

# Dutch involvement in nuclear armament

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The authors review the postwar development of Dutch strategy, especially with regard to the question of storing nuclear weapons on Dutch soil, and trace events to the election of May 26 1981.

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Until the German invasion in 1940 the Dutch government tried to uphold a position of strict neutrality in international affairs. After World War II, however, it was soon realized that a return to this prewar neutral policy was not feasible in the light of the critical economic situation of the country as well as the new political situation in the world. To assure the national independence of the Netherlands three other options occurred in the course of the postwar forties. First, there was still the idea of creating a world wide peace-power ideally under the aegis of the UN. Second, there

existed a number of different plans for creating a European defence system. And lastly, there was the possibility of participating in the realization of a broader transatlantic defence system.

The first option was accepted in principle in 1945 by the government's decision to join the UN. But its realization turned out to be unpractical, at least in the short run, as the tension between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union increased through developments in Eastern Europe. In the meantime the Dutch government accepted the second option in signing in 1948 the Brussels Treaty "for collaboration in economic, social and cultural matters and for collective self-defence"<sup>1</sup> by which the Western European Union (WEU) was created. Whereas this organization was in the first place meant as an international safeguard in case of "a renewal by Germany of a policy of aggression"<sup>2</sup> the third option, that of joining a much broader transatlantic defence system, became actual in the eyes of the Dutch government as soon as an acute crisis in East-West relations was reached in the form of the Berlin Blockade in June 1948. It was already clear to the Netherlands that both its

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most powerful WEU allies, the UK and France, could not realize fully the role, desired by themselves, of superpowers in the world arena. The Dutch government, therefore, did not hesitate in becoming a Founding Member of NATO, which was created in 1949. As a result the Netherlands has enjoyed ever since the nuclear-armament protection offered by the US and, to a less extent, by the UK and France, as they have developed their own nuclear weapons in the postwar period.

### **Nuclear reserve powers**

Both the Brussels Treaty and the North Atlantic Treaty are formulated in a way that is in conformity with Article 51 of the Charter of the UN, affirming the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence. In a sense both treaties may be seen as provisions for situations in which the Security Council fails to react effectively in case of armed attacks because of disagreement between its permanent members. However, these provisions for collective self-defence are formulated more clearly in the Brussels Treaty than in the North Atlantic one. For whereas the former prescribes the WEU-Member Countries to "afford the Party so attacked all the military and other aid and assistance in their power"<sup>3</sup> the latter one provides that the NATO-Member states:

will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.<sup>4</sup>

This formulation, which has obviously been chosen for reasons of making the terms of the treaty conform with the US Congress' exclusive right to decide on a declaration of war<sup>5</sup>, has given occasion to some different interpretations of the rights and duties of the Member States. In the case of the Netherlands, however, these provisions for collective self-defence have — at least until recently — been interpreted by successive Dutch governments in a way which is most

loyal to the US, being the dominant partner of NATO. Moreover, in January 1950 a bilateral treaty was concluded between both countries concerning mutual aid in military defence. According to some people this treaty created the theoretical possibility of storing nuclear weapons on Dutch territory<sup>6</sup>. In November of the same year the Dutch Parliament accepted this act to enable the encampment of US troops on its territory.

### **From Shield to Tripwire**

In 1955 the NATO-Member States concluded a treaty on the co-ordination of nuclear information for mutual defence. In this way the Allies obtained the right of getting limited information and training in the matter of nuclear weapons. This treaty was approved by the Dutch Parliament without any discussion. The next year, the Netherlands asked the US at the meeting of the NATO Council to take necessary measures to permit the storing of nuclear weapons on the territory of its Allies. In this connection it was taken for granted that the control of these weapons should be left completely in the hands of the US. Indeed, President Eisenhower offered in 1957 a storage regulation in this respect.

The Netherlands went even as far as offering the installation of the launching bases for the medium-range ballistic missiles. The West Germans, however, did not join this proposal. As a result the Dutch Minister of Defence declared later on that such would only be necessary in case of military urgency. In the meantime the Dutch army was reorganized in accordance with the priority given to the creation of the so-called NATO shield, which consists of the Allied ground forces on the European continent. This fact too might be seen as an indication of the Dutch government's preparedness to store nuclear missiles on its territory.

