

The B-1 Bomber

In June 1977, President Carter announced that the B-1 strategic bomber programme would be cancelled. He had been drawn to the decision by the efficiency and low cost of the ALCM, coupled with projections that the older B-52 bombers could remain airworthy into the 1990s. The move had been foreseen by some air force officials within the Pentagon during the early days of the ALCM programme. Afraid that the effectiveness and low cost of the ALCM would threaten new bomber programmes they had fought to have the cruise programme cancelled, only to have Kissinger save it from elimination for the purposes of arms control.

The B-1 decision received a great deal of criticism within the United States from a variety of fronts. Although the decision to end the programme may have been prudent, many felt that Carter had been wrong to simply cancel the programme outright rather than trading the bomber away for Soviet concessions at SALT. In fact the Soviet negotiators realized that the cancellation of the B-1 made it increasingly unlikely that the US would agree to significant limits on the weapon the Soviets had thought they had dealt with back at Vladivostok in 1974.

The decision marked the formal arrival of the ALCM as a vital part of the US deterrent force. Only six months after the formal decision to proceed with development of the long-range ALCM, the fledgling missile had earned itself a place from which its elimination or near elimination through arms control would be almost inconceivable, whatever concessions the Soviets might make.

One Bomber with Cruise Missiles equals One MIRVed Missile

In September 1977 Gromyko travelled to Washington. Coming back full circle to the compromise achieved by Kissinger in January 1976, the two sides agreed that cruise missile-carrying bombers would be counted against the MIRV ceiling of 1,320. Cruise missile-carrying bombers and other strategic bombers would have so-called *functionally-related observable differences** in order to facilitate verification.

The Soviet ALCM programme was a long way from matching progress made in the US. Their longest-range ALCM had an estimated range of 600-700 kilometres. However, by achieving agreement on counting cruise-missile bombers as MIRVed missiles, the Soviets had ensured that they could make up for their lack of ALCMs by maintaining more MIRVed ballistic missiles and would therefore not lag behind the US in overall numbers.** In addition, the agreement served to constrain US force growth because now the US had to choose between

* These are external features which can be detected by satellites, and without which certain weapons systems would be indistinguishable from others.

** This is an example of the principle known as *freedom to mix*.

MIRVed ballistic missiles and cruise missile-carrying bombers.

Although the principal counting rules and limits on cruise missiles had been established, certain other cruise missile-related issues remained to be resolved.

Conventional ALCMs

Having agreed to limit GLCMs under the protocol, the US was anxious to reassure its Western European allies that their interests were being protected rather than traded away at the negotiations. In order to do that the US planned to deploy conventional ALCMs on non-strategic bombers in Europe. The US therefore advocated exempting conventionally armed ALCMs on non-strategic bombers from treaty limitations.

On this issue verification became the overriding factor. The Soviet Union maintained that there was no way of determining if a missile was armed with a conventional or nuclear warhead. The US was unable to develop a definitive way of verifying such a distinction. In the end, the US gave in and the request for an exemption for conventional ALCMs was withdrawn.

The SALT II Treaty was signed by President Carter and General Secretary Brezhnev in Vienna on 18 June 1979. At that time the Soviet Union had a large number (the International Institute for Strategic Studies estimates 800) of short-range ALCMs. The first tests of a new Soviet long-range ALCM were observed in late 1978. The US had approximately 400 short-range ALCMs and the long-range version was undergoing fly-off tests to determine which company would be awarded the contract to build the missile.

The treaty accepted the long-range ALCM as a new element of strategic nuclear forces prior to its deployment. The newly established counting rules reflected two concerns. First, the principle of freedom to mix ensured that the Soviet Union was not penalized for choosing to develop a relatively small (six to seven percent) bomber and ALCM force. Second, limits were established only if they were adequately verifiable by national technical means of verification.

START

New negotiations on limiting strategic nuclear arms began three years later on 29 June 1982. Prior to the official beginning of the negotiations, President Ronald Reagan outlined the initial US position. He suggested that reductions be tackled in two phases. The first phase would involve reductions to 850 launchers and 5,000 ballistic missile warheads. Bombers were to be limited in the first phase but ALCMs were not to be dealt with until the second phase.

The Soviet opening proposal called for a freeze on strategic nuclear weapons and a 20 percent reduction in the limits established under SALT. The proposal included an old SALT position and called for a ban on the