

NOTE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S TALK WITH THE BELGIAN PRIME MINISTER,
M. MARTENS, AT 10 DOWNING STREET ON WEDNESDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 1979

PRESENT:

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| Prime Minister | M. Wilfried Martens |
| Chancellor of the
Exchequer | M. Henri Simonet, Minister
of Foreign Affairs |
| Secretary of State for
Defence | M. Robert Vaes, Belgian
Ambassador in London |
| Lord Privy Seal | M. Jacques van Ypersele,
PM's Chef de Cabinet |
| Sir Michael Palliser, FCO | M. Alfred Cahen, Foreign
Minister's Chef de Cabinet |
| Sir Peter Wakefield,
HM Ambassador, Brussels | |
| Mr. Michael Alexander | |

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Defence

The Prime Minister said that NATO would shortly have to take some major decisions if she was to maintain a credible defence capability against the Soviet Union. In particular there was the problem of Theatre Nuclear Force (TNF) modernisation. The Secretary of State for Defence ^{said that NATO} was agreed about the need to modernise TNF to meet the Soviet threat. The position of Belgium was important because Belgium was in a position to give a lead to small countries by accepting modernised TNF on its territory. It was essential that a decision be taken in December. There was a real risk that if decisions were not taken then, the Soviet threat would take on unacceptable proportions.

M. Simonet said that there were already tactical nuclear weapons based in Belgium. The question for the Belgian Government was whether they were willing to replace the short-range weapons systems with medium-range weapons systems. He would be visiting the Federal Republic on Monday and would pursue the question with the German Government. He was not concerned about American attitudes but was very anxious about those of the Germans. Belgium had been wrong-footed over the neutron bomb and did not intend that this should happen again. M. Simonet said that he was not clear what Chancellor

Schmidt wanted. There seemed to be a difference of attitude between the Chancellor and his Foreign Minister. Herr Genscher wanted to take a decision and talk about the arms control aspect later while the Chancellor seemed readier to accept a preliminary discussion about the possibility of a linked arms control proposal. M. Simonet said that he would put proposals to his Government when he was clear about the attitudes of the Federal Republic.

M. Simonet said the question was a very difficult one for the Dutch. They would prefer to leave the decision to others. It might be that religious and other groups in the Netherlands would force a full Parliamentary debate on TNF modernisation. If this happened, there would be no TNF based in the Netherlands. Such an outcome would pose major problems for Belgium. There were differences of opinion within the country and within the Parties there. His own Party, the Socialist Party, was split. The Flemish speaking Socialists in the north would want to keep in step with the Dutch. If, as a result, they came out against the basing of modernised TNF in Belgium they would try to blackmail the French speaking Socialists into pursuing the same policy. The Christian Democrats might well have similar problems because of the attitude of religious groups.

As regards the attitude of other members of the Alliance, M. Simonet said that he assumed the United Kingdom would have no difficulty with TNF modernisation since we already had weapons systems targetted on the USSR. However, the Scandinavians would clearly make no move. The attitude of the Italians was unknown to him but their decision would be very important for Belgium. Even if they were to accept only a token force it would be helpful. M. Simonet said that he thought it would be wrong and dangerous to leave it to Germany to decide alone whether or not to accept modernised TNF on her soil. It could spell the end of the Alliance because it would lead to a special relationship between the United States and the Federal Republic. Chancellor Schmidt was well aware of the dangers of such a special relationship because a situation where the Federal Republic was left alone with the United States to share the responsibility in this area created the possibility that one day the Federal Republic might do a deal with the Soviet Union. The

Soviet Union might well have drawn from the neutron bomb fiasco the lesson that it was enough simply to exert a little pressure on some members of NATO to get its way. Failure to agree on TNF modernisation could be the prelude to a period in the early 1980s when the imbalance on the tactical level in Europe would be so marked that the Soviet Union might be able to secure concessions on major issues, eg in the Mediterranean. This would in effect mean the Finlandisation of Western Europe. M. Simonet said that he would ensure that these factors were taken into consideration in the Belgian Cabinet's discussion of the issue. M. Simonet intended to fight for the right decision but if Belgium was left alone the situation would be very difficult.

M. Martens said that he had been told by Mr. Kissinger that the SALT II Agreement would not be ratified unless President Carter's Administration had taken a decision to proceed with TNF modernisation. It was important that the Europeans should not give the impression that they were refusing to take action. But the timing of a decision and clarification of the Federal Republic's intentions would be very important. It was an extremely delicate decision for the Belgian Government but would have to be taken by the end of the year. The Prime Minister said that it was essential that an effective capability to resist the Soviet Union was maintained. She wondered whether West European leaders were giving a sufficiently effective lead. Her own experience was that audiences were always quick to respond when addressed about the extent of the Soviet threat and about the need for a credible defence capability. It was all a question of resolve.

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