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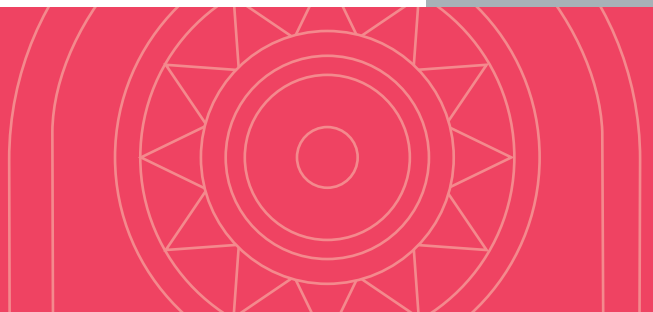
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Prelude to the Euromissile Crisis

The Neutron Bomb Affair, the Netherlands, and the “Defeat of the Strangeloves,” 1977–1978

By Ruud van Dijk
NPIHP Working Paper #8
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Christian F. Ostermann, Leopoldo Nuti and Evan Pikulski, Series Editors

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Executive Summary

The “Neutron Bomb” crisis of 1977–78 sprung from the confluence of nuclear forces modernization, a growing anti-nuclear movement in Europe, and important changes within NATO’s balance of power. Through recently declassified Dutch, German, and US documents, this working paper shows that the Netherlands was the weak link in efforts to modernize NATO’s theater nuclear forces. As the deployment of “Enhanced Radiation Weapons” (ERW) transformed from budget footnote to international media scandal, policymakers in the United States and West Germany struggled to find a balance between the shared desire to enhance the alliance’s theater nuclear force (TNF) capabilities, while recognizing the sudden groundswell of opposition against ERW on both sides of the Atlantic.

Successful deployment of ERW had to be an alliance-wide measure—no member country wished to be the sole host of such weapons. Yet, despite efforts by US and West German officials to force unwilling smaller allies like the Netherlands to stay on board, widespread opposition ranging from communist-led public protests to dissent from members of the center-right coalition government ended any such possibility. Dutch reluctance, a product of domestic politics, played an important part in weakening the NATO compromise for the production and introduction of ERW. More decisive, however, was the widespread public aversion to ERW, itself a manifestation of re-emerging popular movements against the nuclear arms race in western societies. Public resistance to NATO TNF modernization plans would grow to unprecedented levels during the Euromissile Crisis of the early 1980s. However, the shift in public attitude occurred during the earlier 1977–78 Neutron Bomb affair, making it the opening act of the later Euromissile episode.

Prelude to the Euromissile Crisis

The Neutron Bomb Affair, the Netherlands, and the “Defeat of the Strangeloves” 1977–1978

By Ruud van Dijk¹

I. The Euromissile Crisis and the Cold War

The Neutron bomb affair, and with it the Euromissile crisis, began with Walter Pincus’ June 1977 article “Neutron Killer Warhead Buried in ERDA Budget,” printed in the *Washington Post*. Pincus set the tone for following debate on “Enhanced Radiation Weapons” (ERW), depicting the Carter administration as ready to build America’s “first nuclear battlefield weapon specifically designed to kill people through the release of neutrons rather than to destroy military installations through heat and blast.”² This description was only a small step from the characterizations of ERW as a perverse weapon that kills people and spares buildings, or as a capitalist weapon “preserving property while killing and sickening people” that would become commonplace in the debate over their deployment.³

The principal national security officials in the Carter administration were caught unawares. Robert E. Hunter, a member of National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski’s staff, later recalled that:

We suddenly had a crisis. In fact, I got a call on the Sunday morning from Brzezinski, for whom I worked, and he said “What the hell is that? I didn’t know about it.” [Defense Secretary] Harold Brown called up Zbig Monday morning and said, “What

¹ **Ruud van Dijk** is the coordinator of the BA and MA programs in the history of international relations at the University of Amsterdam. His Ph.D. (1999) is from Ohio University, where he wrote a dissertation on the East-West contest over Germany in the early Cold War. He holds MA degrees from the University of Kansas and the University of Amsterdam. He has been a frequent contributor to op-ed pages of Dutch newspapers, commenting on US foreign policy and American politics.

² *The Washington Post*, 6 June 1977. For Pincus’ self-avowed dislike of the ERW see David Whitman, “The Press and the Neutron Bomb,” in Martin Linsky, et al, *How the Press Affects Federal Policy Making* (New York: Norton, 1986), 145–217, this point, 151. In November 1977, the National Council of Teachers of English awarded Pincus its Orwell Award for “bringing to public attention, and thus to debate in the Senate, the appropriations funding for the neutron bomb.” *Washington Post*, 24 November 1977. A warhead, suitable for deployment on surface-to-surface missiles such as NATO’s Lance, ERW was often, and incorrectly, referred to as the neutron “bomb.” An even more complete, descriptive name for the weapon, also used at times, is Enhanced Radiation Reduced Blast weapon (ERRB or er/rb). In internal documents, such as the Energy Research and Development Administration’s budget bill, the technology was often referred to as “ER.”

³ Herbert Scoville, Jr., “A New Weapon to Think (and Worry) About,” *The New York Times*, 12 July 1977.

the hell are they talking about?” What had happened is that Pincus had gone through the defense budget on Capitol Hill and found this thing and christened it. Then, of course, everybody suddenly paid attention to it.⁴

ERW became politically controversial in Washington and US public opinion quickly turned against it, with Western Europe not far behind.

Intended to enhance NATO’s theater nuclear forces (TNF), ERW had been discussed within the alliance as early as 1976. Prior to the matter becoming public, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance reported to President Jimmy Carter, that there had been no objections within NATO.⁵ While neutron weapons originally enjoyed broad support in NATO circles, the trepidation, rejection and anger that spread so quickly after their announcement made the alleged merits of the weapon barely seem relevant.

Experts saw ERW as an effective and appropriate addition to NATO’s arsenal in light of the Warsaw Pact’s numerical superiority in conventional weaponry (especially armor), the lack of promise in negotiations on the Mutual Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR), and because of a broad based consensus within NATO on the need for TNF improvements. In case of a Warsaw Pact invasion, neutron weapons could quickly halt Warsaw Pact tank formations by disabling their crews while simultaneously inflicting less damage than traditional nuclear weapons on towns and cities in the densely populated European theater of war. A frequently-used counterargument ran that the precision characteristic to ERW due to their reduced collateral effects would make the use of nuclear weapons more likely, i.e. they would lower the nuclear threshold. Proponents of ERW responded that better defensive capabilities for NATO would enhance deterrence and make war in Europe less likely.⁶

⁴ Oral history interview, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, 12 October 2005. Library of Congress American Memory, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:303:./temp/~ammem_NB1M:: (14 March 2013).

⁵ Vance to Carter, “European Attitudes toward the ‘Neutron Bomb,’” 25 July 1977. *Declassified Documents Reference Service* (DDRS), DDRS-285354-i1-4_CK3100516283. On 8 July, Walter Pincus cited unnamed White House officials saying that after an American briefing on ERW in 1976, West German officials had been “not tremendously enthusiastic.” *Washington Post*, 8 July 1977.

⁶ “Arms Control Impact Analysis. Program title: W-70 Mod 3 (Lance) Warhead.” (Presumably Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, ACDA, paper). *Archive Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (ArchBuZa), DDI-DAV,

This back-and-forth was part of a larger debate during the mid–late 1970s on the nuclear arms race and nuclear arms control, which for its part was a reflection of the inherent paradox embedded in the concept of (nuclear) deterrence: in order to reduce the likelihood of war breaking out, war fighting capabilities had to cover the full spectrum credibly: from conventional weapons, to theater nuclear weapons, to strategic nuclear weapons. When briefing the new Dutch Defense Minister Roelof Krusinga in January 1978, the head of the Dutch General Defense Staff, General A.J.S. Wijting described it as follows:

In order to influence the political decision making of the opponent decisively, tactical nuclear weapons must be ready for effective military use. Only when this possibility is assured truly and in all details, and therefore their use—if necessary—credible, can tactical nuclear weapons play their part in deterrence.⁷

The apparent contradiction was becoming a harder sell to Western public opinion in the mid-1970s than earlier in the nuclear age, as events soon demonstrated. In this era of détente, pressures to maintain a credible deterrent remained a major driver of the nuclear arms race. Whatever people may have expected at the outset of the decade, this arms race was not going away.⁸

Arms control agreements such as the 1972 Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I) between the Soviet Union and the United States had suggested that East-West rapprochement would place limits on the growth of nuclear arsenals. Documents such as the Basic Principles of Relations Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1972), East-West breakthroughs such as West Germany’s *Ostpolitik*, the 1971 Four-Power Agreement on Berlin, and wide-ranging agreements such as the Helsinki Final

1975–1984/0356. Also editorials in *New York Times*, “The Neutron Weapon,” 12 July 1977 and “The Virtues of the Neutron Bomb,” 30 March 1978.

⁷ “Lezing NAVO strategie.” Defense Staff paper, 27 January 1978. *ArchBuZa* DAV19751984/03285. Where often the term “theater nuclear weapons” was used at the time, this speaker used “tactical nuclear weapons.” The actual briefing took place on 24 January: memo to members Defense Council, 18 January 1978. *ArchBuZa* DAV19751984/03310. (All translations from the Dutch and German by the author).

⁸ In his memoirs, Dutch peace activist, and leader of the influential Interchurch Peace Council (IKV), Mient Jan Faber, relates how in 1976–1977 this realization gave rise to the soon-to-be influential campaign to eliminate nuclear weapons, beginning with the Netherlands. *Vooruitgeschoven spionnen: Bevrijd uit de boeien van de Koude Oorlog* (Utrecht: Spectrum, 2007), 24–28.

Act (1975) suggested to some that the Cold War itself could be winding down. However, difficult US-Soviet negotiations over SALT II were only one example of how East-West relations remained competitive. Another was the Soviet development of the RSD-10 Pioneer, a new intermediate nuclear missile known in the West as the SS-20. When the neutron bomb hit the headlines in the summer of 1977, rising public expectations about nuclear arms control and détente ran headlong into Cold War realities. Policymakers in Washington and West European capitals, often divided on the neutron weapon, were caught in the middle.⁹ In hindsight, they were themselves partly to blame for this, as planning for the development and possible introduction of this new, short-range tactical nuclear weapon occurred entirely out of the public eye.¹⁰

Over the next ten months, Western activists—legitimized by prominent national security experts such as West Germany’s Egon Bahr and supported by the Soviet government and its allies—rallied to prevent NATO from deploying ERW in Western Europe. Meanwhile, political leaders and government officials on both sides of the Atlantic worked to develop a production and deployment plan that would make ERW a shared responsibility, all the while struggling to reconcile the neutron weapon with their own consciences. By mid-March 1978, they seemed to be succeeding. However, just days later, President Carter began to have second thoughts, and he soon indicated that he wanted to cancel the program. Pressured by his advisers, he eventually agreed only to defer a decision on the production of ERW.¹¹

⁹ On détente and its arms control component, see Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* revised edition (Washington, D.C., Brookings, 1994), the neutron bomb in this context, 935–945. On the Soviet development of the Pioneer/SS-20, Steve Zaloga, *The Kremlin’s Nuclear Sword: The Rise and Fall of Russia’s Strategic Nuclear Forces, 1945–2000* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 2002), 171–173; Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 1969–87* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1990), chapter 4.