### **Snared by the wire**

In May 1959 another bilateral treaty

between the US and the Netherlands was concluded. It concerns specifically co-operation in the use of nuclear energy for mutual defence. This implies the disposal of information about the vehicles, but nothing is mentioned about the disposal of nuclear warheads. This occasioned some speculation about the existence of a secret treaty and secret co-operation programs between the two countries<sup>7</sup>. Finally, in the course of the 1960s a number of technical programs were carried out concerning the installations of different vehicles for nuclear weapons, including both artillery and bombers.

In 1960 the Dutch government published a Defence Report stating that the so-called NATO shield had gained importance because of the recent attainment of a nuclear Balance of Terror between the US and the SU. For in the new situation of Mutual Assured Destruction this shield was just a tripwire, as it was designed to be within the previous US-policy of Massive Retaliation. It might now function as an effective means to catch an attack in its first stage. And in this connection the armed forces in Europe have been provided with Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs) ever since.

The Report, however, stressed that the policy of nuclear deterrence remains a US affair. On the other hand, it underlined the importance gained by the modern conventional armies in this new situation. For, as it argued, the more these conventional forces are strengthened by the opposing parties, the more possible it becomes for them to postpone the use of nuclear weapons. This argument was used again in 1964 in the Governmental Report on Disarmament, Security and Peace. In short, in the first two postwar decades nuclear armament was never rejected by the Dutch government, and not even made a subject for discussion within Parliament.

### **Widened debate**

The shift from the policy of Mass Retalia-

tion to that of Flexible Response, which the same level, i.e. using conventional weapons as well; (2) escalation to the level of TNWs; and (3) immediate use of TNWs. These alternatives are *not* to be seen in a successive order. For, as is argued by the Dutch government, the uncertainty which of these three alternatives will be chosen first is an essential part of the new strategy. It was precisely the exclusion of the option of a direct nuclear reaction on a limited conventional attack, which was intended by the left-wing Liberal in his interpellation. took place in the 1960s, has stimulated a growing number of people inside and outside Parliament to join the Communist and Pacifist groupings in discussing Dutch involvement in nuclear armament. Outside Parliament the latter two groupings have already been active since the 1950s in collecting signatures and in organizing mass demonstration (such as traditional Easter marches borrowed from the English pacifists) in favour of nuclear disarmament.

Moreover, since the elections in 1959 the tiny Communist Party stood no more alone in Parliament in these matters, but gained support from the almost equally small Pacifist-Socialist Party (resulting from an extra-parliamentary 'Third-Road' movement) which entered Parliament in that year. Their attempts to start a parliamentary discussion on nuclear disarmament, however, failed to yield any result because no other party was interested in it. Still in 1962, when the Dutch Reformed Church published a report condemning nuclear weapons as illegitimate for defence purposes, the great majority of Christian-Democrat MPs neglected to promote at least a 'No First Use'-declaration, which is a minimum conclusion to be drawn from this report.

Only in 1970, three years after the official acceptance of the Flexible Response Strategy by the NATO Council, the first parliamentary discussion on Dutch involvement in nuclear armament was started. This happened in the form of an interpellation

applied for by a representative of a small left-wing Liberal Party<sup>8</sup> concerning the different interpretations of the NATO policy of Flexible Response. For this party concluded that this new strategy implied a dangerous lowering of the nuclear threshold. Of course, the Communists and Pacifists jumped eagerly into this discussion. Anyhow, this debate elucidated the government's viewpoint which gained support of the majority of Parliament: Flexible Response implies three options in principal in the case of a conventional attack: (1) a reaction on the same level, i.e. using conventional weapons as well; (2) escalation to the level of TNWs; and (3) immediate use of TNWs. These alternatives are *not* to be seen in a successive order. For, as is argued by the Dutch government, the uncertainty which of these three alternatives will be chosen first is an essential part of the new strategy. It was precisely the exclusion of the option of a direct nuclear reaction on a limited conventional attack, which was intended by the left-wing Liberal in his interpellation.

### Deep ambiguity

In the course of the 1970s a growing resistance against the Flexible Response Policy can be observed among the European NATO partners. In this development the role of the Netherlands has become more and more ambiguous. For on the one hand the Dutch government tried to uphold a maximum of Atlantic Solidarity, which in practice means a positive attitude towards almost any policy preferred by the US. On the other hand a too uncritical attitude would lead to serious conflicts with the majority in Parliament, which has gradually come to consider the Flexible Response strategy a dangerous lowering of the nuclear threshold.

