



Michael Pentz

Opportunity or Opportunism?

Reagan and Brezhnev have come up with new peace proposals. But do they mean anything.

In the January 1982 issue of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* there is a short article by Professor Carl G Jacobsen, who is professor and director of Soviet Studies at the University of Miami.

Jacobsen noted that in 'the gigantic peace demonstrations recently witnessed in Western Europe' the 'primary focus' has been on US cruise missile and Pershing II deployment plans rather than on the Soviet SS20 (though this is also attacked). This emphasis is apparently puzzling to many Americans. Jacobsen goes on to explain this in the following terms:

'The crux of the matter is that planned Cruise and Pershing deployments are seen to constitute a provocative "Cuba in reverse."

Cruise missiles and Pershing Us stationed in Western Europe would threaten Moscow. Their planned deployment is therefore seen as renegeing on an "understanding" that goes back to 1962-1963. This interpretation suggests that if it was legitimate for Washington to demand Soviet withdrawal in 1962, then it would be equally legitimate for Moscow to take a similar stand in 1983, when Cruise missiles and the Pershings are scheduled to appear in Europe.'

Why has the Soviet Union, since 1977-8, been replacing its 1959-vintage SS4 missiles, and probably also some of its 1961-vintage SS5s, by the new SS20s?

The SS4 is a massive missile (73 feet long, 5 feet in diameter) carrying a single 1 mega-

ton warhead. It has a range of about 2000km. It is extremely inaccurate (it has a 50/50 chance of landing within 15 miles of its target). It is propelled by a non-storable liquid fuel and takes several hours to prepare for launch. This makes it very vulnerable to attack. It is clearly a 'counter-city', or 'deterrent' weapon, and SS4s have been aimed at cities in Western Europe including Britain for practically 20 years.

The SS5 is even more massive than the SS4 (80 feet long, 8 feet in diameter) and is only slightly less obsolete than the SS4; first deployed in 1961 it is also liquid fuelled, but the liquid is storable. It has about double the range of SS4 and also carries a single 1 megaton warhead. It is a counter-city weapon,

like the SS4, with an accuracy of about 1.2 km compared with 2.4 km for the SS4.

SS20

The SS20 (first deployed in 1977) is a modern, solid-fuelled (so quickly launchable) missile, carrying three independently targetable warheads each of 150 kilotons yield and with an accuracy comparable with that of the best US missiles (about 400 metres).

Does the accuracy of SS20 make it an effective 'counterforce' weapon? No it does not. The 'hard-target kill probability' of SS20 is between 30% and 60% depending on the 'hardness' of the target. A weapon has a significant counterforce capacity only if the kill probability is well over 90% — and for that an accuracy of a few tens of metres is needed. So what's the point of SS20 and why is there such a fuss about *if*?

The vital difference between SS20 and the obsolete SS4s and SS5s it is replacing is that

Reagan's 'Zero Option' offer was obviously ridiculous

SS20 is mobile — it is launched from a mobile carrier. This makes it less vulnerable to attack, whereas the SS4 (and SS5) missiles were becoming more and more vulnerable to attack by US forward-based nuclear forces.

As Professor Jacobsen explains, the SS20s merely modernise a long existent threat to Western European cities:

'The point of the matter is, in other words, that SS20s merely confirm and guarantee long established Soviet strike potentials against America's allies. The Cruise and Pershing II missiles, however, threaten not just reciprocal destruction of Soviet allies; they threaten the Soviet heartland instead, just as effectively as do inter-continental range missiles based on US soil. For there to be a true analogy Moscow would have to deploy the SS20s in Cuba. The

European Theatre Nuclear Weapons 1980

	NATO	WTO
<i>Ground-launched missiles (range 750-5000km)</i>		
No. of warheads	198 ²	992
Total lethality ¹	1725	3406
<i>Submarine-launched missiles (range 1200-5000km)</i>		
No. of warheads	1056 ³	60
Total lethality	2440	15
<i>Aircraft (range 800-5000 km)</i>		
No. of warheads	1133 ⁴	1926
Total number of warheads	2387	2978
Total lethality ¹	4165	3421

¹ Lethality is the key quantity one needs to compare if one is concerned with counterforce capacity, ie, effectiveness against 'hard' military targets.

² Includes 18 French warheads

³ Includes 64 French warheads

⁴ Includes 57 French warheads

fact that Washington apparently feels that Moscow will be forced to swallow Cruise and Pershing missiles in NATO Europe, when it is quite clear that the United States would not tolerate SS20s outside Havana, furthermore suggests that US policymakers are far more confident about balance of power realities than their rhetoric would suggest.'

It is perhaps ironic that this commentary from a quite unbiased American source pre-dates by three months the hue and cry in the media (with the BBC well to the fore, as usual) about the 'Cuba card peeping from Mr. Brezhnev's sleeve' (*Guardian* 17 March 1982). The technique used by the media (and by Mrs Thatcher) both to pooh-poo the Brezhnev proposals and to promote Reagan's 'Zero-Option' as an 'historic proposal' is basically one of falsifying the data.

Brezhnev proposals

First, let's take a look at what Brezhnev actually proposed. In a speech on 3 February, he referred to earlier Soviet calls for a moratorium on further deployment of missiles in Europe and for an agreement that would reduce the current stocks of both sides by 'hundreds', and he went on to say 'It would be possible, for instance, to cut by 1990 the present number of medium-range nuclear armaments by each side to one-third or even less'. He suggested that this could be achieved if both sides agreed now to a step-by-step reduction that would lead to a 'cut in arsenals of both in the next few years by approximately one third — and then going further ahead'.

