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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

1 March 1983

*Handwritten mark, possibly initials 'MH'.*

*Dear John,*

Visit of the Netherlands Prime Minister:  
2 March

/ As you requested on the telephone I enclose a note on the internal political scene in the Netherlands to complete the Prime Minister's briefing for Mr Lubbers' visit tomorrow.

*Yours ever*  
*J E Holmes*

(J E Holmes)  
Private Office

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## NETHERLANDS INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE: MARCH 1983

1. The three principal political parties in the Netherlands are: the Christian Democrats, CDA (a confessional party covering the whole of the political spectrum, the right marginally predominating); the Liberals, VVD (Conservatives in British political terms); and the Labour party, PvdA. The low threshold for representation in their system of PR allows for a plethora of minor parties (all of which are in retreat at the moment), the largest being the Democrats, D'66.
2. The last Government was a CDA/D'66/PvdA Centre-Left coalition, which the PvdA left in the spring of 1982. A General Election followed in September 1982. The acknowledged need for coalition government, the unpredictable importance of small parties and the catholic political outlook of the CDA mean that government formation is a long drawn-out process. The 7 weeks it took last autumn was relatively speedy. Mr van Agt, the last Prime Minister, who had moved the CDA steadily to the right, sought and eventually obtained a coalition with the VVD. Having created the coalition, Mr van Agt resigned. Mr Lubbers succeeded as leader of the CDA and Prime Minister.
3. The CDA has usually formed the major part of coalitions. The political colouring, such as there is, of the Government tends to come from the junior party, in this case the VVD. The present Government is therefore Centre-Right. Mr Lubbers sees the CDA as moderating the influence of the VVD.
4. The present coalition is sturdy by Dutch standards. Portfolios have been distributed between the parties to minimise interparty tension (Foreign Affairs and Defence both CDA, Home Affairs and Justice both VVD). There is a great degree of unity within the Government on how best to tackle the main difficulties facing the country: the economy and INF. During

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the coalition formation, CDA and VVD working parties agreed on a 4-year programme of expenditure cuts designed to bring down PSBR from 11.9% to 7.4% by 1986. The VVD accepted the CDA's budget for 1983 (already announced on 21 September 1982) which contained economies totalling 13 billion guilders (about £3.5 billion).

5. The Government favour the deployment of INF. However, the Government's parliamentary parties are not so united in approach: the Loyalist faction of the CDA is against INF deployment.

6. The next elections are due in the autumn of 1986. The prospects of Mr Lubbers seeing out his full term are fair and for 1983 are very good. In the shorter term the issue of INF and in the longer term differences over the handling of the economy are the two areas which are most likely to cut short Mr Lubbers' term of office.

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