Moreover, the Schlesinger doctrine, launched in 1974 to improve the credibility of nuclear deterrence in the framework of this Flexible Response policy, has caused just the opposite to what it was aimed for. For, instead of stimulating the European NATO partners in

supporting this policy, it heightened their suspicion about US preparedness to risk a total war (which means to risk the very existence of the US) in case of an attack against Western Europe. In this connection the Schlesinger doctrine of introducing mininukes, i.e. the smallest possible versions of TNWs (all TNWs have an explosive power between 10 and 0.1 KT TNT), was recognized by many politicians as a strategy similar to the previous 'Vietnamization' of the Vietnam War, which showed the US government's wish to reduce the risking of US lives in defending non-US territories.

Apart from these tactical considerations the moral objections against the actual use of TNWs on the battlefield have grown considerably, especially since 1977, when it became known among the public that the US was considering the production of the so-called Neutron Bomb, an anti-tank weapon with an explosive power of about one KT TNT, of which the killing capacity of its radiation is considered more important than its explosive power. By its potential to leave strategic objects unimpaired while killing people the N-Bomb has become in the eyes of many people pre-eminently a symbol of the dehumanized nature of a defence by means of nuclear weapons. A series of massive protests against this N-Bomb marked a new escalation in the extra-parliamentary actions against nuclear armament in general and against Dutch involvement in it in particular<sup>9</sup>.

### Latest options

During the second half of the 1970s the modernization of the TNWs in Europe became a question. As a result a continuous discussion on nuclear armament inside and outside Parliament has been going on ever since. In this discussion four different but related groupings can be recognized. First, there are those people supporting unconditionally the Dutch government. Based on a little majority of Christian Democrats and right-wing Liberals the Dutch Cabinet con-

sidered for the time being nuclear armament indispensable for its national defence. On the other hand, it propagated the intention to reduce the role of TNWs in three ways:

1. by enlarging conventional armament;
2. by replacing, wherever possible, nuclear weapons by conventional weapons;
3. by advocating among its NATO Partners the inclusion of TNWs in disarmament negotiations.

Second, there are fundamental Pacifists, who reject in principal all kinds of armament. This group has got hardly any support in Parliament, but is most active in organizing all kinds of actions, many being of an extra-parliamentary nature.

Third, there is a growing group of so-called nuclear pacifists, who somehow are prepared to accept conventional weapons as indispensable for national defence, but reject, tactically and/or morally, any Dutch involvement in nuclear armament. Apart from the MPs of the little left parties (Communists, Pacifist-Socialists and Radicals) who are either fundamental pacifists or nuclear pacifists, the two largest parties in Parliament, the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats, include some twelve and two nuclear pacifists respectively<sup>1</sup>.

Lastly, there exists a rather multifarious category of so-called gradualists. These people have been supporting partly or totally the following nine points<sup>1</sup>:

1. a refraining from any 'modernization' of the present nuclear equipment, to avoid a lowering of the nuclear threshold in war-situations;
2. a rejection of the Dual Capability (i.e. the combination of conventional and nuclear use) of TNWs;
3. a drastic reduction of the number of US nuclear weapons in Europe to about 500 or 1000;
4. a strengthening of the actual control by the Supreme Allied Commander in

- Europe (SACEUR) of the TNWs by relieving the commanders of future front-lines of their competence in taking care of TNWs and withdrawal of these weapons to the NATO hinterland;
5. the abolition of the strategy of Quick Reaction Alert (the placing of weapons in continuous take-off positions);
6. withdrawal of all advanced artillery;
7. withdrawal of all advanced aeroplanes and surface-to-surface missiles to the NATO hinterland;
8. a promoting of a mutual no-first use declaration;
9. a promoting of denuclearized zones in Central Europe and the Baltic Area.

Of course, these points have been welcomed by the different pacifists as merely encouraging steps in the direction of the ideal situation desired by themselves.

