

Cruise Missiles

**Some
important
questions
and
answers**

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The Russians have recently introduced the modern and accurate SS20 missile which can strike targets throughout Western Europe from bases deep in the Soviet Union. They have over 350 of them. Each has three warheads and so can strike three separate targets.

NATO's equivalent nuclear force (our intermediate-range nuclear force) is much older. For a long time it consisted of UK Vulcan bombers and American F111 aircraft based in Britain. The Vulcans have now been withdrawn and the F111s have become both more vulnerable to attacks on their airfields and less able to penetrate Soviet defences.

Modernisation

As a result of this potentially dangerous inequality, the Alliance decided in December 1979 that it must plan to update its forces. The modernisation planned would be achieved by basing Pershing II and cruise missiles in Europe, unless there was agreement at the negotiations in Geneva which would enable NATO to change these plans.

One hundred and sixty cruise missiles would eventually be based in the United Kingdom, at two bases, RAF Greenham Common and RAF Molesworth. The first missiles would be deployed at Greenham Common by the end of 1983. They would be part of a total of 572 missiles (464 Cruise, 108 Pershing II) planned for Europe as a whole. So far, the UK, the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy

have agreed to accept missile bases. Belgium and the Netherlands are due to take cruise missiles later in the 1980s, subject to the final decisions of the governments of the two countries.

At the same time, and in parallel, NATO agreed that the United States should offer to negotiate an arms control agreement with the Soviet Union to limit the numbers of these types of nuclear weapons on both sides.

The two-track policy

Ours is a strategy for peace. We will maintain strong British forces in order to safeguard peace. We thus show anyone minded to attack us that they would suffer unacceptable damage in return. But at the same time we shall continue to work for balanced and verifiable agreements between the West and the Soviet Union which could improve security at a low level of armaments. No one in Britain wants to pile up armaments for their own sake. But one-sided disarmament would undermine our security and remove any incentive for the Russians to negotiate seriously with us. Real disarmament will only be achieved through firm treaties patiently negotiated, with safeguards against cheating. With our allies we shall continue to seek such treaties.

This 'two-track' agreement by NATO – modernisation of nuclear forces and, in parallel, a major effort to reach an arms control agreement – is now being put into operation. But some aspects of the decision, and the weapons systems involved, have not been fully understood. There have been misconceptions and some incorrect statements of fact which have confused some people about the issues.

The questions and answers below will clear up some of these major misunderstandings.

Q1 Will cruise missiles make nuclear war more likely?

A1 No. We do not believe nuclear war is likely and our aim is to keep things that way. The best way to ensure this is to maintain a stable balance of forces. We do not need to match the Russians weapon for weapon, but we do need a range of forces to show the Russians that we could respond to any level of attack. If the Russians had an advantage at any level, they might be tempted to take the risk of using it or blackmailing us. It is the new Russian nuclear weapons targeted on Europe – and Russian actions, eg. in Afghanistan – which are creating tension and insecurity. In order to maintain the basis of deterrence, which has preserved the peace in Europe for nearly 40 years, we are forced to modernise our own weapons. The introduction of cruise missiles would therefore help to prevent nuclear war by preserving the balance. The missiles would become part of NATO's defensive forces – the whole purpose of which is to deter aggression against us.

Q2 Will cruise missiles give NATO a new class of weapon?

A2 No. Cruise missiles simply modernise a capability NATO already has. There is nothing new either about the idea of cruise missiles (the German doodlebug of World War II was the first) or the concept of intermediate-range nuclear weapons. Cruise missiles will ensure that NATO will retain the capability which, as already explained, has been provided by the Vulcans and F111s over the last 20 years.

Q3 Will cruise missiles give a new twist to the arms race?

A3 No. The Soviet Union is deploying its new SS20s now, and has been doing so since 1977. The first NATO cruise missiles, on the other hand, are not due to start arriving in Europe until the end of 1983. The Russian modernisation programme is therefore well under way. NATO has not yet begun.

So, NATO is being forced to modernise its forces in order to preserve the basis of deterrence. But we have not tried to match the Soviet Union exactly. The NATO missiles will only have one warhead each (not three); their range will be shorter than the SS20s'; and the total planned involves fewer warheads than the Soviet Union has already deployed.

Our aim is simply to convince the Russians that the risk of using their nuclear weapons, like the SS20, against us outweighs anything they might hope to gain.