¹⁰ Asked if he was pursuing an agenda when he wrote the article that revealed the neutron grenade, Pincus says that he, already highly skeptical of tactical nuclear weapons in the European theater, was also bothered by the fact that this was a new nuclear weapon, about to be produced, without there having been a public debate. *Interview with the author*, 14 May 2014.

¹¹ Major treatments of the neutron bomb affair include Sheri Wasserman, *The Neutron Bomb Controversy: A Study in Alliance Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1984); Michael Broer, Frederick Donovan & James Goodby, *The Neutron Bomb and the Premises of Power: President Carter’s Neutron Bomb Decision* Pew Case Studies in

The US reversal on ERW procurement put a sudden end to the neutron bomb affair and threw NATO into turmoil. However, it did not end the debate over NATO's TNF modernization. Quite the opposite, the neutron bomb affair confirmed NATO's need to show itself capable of addressing security needs in the "gray area"—weapons systems not covered by SALT or MBFR—and of responding to the Soviet Union's growing capabilities, particularly the SS-20, and Soviet political campaigns.¹²

Meanwhile, anti-modernization activists were spurred on by what they saw as their successful campaign against ERW. As such, the neutron bomb episode formed the first in a series of crises of East-West and inner-NATO conflicts that has been collectively dubbed the "Euromissile crisis." Arriving at a time of eroding détente due to disagreements over SALT, domestic politics in the United States, and a series of conflicts in the Third World, the Euromissile crisis was both a product of and a contributing factor to a new era of both East-West confrontation and inner-NATO contention.

The neutron bomb fiasco was not a historical orphan—it had many parents. The Soviet Union and West European communists viewed ERW's demise as a promising political victory; with the crucial substitution of "threatening" for "promising," they were joined in this assessment by many Western supporters of NATO.¹³ West European governments, especially West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, primarily blamed President Carter for suddenly pulling the plug on a production and deployment compromise the chancellor had

International Affairs, Case 318 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, 1995, 1988); and, with special attention to the West German debate and the role of Egon Bahr, Kristina Spohr Readman, "Germany and the Politics of the Neutron Bomb, 1975–1979," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 21:2 (2010), 259–285.

¹² The "gray area" covered nuclear weapons systems between the strategic and conventional levels that were not covered either in SALT or MBFR. At times these would all be referred to as Theater Nuclear Forces/Weapons, at other times intermediate range nuclear missiles such as the SS-20 or Western cruise and Pershing missiles would be discussed as a separate part of the "gray area," or experts would distinguish between Short Range TNF and Long Range TNF, or regular "tactical" nuclear weapons and the "deep strike" variation. On Moscow's campaigns against NATO modernization plans in the late 1970s and early 1980s see Gerhard Wettig, "The Last Soviet offensive of the Cold War: emergence and development of the campaign against NATO euromissiles, 1979–1983," *Cold War History* 9:1 (2009), 79–110.

¹³ Soviet ambassador to the Netherlands at the time, Alexandr Romanov, in 1979 received an award for helping awaken Dutch popular opposition to the Neutron Bomb. *Christian Science Monitor* 7 July 1979.

accepted at significant domestic political cost.¹⁴ National Security Adviser Brzezinski, joined by Secretaries Brown and Vance, warned Carter of the negative consequences for NATO and US interests of his sudden change of mind; then, in the wake of the affair, tried to blame the Europeans, characterizing them as “gutless”; and ultimately also assigned some of the blame to himself for not keeping the president sufficiently apprised of NATO deliberations over ERW.¹⁵ Others have pointed to the reluctance of smaller European allies such as the Netherlands to support or deploy neutron weapons as a major cause of the debacle. Robert Hunter, for example, remembers the events of late March and early April, 1978 as follows:

So, after Carter said what he did, stopping the program, there was a big shock. German Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher came running across the Atlantic, terrified that this was going to make Schmidt look bad or the German government look bad . . . Carter put to Genscher the direct question, “Are you prepared to deploy this?” The German answer was, “Only if the Dutch will deploy it.” Next question: “Are the Dutch prepared to deploy it?” “No.” So Carter says, “All right, then you’re not prepared to deploy it. That’s correct? Ok, fine. Then I’ll stick with my decision.” The Germans then went out and said Carter had done this, and Carter had done that, and Carter had done the other thing. I’ve never talked to President Carter about it, but I presume what was in his mind was that enough damage had been done, and that there would be no value in throwing spitballs back at Schmidt. He kept his mouth shut. So Schmidt got away with the argument that, somehow, he had been the white knight and Carter had been the villain. One could understand why the Germans weren’t prepared to do this by themselves. One could understand why the Dutch weren’t prepared to do it. The ERW probably should have been killed in the first place. After all, it wasn’t key to the strategy of the Alliance and didn’t really matter one way or the other. The President’s initial instincts finally prevailed, and he was let down by the Germans, and I guess you could also say the Dutch. But the conventional wisdom that is propagated by all kinds of people is wrong. I was in a position to know, and I watched it with a certain amount of disgust, but respected the President’s decision to take the blame for something that wasn’t his fault.¹⁶

¹⁴ Klaus Wiegrefe, *Das Zerwürfnis: Helmut Schmidt, Jimmy Carter und die Krise der deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2005), 201–204.

¹⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977–1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983), 301–306; Brzezinski quote: telegram Dutch foreign minister, Chris van der Klaauw, to foreign ministry, the Hague, on his meetings with US officials, 11 April 1978. *ArchBuZa* DPV/1983–1990/734.

¹⁶ Oral history, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*. Broer, et al cite their own interview with Hunter, who in that instance mentioned Belgium instead of the Netherlands; they also cite their interview with Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Walter Slocombe, who played down the role of the Europeans. *The Neutron Bomb and the Premises of Power*, 10.

Hunter has not been the only one to point to Dutch resistance to ERW as a cause of the debacle.¹⁷

The Dutch role was indeed significant. Communist-led popular resistance against ERW arose early in the country and was well-organized and widespread; members of the new Dutch cabinet were highly ambivalent about the new weapon, and Defense Minister Roelof Kruisinga even resigned over the matter in early March 1978. Finally, in the wake of Kruisinga's resignation, the lower house of parliament passed a non-binding resolution rejecting ERW production, asking the government to relay its opposition to the NATO allies.¹⁸

However, the exact impact of small allies such as the Netherlands is just one of many questions pertaining to our understanding of NATO nuclear planning tied up in the neutron bomb crisis. How did officials in Washington and Western Europe view ERW's military and political significance? How did they plan to produce and deploy the weapon? What, given widespread opposition to ERW, were the chances for success? What was the role of small NATO countries, especially the Netherlands? Was the Hague ever seriously considered as a candidate for deployment of ERW, or did the allies take Dutch opposition for granted? What was the nature of various objections to ERW put forward by opponents? Who all could be counted among the opponents? Finally, can this episode contribute to our understanding of larger questions connected to the era? For example, where did the relatively sudden and widespread resistance to the nuclear arms race in the West come from? Was opposition to ERW evidence of a shift in thinking about the importance of nuclear weapons in international

¹⁷ See part VI, below.

¹⁸ Production of ERW weapons would always be a decision for the United States. Accounts in Dutch include P.J.J. Maessen, *De kwestie van de neutronenbom Binnenlandse beïnvloeding van het buitenlands beleid* 4 (Leiden: Instituut voor Internationale Studiën, 1984); Remco van Diepen, *Hollanditis: Nederland en het Kernwapendebat, 1977–1987* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2004), chapter 2; Beatrice de Graaf, *Over de Muur: De DDR, de Nederlandse kerken en de vredesbeweging* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2004), chapter 4; Leon van Damme, “‘Hij doorbrak de goede sfeer van camaraderie’: Het aftreden van Minister van Defensie Kruisinga en de gevolgen hiervan voor het latere Nederlandse kernwapenbeleid,” *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 125:3, 400–412. Also, Ruud van Dijk, “‘A mass psychosis’: The Netherlands and NATO's dual-track decision, 1978–1979,” *Cold War History* 12:3, 381–405.

politics, as Francis Gavin has suggested?¹⁹ Thirty years since it ran its course, it is becoming feasible to approach the history of the Euromissile crisis through archives and published document collections.²⁰ This paper draws mostly on declassified American and Dutch materials and published German documents for a new look at the delicate political and diplomatic maneuvering between the Carter administration and its European allies over ERW between June 1977 and April 1978 against the background of widespread public rejection, using the Dutch role as a close-up window on the affair.

II. Outlines: Summer 1977

European responses to US newspaper reports about the neutron weapon came quickly. On 28 June 1977, Hein Roethof, a Dutch social democrat in the lower house of parliament, questioned the government about how neutron weapons would affect the nuclear threshold; whether one actually should choose weapons that sought to limit damage to property more than to people; and if ministers would take a critical, or better, negative position on the weapon.²¹ Roethof's questions contributed to a flurry of internal memorandums at the ministries of defense and foreign affairs. Most of these memorandums took the position that

¹⁹ Francis J. Gavin, "Wrestling with Parity: The Nuclear Revolution Revisited." In Niall Ferguson et al, eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 189–204, especially 198–204.

²⁰ In 2009, the Cold War International History Project and the Machiavelli Center for Cold War Studies organized the conference "The Euromissiles Crisis and the End of the Cold War: 1977–1987" which together with a collection of new research papers has produced a large document reader, available at: <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-euromissiles-crisis-reader> (21 March 2013). See also the conference organized by the German Historical Institute and the Institute for Contemporary History Munich-Berlin, held in March 2009: "Nuclear Armament, Peace Movements, and the Second Cold War: The 1979 NATO Double Track Decision in German-German and International Perspective," http://www.ghi-dc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=785&Itemid=361, and the corresponding publication: Philip Gassert, Tim Geiger, Hermann Wentker (hrsg.), *Zweiter Kalter Krieg und Friedensbewegung: Der NATO-Doppelbeschluss in deutsch-deutscher und internationaler Perspektive* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011). See also the National Security Archive's electronic briefing book on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of NATO's 1979 Dual-Track decision: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb301/index.htm> (21 March 2013). That new documentation is becoming available does not mean researchers already have access to all relevant collections. NATO documents deemed sensitive usually get culled from files made available from Dutch foreign and defense ministry collections, and in the United States, processing, for example, of files from the US embassy in the Netherlands for the late 1970s and early 1980s has not been completed. At the presidential libraries, much material remains classified also.