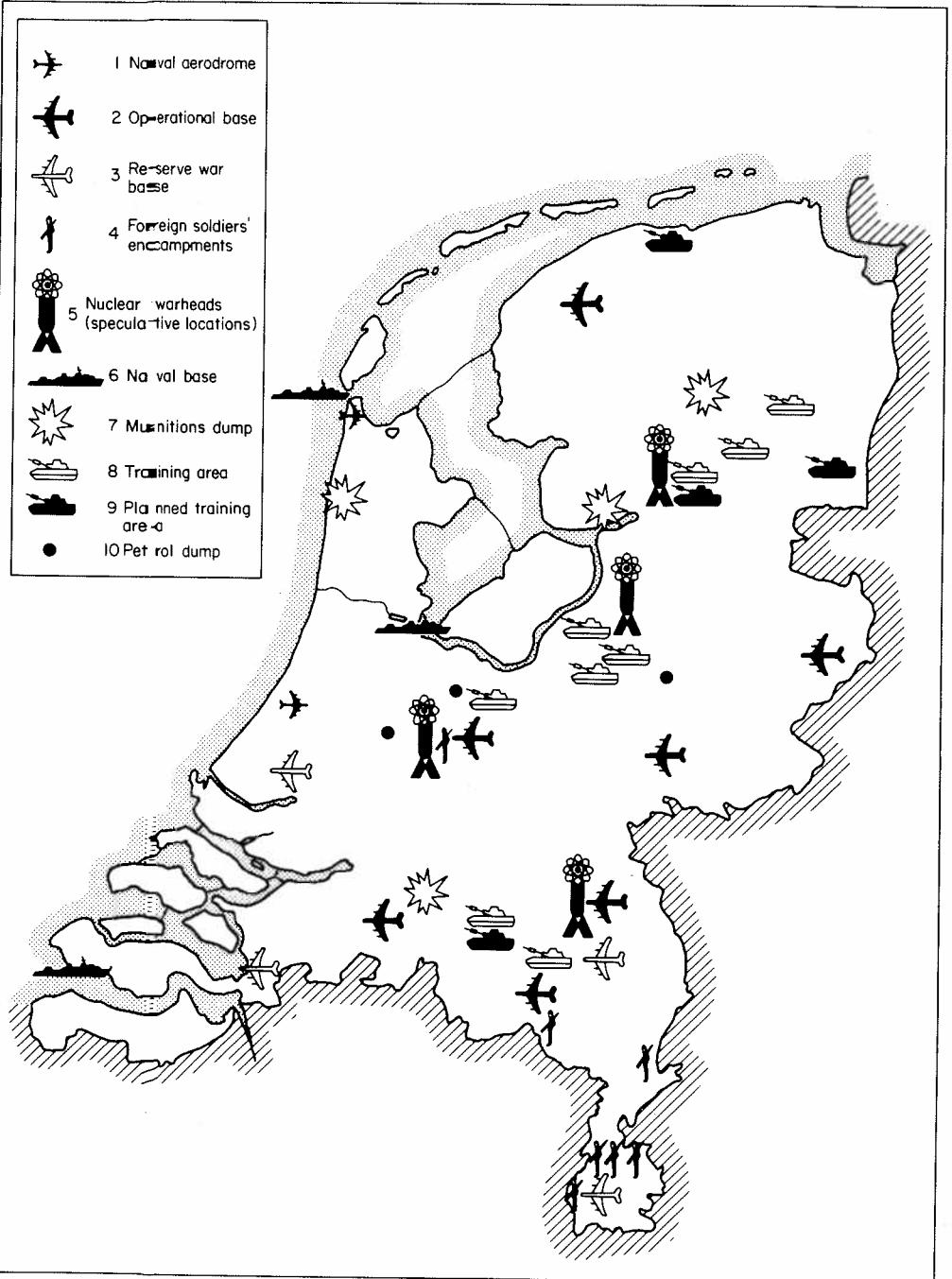
In the course of the last two years the former Cabinet<sup>1,2</sup> had to face a growing mutual approach between the Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and left-wing Liberals in matters of nuclear armament. As a result there have been several differences of opinion in these matters between the Cabinet and the majority of Parliament. This culminated in December 1979 in the acceptance by Parliament of the so-called Stemer-dink-motion, in which it is stated that the Netherlands ought not to agree with any NATO decision to modernize nuclear weapons including any installation of new nuclear missiles on Dutch territory. The Dutch government, on the other hand, agreed at the North Atlantic Council with the arguments for modernization. However, to avoid a conflict between Cabinet and Parliament, the Prime Minister declared on 12 December 1979 that only at the end of 1981 will the Netherlands decide, in close consultation with its allies, on the installation of these missiles in Dutch territory. This decision will be dependent, as he argued, on the fact whether the future disarmament talks yield concrete results.

