ARE ALSO CONSIDERABLY MORE NEGATIVE THAN THEY ARE PREPARED TO LET ON
INPUBLIC.

2. DE SCHOUTHEETE SAID MORE SPECIFICALLY THAT EEC FOREIGN MINISTERS
DISCUSSION ON 25FEB HAD REVEALED SUBSTANTIAL UNHAPPINESS ABOUT
FACT THAT USSR AND USA WERE ENGAGED IN OPEN DISCUSSION OF TOTAL
NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT, EVEN IF NEITHER OF THEM BELIEVED IN IT. FACT
WAS THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO/NO WAR IN EUROPE IN FORTY NUCLEAR
YEARS, AND THAT THERE HAD BEEN TWO DISASTROUS WARS IN PREVIOUS
FORTY NON-NUCLEAR YEARS. YET IT STILL REMAINED DIFFICULT TO CONVINC
EUROPEAN PUBLIC OF CONTINUED VALUE OF DETERRENT; PRESENT STANCE OF TWO
SUPER POWERS WOULD ONLY MAKE IT MORE SO.

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3. FRENCH IN PARTICULAR WERE ADAMANT THAT NOTHING CONCERNING FORCE DE FRAPPE SHOULD BE DISCUSSED QUOTE DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY UNQUOTE WITH USSR. BY THIS THEY MEANT THAT NOT/NOT ONLY DID THEY RULE OUT DIRECT DISCUSSION OF FRENCH DETERRENT, THEY ALSO DID NOT/NOT LIKE AMERICANS CONSIDERING CONCESSIONS THAT TOOK ACCOUNT OF IT EVEN INDIRECTLY. BRITISH, HE DAIS, HAD SIMILAR VIEWS, THOUGH THEY WERE LESS POINTED THAN FRENCH IN EXPRESSING THEM.

4. DE SCHOUTHEETE ADDED THAT BELGIANS WERE NOT/NOT ESPECIALLY CONCERNED ABOUT MISSILES DEPLOYED ON THEIR OWN TERRITORY. THEIR POSITION WAS VERY CLEAR: THEY WOULD DISMANTLE IF THERE WERE AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE USSR AND USA ALONG THE LINES FORESEEN LAST YEAR WHEN THEY ACCEPTED STATIONING OF THE MISSILES (OURTEL ZVGR0245 15MAR85). IN ANY CASE, THE CRUISE SEEMED TO A SURPRISING EXTENT TO HAVE DISAPPEARED AS A PROBLEM IN BELGIUM. FLEMISH SOCIALISTS HAD NOT/NOT DONE WELL WITH IT AS AN ISSUE IN THE OCT ELECTIONS, AND THE PRESS WAS NOW PRETTY WELL SILENT ON THE MATTER. IN CIRCUMSTANCES, IT LOOKED AS THOUGH THE GOVT COULD AFFORD TO BE REASONABLY RELAXED.

5. VISIONS OF A NON-NUCLEAR EUROPE WERE ANOTHER MATTER. IN THE FIRST PLACE, BELGIANS DID NOT/NOT BELIEVE THAT USSR WOULD GENUINELY BE PREPARED TO LIVE WITH CONDITIONS NECESSARY FLRCMSDVEKSYJUK REGIME. BUT IF EVER THEY LOOKED LIKE DOING SO, WESTERN EUROPEANS WOULD HAVE TO ASK WHETHER IT WAS IN THEIR OWN INTEREST, GIVEN ENORMOUS ADVANTAGES IN TERRITORY AND CONVENTIONAL STRENGTH WHICH

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USSR ENJOYED. THIS, BOTH MEN REPEATED, WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO GET ACROSS TO EUROPEAN PRESS AND PUBLIC, BUT THEY WERE LIKELY TO HAVE TO TRY. BOTH PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER APPEARED TO SHARE THAT VIEW, AND WOULD BE TALKING ALONG THOSE LINES IN PUBLIC TO EXTENT THAT IT WAS POLITICALLY REALISTIC TO DO SO.

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