

October 31, 1979

Letter from Jimmy Carter to Andreas A.M. Van Agt

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Summary:

U.S. President Jimmy Carter writes to Prime Minister Van Agt about the Dutch proposal to cut NATO's TNF modernization proposal.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

SECRET

October 31, 1979

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

As you know, the Alliance is entering the final phase of its deliberations on Theater Nuclear Force modernization and arms control. I think we can all be proud of the quality and intensity of Alliance consultations on this subject. In my judgment, the crucial December decisions will mark a watershed in NATO's resolve. They will also test the determination in each of our countries to maintain a credible ladder of deterrence and simultaneously to show our publics that we will take the initiative to negotiate a significant reduction in the level of these weapons.

With this in mind, I want to express my deep concern about the Dutch proposal to cut NATO's modernization program by half. I am concerned that this proposal could jeopardize all our efforts and unravel the consensus each member of the Alliance has tried so hard to build. In light of the fact that the 572 figure is deemed necessary by NATO's defense experts, a decision to deploy less would seem weak. It would send precisely the wrong signals to the Soviet Union, undermining their incentive to bargain with us seriously, and would create serious political problems in some countries of the Alliance. For all these reasons, I hope you will decide not to introduce your proposal into the Alliance in the upcoming consultations.

At the same time, I want you to know that I fully understand and share your desire to give the Dutch public vivid evidence of reduced NATO reliance on nuclear weapons and of the Alliance's dedication to the objectives of arms control. That is why I am attracted to the idea that as an integral part

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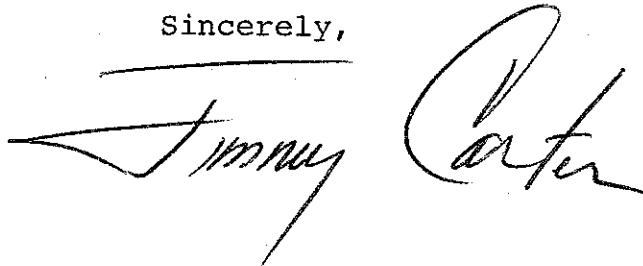
- 2 -

SECRET

of the NATO decision to deploy 572 Long-Range Theater Nuclear Force warheads in Europe, we could reduce our nuclear stockpile by 1,000 weapons. Such a step would be a concrete demonstration that through TNF modernization, we are not engaging in a nuclear buildup. It would demonstrate our commitment to arms control, provide an opportunity to give MBFR a push forward with a streamlined NATO proposal, and respond to Brezhnev's unilateral steps. This concept has been favorably received by each of the four other countries which will provide basing for our modernized TNF, and I ask that your government also give the most serious consideration to this possibility.

Mr. Prime Minister, we are approaching a crossroads. By working together, I believe we can overcome our problems and move to a decision in December that will provide for needed improvements in Alliance defenses and build a strong foundation for Alliance arms control efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jimmy Carter". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".

His Excellency
Andreas A. M. Van Agt
Prime Minister of the Netherlands
The Hague

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