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Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions

Attached is the text of the fourth Western Press Briefing on the MBFR negotiations, given in Vienna on 12th December, 1974.

PRESS BRIEFING BY H.E. BARON W.J. DE VOS VAN STEENWIJK
ON BEHALF OF THE WESTERN PARTICIPANTS IN THE
MBER NEGOTIATIONS, VIENNA, 12TH DECEMBER, 1974

This past round of the Vienna negotiations has been an active one, with several proposals made by both sides. We can't report real progress yet, but manifest effort has been put into the enterprise by both sides.

From the outset of these negotiations, the Western objective has been to reach agreement on militarily significant reductions which would lead to approximate parity in ground forces in Central Europe. During this round and the last, the West has made a number of important proposals designed to contribute to making progress toward this objective. On the other hand, Eastern suggestions made in this round have been limited to measures which would not in themselves involve militarily significant reductions and which would not contribute to correcting the present unequal relationship of forces in Central Europe.

On the Allied side, we concentrated during this round on three major issues: the question of phasing, or who should reduce their forces first, the question of what forces should be covered under an agreement, and the question of achieving greater clarity on the actual facts of the situation that we are negotiating about. We made important proposals on all three points.

I cannot go into details, but as regards the first subject, who should reduce first, in order to take into account Eastern concerns, the West introduced a number of proposals which we think cumulatively result in a comprehensive and workable approach to the problem.

As you know, we consider that in a first phase agreement, agreement should be reached that the goal of the reduction process should be approximate parity in ground forces and that there should be a substantial US-Soviet reduction leading in that direction before the other direct participants

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reduce their forces in a second phase. In other words, the Allies want to be sure that the reduction process is going to deal effectively with the ground force disparities in the area, where the East has about 150,000 more men and 9,500 more tanks than we do.

In our view, it is highly justifiable that the superpowers, the US and the USSR, should lead the way in reductions. But we have offered to make a number of important commitments about the inclusion of the remaining direct participants in further reductions.

To this end, we have proposed a series of specific and concrete commitments to assure the East first, that, if there is a satisfactory first phase reduction agreement, second phase reduction negotiations will take place within a fixed, reasonable period of time thereafter, and second, that all the remaining non-US Western direct participants, with the exception of Luxembourg, will participate in reductions to an agreed common ceiling in the second phase. We have also indicated to the East the overall scope of reductions to be taken in both phases. These proposals should satisfy the East that a second phase would follow the conclusion of a first phase agreement, and that reductions by all the remaining Western direct participants would take place in it.

The Warsaw Pact participants have not yet accepted our approach. They have stuck to their original concept that there should be no reductions whatever until after all direct participants have made specific commitments on both the number and timing of reductions. As far as NATO is concerned, the US as a superpower is willing to reduce first, and all the Allies want to see substantial prior US-Soviet reductions and Eastern agreement that a common ceiling in ground force manpower will be the goal of the negotiations before the remaining Western direct participants take the new and far-reaching step of concluding an agreement with the Warsaw Pact to reduce their forces in a second phase. The East claims it has taken some account of these requirements. But the limited proposals

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which it has made do not change the essential Eastern position that there should be no reductions whatever until after all direct participants have made specific commitments on both the number and timing of reductions.

We also made proposals relating to other aspects of our two phase approach. Previously, we proposed a mutual commitment, not to increase the overall level of ground force manpower on each side between the two phases in order to complement a satisfactory first phase agreement providing for substantial US and Soviet withdrawals.