²¹ *Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*, 1977. 178: Vragen van het lid Roethof (P.v.d.A.) over plannen voor het gebruiken van *neutronenbommen* voor de verdediging van W.- Europa. (Ingezonden 28 juni 1977) http://ressourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/1977/PDF/SGD_1977_0000244.pdf.

ERW—which some likened to the “mini-nukes” debated earlier in the decade—would lower the nuclear threshold, worsen East-West relations and prospects for arms control and non-proliferation, and, in the case of their use in war, promote escalation to a wider nuclear war.²²

The office of Atlantic Security in the foreign ministry took a more balanced position, but still noted that the Americans had provided their allies with insufficient information, and it complained about the clumsy way the matter had been handled by Washington in its early stages.²³ Insufficient knowledge of ERW and the need to respond to Roethof’s questions also led to a meeting between Dutch embassy officials in Washington and Pentagon officials Henry Gaffney and Col. Jack Goldstein in early July. While cooperative, the Americans were quick to point out that the US had discussed ERW as many as four times since the discussion of the Nunn-amendment to the Military Authorization Bill for FY 1975 on TNF in Europe. There had been no notable European reaction. Emblematic of the way officials on both sides of the Atlantic still underestimated the political difficulties that would arise especially in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Gaffney and Goldstein told the Dutch that deployment would just be a bilateral matter between the Americans and the West Germans, on whose territory the weapon would be placed. To counter negative press reports, the Americans closed with a case for the neutron weapon: it would enhance NATO’s TNF and thereby preserve the alliance’s full spectrum of deterrent capabilities; its use would require a presidential decision and thus ERW would not lower the nuclear threshold; in case of a war,

²² See especially DIO/OV (foreign ministry office of disarmament and international peace) draft, of 1 July; a DGIS (foreign ministry office of international cooperation) paper of 11 July, probably submitted from the Netherlands permanent mission in Geneva; and DIO/OV papers of 28 July and 12 August, both of which seem to have been modeled on the 1 July draft; finally also the DAB (defense ministry office for general policy matters) internal discussion paper of 24 August. *ArchBuZa* DPV 1983–1990/731.

²³ DAV memorandum, 8 July; DAV paper, 12 August, *ArchBuZa* DPV 1983–1990/731. The office’s counsel of caution was reflected in Defense Minister Bram Stemerding’s responses in Parliament on 15 July to the Roethof questions: http://ressourcesgd.kb.nl/SGD/1977/PDF/SGD_1977_0000244.pdf

ERW's precision would promote an optimal military effect, minimize collateral damage, and reduce the chance of escalation.²⁴

There were other American officials who were worried about the way the neutron weapon had been framed in the press. W. Tapley Bennett, US ambassador to NATO, wrote to Brzezinski on 21 July that "I hope that patient explanations will overcome the earlier emphasis in the press that we have a neutron bomb that kills people and spares buildings. It was not just the Scandinavians who reacted badly to that." It may already have been too late. On the day Bennett sent his letter, Egon Bahr, the architect of West Germany's *Ostpolitik*, published a soon-to-be famous article in the magazine of his Social Democratic party (SPD), *Vorwärts*, entitled "Ist die Menschheit dabei, verrückt zu werden?" (Is humanity going mad?). Bahr denounced the neutron weapon as "a symbol of the perversion of thought." ERW, part of an ongoing NATO TNF review going back several years, had become public accidentally and it was increasingly being defined in ethical terms—not by NATO or the Americans, but by its opponents everywhere. In short, within a month, Pincus' discovery had led to a controversy that was increasingly difficult to manage for the Western alliance.²⁵

Vance alluded to this in his memorandum to the president a few days later, paying special attention to the FRG where, the secretary warned, ERW already posed serious problems for Chancellor Schmidt. Vance also mentioned that Dutch "Defense Minister Stemmerdink [sic] has criticized [NATO's Supreme Commander] General Haig's support for the enhanced radiation weapons." However, the State Department believed that "the

²⁴ Embassy Washington (Tydeman) to minister of foreign affairs, 11 July 1977. *ArchBuZa* DDI-DAV 1975–1984/03560. For background on the Nunn amendment of 1975, and the senator's general involvement with NATO's nuclear weapons plans, see Philip Taubman, *The Partnership: Five Cold Warriors and Their Quest to Ban the Bomb* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), chapter 17.

²⁵ Bennett to Brzezinski, 21 July 1977, *DDRS* DDRS-279514-i1-2_ CK3100490333. Bahr's article: Achim Maske & Martin Niemöller, hrsg., *Die Neutronenbombe: Analysen und Stellingnahmen* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1977), 9–10. See also Spohr Readman, "Germany and the Politics of the Neutron Bomb," 268–269. Bahrs memoir, *Zu meiner Zeit* (Munich: Blessing, 1996), 496–498.

Europeans, if pressured by us, would accept a presidential decision to develop the weapon, but would breathe easier if you should cancel.”²⁶

By this time, the president himself was developing some doubts. Two weeks earlier, in response to the initial wave of public criticism and Congressional resistance to ERW, Carter had sent a funding request to the Senate which, in turn, made funding conditional on a presidential statement that ERW was in the national interest. The weapons were to be deployed in Europe for the benefit of America’s allies there, so in order to certify that ERW was in the US national interest, Carter needed the endorsement from the countries Vance had just described as reluctant to welcome ERW. In addition, as Brzezinski was to note in his memoirs, the president was uncomfortable being seen as the one to introduce this new nuclear weapon. Carter had made arms reduction and non-proliferation centerpieces of his foreign policy, and, as Brzezinski reports, “he did not wish the world to think of him as an ogre.” On 16 August, the White House announced that the president would consult with the allies in Western Europe before deciding on whether to produce ERW or not. In practice, this meant that the administration would seek a European endorsement of ERW and a willingness to deploy the weapon.²⁷

Writing to Carter two weeks later, Schmidt warned that as controversial as ERW was in the US, “discussions and reactions have been even more passionate and sensitive in my country.” Consultations between American and German experts were very welcome, but the chancellor warned that decision making on ERW would have to involve all members of the NATO alliance: “it is important for the Federal Republic that this matter should not be

²⁶ Vance to Carter, 25 July 1977. In their meeting on 13 July Carter and Schmidt had not touched on ERW, as Schmidt reported to French president Giscard d’Estaing a week later. Memocon Schmidt-Giscard meeting, 19 July 1977, *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* [AAP] 1977 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008), 994–1002, this point, 996–997. Also, *ibid.*, memcon Carter-Schmidt meeting, 13 July, 1977, 950–960.

²⁷ Broer, et al, “The Neutron Bomb and the Premises of Power,” 2. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 302. *The New York Times*, 17 August 1977. For an early use of “ogre” in connection with the neutron weapon: Jack Anderson and Les Whitten, “Neutron Bomb: Not Quite an Ogre?” *Washington Post*, 6 August 1977.

presented as a bilateral German-American problem, but that the alliance should find an answer which will have the common support of all its members.”²⁸

Neither side wanted to take the lead. Carter held back because, as he stated two years after leaving office, “we [didn’t] want to commit ourselves to develop another new weapon unless we [were] sure that somebody [was] going to deploy it.”²⁹ Schmidt had his own doubts about the neutron weapon, but opposing it would have carried political costs, for example *vis-a-vis* his coalition partner, the Free Democrats, (FDP) or his opposition Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU).³⁰

As if to illustrate that while alliance consultations were important, West German views were crucial, a US delegation consisting of state and defense department officials traveled to Bonn on 12 September before meeting with the eleven permanent representatives of NATO’s Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) in Brussels the next day. Vance and Brown reported to Carter that at the Bonn meeting, which the other allies had not been informed about, the tone had been frank, and that it had been useful in setting the tone for the Brussels meeting. The Germans were likely (their final position still being worked out) to support the president “once a decision is made,” provided the Federal Republic would not be singled out as the main supporter and recipient of ERW and the US helped to prevent other allies from evading responsibility. In Brussels, according to the memorandum for the president, the Americans had emphasized that all allies should share responsibility for ERW: “we would not want private differences to result in public divisions. This message was aimed primarily at the

²⁸ Schmidt to Carter, 1 September 1977. *DDRS* DDRS-272408-i1-5_CK3100144041. Schmidt’s letter may have been informed by a joint defense and foreign ministry paper of the same date providing a measured, and on balance positive, analysis of the military, foreign policy, and arms control aspects of ERW. *AAP* 1977, 1144–1153.

²⁹ Oral history interview, 29 November 1982. *Carter Presidency Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia*, http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/ohp_1982_1129_carter.pdf, 33. Neither here, nor in his memoirs does Carter refer to any moral qualms he may have had about ERW, although he does refer to the unpopularity of neutron weapons in Europe and that in his view the time had passed for the US to force new weapons on its allies. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam, 1982), 225–229.

³⁰ Wiegrefe, *Das Zerwürfnis*, 191–195.

Dutch, Danes, and Norwegians, whose public opposition could isolate and embarrass Bonn, in the event you decide to proceed with ER weapons.”

None of the Allies advanced a final decision on ER weapons. Generally, however, key allies spoke positively about the possible contribution of these weapons to NATO military effectiveness and deterrence. Concerns and reservations, in contrast, were posed as questions rather than as objections.³¹

Following a substantial discussion of the military-strategic merits and drawbacks of ERW, the memorandum continued, the NATO allies had expressed a unanimous view on one particular aspect of the problem:

The Allies were both upset about having been confronted unprepared with the US press stories about the “neutron bomb” and somewhat defensive about not having handled the issue more effectively in the public so far. They all agree that the issue must be “de-emotionalized” and dealt with both publicly and privately as no more than whether or not to introduce a particular refinement to a part of the existing theater nuclear force. In this respect, the Allies would prefer if the final presentation of your final decision be low key.³²

Going forward, the alliance faced a tall order: while President Carter wanted the Europeans to share responsibility for a decision to produce and deploy ERW, Chancellor Schmidt only seemed willing to endorse an American decision after it had been taken.³³ In addition, Schmidt and the Americans required that other European allies would join Bonn in supporting ERW, or at a minimum not openly object to the weapon. All allied governments, meanwhile, seemed to understand that, at least for the time being, they had lost control of the public discussion of ERW. While they hoped to regain control, in light of how they wanted

³¹ Vance and Brown to Carter, 23 September 1977. *DDRS* DDRS-294262-i1-4_CK3100567209.

³² *Ibid.* See also “Botschafter Pauls, Brüssel (NATO), an das Auswärtige Amt,” 13 September 1977. *AAP* 1977, 1191–1196. This German report shows that the Dutch representative at the meeting joined his colleagues in asking military-strategic questions of ERW, stated that his government currently lacked sufficient information to make a decision, and warned that the effect of ERW on East-West relations in general should be analyzed prior to an alliance decision.

