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Ruud van Dijk. "‘A Mass Psychosis’: The Netherlands and NATO’s Dual Track Decision, 1978-1979.” *Cold War History* 12:3 (August 2012): 381-405. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2011.621750. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2011.621750>

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Reviewed by **Kristina Spohr**, London School of Economics and Political Science

Ruud van Dijk’s article is thoroughly researched. It tells the Dutch high politics story of how The Hague dealt with one of the central and highly contested Cold-War North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nuclear strategy issues: the decision over the production and deployment of Longer-Range Theatre Nuclear Forces (LRTNF) in Europe.¹ It is based on Dutch cabinet files, files of the office of the Prime Minister, Foreign and Defence Ministry papers and the private papers of the contemporary Prime Minister Andries van Agt and Vice Prime Minister Hans Wiegel, through which Van Dijk traces Dutch nuclear policy making in 1978-9.

As van Dijk shows, domestic party politics played a crucial role in bringing about a rather volatile political situation in the Netherlands by late 1977 – just at the time when Atlantic Alliance nuclear issues were becoming heatedly debated. A centre-right coalition government [consisting of the Christian Democrats (CDA) and centre-right liberals (VVD)] had emerged unexpectedly after a period of social democratic dominance. This

¹ It is noteworthy that the NATO dual-track decision has recently received quite a bit of scholarly attention, as recent publications including the reviewer’s own work reveal. Gerhard Wettig. “Die Sowjetunion in der Auseinandersetzung über den NATO Doppelbeschluss 1979–1983,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 57:2 (2009), 217-59 ; Leopoldo Nuti, “The Origins of the 1979 Dual Track Decision: A Survey,” in Id. (Ed.). *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 57-71; Joachim Scholtyseck. “The United States, Europe and the NATO Dual-Track Decision.” in Matthias Schulz/Thomas A. Schwartz (Eds.), *The Strained Alliance. U.S.-Relations from Nixon to Carter* (Cambridge et. al.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 333-352; Philipp Gassert/Tim Geiger/Hermann Wentker (Eds.), *Zweiter Kalter Krieg und Friedensbewegung: Der NATO-Doppelbeschluss in deutsch-deutscher und internationaler Perspektive* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011); Kristina Spohr Readman. “Conflict and Cooperation in Intra-Alliance Nuclear Politics: Western Europe, the United States, and the Genesis of NATO’s Dual-Track Decision, 1977-1979.” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13:2 (Spring 2011), pp. 39-89.

coalition held a very slim majority in parliament; furthermore, the CDA was effectively a merger of three smaller Christian parties, which had not yet formally become united (and indeed only in 1980 completed their fusion into a new united party). Consequently, the highest echelons in the Dutch political scene suffered from significant polarization in political outlook – not least over nuclear politics. This polarization was reinforced by the institutional rivalry between the cabinet and parliament as well as power-political competition and serious ideological rifts between individual parliamentarians. But, as van Dijk explains (383-4), divisions also existed between key actors of the Cabinet. The taking of any more-or-less unanimous government decisions affecting national security, which would find parliamentary approval, was a challenge under the best of circumstances. And if this was not enough, Dutch public opinion, being influenced by forceful left-leaning pacifist and anti-nuclear groups as well as the church milieu which promoted a ‘nukes-free’ Netherlands that should set an example for the world, affected Dutch high politics in no insignificant ways.

Against the background of electoral politics and specific domestic high-low politics dynamics that would make the formation of a cohesive Dutch government nuclear position difficult, van Dijk explains how van Agt, his Defence Minister Scholten and Foreign Minister van der Klaauw, navigated the Dutch position in allied discussions: first during the 1977/78 neutron bomb affair – a controversy over the American production decision and the European commitment to deploy Enhanced Radiation Warheads (ERW) – and then during the Alliance’s dual track decision making process between 1977 and 1979. Van Dijk’s few points on the allied crisis over the neutron bomb are somewhat confused (384-5). The gist appears to be that ultimately the Dutch did little, that they had a negligible impact on allied arguments over the production, deployment, and bargaining value of the ERW, and that ultimately the whole story was more or less irrelevant as a forerunner case-study for Dutch nuclear policy making in the late 1970s. With U.S. President Jimmy Carter’s postponement of the production decision of ERWs, it hardly mattered what the Dutch did or did not do.