During this round, we have made proposals whose effect would be to extend coverage in connexion with possible agreements to all ground and air force personnel in the area. We remain unwilling to reduce our air force personnel for valid military reasons having to do with the mobility of aircraft and the proximity of the Soviet Union to the reduction area. Moreover, the totals of air force manpower on both sides are nearly equal, with a slight superiority on the side of the Warsaw Pact. The disparity which needs to be corrected is in ground forces. But in order to facilitate agreement and to meet concerns raised by the East, we have offered a mutual commitment not to increase the overall level of air force manpower in the area of reduction in connexion with a first phase agreement. This important step should enable the participants to concentrate on what we consider the main requirement of these negotiations - dealing with the ground force disparity - without concerns that other forces in the area would be increased. So we now have a complete framework for serious work on reductions leading to a more stable military relationship in Central Europe, which is the main task of these negotiations.

With the same aim of getting down to the main business of the negotiations, and of knowing what the problem is in objective, quantifiable terms, we have been very forthcoming to the East with regard to data. We took the initiative to put forward figures at the outset for ground force manpower and

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tanks. These clearly demonstrate the large disparity to which I have just referred. We have done this because, in a complicated undertaking like this, you have to have agreement on the facts.

In general, though the Eastern representatives have also been active in developing ideas during this round, they all go in the direction of establishing limitations over the forces on NATO countries based on the present unequal force relationship and without achieving militarily significant reductions.

To sum up where matters stand at present, there is no real progress to report as yet. But the activity by both sides which I have described justifies the hope that we are moving into a stage of increased movement in the negotiations. We remain optimistic that we can make progress.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. (Goshko, Washington Post)

Mr Ambassador, even though you are appearing here as a spokesman for all the NATO countries, I would like to ask you a question in your capacity as Head of the Netherlands Delegation. There had been some reports about proposals made by Mr Vredeling in the NATO Defence Planning Committee in Brussels earlier this week. Could you give us some clarification on what this means in terms of the MBFR negotiations here. This leads to some apparent inclusion of the nuclear forces in the MBFR talks.

A. I will be happy to make some comments concerning that. The present Netherlands Government made clear already when it came into office 20 months ago in the programme it submitted to Parliament at that time that it favoured an examination of the possibilities of reducing the role of nuclear weapons. It also subsequently made known, and it has repeatedly expressed that view, both in public and in Parliament, that it was in favour of examining the possibility of bringing nuclear weapons, that is tactical nuclear weapons, into the purview of the MBFR discussions. However, the Netherlands Government also continues to support the Allied approach to the MBFR negotiations. You may have seen the communique issued yesterday in Brussels, after the end of the meeting of the NATO Defence Planning Committee, in which it was confirmed that all Ministers continue to support the Alliance approach to the negotiations. Of course, this communique was also signed by the Netherlands Government, which was represented in that meeting by its Minister of Defence, Mr Vredeling. So this is the situation: we continue to support the Alliance approach.

Q. (Lendvai, Financial Times)

That is a bit of a two-faced approach. On the one hand, the Netherlands Government seems to be undercutting the Western position, on the other hand you state formally that you support it.

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A. Of course, the Netherlands Government is free to have its own opinion, and to express that opinion, not only in the country itself, but also in the Alliance. And it has made its views known within the Alliance repeatedly; they are well known. On the other hand, the Government has also adhered to the principle that that Alliance is the main vehicle, as we see it, for the time being for the détente policy, and this means that the Alliance, the Allies, have to work together. For that reason the Government has made very clear, and will continue to make clear, that it will conform to and support the Alliance position.

Q. (Mitchelmore, New York Times)

In context of that, Mr Ambassador, I see that you are saying in your statement that "we are unwilling to reduce our airforce". But I do not find such a strong statement with regards to tactical nuclear weapons. Is that an oversight?

A. We are talking about overall manpower now, and not about specific types of weapons. If you cover overall ground forces manpower, as we have indicated we are willing and prepared to do, and you also cover overall air force manpower, as we have now indicated that we are prepared to consider that, then you automatically cover all forces, because nuclear weapons are either part of the air forces or of the ground forces. Implicitly, they are under such an overall limitation.