³³ On 16 September, the US embassy in Bonn did report that according to two top officials in the West German foreign ministry, the chancellor supported ERW deployment on military grounds, but that he was proceeding with extreme caution due to resistance in his own party. 1977BONN15360, Bonn Embassy to Department of State, 16 September 1977, *US National Archives, Access to Archival Databases (NARA-AAD)* <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=4073>.

the president to announce his final decision it appears that what they wanted most was for the issue to go away.³⁴

Finally, from the Brown-Vance memorandum it appears that as early as September 1977, the Americans had placed the Netherlands, together with Denmark and Norway, in the category of countries that were not merely most likely to oppose ERW, but also needed to be forewarned against publicly undermining alliance unity by speaking out against the new weapon.

III. Dutch Politics and the “Neutron Bomb”

The allies had good reason to worry about the Dutch position. Not only were many foreign and defense ministry officials highly skeptical of ERW, by the time the US delegation traveled to NATO, the Dutch Communist Party (CPN) had begun to organize a popular campaign against the weapon, one that was quickly gathering steam and would eventually collect 1.2 million signatures.³⁵ The fact that the communists were taking the lead in this campaign, as apparent extensions of Moscow’s efforts to exploit the brewing NATO crisis, only raised the stakes. On top of that, in the wake of elections for the lower house of parliament the previous May, the Netherlands was in the middle of what would turn out to be a fruitless, five-month-long effort to create a cabinet led by the Social Democrats (Partij van de Arbeid, PvdA). The sitting caretaker government was reluctant to take a firm stand on ERW, and it remained to be seen if a new government would be willing and able to stay within the NATO fold on this issue.

The Netherlands had been governed since 1973 by a coalition government led by Social Democrat Joop den Uyl, which included four smaller parties . The most important of

³⁴ Most allies had agreed, and none had objected, to the notion that “it would be better to put the controversy behind us with a decision, one way or the other, than to let it drag on.” Vance and Brown to Carter, 23 September 1977. See also Vance to Carter, 25 July 1977, when the secretary reported that the allies “would probably prefer in the present heated atmosphere to see any decision postponed.”

³⁵ See for example, Jonathan Kandell, “Neutron Issue Sparks Wide Dutch Protest,” *The New York Times*, 16 April 1978.

these were the Catholics (Katholieke Volkspartij, KVP), whose cabinet ministers included Dries van Agt. Amid growing tensions in the coalition, the Christian Democrats, led by Van Agt, pulled out in March, 1977. The May elections ended in a victory for the PvdA, and just about everyone expected that they would lead a new government. However, during the negotiations with the Christian Democrats over the summer and into the fall, the party overreached, and in early November Den Uyl had to abandon his hopes of another four years in power. Instead, Van Agt quickly reached an agreement with the pro-business Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD), led by Hans Wiegel. Together, the two sides had a slim majority of 77 out of 150 seats in the lower house. The actual stability of the Van Agt-Wiegel cabinet that was inaugurated on 19 December was even more precarious due to the transitional state of the Dutch Christian Democrat Party at the time.³⁶

Traditionally, the great majority of Dutch Christian Democrats were represented by three parties: the KVP, the protestant Anti Revolutionaire Partij (ARP), and the Christelijk Historische Unie (CHU). As Dutch society became more secular and less rigidly organized according to the traditional religious and social-political “pillar” system during the 1960s and early 1970s, all three parties, but especially the KVP, began to lose electoral ground. Talks about a possible merger began as early as 1966, and 1977 was the first time the three ran in national elections on a joint platform connected to a single list of candidates.³⁷ Ideologically the new group (it was to complete the merger into a new political party only in 1980), the Christen Democratisch Appel (CDA) was still divided. Left-leaning members, many of whom originated in the ARP, resented the fact that their new party now governed with the liberals instead of the social democrats. Six of their newly elected members of parliament declared

³⁶ See for example Johan van Merriënboer, Peter Bootsma, and Peter van Griensven, *Van Agt: Tour de Force, Biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2008), chapter 11.

³⁷ James Kennedy, *Nieuw-Babylon in aanbouw* (Amsterdam: Boom, 1995), 184–190; Gerrit Voerman, ed. *De Conjunctuur van de macht: Het Christen Democratisch Appèl, 1980–2010* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2011); Roelof Bouwman, *De val van een bergredenaar: Het politieke leven van Willem Aantjes* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2002), chapter 9.

they would not consider themselves bound to support Van Agt's government. At most they agreed to judge the cabinet on a case-by-case basis. These six members, later joined by about four more, of the new CDA became known as "loyalists." In the next four years, their independent stance constantly threatened to bring down the coalition, especially because the opposition PvdA aimed its parliamentary strategy at these "loyalists" from the rest of the CDA. Political polarization therefore was paramount.³⁸

The trials and tribulations of the CPN were also thrown into this mix. Clobbered at the polls in May (the party lost five of its seven seats in the lower house) and internally divided, it was in need of an issue with which to boost its declining political fortunes and improve its standing with Moscow. There could hardly be a better one than ERW. The Soviet Union had already called the weapon a threat to peace and détente and called upon its allies in the West to oppose it. Furthermore, Dutch public opinion seemed receptive to what in August officially became the communist-led campaign to "Stop the Neutron Bomb." The campaign received active support from Moscow and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and it was quite successful in mobilizing a wide cross-section of the Dutch population against what many considered a particularly heinous weapon.³⁹

The Dutch Domestic Security Service (BVD) was well informed about the communist role in the campaign. On 6 February 1980, its director sent the Minister of Defense a detailed, 32-page report on CPN activities against TNF modernization from the start of the neutron bomb campaign in August 1977 until October 1979. The report gave a description of close coordination between the CPN and the Soviet Union (and other East European countries), of

³⁸ Van Diepen, *Hollanditis*, 88–90.

³⁹ Carel Horstmeier, "Stop de Neutronenbom! The last mass-action of the CPN and the Moscow-Berlin-Amsterdam triangle." In Horstmeier, et al, eds., *Around Peter the Great: Three Centuries of Russian-Dutch Relations* Baltic Studies 4 (Groningen: inos, 1997), 65–77; Carel Horstmeier, "Die Beziehungen der niederländischen kommunistischen Partei (CPN) zur SED," *Jahrbuch für historische Kommunismusforschung* 1998, 157–186; De Graaf, *Over de Muur*, chapter 4; Van Diepen, *Hollanditis*, 90–94; Ger Verrips, *Dwars, duivels en dromend: De Geschiedenis van de CPN, 1938–1991* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1995), chapter 28. For critical review of the studies by Van Diepen and De Graaf, see anti-Neutron bomb campaign organizer and then-CPN member Nico Schouten's "Memoires van onze tijd: Een serieuze geschiedenis van 'Stop de N-bom' moet nog geschreven worden," *Groniek* 2005, No. II, 299–308.

how the party sought the cooperation of non-communists while maintaining control of the campaign, and of CPN efforts to influence the broader anti-nuclear movement and to infiltrate, via the Christians for Socialism (CvS) youth group, the prominent eucumenical Interchurch Peace Council (IKV). The CPN role was no secret, but the BVD appears to have had informants inside the party able to furnish fairly precise information on, for example, meetings between Joop Wolff, campaign leader and member of parliament, and Soviet and East German officials.⁴⁰ The CIA also recognized the communist role in the resistance:

The Netherlands presents a case where Soviet efforts to reinforce strong indigenous anti-war and anti-nuclear sentiments have been most successful. Soviet efforts bore fruit here long before anywhere else with the creation, in 1977, of a Soviet-assisted mass movement to protest against the issue of the day—the neutron “bomb.” The Dutch Communist Party (CPN) and its fronts are generally acknowledged to be one of the two leading forces promoting the peace movement in the Netherlands.

Assessing the scope of the entire Soviet campaign against ERW, the agency calculated that “it would cost the US government over \$100 million to duplicate . . . the anti-neutron ‘bomb’ program.”⁴¹

As the CIA and Dutch intelligence acknowledged, popular opposition to ERW was genuine. In the fall, the Dutch Parliament became more involved, most notably by holding a full day of hearings on ERW on 7 November that featured national and international experts as well as witnesses from the defense and foreign ministries.⁴² The caretaker Den Uyl government mostly limited itself to providing factual information, but in a joint memo by the defense and foreign ministers dated 22 October, it emphasized that ERW needed to be

⁴⁰ P. de Haan to the minister of defense, “De communistische campagne tegen kernwapenvernieuwing.” 6 February 1980. *Dutch National Archives, The Hague (NA)* Ministerie van Defensie 2.13.5375/647. Initially in the new parliament, Wolff was one of the CPN members who had lost his seat. However, in December he took the party’s second seat.

⁴¹ “Soviet Involvement in the West European Peace Movement.” CIA report, nd (but prepared in late 1982 or early 1983). CIA *CREST* database, US National Archives, College Park, MD, CIA-RDP85M00364R001001530019-5. It is not clear what the \$100 million figure is based on, and based on Horstmeier’s estimates on East German spending—a total of about half a million Dutch guilders on the campaign to oppose the neutron weapon, about one fifth of which went to the CPN (exchange rates between the Dollar and the Guilder at the time were about 1:2)—it seems high. “Stop de Neutronenbom!,” 77.

⁴² Report on the hearings, dated 22 December 1977 at:
http://resourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/19771978/PDF/SGD_19771978_0003938.pdf;

considered in the total context of NATO TNF. It also warned that no alliance decision should increase the danger of nuclear war, result in an increase of the alliance's nuclear arsenal, or jeopardize arms control, but Defense Minister Stemerding and his colleague, Foreign Minister Max van der Stoep, argued against unilateral Dutch steps.⁴³

Reducing reliance on nuclear weapons and being a reliable NATO ally had been Dutch government policy since 1971.⁴⁴ In spite of formal insistence on acting in concert with the allies, the Den Uyl government had begun to test the limits of allied solidarity during TNF negotiations. NATO discussions of TNF seemed to hold little promise of reducing the role of nuclear weapons in the foreseeable future. Instead, Defense Minister Stemerding believed that new weapons systems kept being introduced, not because they fit a particular need, but because they had become technologically feasible. At the ministerial NPG meeting on 8–9 June 1977 in Ottawa, he therefore pleaded for a comprehensive review of NATO TNF, something his colleagues eventually endorsed.⁴⁵ Internally, Stemerding was quite open about his determination to use outstanding decisions on Dutch nuclear tasks, such as the nuclearization of the new Lance artillery, as leverage to make the comprehensive review a reality. Otherwise, he stated at a Dutch Defense Council meeting on 12 October 1977, the Netherlands could not have the same kind of influence within the alliance.⁴⁶ The allies did

⁴³ Materials on government cooperation with the 7 November 1977 hearings on ERW: NA 2.13.5375/339. 22 October 1977 defense and foreign minister memorandum on ERRB:

http://ressourcesgd.kb.nl/SGD/19771978/PDF/SGD_19771978_0003936.pdf

⁴⁴ Dutch Atlantic Commission, *Nederland en de Kernwapens: Een Studie over het Nederlands Nucleair Beleid, 1972-1985* (Alphen aan de Rijn: Samsom: 1987), 57.

