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Defence 19



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
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MO 14/11

25th October 1979

Dear George,

VISIT OF DUTCH DEFENCE MINISTER

As you know, Mr Scholten, the Dutch Defence Minister, at his urgent request made a brief visit to London today to see my Secretary of State; he emphasised that he regarded the very fact of the visit as confidential. Mr Scholten had a brief meeting with Mr Pym, at which no officials were present; and discussion continued over lunch, at which Messrs Van Vloten and Van der Put and Mr M E Quinlan, Deputy Under Secretary (Policy and Programmes), were also present.

2. Discussion was confined to TNF modernisation. Mr Scholten made it clear that he himself was anxious to secure a positive Alliance decision in December, and was prepared to accept GLCM basing in the Netherlands, and he emphasised that he considered arms control negotiations should follow upon modernisation, rather than precede it. He was a convinced supporter of Dutch national nuclear armament. He was, however, at pains to make clear the extremely difficult questions for the Dutch Coalition Government posed by the reports of the High Level and Special Groups and he explained the elaborate Parliamentary timetable in the Netherlands for discussing the issues raised; he did not expect the Dutch Cabinet to reach a decision until shortly before the meeting of the NATO Defence Planning Committee in December.

3. Mr Scholten said that there were strong feelings in the Dutch Parliament that a decision on TNF modernisation should be conditional upon the ratification of SALT II;

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should be accompanied by serious studies aimed at reducing the present obsolescent nuclear armouries in Europe; should involve the basing of less than the recommended number of 572 GLCMs; and should leave Option III (the nuclear option) in MBFR on the table. Of these considerations that which weighed most heavily with Mr Scholten was clearly the number of GLCMs and he returned several times to the argument that this figure was an arbitrary one, not explicitly justified by the HLG's report; it would be helpful if this overall number could be reduced, and as a consequence the number, 48, recommended for basing in the Netherlands could also be reduced.

4. The Secretary of State made it clear in response that the United Kingdom Government entirely understood the Dutch Government's Parliamentary problems, and were willing to do anything they could to help on presentation. Mr Pym emphasised, however, that he thought that it would be most unwise to start tampering with the overall number of 572 GLCMs which had been recommended on military grounds by the HLG, and was clearly justified in the face of the very significant military threat posed by the Warsaw Pact. It would be a very dangerous course indeed to start changing, and reducing, this number if there were no grounds for doing so other than purely tactical political ones. There would clearly be time, between a decision being reached and the deployment of the missiles, for there to be a reduction in numbers if complementary arms control negotiations with the Russians had meantime proceeded to a point which would make such a reduction militarily justifiable. Thus decisions on modernisation did not need to depend on ratification of SALT II, which would precede further arms control negotiations. It would not be possible to do this the other way round. Mr Pym agreed with Mr Scholten that the ultimate objective of the whole Alliance was "zero growth" but he emphasised that the Alliance really must negotiate from strength.

5. Mr Pym agreed that we would reflect on what Mr Scholten had said so that officials could pursue whether there was any help that could be given to the Dutch on presentation; he made it clear that there could be no change in the

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British position on substance. MOD officials will be pursuing this with FCO officials with a view to considering what should be said to the Dutch before the meeting of the Nuclear Planning Group in The Hague on 12th-14th November.

6. I am sending copies of this letter to Michael Alexander (No 10) who will wish to take note of it in connection with the briefing for the Prime Minister's visit next week to Bonn, and to Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

*Yours and*  
*Brian Norbury*

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