

The Kissinger Compromise

In January 1976, the beginning of the election year in the US, Kissinger renewed his efforts at finding a way to overcome the cruise missile issue and went to Moscow with another set of proposals. He suggested again that cruise missiles be put outside the Vladivostok ceilings but that they be subject to further constraints. Those constraints included a range limit of 2,500 kilometres on ALCMs, 1,900 kilometres on SLCMs and 500 kilometres on GLCMs. Only 200 ships and 250 bombers could be cruise missile carriers.

The Soviets put forward some new ideas of their own. In particular they were willing to move away from a complete ban on all cruise missiles and allow ALCMs with a range of up to 2,500 kilometres, providing the ALCM-carrying bombers were counted against the ceiling of 1,320 on MIRVed missiles. In the end Kissinger accepted this proposal and the conundrum of air-launched missiles, which had perplexed the negotiators since Vladivostok, was resolved.

Upon returning to the US, Kissinger found that he was unable to win approval for the proposals. In February the US position at the negotiations reverted to the ceilings agreed to at Vladivostok and deferment of the cruise issue. The compromise achieved in Moscow was left on the table but never pursued. In March 1976, perhaps in response to US backtracking, the Soviets proposed that all long-range SLCMs be counted as strategic weapons and included under the overall ceilings established at Vladivostok.

A number of factors contributed to the US refusal to stick with the compromise. By early 1976 the US election year was moving into full swing and President Ford was less willing to advocate proposals that could be interpreted as concessions. Within the Defense Department and the administration, cruise missiles continued to garner support and the ground-launched version was now seen as a way of providing further US flexibility in Europe. It was also thought that, if the US held out long enough, the Soviets would come around with other concessions.

The Carter Administration

In January 1977, one year after the Kissinger compromise, the US Department of Defense approved continuation of the cruise missile programme. Engineering development of all aspects of the SLCM were approved and development of the GLCM was also given the go-ahead. For the first time the longer-range ALCM (AGM-86B or ALCM B) was given priority over the shorter-range version (ALCM A).

The timing here is worth noting. Although the negotiators had been discussing upper limits on numbers of long-range ALCMs as early as one year previously, it was only at this point that a formal decision was made by the US Department of Defense to actually pursue

development of the long-range missile.

Fresh into office, President Carter was anxious to have an impact on the arms control negotiations and an intensive internal review of the US negotiating position was undertaken. The result was a "Comprehensive Proposal" calling for reductions based on a new framework. The proposal lowered the Vladivostok launcher ceiling from 2,400 to 1,800-2,000 and the ceiling on MIRVed missiles from 1,320 to 1,100-1,200. Cruise missiles with a range less than 2,500 kilometres were not limited at all. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance took the proposal to Moscow in March 1977.

Upset about the move away from the Vladivostok accord, which they continued to view as fundamental, the Soviets rejected both positions angrily and publicly. They were particularly angry about the US cruise missile proposal, reiterating their belief that the issue had been dealt with at Vladivostok.

Three Tiers

The US retrenched and searched for a new way out of the problem. By May 1977 a three-tier framework was developed that would become the basis for the eventual treaty. The first tier was to be the heart of the treaty, the second tier, a time-limited protocol and the third, an agreed statement of principles for negotiations at SALT III.

The duration of the protocol was to be three years, and the US suggested that it include a ban on the testing and deployment of SLCMs and GLCMs with ranges of more than 600 kilometres. Such a ban would not affect US plans for either missile since neither would be ready for deployment within the envisaged three-year time-frame.

Soviet desire to limit the ranges and deployment of SLCMs and GLCMs stemmed from their concern about possible US deployments in and around the European theatre. The potential for a long-range GLCM that could reach the Soviet Union caused them particular concern. In the end, the two sides reached agreement on a protocol which banned the deployment of SLCMs and GLCMs with ranges in excess of 600 kilometres. The US hoped that by agreeing to ban, if only temporarily, the two missiles that seemed to cause the Soviets greatest concern, they would encourage Soviet leniency on the ALCM issue. The Soviets accepted the three-year period believing that there would be tremendous political pressure on the US to continue to abide by its terms when it expired.

The protocol dealt with the issue in the near term but did not, as the Soviets had hoped, provide a precedent that carried over to the next set of negotiations. In the longer term the GLCM has been dealt with in the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty. The SLCM was not included in the INF negotiations, although the issue may resurface in the wake of the INF Treaty if the US chooses to compensate for the elimination of GLCMs with SLCM deployments off the coast of Europe.