⁴⁵ A foreign ministry directive to the Dutch Permanent Representative at NATO in October, in anticipation of allied criticism for Dutch delays in deciding on its contributions to NATO's deterrence capabilities for 1978–1982, explicitly referred to Stemerding's plea. Foreign Minister to Permanent Representative NATO, 25 October 1977. *ArchBuZa* DAV/1975–1984/03257. See also an internal defense ministry reconstruction of the origins of Stemerding's proposal and implementation by the alliance, 29 June 1978, *Archive Dutch Defense Ministry* (ArchDef), Kabinet van de Minister, (1966) 1976–1990/73. See also Bram Stemerding, *Dagboeken* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1986), 131–135. Stemerding had a reputation for demanding comprehensive reviews and rationalizations of alliance policies. See Jan Willem Honig, *Defense Policy in the North Atlantic Alliance: The Case of the Netherlands* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), chapter 7. Of course, it was not as if the alliance itself, led by the United States, had not been reviewing its TNF capabilities and needs in the preceding years.

⁴⁶ Defensieraad 12 October 1977 *ArchBuZa* DAV/1975–1984/03310.

not respond well to this tactic.⁴⁷ At NATO's so-called multilateral exam of Dutch contributions to alliance Defense Planning for 1978–1982, several countries felt it necessary to remind the Dutch that nuclear deterrence was a shared risk, and they pleaded for an end to delays on Dutch decisions on its nuclear role.⁴⁸

In its reticence, the Den Uyl cabinet was well within the mainstream of Dutch political thinking on nuclear weapons. On 25 November, the joint Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Foreign Relations discussed the government's memorandum on ERW of 22 October with Stemerding and Van der Stoep. Foreshadowing what was to come once a new government was in place, many speakers—including members from the CDA, the party most likely to hold the balance—clearly indicated their discomfort with ERW.⁴⁹

IV. NATO at an Impasse

The Americans, West Germans, and the rest of the alliance spent the fall and winter hammering out a compromise on ERW introduction. On 27 September, Schmidt discussed the matter with Brzezinski. The chancellor maintained that the decision to produce neutron weapons had to be an American one. Only after it had been taken would the time come for NATO to decide on deployment, and only after that could specific countries be identified. There would be great resistance in the FRG if the country turned out to be designated alone for ERW deployment. Schmidt added that it would probably take two to three years for a majority of his current governing coalition to support deployment, and argued that a decision should not be rushed at this time. Brzezinski, noting that next to the FRG the two most suitable countries for ERW deployment were Belgium and the Netherlands, replied that while

⁴⁷ Although in late November, the Pentagon's Henry Gaffney did urge Dutch officials to come up with their own ideas on a European role in NATO's TNF. Ambassador Tammenons Bakker to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 29 November 1977, *ArchBuZa* DAV/1975/1984/2174.

⁴⁸ Telegram, Dutch Permanent Representative at NATO to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 27 October 1977. *ArchBuZa* DAV/1975–1984/03257.

⁴⁹ Combined defense and foreign affairs committee discussion on 22 October memorandum with defense and foreign ministers, 25 November 1977:
http://ressourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/1977/1978/PDF/SGD_1977/1978_0003937.pdf.

Carter did see ERW as militarily useful, he did not want to be seen as an ogre; given the German position, one would either have to drop the weapon or find a way to introduce it into the MBFR talks.⁵⁰

The National Security Adviser's words notwithstanding, the chances that the Netherlands would eventually deploy neutron weapons were not improving. According to the German report of a NATO NPG meeting that same day, the Dutch permanent representative was the only one present not to acknowledge the military desirability of the neutron weapon.⁵¹ The NPG ministerial meeting in Bari, Italy on 11–12 October agreed merely to continue discussions, in part because a week earlier West Germany's national security council had not finalized a position on ERW.⁵²

Carter administration deliberations initially focused on the West German suggestion to link ERW introduction to arms control negotiations, particularly MBFR. In a paper for a discussion in the Special Coordinating Committee (SCC) of the National Security Council, staff members James Thomson and Victor Utgoff admitted in November that the public relations battle could not be won: "if we decide to go ahead with production and deployment, we will be heavily criticized for opening another round of the arms race in a new and horrible way. No amount of public education will mute this criticism." However, they added that President Carter also faced serious political repercussions if he decided not to proceed, especially with Congress. Thomson and Utgoff concluded that a way out might be, as the Germans were now demanding, a connection of ERW introduction with arms control.⁵³ At the SCC meeting on 16 November, participants agreed that ERW should be produced, that West

⁵⁰ Memcon, Brzezinski-Schmidt meeting, 27 September 1977. *AAP* 1977, 1250–1255.

⁵¹ Ambassador Pauls report to Bonn, 28 September 1977, *AAP* 1977, 1196.

⁵² Final communique in NATO on-line library: <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c771011a.htm> (26 March 2013). A German report on Bari: Ministerialdirektor Blech an Bundesminister Genscher, z.Z. Peking, 14 October 1977, *AAP* 1977, 1385–1387. On the 6 October FRG federal security council meeting, "Bundeskanzler Schmidt and Bundesminister Leber." 6 October 1977, *AAP* 1977, 1329–1332.

⁵³ Thomson and Utgoff to Brzezinski and Deputy National Security Adviser David Aaron, 14 November: paper for 16 November SCC meeting on ER and MBFR. *DDRS* DDRS-292106-i1-13_CK3100554317. Also an earlier SCC working group paper on ERW and MBFR, by Thomson and Reginald Bartholomew of the NSC staff, 22 October, *DDRS* DDRS-290346-i1-13_CK3100543155.

German agreement to deploy would be sought as a precondition for production, and that a possible link of ERW with arms control—either MBFR, the SS-20, or both—should be discussed with the allies. There was also agreement that wider NATO consultations of “gray area” systems were in order.⁵⁴

The idea to link ERW to the SS-20 was promoted by Defense Secretary Brown, but it was Helmut Schmidt who had recently put TNF and its relationship to US-Soviet strategic arms talks and Soviet TNF modernization in the headlines. In a speech to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London on 28 October, the chancellor argued that

Strategic arms limitations confined to the United States and the Soviet Union will inevitably impair the security of the West European members of the Alliance *vis-à-vis* Soviet military superiority in Europe if we do not succeed in removing the disparities of military power in Europe parallel to the SALT negotiations.⁵⁵

Although Schmidt was caught between opposition to ERW within the SPD, Soviet warnings that ERW would harm East-West relations, and his conviction that East-West détente needed to be preserved, he was willing to accept ERW because of his worries about the negative consequences of SALT for the defense of Western Europe at a time when NATO TNF modernization was urgent. But as he had told Brzezinski, the decision to manufacture the weapon was purely an American one, and the introduction of ERW into Europe should be an alliance decision, not a bilateral matter between Washington and Bonn. Furthermore, the Federal Republic could not be the only country where neutron weapons would be deployed. Schmidt and his party also required that ERW first be introduced in the arms control process: before the Federal Republic would accept neutron weapons on its soil, East-West talks

⁵⁴ 16 November 1977 SCC meeting summary. *DDRS NSC_DDRS-290510-i1-2_CK3100543831*.

⁵⁵ “The 1977 Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture,” *Survival* January/February 1978, 2–10, there 4. See also the retrospective account by Christoph Bertram, director of the IISS, *Die Zeit* 13 December 2008.

needed to demonstrate that no price could be extracted from the Soviet bloc for not deploying them.⁵⁶

Exactly how NATO would work out the details on all of this remained to be seen. An exchange of notes between Carter and Schmidt in late November and early December helped lay the groundwork, but Brzezinski warned Carter on 2 December that the situation was very delicate:

If we are not careful we could find ourselves in the midst of one of those outbreaks of Atlantic tension and debate that followed McNamara's strategic ideas in the early 1960s and Kissinger's ambitions in the 1973 Year of Europe . . . Trying to run over the Allies on these issues won't work . . . It could . . . seriously weaken the Alliance at a time when the great strength of the left in Europe is already undermining the European relationship with us and the willingness of the Allies to stand together against the Soviets.

Choosing to see the NATO glass as half-full, Brzezinski added that "[t]he chances are, in fact, quite good that we can work out something reasonable on their gray area and SALT concerns and on enhanced radiation weapons." Given the reluctance on both sides of the Atlantic to take primary responsibility for the introduction of ERW, and also in light of increasing public resistance, it remained to be seen if a new NATO crisis could indeed be averted in the new year.⁵⁷

It would take time. From an alliance Defense Planning Committee (DPC) meeting on 7 December, the Dutch representative could report that while "all allies subscribe to the military qualities of [enhanced radiation weapons]," it was the political side of things where the difficulties lay. Secretary Brown, emphasizing the military merits of ERW, acknowledged that "neither the political pressure in the member countries nor Soviet propaganda" would stop. The same could perhaps be said for NATO discussions over arms control aspects of

⁵⁶ Broer, et al, *The Neutron Bomb and the Premises of Power*, 5; Spohr Readman, "Germany and the Politics of the Neutron Bomb," 274. On Soviet pressure on Schmidt and the chancellor's apprehensions over Soviet policy toward Western Europe see Soell, *Helmut Schmidt*, 712–723.

⁵⁷ NSC Weekly Report #38, 2 December 1977. *DDRS* DDRS-271172-i1-5_CK3100136590. Carter to Schmidt, 23 November 1977. *DDRS* DDRS-266997-i1-2_CK3100110485; Schmidt to Carter, 9 December 1977. *DDRS* DDRS-266998-i1-2 CK3100110487.

ERW. A meeting of NATO's Eurogroup two days earlier had produced a consensus on the need for further study of this, but at the DPC, British Defense Secretary Fred Mulley wondered if the Soviets would be willing to give something up in return for a weapon that had not yet been produced. Britain also believed that neither MBFR nor SALT were appropriate venues to make proposals on ERW (at the Dutch foreign ministry, someone added in the margin on the telegram: "then were?"). As if to confirm that the real negotiations were still to come, West German Defense Minister Georg Leber did not, according to this Dutch summary, mention ERW at all but instead emphasized how development of the SS-20 (and also the Backfire bomber) had given the Soviet Union a vast preponderance over NATO in the intermediate range systems—a category Leber believed deserved its own place, alongside strategic, conventional, and TNF weapons.⁵⁸

In the meantime, US Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs, Leslie Gelb, warned German embassy officials on 21 December that the impasse in alliance discussions could create the impression that all it took for NATO to be kept from important armament decisions was a propaganda campaign from the East.⁵⁹

V. The Dutch Neutron "Bomb" Crisis

Also in December 1977, the Netherlands finally got a new government. Like its predecessor, the center-right Van Agt cabinet was no fan of the neutron weapon. Also like its predecessor, it put great stock into acting in concert with other countries in foreign policy. It certainly wanted the Netherlands to be a dependable member of NATO, one that did its part in the common defense. At the same time, the cabinet was not deaf to growing anti-nuclear sentiments in the country and in some respects it shared these. The goal of a reduction of the role of nuclear weapons was written into the government's program again, and the available

⁵⁸ Dutch delegation at NATO to minister of foreign affairs, 8 December 1977. *MinBuZa* DPV/1983–1990/733. For the German report: "Botschafter Pauls, Brüssel (NATO), an das Auswärtigen Amt," 8 December 1977, *AAP* 1977, 1715–1721.

