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NATO's "Two-Track" Decision - Negotiate Arms Controls; Deploy New Missiles if Talks Fail

In 1977, the Soviet Union began to introduce a new intermediate-range missile into Europe - the SS-20. This missile carries three nuclear warheads, each with an explosive power equivalent to 150,000 tons of TNT. It is exceptionally accurate, and with a range of 5000 kilometres represents a potential threat to every city in Western Europe. There is as yet no equivalent NATO weapon. Since 1977 the Soviet Union has deployed an average of over one missile a week, and now has a total of 333, carrying 999 warheads, each of which can be aimed at a separate target. It also continues to deploy approximately 250 intermediate-range older missiles, the SS-4 and SS-5 which together with the SS-20s give the Soviet Union an overwhelming advantage in missiles of intermediate range.

NATO Response - The Two-Track Decision

The Soviet deployment of the SS-20 missiles began while the Soviet Union and the United States were negotiating an agreement to limit their strategic intercontinental nuclear weapons, and NATO and Warsaw Pact members were having talks on mutual, balanced force reductions in central Europe. Several Western European governments feared that by introducing a new, devastating missile for use in Europe, while it was codifying a balance in intercontinental weapons, the Soviet Union intended to threaten European NATO members and