



MINISTER-PRESIDENT

His Excellency Mr. Ronald Reagan,  
President of The United States of  
America,  
The White House,  
WASHINGTON D.C.

The Hague, February 23, 1983

Dear Mr. President,

In my letter of February 18, 1983 I promised that I would write you a separate letter setting out my thoughts on the negotiations in Geneva, which I have already discussed with Vice President Bush.

In 1979 NATO determined that a political and military response to the development of the SS-20 was necessary. The response consisted of two aspects: the intention to deploy 572 INF weapons in Western Europe and the offer to negotiate to make deployment unnecessary.

In the negotiations the Soviet Union has from the outset adopted the standpoint that its weapons systems, in particular the SS-20, were merely a response to the West's existing nuclear capability. The United States, supported by its allies, has taken the zero option as the basis of its negotiating position. The zero option covers more than just the SS-20, but its main component is elimination of this weapons system.

Apart from the "walk in the woods" the talks in Geneva have so far failed to yield any real prospect of an agreement. The Soviets for their part seem to be more concerned with the propaganda value of the talks and to this end have even been prepared to concede that if the 572 missiles are not deployed a substantial reduction can be made in the number of SS-20's. This offer clearly falls short of what is required, but it has made some impression on public opinion in Western Europe.

The question now is to decide how we should proceed in the negotiations. Unity within NATO is clearly an indispensable requirement, but in addition agreement on a substantive approach is needed. In this respect there is a close connection between the timing and the content of further steps.

Generally speaking, there are now three possible courses of action in the further talks in Geneva.

The first is to persevere with the zero option and, if no agreement can be reached on the subject with the Soviet Union, to implement in full the modernisation programme.

The second is to continue the negotiations and after demonstrating our political resolve by deploying a given number of the missiles, to reach agreement with the Soviet Union on the numbers that each side can continue to deploy. This will be fewer than 572 but will certainly not be zero.

The third is to use the fact that Secretary Andropov has acknowledged that he could reduce the SS-20 arsenals in order to get him actually to start dismantling the weapons, and then to use the threat of deployment of our weapons to get him to increase the reduction step by step.

It would seem to me that timing is of the utmost importance in this connection. After the German elections there will be nine months until the pershings actually have to be deployed in West Germany. In this period, the climate for negotiations would certainly seem to be favourable. The complexity of the problem alone would seem to preclude the possibility of a comprehensive agreement being reached before next december. The question is whether the Soviet Union can be induced to reduce its weapons levels only if the West starts actual deployment. Such an approach is of course conceivable, but one has to ask oneself whether the momentum of the negotiations and the pressure to achieve results would not be lost as a consequence. In the following stage of the negotiations the Soviets will again find a reason to procrastinate, especially since the uncertainty about actual deployment is greater in the smaller NATO countries than in West Germany. Equally, we in the West will once again be able to argue that results can be expected in Geneva only after all 572 missiles have been deployed. Unpleasant as it is, there is no point in closing our eyes to reality.

This analysis raises the question of whether another political initiative could not be developed which would hold out better prospects. Such an initiative is all the more necessary in view of the fact that, however unjust it may be, the impression has been gained that the parties at Geneva have not yet really been negotiating.

The question now is whether we should not endeavour to get the Soviet Union to agree to an actual reduction of say xx SS-20's per month as from today, in exchange for which we would declare that we were prepared to postpone deployment of pershing and cruise missiles if the SS-20's continued to be dismantled at the rate of xx per month. If we were to make this offer for an initial period of for example six months, the Soviets would be agreeing to only a limited reduction and we to only a limited postponement. This should be acceptable to both sides.

Once such an arrangement was under way, it could be continued on the same basis, and a decision on what the ultimate overall result should be could then be taken while the actual negotiations were proceeding.

Such an arrangement is logical for two reasons:

- Negotiating an agreement from scratch is extremely difficult; what is needed is a step-by-step approach.
- The Soviet Union has already deployed its missiles whereas we have not; this means that there will have to be a trade-off on the basis of numbers on their side against time (postponement) on ours.

Acceptance or rejection of such a proposal by the Soviet Union would give a clear indication whether or not it is sincere in its desire to achieve arms control. It would in effect put the Soviets on the spot.

Mr. President,

I fully appreciate the historical responsibility which the United States bears as the largest NATO ally. I also share your view that the West must not yield to Soviet pressure. It would be in no way inconsistent with this, however, to recognise that we should be prepared - and the political debate in the Netherlands on INF has underlined this time and again - to examine with the greatest care every possible way of using arms control to prevent the deployment of new INF systems in Europe.

I would add that we shall succeed in this only if we direct our efforts not only to ensuring that the West presents a united and resolute front but also to examining how we can break through the Kremlin's "closed front". In Moscow too, the various options are being weighed against one another. Our object must be to induce the Soviets to agree to a process of weapons reduction.

The ideas I have set out above are in no sense a formal proposal on the part of the Netherlands. I have not mentioned them in public because, as the Netherlands' government has stated repeatedly, we wish to do everything to maintain a common NATO front and thereby to give the negotiations in Geneva the maximum chance of success.

I should nevertheless appreciate it if you would take these ideas into consideration in your further deliberations on the course to be followed at Geneva in the resumed negotiations.

I am looking forward to meeting you on March 15.

Yours sincerely,

  
(Ruud F.M. Lubbers).