⁵⁹"Botschafter von Staden, Washington, an das Auswärtigen Amt," 21 December 1977, *AAP* 1977, 1794–1796.

evidence strongly suggests that most members of the cabinet took this seriously. CDA Defense Minister Roelof Kruisinga professed to be so troubled by a possible introduction of the neutron bomb that he publicly broke ranks with his colleagues in February 1978, after which his position became untenable. Citing insurmountable moral qualms, he submitted his resignation on 3 March.⁶⁰

Kruisinga's case was a peculiar one. He fit uneasily in the cabinet. During the formation of the government, he rejected the candidate coalition partner VVD put forward as his deputy, damaging his relationship with that party from the outset. Chairing his first Defense Council meeting, he felt it necessary to deny reports that he was a pacifist.⁶¹ According to an American diplomat who knew him well, Kruisinga may have had "some feeling of inadequacy in the job" and seized upon the ERW issue to get out.⁶² At the same time, his ethical objections to ERW were undoubtedly heartfelt. In any case, the Kruisinga episode fully revealed the broad scope of the opposition to neutron weapons in Dutch politics and society.

The matter came to a head thanks to a resolution put forward in parliament on 15 February by, among others, PvdA delegate and former Defense Minister, Stemerding. The motion asked that the government publicly reject introduction of neutron weapons and report this position to NATO. It was an early example of how the social-Democratic opposition intended to make life difficult for the new government.⁶³ Just four months earlier, as defense minister, Stemerding had taken the same position the Van Agt government now wanted to take—namely that the issue was being discussed within NATO, that the alliance as a whole

⁶⁰ See cabinet meetings 3 March and 4, 1978: NA 2.02.05.02/2398 and 2652. An account sympathetic to Kruisinga is Van Damme, "'Hij doorbrak de goede sfeer van camaraderie'".

⁶¹ Defense Council, 21 December 1977. *MinBuZa DAV/1975–1984/03310*.

⁶² Author interview with Marten van Heuven, 5 June 2014. Van Heuven, of Dutch descent, was Political Counselor at the Hague embassy 1975–1978. See also Van Diepen, *Hollanditis*, 96. According to a former member of the Dutch internal security service (BVD), Kruisinga was also in close contact at this time with the coordinator of the campaign against the neutron bomb, CPN member of parliament Joop Wolff. Frits Hoekstra, *De Dienst. De BVD van binnenuit* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012), 109–111.

⁶³ Meeting of the lower house of parliament, 15 February 1978.

http://ressourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/19771978/PDF/SGD_19771978_0000293.pdf.

should decide on this, and that by acting unilaterally, the Netherlands would isolate itself.⁶⁴ It was going to be difficult to maintain unity in the cabinet. Kruisinga had spoken out publicly against ERW prior to joining the government, something that, he argued in a cabinet meeting in early February, would make it not credible if he were now to change his mind.⁶⁵

Dutch politics and society, even officialdom, seemed to be with Kruisinga. On 9 February, the Protestant Council of Churches warned the cabinet that “since, in their decision making, government and parliament need the support of the population . . . our ‘no’ to the neutron bomb means that even more than before the churches will work to shape the consciences of their members.” People should know, the Council added, that they were not powerless to put a stop to the madness of the arms race.⁶⁶ Religious activism certainly did not hurt the communist-led campaign, “Stop the Neutron Bomb,” now in full swing. Meanwhile, the same skepticism that permeated initial defense and foreign ministry evaluations of ERW the previous summer only seemed to have grown. A telegram from the Dutch Permanent Representative at NATO on an alliance discussion in late January of the most effective way to respond to a recent public letter on ERW by Soviet leader Brezhnev, contains a series of marginal comments highly critical of arguments supporting neutron weapons. The argument that the West should regain the initiative against the Soviet “cold war effort” against ERW, the commenter at the foreign ministry deemed “the world upside down.” According to the same reader, it was “nonsense” to argue that, compared to existing nuclear weapons, ERW “poses much less danger to non-military targets and to civilians.” And to argue that it was “not inhumane” for the alliance to consider neutron weapons as constituting the most

⁶⁴ For example, cabinet meeting 28 October 1977. *NA* 2.02.05.02/2208.

⁶⁵ 3 February 1978. *NA* 2.02.05.02/2397.

⁶⁶ Letter, Raad van Kerken in Nederland to the Council of Ministers, 9 February 1978. *ArchBuZa*, *DAV/1975–1984/462*.

effective defense against the Warsaw Pact tank threat, according this unidentified Dutch official, was “near-perfidious language!”⁶⁷

On 17 February the cabinet devoted an extended discussion to the problem, as it appeared possible that the CDA delegates might support Stemerding’s resolution. A coalition party supporting an opposition resolution designed to cause political trouble would be a bad thing, but Kruisinga still believed the government should state in parliament “its concern about the introduction of the neutron bomb in NATO’s arsenal.” This was further than Foreign Minister Chris van de Klaauw (VVD), but also Van Agt, was willing to go. In Van der Klaauw’s view, the government should merely refer to its earlier statements on the matter, which for their part were a continuation of the line put forward by the Den Uyl government, and repeat that “the government had serious concerns and grave doubts regarding the neutron bomb, and its position would be determined during alliance discussions.” The room for maneuver was very narrow. Justice Minister Job de Ruiter (CDA) summarized: “The population will refuse to accept a weapon like that . . . If the Netherlands would be compelled to participate in the introduction of the neutron bomb, criticism of the alliance will increase.”⁶⁸

At Kruisinga’s request, the cabinet devoted another meeting to the issue, on 23 February, the day that he and Van der Klaauw were to appear in parliament to discuss Stemerding’s resolution. Van der Klaauw underscored the importance of sticking to the present policy, referring to a letter he had received the previous day from US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. In the letter, Vance announced what had become the formal American proposal to the allies: the US was prepared to go forward with the production of the neutron warhead and was willing to forego deployment if the Soviet Union dispensed with deployment of its SS-20 missiles. The US, Vance wrote, sought collective allied support in

⁶⁷ Dutch Permanent Representative at NATO to minister of foreign affairs, 27 January 1978. *ArchBuZa* DPV/1983–1990/733.

⁶⁸ *NA* 2.02.05.02/2397.

this purpose, including a stated willingness to accept the neutron bomb if Moscow failed to respond. Vance professed to understand the difficulties the Dutch government experienced as a result of these plans. However, he added that there would be no amelioration “by further delay or by abandoning a weapon that can strengthen our peoples’ security because the Soviets have elected to exploit the issue.”⁶⁹

If, Van der Klaauw argued, the US wanted to bring the neutron bomb into arms negotiations with the Soviet Union, it was important not to close off any options. Other European allies were moving in the direction of accepting the possibility of deployment. It would be “very risky” if the Netherlands would decide negatively now. He also reminded his colleagues that by bending over backwards to accommodate the CDA delegates, one could alienate coalition partner VVD, which was more hawkish on defense matters.⁷⁰

Accommodating the CDA parliamentarians was exactly what Kruisinga wanted to do, not least because the group’s rejectionist stance on ERW was very close to his own. But there were other ministers who believed the CDA had to be given some sign that the cabinet, too, objected to ERW. Van der Klaauw was only willing to go as far as expressing “great concern,” and this won the day. Deputy prime minister Wiegel, who chaired the meeting (Van Agt being on vacation) concluded that “minister Van der Klaauw articulates the view of the council [of ministers] well.” In response, Kruisinga, who had just promised to align his presentation in parliament with that of the foreign minister, noted that Van der Klaauw’s text “only has the agreement of the majority of the council.” When Wiegel stipulated that what Van der Klaauw was going to say in parliament was the opinion of the council of ministers, Kruisinga said he recognized that.⁷¹

While he may have acknowledged his defeat in the cabinet, Kruisinga turned out to be unable to fall into line. Appearing alongside Van der Klaauw in parliament later that day, he

⁶⁹ Vance to Van der Klaauw, 22 February 1978. Papers of H. Wiegel. NA 2.21.303/366.

⁷⁰ NA 2.02.02.02/2652.

⁷¹ NA 2.02.05.02/2652.

went on to argue against introduction of the new weapon, and he claimed his colleague held the same position, even though the foreign minister had just stated the official cabinet view.⁷² It was the beginning of the end for Kruisinga. The next day, he had to promise his colleagues to remain silent in the second round of the debate, scheduled for 28 February, and also to refrain from commenting to the press. The difference between “objection to” and “serious concerns about” may have eluded Kruisinga, but Finance Minister Frans Andriessen (CDA) apparently had trouble with the distinction too, even after the embarrassing developments in parliament on the 23rd. During the cabinet meeting on the 24th, Andriessen reminded his colleagues that in his view, prior to their appearance in parliament Kruisinga and Van der Klaauw had agreed on things.⁷³

Another take on Kruisinga’s behavior was offered at the cabinet meeting of 3 March, following his letter of resignation.⁷⁴ Cabinet colleague Rinus Peijnenburg (Science, CDA) concluded: “emotionally Minister Kruisinga has not been able to accept what rationally he could not reject.” Other colleagues were less philosophical. Public Works minister Danny Tuijnman (VVD) objected to Kruisinga’s letter of resignation because in it “there is insufficient recognition of the fact that for the other cabinet members this is an extraordinarily difficult question too. The letter gives the impression as if the other cabinet members ultimately would judge this differently.” Housing minister Pieter Beelaerts van Blokland (CDA) agreed: the government needed to take great care in drafting a statement “in order to prevent society from getting the impression that only one member of the cabinet has made a sensible judgment on the neutron bomb.” At another meeting to deal with Kruisinga’s resignation, the following day, cabinet ministers argued along similar lines: on the merits of this weapon, the differences between Kruisinga and his former colleagues were probably

⁷² Debate in parliament on 23 February 1978, http://resourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/19771978/PDF/SGD_19771978_0000297.pdf

⁷³ NA 2.02.05.02/2652.