Q. (Possaner, Die Presse)

Mr Ambassador, I would like to get back to the question concerning Mr Vredeling. If Mr Vredeling says that from his point of view it would be better to reduce tactical nuclear arms in Europe, does this not show dissent in the NATO camp?

A. One of the good things about the NATO Council is that one is always free to dissent, and everybody is entitled to his own opinion. The NATO Council is always discussing things, and every Government has its own opinion and is entitled to it. What matters is that we try to harmonize these opinions within the Council, and once we have harmonized

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them and taken a common position, then we all support it. And that is the basic position of the Netherlands Government. It is not an issue in Vienna. We are one group, and we have a common position which we all support. I can only repeat that the Netherlands Government is supporting the Alliance approach to the MBFR negotiations.

Q. (unidentified)

May I take the heat off the Netherlands? In recent weeks there has been a certain amount of aggressive talk from the US to the oil-producing countries. There have also been, much more significantly, naval operations in the Indian Ocean, with the US participating. Does not that suggest that the centre of armed forces pressure may be moving from Europe to the Southern part of Asia?

A. This is a very interesting, as well as a wide-ranging question, and a little bit outside the area of the negotiations we are conducting here. I would not like to speculate too much on that. I think we should concentrate on the military confrontation which still is a fact in Europe, if you look at the number of forces which are on both sides. It is our task here to try to find the formulas with which we can reduce that confrontation. And if we succeed in that, we can be quite satisfied.

Q. (Wieland, Reuters)

Mr Ambassador, I would like to ask you a question about your decision to extend the freeze after the first stage to include air force personnel. You describe that as an important step. I wonder whether you can tell us to what extent that may answer the concerns of the Eastern side. Has this been a serious issue in the negotiations?

A. It has indeed been a concern expressed by the Eastern side, that in our approach, which focused on removing the disparities between the ground forces of both sides, these large disparities which we feel are the key element in the security situation, this large and potentially destabilizing factor, by neglecting other elements of the forces - especially

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air forces - we would possibly open the way to circumvent an agreement. For instance, we could circumvent an agreement by increasing the air forces. We have given serious consideration to that argument, and since we found that was a serious Eastern concern, and a valid one, we have indicated a way of meeting that concern. I think we have made a constructive proposal, and we hope that the other side will recognize our constructive aim and its seriousness, as well as the usefulness of this proposal.

Q. But it does not follow from this that you have given any indication that in a subsequent stage you would be prepared to reduce those air forces.

A. No; as I said in my statement, we remain unwilling to reduce the air forces for reasons we have previously given, military reasons, and as I also said, the large disparities are not in the air forces - they are in the ground forces. Here is where we have to look for means and ways to decrease instability in the sector of the ground forces. These enormous disparities are potentially destabilizing factors in our view. That is why we want to give priority to solving this problem.

Q. (Possaner, Die Presse)

Mr Ambassador, we learned from the NATO meeting that the Western side has reinforced its troops by 1600 tanks. Now the tank disparity between East and West would no longer be 9,500, but this number minus 1600. Has this figure of 1600 been agreed upon during this meeting, or, if not, do you have any idea how the Eastern side will react to this reinforcement?

A. If I am correct, the 1600 figure does not pertain exclusively to the area of reductions. This is a NATO-wide, a Europe-wide figure. It is not really an expansion of forces, but pertains to modernisation of forces. Inasfar as it includes a possible extension as well, well, this would be one way of making up disparities - but not the best one. We are here to work on reductions. Of course, we have no agreement as yet. That is one reason why we should make all efforts to continue our negotiations here.

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Q. (Ertl, Kurier)

Mr. Ambassador, you have talked about a mutual agreement not to increase the overall level of ground force manpower between the two phases, and you have already mentioned the level of overall air force manpower. Does this indicate that you put your main efforts into not increasing, rather than reducing forces?