Q4 Does the cruise missile decision mean that NATO no longer believes in arms control?

A4 No. The agreement to base cruise missiles in Europe was only part of NATO's decision on intermediate-range nuclear forces. NATO also agreed that a major effort should be made to limit the number of such weapons on both sides. As agreed by NATO Ministers, the Americans on their own withdrew 1000 nuclear warheads from Europe and they will remove one more for each new warhead deployed in the modernisation programme. So there would be no increase in the number of nuclear warheads in Western Europe. With full European support, the Americans also offered to negotiate with the Russians on verifiable arms

control measures for these types of weapons on both sides. To start with, the Russians refused to talk, and only came to the negotiating table when faced with NATO's determination to go ahead with modernisation. Talks began in Geneva in November 1981. NATO governments unanimously proposed a radical solution, the 'zero option', cancelling NATO's deployment plans in return for the Russians dismantling their equivalent SS4, SS5 and SS20 missiles. This would eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapons from the face of the earth. So far, the Russians have sought to keep most or all of their own SS20 force while preventing NATO's modernisation plans (for example, by suggesting a 'freeze' on these forces), but the West continues to seek balanced reductions, and has now proposed an interim agreement to reduce missile warhead numbers to an equal level. Depending on the outcome of the Geneva negotiations, cruise missile deployments in the UK could be cancelled, halted or reversed at any stage. So 1983 is not a deadline for the negotiations.

Q5 The Russians have offered to retain in Europe only as many missiles as Britain and France have. Should NATO accept this offer?

A5 No. Such a position would allow the Soviet Union to retain a monopoly in these missiles. NATO would still be threatened, without having the means to deter that threat. British and French submarine-launched ballistic missiles, like comparable US and Soviet missiles, are long-range or 'strategic', and therefore are excluded by definition from negotiations on intermediate-range nuclear forces. These negotiations are bilateral between the Americans and the Russians, aimed at superpower equality. The British Polaris force is an independent strategic nuclear deterrent of last resort and is already of the minimum size viable for that purpose.

It is not acceptable that the Russians should retain a substantial number of SS20s both in Europe and beyond the Urals, while NATO has no comparable systems. This would defeat the main object of NATO's 1979 decision to show that the United States is committed to the defence of Europe in the face of the growing Soviet threat. But the Soviet Union's apparent willingness to reduce their SS20 force is a step in the right direction. NATO wants as few of these weapons on each side as possible.

Q6 Will cruise missiles be used as first strike weapons?

A6 No. A 'first strike' attack means a surprise attack intended to disarm the other side by destroying its nuclear weapons before they could be launched. Such an attack forms no part of NATO's strategy – NATO does not have the capability for it; nor does it want it. Even on technical grounds, it would make no sense at all to try to use NATO cruise missiles for a 'first strike' role; they are entirely unsuited for it, for three reasons. First, compared with ballistic missiles they are slow-moving; they would take several hours to reach the Soviet Union from the UK. Because of this, any kind of mass attack by cruise missiles would be detected in plenty of time for the Russians to mobilise their own forces. Second, the number of cruise missiles to be based in Europe is much smaller than the total number of Soviet strategic missiles, many of which are out of range. And third, the mobile Soviet SS20 and their submarine-launched ballistic missiles are, once deployed, virtually invulnerable to pre-emptive attack. The claim that cruise missiles will be used as first strike weapons is therefore completely wrong. NATO is a defensive alliance – none of its weapons will ever be used except in response to attack.

Q7 Will cruise missiles mean we are planning to fight a 'limited nuclear war'?

A7 No. The cruise missiles would help to prevent war. We do not believe that nuclear weapons could be used to achieve a military victory in any meaningful sense. The Americans equally believe that they could not launch limited nuclear strikes against the Soviet Union – from Europe or elsewhere – without putting their own homeland at risk.

But the Russians might think differently. They might believe that in certain circumstances they could successfully attack or blackmail Europe without involving the United States. This would be a misguided assessment – but, for our own safety, we must ensure that they are never tempted to think that way.

Q8 Will cruise missiles change the nature of deterrence?