⁷⁴ Kruisinga’s letter of resignation is in the files of the office of the Prime Minister, NA 2.03.01/8696.

much less than might be concluded from Kruisinga's letter of resignation. Probably—because so far in its meetings, the cabinet had only discussed procedural aspects of the question.⁷⁵

February 1978 was early going for the Van Agt government, and Kruisinga's was a special case. Furthermore, the first order of the day was to fight off the opposition's opportunistic attempt to split the apparently willing CDA parliamentarians from their fellow party members in the cabinet. But it also appears as if most cabinet members knew that, given how they felt about the nuclear arms race, and ERW in particular, a substantial discussion would lead to a policy that would distance the Netherlands from its NATO allies. It could also not be ruled out that once a substantial discussion got underway, the CDA-VVD coalition would fracture. Better perhaps, therefore, to focus on procedural aspects and only think about crossing certain bridges when the NATO process left absolutely no escape routes. This may not have been a model of leadership, but in the circumstances it was not the most foolish course to take either, because the NATO allies appeared to be willing to accommodate such a minimalist stance.

The Kruisinga affair had two outcomes relevant for NATO's ERW discussions. The first was the non-binding resolution by parliament at the end of a debate on the minister's resignation early on 8 March that asked the government to convey the majority's opposition to ERW production to the allies.⁷⁶ The resolution was certainly noted by the allies, and it influenced how various observers at the time evaluated the ultimate outcome (see below, part VI). The effect of the second consequence of the affair, a personal letter by Kruisinga to President Carter explaining his motives for stepping down and urging the president to decide against production of neutron weapons, remains unknown.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ NA 2.02.05.02/2652.

⁷⁶ Debate in parliament on 7–8 March 1978, http://resource.sgd.kb.nl/SGD/19771978/PDF/SGD_19771978_0000301.pdf.

⁷⁷ Kruisinga's letter to "Mr. J. Carter, President of the United States of America," dated 4 March 1978. Prime minister's office files, NA 2.03.01/8696. In his memoirs, the president makes no mention of the letter, and the author has not been able to find a copy at the Carter Library. US diplomat Marten van Heuven, Political

VI. Anti-Climax, Accusations

While the Dutch went through their internal neutron bomb crisis, US-West German discussions about a NATO compromise made significant strides. Given the German insistence on a NATO consensus and, should it come to that, the participation of another alliance member in the deployment, the two processes were connected. A US-West German compromise would have to be supported by the other members—or at least, other members should refrain from open dissent. Also, as German officials emphasized throughout, an agreement between the two governments could never be seen by anyone as such.

Thus, when Bonn relayed the long-awaited position of the *Bundessicherheitsrat* (the FRG's cabinet committee for national security affairs) on ERW of 20 January to Washington, it was for the benefit of top US officials only. Bonn stated that the Americans should now prepare a proposal on all aspects of ERW introduction (a so-called package announcement on production, arms control aspects,⁷⁸ alliance consensus, and deployment) for discussion in NATO's Nuclear Planning Group. The German position contained all elements Schmidt's government had introduced in the preceding months, including a willingness to deploy neutron weapons on German territory should negotiations with the Soviet Union fail and provided deployment would not be limited to German territory.⁷⁹ Allied unity was crucial for the Germans, Foreign Minister Genscher explained to Secretary Vance two weeks later, also to thwart Soviet efforts (“massive pressure”) to drive a wedge between Bonn and

Counselor at the embassy in the Hague and friendly with Kruisinga at the time, has no knowledge of a letter: “if one had been forwarded via the embassy, I would have known about it.” Interview with the author, 5 June 2014. At the cabinet meeting on 4 March, vice-prime minister Wiegel declared that he would withhold permission to the defense ministry to mail letters prepared by Kruisinga to individuals at home and abroad on behalf of the latter as Defense Minister. NA 2.02.05.02/2652. The letter to the president, therefore, may never have actually been sent. Both Carter and Vance mention the 8 March resolution of the Dutch parliament in their memoirs. Respectively, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam, 1982), 226; *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 93.

⁷⁸ Part of the discussion, also with the other NATO members, remained whether ERW could best be introduced as a bargaining chip against the SS-20 or, probably in the context of MBFR, a certain number of Warsaw Pact tanks. Neither forum, most allies agreed, was ideal.

⁷⁹ “Gespräch des Staatssekretärs van Well mit dem stellvertretenden Sicherheitsberater des amerikanischen Präsidenten, Aaron.” 30 January 1978. AAP 1978 I (Munich, Oldenbroug, 2009), 138–143.

Washington. In order to maintain such a united NATO front, the Americans and Germans relied on each other. At this meeting, Vance indicated that Washington was doing its share. The United States, he said, was in contact with other allies, three of which, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, and to an extent also Belgium, took a negative position. (When Vance mentioned Belgium, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, George Vest, interrupted to suggest the country was less negative on ERW than the other countries mentioned).⁸⁰ On 21 February, the West German foreign ministry indicated to the Americans that Norway did not really belong on the list of rejectionist member states either.⁸¹ This seemed to leave the Danes and the Dutch—and Danish policy had always been not to allow nuclear weapons on its territory in peacetime.

On 24 February the NATO council had its first discussion of American ideas for a package announcement on ERW (developed after receiving the formal West German position on ERW and first shared with Bonn a week earlier). The United States stood ready to announce a decision to produce neutron weapons for ultimate deployment in Europe but would be willing to forego deployment if the Soviet Union agreed to forego deployment of the SS-20; the allies would support this American announcement and confirm their readiness to accept ERW in the European theater should negotiations with Moscow fail.⁸² The Dutch representative at the meeting acknowledged the military advantages of neutron weapons, especially their contribution to NATO's deterrent capabilities. However, Dutch objections and reservations, shared by government, parliament, and general public alike, carried more weight.

⁸⁰ Memcon, Genscher-Vance meeting, New York, 12 February 1978. *AAP* 1978 I, 237–240. Immediately following this exchange, the summary notes, the foreign ministers spoke in private before continuing their discussion of other aspects of the ERW matter, suggesting a more detailed discussion of how to keep the Dutch, Danes, and Norwegians in line.

⁸¹“Drahterlaß des Ministerialdirektors Blech.” 21 February 1978, *AAP* 1978 I, 284–286.

⁸² Permanent Representative at NATO to Minister of Foreign Affairs. 24 February 1978. *ArchBuZa* DPV/1983–1990/733. The telegram gives 27 February as the date for the meeting, an error probably due to the speed with which the report was prepared. The contents are very similar to the West German report—see below. Curiously, where the Dutch report identifies Assistant Secretary of State Gelb as the American speaker, the German report speaks of Deputy National Security Adviser Aaron.

These concerns focus [sic] mainly on the implications of this new weapon for arms control and the arms race. The shock effect which the idea of such a new weapon must necessarily have, comes to the fore at a time when efforts to reduce the role of nuclear weapons are rightly considered as very essential in many quarters. These psychological aspects should be given much weight when we consider questions of nuclear armament.

According to the Hague, a way should therefore be found to avoid introduction of ERW.

While warning that an official reaction to the American proposals would take about four weeks, the Dutch representative did welcome the intention first to introduce ERW in arms control talks.⁸³ Underlining the importance of the Dutch position at this time, the German report on the meeting gave the presentation of the Dutch permanent representative a central place. Perhaps more important than the official Dutch position at the meeting, however, was what Foreign Minister Van der Klaauw told his colleague Genscher the same day. In the face of widespread demands in Dutch political circles for a formal “no” to ERW, his government’s position would remain that the use of the weapon in arms control talks with the Soviet Union must remain an option.⁸⁴ Van der Klaauw had managed to prevail with this position in the face of opposition challenges and Kruisinga’s rebellion, but the political battles between 23 February and 8 March in the Netherlands had consequences for how the country could operate within NATO on ERW, and this was not lost on the allies.

In discussions on 4 March, four days before the Dutch parliament voted to oppose the production of neutron weapons, German and American officials continued to deliberate how they might persuade unwilling allies to accept the US proposals on ERW. It would be difficult now for the Belgians to come out in support, the Americans reported, while the Dutch needed more time. In both cases, German help could be very valuable. The German side confirmed that efforts to influence the Hague and Brussels were ongoing, just like the previous month there had been an intercession with Oslo, with positive results. Thus, not only the substance

⁸³ Permanent Representative at NATO to Minister of Foreign Affairs. 24 February 1978. *ArchBuZa* DPV/1983–1990/733.

⁸⁴ “Botschafter Pauls, Brüssel (NATO), an das Auswärtige Amt.” 24 February 1978. *AAP* 1978 I, 321–323. The Van der Klaauw–Genscher conversation is mentioned in note 5.

of what was to become NATO's ERW decision depended on what Bonn and Washington could work out together, maintaining alliance unity remained primarily a German-American affair also. The Americans agreed that bilateral consultations on this point should continue.⁸⁵

German-Dutch consultations did take place a few days later on 7 March, the day the parliament in the Hague opened its debate on ERW in the wake of Kruisinga's resignation. According to German notes on the meeting, Dutch officials doubted if their government could endorse an American decision to produce neutron weapons (the vote in parliament, early the next morning confirmed they were correct) and if the Netherlands could support the decision to deploy ERW in Europe in case arms control talks failed. Given the domestic resistance, according to these Dutch officials, it was out of the question that neutron weapons could eventually be deployed on Dutch territory.⁸⁶ The non-binding resolution passed by parliament early on 8 March confirmed that in spite of the cabinet's formal position, the Netherlands could not be counted on to support the American proposals. The same day, the Dutch permanent representative at NATO informally discussed the consequences for a NATO announcement on ERW with several colleagues. A "summing-up" by the Secretary-General that tried as well as possible to paper over the lack of unanimity seemed the most practical approach. This would still be difficult, the Dutch official noted, because the Netherlands would probably need to see its own position reflected in any "summing-up."⁸⁷ The Dutch, it seemed, could become NATO's own Kruisinga and openly break ranks.

⁸⁵ "Botschafter von Staden, Washington, an das Auswärtige Amt." 6 March 1978. AAP 1978 I, 348–353.

⁸⁶ "Botschafter Pauls, Brüssel (NATO), an das Auswärtige Amt." 24 February 1978. AAP 1978 I, 321–323. The German consultations with the Dutch on 7 March—it is not mentioned where these took place or exactly who participated—are summarized in note 6.

⁸⁷ Dutch Permanent Representative at NATO to Minister of Foreign Affairs. 8 March 1978. *ArchBuZa* DPV/1983–1990/734. See also US permanent representative Bennett's report from the same day, also relaying that, following a series of meetings in the Hague, NATO Secretary General Luns saw "no possibility of favorable Dutch attitude toward our position on ERW." Bennett to Secretary of State, 8 March 1978. *Carter Library* (CL), NSA Files, Brzezinski Material: Cables File, NLC-16-23-6-16-6. Also, Vance memorandum for Carter, 8 March 1978, in which the secretary reported that the Dutch "could not now agree to deployment if the Soviets were not willing to negotiate." *CL Plains File*, NLC-128-13-6-6-3.

