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Cruise: Your Questions Answered

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Summary:

This information leaflet was produced by the Ministry of Defence in April 1983, leading up to the June 1983 general election. The publication explains the Government's position and why the deployment of Cruise missiles is in the UK's interest. While the pamphlet engaged with arguments advanced by peace organisations, no specific groups are named.

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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

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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