Van Dijk’s article gains momentum when he begins dissecting the so-called ‘political’ phase of NATO’s decision-making in 1979 and van Agt’s visions and choices regarding LRTNF. He says almost nothing about the Dutch officials’ input during the NATO High Level Group (HLG) talks in 1978-9 – talks that were central in developing an allied LRTNF strategy. To be sure, in my own research I have found that the Dutch HLG representatives played a minor role in the first year of the Group’s existence.² Yet it was here that Track One (and questions over LRTNF rationale, production, numbers, weapons types, finances and deployments) was originally fathomed out and debated. Van Dijk emphasizes instead that the Dutch in 1979 pressed for a second - arms control - track and managed to influence the Germans in this regard to make a formal proposal of creating in addition to the HLG the so-called Special Group (SG) that would look into arms reduction matters.

² Spohr, “Conflict and Cooperation in Intra-Alliance Nuclear Politics.”

Yet on this particular causality – of Dutch influence on the Germans and consequently NATO more generally – the evidence is skimpy (389).

Van Dijk does a much better job of discussing the details of LRTNF issues in late 1979. As the date for NATO's political decision drew nearer, van Agt sought to square the circle at home between giving the impression that the role of nuclear weapons in the Netherlands and NATO would not be increased (not least in order to keep anti-nuclear voices as quiet as possible), whilst openly supporting an eventual allied consensus on the need for LRTNF for defence and deterrence purposes for the sake of the Dutch showing NATO-loyalty in the Alliance. Van Agt had problems with those in the Dutch parliament (including members of his own party) who wanted to pursue unilateral disarmament and set an example for other Allies. What van Dijk's story seems to show, then, is that the Dutch Cabinet, as it struggled for authority, and parliamentary (as much as popular) support and legitimacy, was so bound up in domestic infighting over how to approach what would become the Dual Track decision and specifically whether it should allow new LRTNF to be deployed on Dutch soil, that until late 1979 The Hague as an international actor was almost sidelined.

Active, as van Dijk argues, the Dutch may have been. 'Leaders' or 'shapers' of the Alliance discourse and in the formative processes of the decision's characteristics they certainly were not. Basically then, as can be gleaned from van Dijk's narrative, the Netherlands hardly played a role in influencing the nature of the Dual-Track decision, i.e., what exactly each track would entail and the way the two tracks would combine. Only during the last two months after all central pegs of the two tracks had already been rammed in via the HLG-SG Integrated Decision Document (IDD), did it become possible for Dutch diplomacy to achieve a few 'national' concessions. To be sure, from the other Allies' perspective van Agt's shaky government had for a long time looked to derail the securing of a unanimous allied vote on the Brussels decision that was so crucial for purposes of showing Alliance purpose, strength and cohesion vis-à-vis Moscow. The concessions now played out sufficiently well at home for van Agt to secure parliamentary support for his pro-NATO vote. By committing to carry the dual-track decision in principle, the Dutch gained the American reduction of 1000 nuclear warheads from Europe (read and presented by the Dutch government as sign of decreasing the role of nuclear weapons) and the acceptance of a future reduction in Dutch nuclear tasks. Moreover, the Dutch were allowed to hold on to their desire to postpone their national deployment decision on LRTNF until 1981 – which in fact they would subsequently postpone two further times.

To sum up, van Dijk's article offers us a first draft of the complicated, highly-contentious domestic story of Dutch nuclear policy-making. The author illuminates in particular the Dutch reaction to the evolution of the making of the dual-track decision in 1978-79 and the Dutch government's internal debates in view of the question over LRTNF deployments in the Netherlands. Perhaps the various strands and layers – institutional and personal rivalry in Dutch domestic high politics, the impact of anti-nuclear popular sentiment on the different groupings amongst government elites, and the consequent

problems deriving from these domestic issues for Dutch nuclear diplomacy in NATO – would have come out even more sharply had the essay been more thoroughly polished by the author himself or the journal editors.

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