A8 No. Like all NATO forces – nuclear and non-nuclear – the purpose of cruise missiles is to deter aggression. The Russians now have the ability to mount accurate nuclear attacks on our military bases and shipping. To maintain deterrence we need to show that if they ever contemplated attacking us in this way with nuclear weapons, we could respond at a similar level. We would not be left with only the options of just surrendering or having to launch a massive nuclear retaliation. If the Russians thought we had only those two options, they might be tempted to gamble that we would prefer to surrender rather than start a full-scale nuclear exchange.

Thus cruise missiles would strengthen deterrence. And by helping us to prevent war ever breaking out,

they will enable us to avoid ever having to make the choice between 'red' and 'dead.'

Q9 Will cruise missiles make us more vulnerable to attack?

A9 No. Even if there were no nuclear weapons in the United Kingdom, we would still be a major Soviet target because of our political and strategic importance. No aggressor could ignore such an important member of NATO. And our position as a rear base for Europe and a forward base for the defence of the Atlantic makes us an even more important target.

If there is a war involving the use of nuclear weapons, the sad truth is that no part of this country will be safe from danger, whether we have cruise missiles or not. The cruise missiles can help to prevent such a war in the first place.

In fact, because cruise missiles are mobile, and in time of tension would be moved up to 100 miles or more away from their peacetime bases, they and their bases are much less vulnerable than our present aircraft-delivered nuclear force. If anything, therefore, cruise missiles would make us a less tempting target than we are at present.

Nor would there be any safety in leaving NATO and being neutral, as the history of Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands shows. All were neutral in 1940 but all were attacked by Hitler.

Q10 Will cruise missiles cost us a great deal?

A10 No. The United States is paying for the missiles themselves and for the personnel who man them. We, however, would provide some of the security guards. The costs of establishing the bases will largely be paid for by NATO funds – to which all members of the Alliance, including the UK, make a contribution.

Q11 Have cruise missiles been forced on this country?

A11 No. The decision to base cruise missiles and Pershing IIs in Europe was fully discussed by NATO Defence Ministers over a period of two years. Indeed the need for them was pressed mainly by the Europeans.

The European allies took the view that they could not ignore the rapidly growing strength of Soviet nuclear forces aimed at Europe, particularly when compared with NATO's existing nuclear forces in Europe. They had to take further steps to deter the Russians from thinking of embarking on nuclear adventures in Europe. The decision to deploy cruise and Pershing II missiles was made unanimously by NATO Defence and Foreign Ministers at a meeting on 12 December 1979. There was no question of the decision being forced on Britain or any of its allies.

On the contrary, the Europeans welcomed American willingness to supply these weapons as a further example of the American commitment to the defence of Europe. The cruise missile decision provides a further visible demonstration to the Soviet Union that the Americans see the defence of Europe as being part of the defence of their own country.

Q12 Will cruise missiles be unreliable and hazardous?

A12 No. The cruise missiles would not be based in Britain until all the tests necessary to ensure the safety and performance of the missile have been completed in the US. The cruise missile is already doing very well in development trials. A success rate of the order of 80% has been achieved in test firings – a remarkably high rate for such a complex weapon system at this stage in its development. As with any new system under development, cruise missiles are being tested up to and indeed beyond the limits of their normal performance. This accounts for some of the results which, in some cases, have been described as failures. No flight tests would be carried out in the UK.

If ever fired operationally (as we hope it never will be) the nuclear warhead would not be activated until it was near its target. Even if the missile crashed before reaching its target, it could not cause a nuclear explosion.

Q13 Will armed cruise missiles be used in peacetime exercises?

A13 No. Cruise missiles would occasionally practise off-base deployment in peacetime. But they will do this without nuclear warheads and without fuelled motors.

Q14 Do cruise missiles mean that the US is thinking of fighting a future nuclear war in Europe, leaving both Russia and America untouched?

A14 No—very much the contrary. If the US had any idea of that kind—sometimes described as ‘superpower sanctuary’—the last thing they would do is to station 300,000 troops in Europe together with new missiles whose key feature is an ability to reach the Soviet homeland. The Russians have made it clear that any US warhead reaching the Soviet Union would be regarded as coming from the United States itself.

Q15 Will control of the cruise missiles be entirely in American hands?

A15 No. The use of the cruise missile bases by US forces in an emergency will be a matter for joint decision between the British and American Governments in the light of the circumstances at the time. These arrangements are exactly the same as those which cover other US bases in this country, and which have been in force for many years. The Prime Minister has assured the House of Commons that she is satisfied with these arrangements, and on 9 February 1983 the Foreign Secretary told the House of Commons: ‘It would not be possible for these weapons to be used without the agreement of both the Prime Minister and the President.’

