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CRUISE MISSILES AND STRATEGIC ARMS CONTROL

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INTRODUCTION

For Canadians, cruise missiles evoke a variety of images: testing the US air-launched cruise missile (ALCM) in northern Canada; the end of US adherence to SALT II limits; and new Soviet cruise missiles on a growing Soviet bomber force.

On 10 February 1983 Canada and the US signed an agreement which would allow the testing of certain US defence systems in Canada. Under this umbrella agreement, the US planned to test the air-launched cruise missile over the Canadian north. The news of possible cruise missile tests sparked protests from many Canadians. The Canadian peace movement burgeoned as the agreement to test the missile became final. Forced to respond to nation-wide resistance to the tests, Prime Minister Trudeau wrote an open letter to Canadians in which he spoke of the need to support NATO countries in their efforts to counteract the recently deployed Soviet SS-20 missiles. The testing of the cruise missile over Canada would be Canada's contribution to the NATO "two-track" policy of military strength on the one hand and arms control on the other.

The testing programme itself has generated mixed results. In 1986 one test ended in a crash-landing near the end of the flight, and, in a second test, the missile simply dropped into the sea when the engine failed to ignite.

As a weapon system the cruise missile has experienced an unprecedented rise from a little-known missile to a critical element of the nuclear forces of the superpowers and a major subject of negotiations on limiting and reducing nuclear arms. It has affected and been affected by strategic arms control negotiations undertaken by the United States and the Soviet Union.

Cruise missiles are "unmanned, self-propelled,

guided, weapon delivery vehicles which sustain flight through the use of aerodynamic lift over most of their flight path." [Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) II, Article II(8).] Cruise missiles can be launched in three different ways: from the ground (GLCM); from the air (ALCM); and from sea (SLCM). They are also categorized by the distances they can cover — some are referred to as short-range or tactical, in the range of a few hundred kilometres, and others as long-range or strategic, with ranges of a few thousand kilometres.

BACKGROUND

In the United States cruise missiles were pursued in the late 1940s and early 1950s as a possible delivery vehicle for nuclear weapons. During the 1950s it became clear that ballistic missiles could provide a more efficient delivery system for nuclear weapons. Consequently, US interest in cruise missiles began to decline, and by the early 1960s there was very little funding or activity in the US directed towards developing cruise missiles. Systems that had been deployed were slowly dismantled.

The Soviet Union has had a more consistent interest in cruise missiles. Like the US it emphasized the development of ballistic missiles as nuclear weapon delivery vehicles during the 1950s. Unlike the US, the Soviet Union continued to develop short-range cruise missiles through the 1950s and 1960s. By 1970, when the first SALT talks were underway, the Soviet Union had several hundred short-range air- and sea-launched cruise missiles. The purpose of these missiles was primarily to provide fleet support to the Soviet Navy, making up for their lack of aircraft carriers. Although the Soviet Union had a long-range cruise missile programme, no missiles were deployed.

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