A. We have made these suggestions not to increase overall ground force manpower between the two phases of the negotiations, and not to increase the overall strength of air force manpower to take account of certain concerns on the other side, which I have already mentioned. These measures are not meant to be considered in isolation. They are to supplement our basic negotiating position which is aimed at substantially reducing the forces on both sides. And at the same time to deal with major disparities existing in the ground force relations. These non-increase commitments which we propose are not to be put in place of reductions, but are to supplement the reduction proposals we made and to facilitate the acceptance by both sides of these proposals.

Q. (Mitchelmore, New York Times)

It seems from the language of your statement that both of these freezes offered, on ground forces and on air forces, were rejected by the Eastern side?

A. I would not say that they had been rejected. We hope that they have not rejected them. We hope that they will give serious consideration to these suggestions, because they have been put forward in good faith and they are designed to meet the concerns that the other side has expressed, and which we consider valid. So I hope that after further studying and analysing them, they will come to recognise that we have made indeed a good and constructive move.

Q. (Ertl, Kurier)

But does this not increasing the overall level mean that you preclude yourself from not changing the general forces into special ballistic forces, as was announced to be taking

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place in Western Germany?

A. The US troop restructuring, if I may say so, is not an expansion of US forces in Europe, it is change, it means replacement of logistic troops with combat troops. I think the figure is 18,000, to take place over a period of two years. This is based on Congressional legislation. But this is not an expansion of forces. So this will not be in conflict with what we have proposed in the area of a non-increase of overall strength.

Q. But in effect it would strengthen your forces?

A. It would be a streamlining, it would be getting the most value out of your forces. All nations are trying to get the best possible product out of the high expenditures that they have to devote to defence. And in view of the increasing costs of defence, and the increasing cost of manpower, it is only natural to try to streamline one's forces. It is not an extension of the forces.

Q. (GDR News Agency)

Mr Ambassador, a general question. There is some talk that there is a total deadlock in Vienna. Do you share this view?

A. No. There is certainly not deadlock as far as we can see. As I said, we remain optimistic. I said that in my statement and I am happy to repeat that. We feel that there has been quite some activity. I mentioned some of the things we have put forward. The other side has developed ideas. And although we have not fully appreciated these ideas, and digested them, the fact that there is much activity - and I indicated that in my statement - indicates that there is reason to hope that we are moving into a more active negotiating phase and that we can indeed make progress in the next year.

Q. (Norwegian Radio)

Yesterday or the day before, the Frankfurter Allgemeine suggested that the US want higher contributions anyway, but let us say that if for instance Western Germany took up such a proposal, would that not make the MBFR negotiations more difficult?

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A. I do not see that. The question of burdensharing is an eternal one. It has been with the Alliance from its beginning. The success of these burdensharing efforts has not always been very spectacular. There has been a certain shift of the defence effort, a relative shift from the US to Europe, in the last decade. There may be some more shifts in the future. That is difficult to predict, for all this depends on the relative increase in the wealth of both sides of the Atlantic. Generally, burdensharing means shifting within a certain total defence establishment. It does not mean that there has to be an increase. If there should at some time be fewer American forces, and I am not making any forecasts, this is not the case of the present discussions in Brussels. Discussing this in theoretical or philosophical way, it may in future entail replacement of certain American forces by European forces, leaving aside the MBFR efforts. But coming back to MBFR, once we have established a common ceiling on both sides, and that is what we are striving for, we on our part would certainly not want to change this subsequently. We would certainly be very careful that any burdensharing exercise and changes of forces within the Alliance would not mean going beyond the common ceiling.

Q. (Unidentified)

Mr Ambassador, from the Vladivostok meeting and partly from Mr Schlesinger's statements, we learned that there is evidently some agreement between the US and the Soviet Union to include the Western tactical atomic forces in Europe in the MBFR talks here. Now I see that your statement does not even touch this question, and the Eastern statement touches it only slightly. Why this hesitation?