The cruise missiles will be manned and operated by US forces, and their routine day-to-day handling will be carried out by the United States Air Force. But the arrangements for the safety and security of the missiles will all have been agreed in great detail with the Ministry of Defence, and British servicemen will be directly involved in the security of these missiles.

will be withdrawn for each new missile that is deployed.
So the result will be a drop in the number of nuclear warheads in Europe.

Will they be a peace-time hazard?

No. Cruise missiles will not be introduced until we are quite satisfied with their safety and performance. Exercises moving cruise missiles off their bases by road will occasionally take place. But the missiles on exercises could not be fired – they will not have fuel in their motors and they will not be fitted with nuclear warheads. There will be no flight tests in this country.

Do they mean we have given up hope of arms control?

No. Hand in hand with the decision to modernise went an offer to the Russians to talk about limiting these weapons. The Americans are now working as hard as they can, in talks with the Russians, to reduce the number of missiles of this type, ideally aimed at getting rid of them altogether. We would like an agreement as soon as possible on as low a number as possible on each side. But the talks can, if necessary, continue after the first missiles arrive and, if agreement were reached later, missiles already here could be taken out.

Won't their control be entirely in American hands?

No. Cruise missiles would be based in this country under arrangements which mean that they could only be fired with the agreement of the British Prime Minister.

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CRUISE

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

IS NUCLEAR WAR MORE LIKELY?

HAVE WE BEEN FORCED TO HAVE THEM?

WILL WE BE MORE LIKELY TO BE ATTACKED?

WILL THEY BE USED FIRST?

WILL WE HAVE ANY CONTROL?

Won't cruise missiles make nuclear war more likely?

No. Nuclear war is not likely and we aim to keep things that way. To do so we need to keep our forces up to date, especially when the Russians have been modernising theirs, aiming new nuclear weapons at Europe.

Aren't they a new and frightening development?

No. The idea of cruise missiles (weapons which fly at slow speeds and at low level underneath enemy radar) has been around for a long time – since the German doodlebug of World War II. The Soviet Union has been working on cruise missiles for many years. Cruise missiles take advantage of modern technology to fly accurately over long distances, but there is nothing new in the basic idea.

Will they mean NATO can make a 'first strike' against Russia?

No. They simply modernise NATO's defensive capability. Up to now this has been provided by aircraft but these are getting old, and more vulnerable to improved Soviet defences and to attacks by Soviet missiles on their bases. Cruise missiles will not give us – nor do we want it – the ability to mount a surprise attack or 'first strike' on the Soviet Union.

Can't they be kept outside Britain?

No. Cruise missiles are planned to be based in Britain (and a number of other European countries) so that NATO can continue to have nuclear forces in Europe capable of reaching the Soviet Union. We need these to prevent the Soviet Union from thinking that if it were to threaten or even attack Western Europe the United States might stand aside and not come to our defence. Cruise missiles will be an insurance against Russian attack or nuclear blackmail.

Does putting them in Europe mean that America's planning to fight the next war in Europe?

No. Cruise missiles are to prevent a war, not fight one. If America had any idea of fighting a limited nuclear war in Europe, the last thing she would do is agree to station missiles in Europe which could reach the Soviet Union. For the Soviet Union would know that the American President had agreed to launch them, and would look on them as coming from the United States.

Have they been forced on us against our will?

No. The decision was taken by all the NATO Allies in 1979, after two years' study and discussion. Indeed the modernisation was largely a result of European pressure, because NATO's forces were getting older and because the Soviet Union was introducing large numbers of new and accurate missiles threatening Europe. American willingness to supply these weapons reinforces the continuing US promise to defend Europe.

Won't they increase the chances of an attack on Britain?

No. They will help prevent an attack. If war started Britain would always be a target; the important thing is to prevent war in the first place. Because cruise missiles are mobile, their bases are less vulnerable than airfields to attack. Cruise missiles will help NATO's policy of deterrence – which has kept the peace in Europe for well over thirty years – to go on working.

Will they increase the number of nuclear weapons in Europe?

No. The United States has already withdrawn 1000 nuclear warheads from Europe. At least one more