Exactly how the compromise that Brzezinski, Vance, and Brown took to President Carter the weekend of 18 March finally was worked out is not entirely clear. However, a public Dutch exception—either to a United States announcement to produce neutron weapons or to the part where the alliance was to declare a general willingness to deploy if negotiations with Moscow did not produce results—does not appear to have been part of it. Rather, like many other NATO members, the Netherlands would be allowed to have no comment on a public announcement by NATO’s secretary-general of alliance support for neutron weapons.⁸⁸ If it ever sought to take exception to parts of the NATO ERW package announcement on production, arms control, and possible deployment, the Dutch government was talked out of it. This is suggested by hand-written notes on a memorandum to his boss by Brzezinski staffer Reginald Bartholomew on 20 March, urging the national security adviser to persuade President Carter not to reverse course: “FRG, and even Dutch + Danes who were questionable (and have now reported in) have all said: ‘we were ready to do it—had our people in line’—afraid will come unstuck.”⁸⁹

Whatever the Dutch and other governments were prepared to do, it was not enough for Carter. Reviewing what the NATO allies were about to endorse, the president balked, arguing that given the West German insistence that at least one other country would agree to deploy neutron weapons if it came to that, there was no clear evidence that neutron weapons, once produced, would actually be deployed. There are indications that the White House viewed the German conditions as a way for Bonn itself to avoid taking a share of the responsibility for the introduction of neutron weapons. Meeting with Genscher on 4 April, the President asked “what is the attitude of other governments where deployment is possible? Who would commit himself to deployment publicly? Would you do it alone?” Genscher could only repeat the official German position. Later in the meeting, Brzezinski added: “your

⁸⁸ Broer et al, “The Neutron Bomb and the Premises of Power,” 9–10.

⁸⁹ Bartholomew to Brzezinski, 20 March 1978, “Your meeting on ERW tonight.” *DDRS* DDS-266433-i1-2_CK3100107239.

insistence on another country joining the deployment decision gives the Russians an opportunity to wage a propaganda campaign for one year and keeps the issue wide open. You are avoiding the problem.” In short, Carter felt that he would be the one left holding the bag on ERW, something he had been determined to avoid since the previous summer.⁹⁰

How much of it was due to Dutch resistance? As one of two NATO countries apart from Germany where neutron weapons could most logically be deployed from a military-strategic perspective (Belgium being the other one), the Netherlands was important. Notwithstanding Genscher’s 4 April claim that the Dutch position was still open, it had become rather clear over the previous weeks that the Dutch would not accept neutron weapons on their territory, even if the Soviet Union refused to negotiate. Evidence included the 8 March vote in parliament, the successful communist-led popular campaign (on 19 March, 50,000 people gathered in Amsterdam to “Stop the Neutron bomb”), the disapproval of ERW by certain cabinet members, and the opposition by their advisers in the defense and foreign ministries. Confirming that deployment in the Netherlands was not in the cards, Brzezinski only mentioned Belgium as a possible second continental ally willing to deploy neutron weapons on its soil in a memo on ERW for the president in early May 1978.⁹¹

But the evidence also shows that the Dutch were far from alone in their reluctance even to go along for the moment. Belgium, although apparently a bit more open to taking a fresh look if arms talks failed, was also not eager to welcome neutron weapons.⁹² Moreover,

⁹⁰ Memcon Carter-Genscher meeting, Washington, 4 April 1978. *DDRS* DDRS-272410-i1-3.pdf;_SW_CK3100144044. The German summary of the meeting shows Genscher arguing that postponing a decision on who might deploy in case arms control talks failed was just that, and not a decision; even the Dutch position was still open, he claimed. This summary also shows that when talking about the targets of Soviet propaganda, Brzezinski particularly mentioned Belgium and the Netherlands. “Deutsch-amerikanisches Regierungsgespräch in Washington.” 4 April 1978. *AAP* 1978 I, 480–483. See also Genscher’s memoirs: Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Siedler, 1995), 404–409.

⁹¹ Brzezinski to Carter, 3 May 1978. *DDRS* DDRS-259311-i1-4_CK3100062724.

⁹² On 20 March, the Dutch representative at NATO reported that internally Belgian officials conceded that if arms talks with the Soviets failed, introduction of neutron weapons would become inevitable. During the same round of consultations, the Norwegian PR told his Dutch colleague that his government, if it had been asked during a parliamentary debate on NATO’s ERW compromise, would have declared at this point not to support

there is no evidence that Carter ever singled out Dutch reluctance as the central reason for his sudden decision to change course. Rather, the president seems to have been moved by a more general sense that ever since ERW had become a controversial, public issue, the political support for its introduction simply never materialized in sufficient measure. The president himself was reluctant too. This was the primary reason he had sought allied endorsement of a production and deployment plan to begin with.⁹³

While preponderant Dutch influence on Carter's sudden change of heart cannot be documented and probably did not exist, many outside observers did believe Dutch resistance played a major role. Reporting on rumors of what at that time still seemed a stalemate between Washington and its allies over ERW on 28 March, *New York Times* diplomatic correspondent Richard Burt quoted administration officials as saying that Carter would probably soon receive the reassurances from the allies he was looking for.

However, other officials say that it may not be possible to obtain promptly the firm commitments Mr. Carter seems to require. Pointing to strong opposition to the neutron bomb voiced by the Dutch Foreign Minister, Christoph Van Der Klaauw, late last week, these officials contend that the NATO plan could now rapidly fall apart.⁹⁴

Three days later, political columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak took President Carter to task for what they called a lack of leadership on ERW, but also singled out the Netherlands as the most wavering of the Europeans: "As the Carter administration continued to procrastinate and seek some easy way out . . . governments in Western Europe (particularly the Dutch) wavered under political pressure."⁹⁵ A *New York Times* editorial on 30 March went out of its way to refute the argument of the Dutch parliament that neutron weapons would

possible deployment. Dutch Representative at NATO to Foreign Minister. 20 March 1978. *ArchBuZa* DPV/1983-1990/734.

⁹³ His own doubts about neutron weapons may have made the president vulnerable to pleas from people close to him personally and politically during the weekend of 18 March 1978, when he rejected the compromise worked out with the allies. In interviews with the author, both Harold Brown and Richard Burt pointed to the opposition of U.N. ambassador Andrew Young as a crucial factor in tipping the balance against ERW at this time.

Respectively, email to the author 5 June 2014, interview 3 June 2014. See also David M. Alpern, et al, "Furor over the Neutron Bomb," *Newsweek* 17 April 1978; and Bartlett C. Jones, *Flawed Triumphs: Andy Young at the United Nations* (Lanham, MA: University Press of America, 1996), 45-46.

⁹⁴ "NATO Agreement on Neutron Bomb Expected Soon." *The New York Times*, 28 March 1978.

⁹⁵ "The Heated Debate over the Neutron Bomb." *The Washington Post*, 31 March 1978.

make (nuclear) war more likely.⁹⁶ Two days earlier the Dutch ambassador in Moscow had reported that Soviet media were reporting widely on the resistance in the Netherlands, where the Soviet campaign against ERW had been the most successful. Current worries in Moscow actually focused on the counter-publicity from NATO quarters and the effect of the formal position of the Van Agt government in the face of the protests. “One seems to worry here that the position of the government will largely neutralize the effect of the public protests on alliance deliberations, and that these [protests] will no longer have any special weight in the decision making.” Comparatively speaking, however, the campaign had been very successful in the Netherlands: “it is a clear disappointment for the USSR that the agitation against the errb-weapon has not had the same spectacular effect in the federal republic and Belgium as in the Netherlands.”⁹⁷

When it became clear in the wake of Genscher’s meeting with Carter that development of the neutron bomb would indeed be put off (the formal announcement by the White House came on 8 April), critics on the left and the right argued that Dutch resistance must have helped move Carter. On 6 April, the military correspondent of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* put it rather bluntly:

The Dutch faction against the “*Neut*” even found a sympathetic ear in Washington. The formulation of a cabinet minister in the Hague, that the Dutch are a people of preachers and merchants and therefore due to their nature against such terrible weapons such as the neutron bomb, must have appealed to a pious man like Carter.⁹⁸

From the opposite side of the political spectrum, Christopher Hitchens viewed the Dutch as already outside of NATO’s consensus and as potential leaders in a wider uprising against business-as-usual in the arms race:

⁹⁶ “The Virtues of the Neutron Bomb,” *The New York Times*, 30 March 1978.

⁹⁷ Embassy, Moscow to Foreign Minister. 28 March 1978. *ArchBuZa* DPV/1983–1990/734.

⁹⁸ Adelbert Weinstein, “Carters atomares München,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 6 April 1978. Reporting on the 13 April German Bundestag debate on the matter, the Dutch embassy in Bonn mentioned a television debate on the same day where Christian Democratic (CSU) Bundestag member Richard Jäger had declared that on the European side the biggest mistake had been made by the Dutch parliament by rejecting ERW. Embassy Bonn to Foreign Minister. 14 April 1978. *ArchBuZa* DPV/1983–1990/734.


And in Holland; docile, civilized, agreeable Holland, a majority of Parliament and people have declared against the neutron warhead and the thinking which lies behind it . . . If the Dutch repudiation of the neutron bomb spreads to other NATO countries and stiffens Congressional opposition in the United States, then it will be the first time that the Strangeloves have lost a round for some time.⁹⁹

Hitchens's commentary points to the way the Cold War was changing in 1977–78: it had indeed become possible for the traditional dynamic of the arms race to be interrupted, albeit just on one side and only temporarily. In the case of ERW, the way opponents introduced the weapon to the public and came to set the terms for the debate made all the difference.

Supporters of neutron weapons never came close to regaining the initiative. Part of the reason was that they were outnumbered, certainly among the public at large, but in the case of the Netherlands also among elected officials and, perhaps, national security professionals. But the Dutch were only the weakest in a NATO chain full of weak links on ERW. The way in which the Soviet Union and its allies in the East and West organized their campaign against introduction of the weapon was also responsible. However, the extent to which large numbers of people in the West had become receptive to the rhetoric of an array of opponents to the nuclear arms race was much more important. The articles by Walter Pincus and Egon Bahr fell into very fertile soil, as did subsequent initiatives such as the Dutch “Stop the Neutron Bomb.” This had relatively little to do with communist propaganda and much more with general perceptions of the state of the Cold War and, in particular, the nuclear arms race.

Exactly what were these perceptions; where did this receptiveness come from? In 1977–78, to stay with Hitchens's terminology, the “Strangeloves” indeed lost a battle, but what was to become known as the Euromissile crisis was only beginning. A better understanding of the sudden emergence of resistance to business-as-usual in the nuclear arms race in 1977–78 should also add to a clearer understanding of that ten-year contest.

⁹⁹ “The Neutron Bomb and the Conscience of the Dutch,” *New Statesman*, 7 April 1978.



NPIHP is a global network of individuals and institutions engaged in the study of international nuclear history through archival documents, oral history interviews and other empirical sources. Recognizing that today's toughest nuclear challenges have deep roots in the past, NPIHP seeks to transcend the East vs. West paradigm to assemble an integrated international history of nuclear proliferation. NPIHP's research aims to fill in the blank and blurry pages of nuclear history in order to contribute to robust scholarship and effective policy decisions.

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