A. There is no hesitation. Both the Eastern and the Western side recognise that meetings like the one in Vladivostok, which seems to be successful, a success in SALT - this can only have a beneficial effect on other East-West negotiations. So in this respect I suspect there is a certain mutual influence. As concerns the first part of your question, it was specifically

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said by the US, and only recently Secretary Schlesinger repeated this, that there was no agreement in Vladivostok on including tactical nuclear weapons in the Vienna negotiations. There was agreement not to include FBS' in SALT. But that does not mean that they would automatically be included in the MBFR negotiations.

Q. (Lendvai, Financial Times)

Both you and your East European colleagues agree that there has been no progress so far. If there is no progress, you usually call this a deadlock. And the second question is: Where will these FBS' then be discussed? It is unlikely that they will be discussed in CSCE.

A. As to the first question, I do not see why, if there is no progress, there must be a deadlock. There can be other reasons for not making progress. It is just that we are working with a very complicated subject, and it has been sufficiently explained at previous occasions that these negotiations are complex because of the number of participants - 19 - the subject matter is complex, the fact that we deal with national security issues and thus we would not lightheartedly take decisions. We always knew that we would need a lot of patience, a lot of perseverance, and that it will not be easy to reach solutions. We still feel that we certainly are not deadlocked, and we continue to have a great deal of hope that we can make actual and factual progress in the next year. The question about the FBS' is a good one. Where would they be discussed? This is a very complicated subject matter. These so-called FBS' are not only on the Western side. They are also on the Eastern side. And they are stationed in an area that goes beyond the one we are discussing here. This is just to indicate one of the complications which arise on this issue. At this stage I cannot give you an answer how they would be discussed. The only thing I can assure you is that the Alliance position here continues to be that we should continue to focus on ground forces.

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Q. (Ertl, Kurier)

May we take it from your statement that you expect a first agreement in 1975?

A. I did not say that I expected anything. I said that I had hope. I would hate to try to forecast any specific dates by which we could reach agreement. I should say that I see no reason why it should be excluded that we could reach an agreement in 1975. But I would not like to forecast it, and I would like to stress again that these are very complex discussions, and we are not negotiating against a deadline. I certainly feel that we should avoid hastily and carelessly drafted agreements which then might prove to be unsatisfactory and hamper rather than promote security of all concerned.

Q. (Possaner, Die Presse)

Mr Ambassador, I really do not want to keep after you, but when you spoke about FBS' in Europe, you mentioned that there was no statement by Secretary Schlesinger concerning that this issue would be talked about in MBFR. He did say it, but only in a conditional form. He said, if there were negotiations about these tactical weapons, they would be negotiated within MBFR. Now if you exclude this possibility, do you expect that we will be facing a third conference, after MBFR and SALT?

A. I do not expect anything, and I do not forecast anything. I want to say that Secretary Schlesinger said in so many words that if these systems would be discussed, MBFR would be the forum. But at the same time he also said that there is no indication that they actually will be taken up in MBFR. And that is indeed the position. I now repeat for the third or fourth time that we continue to have the position that we should focus our negotiations here on removal of the large disparities in conventional ground forces. Disparities which strongly favour the Eastern side.

Q. (Clark, BBC)

Mr Ambassador, you said in your statement on the subject of phasing that commitments had been offered to the East that the second phase reduction negotiations would take place

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within a fixed reasonable period of time. In view of that, could you comment on the statement made earlier by the Warsaw Pact spokesman, who complained about postponing of reductions by other direct participants for several years. He said that after a first Soviet-US first phase, the other participants would not reduce for several years. Is he justified in suggesting that several years will indeed pass, and would you call that a reasonable period of time?

A. I don't think one can state it that way, that we have postponed them for several years. It is not quite in conformity with the indications we have given to the other side. I do not want to go into details here. We try to adhere as much as possible to the rule of confidentiality. I read this comment about the several years just a short time ago, and I couldn't quite understand what it was based on. It certainly could not be based on anything we ever said to them.