## Conclusion

In the last three decades the official Dutch position concerning nuclear armament as an integral part of its defence policy has shifted from a policy in optimal correspondence with the US position in NATO to a more ambivalent one. This is caused by a mutual approach in the stands on nuclear defence of Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and left-wing Liberals, together forming a majority in Parliament; as a result the former policy, still preferred by the Cabinet based on a coalition of Christian Democrats and right-wing Liberals, has been undermined. Whether this ambivalent policy into which the Dutch government has been manoeuvred, be transformed into an official policy backing most — if not all — of the nine points supported by the gradualists, depends on the outcome of the ongoing negotiations in forming a new Cabinet in accordance with the results of the election in May 1981. The predicament in which the last Cabinet has found itself these last years, is sometimes called by the Americans 'the Dutch disease'. However, the consideration worrying these Americans that this 'disease' might infect other NATO partners, bypasses the fact that it was in fact, the German government which decided not to introduce any TNW on its territory if it remains the only one among those on the European Continent to do so. By this decision the Germans have made themselves, in a way, affect the outcome of the Cabinet-formation negotiations of their neighbours in 1981.

## References

1. Preamble *Brussels Treaty*, March 17, 1948
2. Ibid. (This provision was subsequently deleted by the *Paris Protocol* of September 1954)
3. Ibid. Art 4
4. *North Atlantic Treaty*, April 4, 1949, Art 5
5. A H Robertson, *European Institutions. Co-operation: Integration: Unification*, London/New York (1959) 1973, 93
6. G ten Berge & A J C Vierling (eds), *Documentation-file Nuclear Armament Conference*, Free University Amsterdam, April 1979 (in Dutch), 10
7. Speculations resulted from *a-contrario* reasoning by H de Lange in *IKV-geschrift* 3 and in publications in *Hervormd Nederland*. These matters are now studied by a polemological working-group under guidance of L Wecke at the University of Nijmegen.
8. Interpellatie Imkamp (D'66), 14 April 1970
9. Cf. E Boeker, Netherlands against nuclear arms — towards unanimity? (in Dutch), in: F Barnaby, *Vredesverwachtingen* [Peace-expectations], Amsterdam 1980, 85-92
10. In Ten Berge & Vierling 1979, 15, their names are mentioned
11. Cf. *ibid.*, 17
12. By the election of May 26, 1981, the coalition of Christian Democrats (CDA) and right-wing Liberals (VVD) lost together 3 mandates, therefore losing its tiny majority gained at the elections of 1977.



Military infrastructure of the Netherlands (source: Ten Berge & Vierling 1979, 63)

# The extreme of ludicrösis: some theological options

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The author sets nuclear proliferation in the context of the theological and ethical response to human reality, especially the oppositional, absorptionist and parallel forms of Christian ethics.

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There is a report — the truth of which will perhaps only emerge when the biography appears — that Dr Geoffrey Fisher, then Archbishop of Canterbury, was interviewed on the subject of 'the bomb' by an American pressman. The interviewer asked for his reaction to the news that the H-bomb could now be manufactured. Fisher's reply appeared so unruffled that the reporter pressed him: did he not think it disastrous that now "the whole of humanity" could be demolished? The Archbishop's reply has become famous (or notorious, according to taste): "But we've all got to die some time, and it shouldn't be all that dreadful if they all died at the same moment."<sup>1</sup>

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It is sometimes refreshing to have an extreme position stated without ambiguity. Dr Fisher's eschatological ethics remind me (in form, though not in content) of the views expressed by the late Flannery O'Connor, the Roman Catholic novelist from Georgia. She once wrote in a letter:-

The Church's stand on birth control is the most absolutely spiritual of all her stands and with all of us being materialists at heart, there is little wonder that it causes unease. I wish that various fathers [sc., Roman Catholic priests] would quit trying to defend it by saying that the world can support 40 billion. I will rejoice in the day when they say: "This is right, whether we all rot on top of each other, or not, dear children, as we certainly may. Either practise restraint or be prepared for crowding."<sup>2</sup>

Yet this ruthless clarity should be seen as merely presenting in a sharp light one of a number of possible ethical attitudes; and these attitudes are the expression, as applied to a particular empirical problem, of a corresponding number of basic theological assumptions. It is common practice to take one of these attitudes (without, usually, examining the assumptions behind them) and label it 'the Christian view'. Let us take