On 16 March, Brezhnev announced a unilateral freeze on the deployment of SS20s in Europe and called on NATO not to deploy Cruise and Pershing II missiles in five Western European countries. Then followed the 'warning' passage that was avidly seized upon by the media to distract attention from the substance of Brezhnev's positive proposals: 'We regard it as our duty to make perfectly clear that if the United States and its NATO allies, in defiance of the will of the nations for peace, were to carry out their plan to deploy in Europe hundreds of new American missiles, capable of striking targets on the territory of the Soviet Union, a different strategic situation would arise in the world. There would arise an additional threat to our country and its allies from the United States. This would compel us to take retaliatory steps that would put the other side, including the United States, its own territory, in an analogous position.'

The response from Mrs Thatcher was to assert that the Soviet freeze on intermediate range weapons should be dismissed because 'it freezes the total superiority of the Soviet

Union in these particular theatre nuclear weapons' (House of Commons, 16 February). She was, as usual merely echoing an earlier statement by Reagan — to the effect that a freeze on current nuclear missile deployment in Europe would leave the Russians with 'a 300 to nil advantage'.

Like all good lies, these are based on the truth, which is that NATO (excluding France) does indeed have no *land-based* intermediate range missiles, provided that one defines 'intermediate range' in such a way as to exclude the Pershing IA missiles, ie above 750 km.

It so happens that NATO chose not to develop *this particular type* of theatre nuclear weapon, relying instead upon a combination of submarine-launched missiles (the four British Polaris submarines and the five US Poseidon submarines assigned to the European theatre) with forward-based nuclear strike aircraft and shorter ranged ground-based missiles. If we count *all* the relevant weaponry systems on both sides, the picture looks rather different.

There was evidently a rough balance in 1980, and the figures include 480 of the new SS20 warheads. The WTO had more warheads but NATO had greater lethality.

Reagan's 'Zero Option'

President Reagan's 'Zero Option' proposal was that the Soviet Union should withdraw *all* its intermediate range missiles (SS4 and SS5 as well as the SS20) from Europe, in return for which the USA would not deploy the 464 Cruise missiles and 108 Pershing II missiles. The proposal could hardly be taken seriously because, apart from the obvious point that it would seriously upset the existing quantitative balance, it ignores the qualitative differences between SS20 and Cruise and Pershing II.

Reagan's 'Zero Option' offer was obviously ridiculous. So why did he make it? One reason was given away by Mrs Thatcher when she said that if the Soviet Union didn't accept Reagan's offer we would have to reconsider our level of defence expenditure. In other words, they *expected* the Soviets to reject the offer, and this would then provide the excuse they want to spend even more on new nuclear weapons, like MX and Trident and the Cruise missiles and Pershing II. The other reason was, in a way, a tribute to the growing strength of the peace movement in Europe. Reagan is afraid of its political influence and hoped, by this move, to confuse and divide the campaign.

The only merit of the Reagan proposals is in the fact that they had to be made in response to pressure from the European peace movement and that this may create an

opening through which it may be possible, by further pressure, to force genuine negotiations that could lead to deep cuts on both sides.

The peace movement

EP Thompson, in an article in the *Guardian* (30 November 1981) advocated a positive response to the "Zero Option" from the European peace movement and supported a proposal by David Ellsberg that Reagan's proposals should be accepted without bargaining, if and only if they are accompanied by a general freeze, binding on all powers, on the development, testing, manufacture and deployment of all further nuclear weapons at every level.

Commenting upon this in a letter (*Guardian* 8 December) Joan Ruddock (National Chairperson, CND), Bruce Kent (General Secretary, CND) and I wrote:

'We take the point that this is in harmony with both the US peace movement's campaign for a freeze and with the European movement's campaign to keep Cruise and Pershing II out of Europe and reduce (and ultimately eliminate) all nuclear weapons in Europe.

We should like to suggest an addition to the Ellsberg formula that would be in harmony with the principal aim of the British peace movement, and which would also make the

formula a bit better balanced. The formula would then have three elements:

1. The USSR withdraws SS4, SS5 and SS20 from the European theatre.

2. The USA withdraws the F111 bombers and the Poseidon submarines from the European theatre. (This is our addition. It would mean the closure of the Holy Loch base and of US Air Force F111 bases in Britain).

3. Both sides agree to a general freeze on the development, testing, manufacture and deployment of all further nuclear weapons systems at every level.'

Brezhnev's subsequent statements indicate that the Soviet Union would be willing to negotiate seriously on any formula, such as this one, which would lead to real, and reasonably balanced, reductions in nuclear weapons in Europe.

Mrs Thatcher, in her comments on the Brezhnev proposals on 16 March, stressed her 'commitment to negotiating disarmament — *but only from a position of strength*'. This well-worn phrase highlights a concern that is not alleviated by the apparently inflexible preoccupation on the Soviet side with concepts of 'strategic balance'. People who really want to see nuclear disarmament happen (as distinct from just being talked about) often warn us that the concept of 'strategic balance' can be a dangerous one. If

either side interprets 'balance' as meaning 'approximate *apparent* balance, but with a *real* safety margin in our favour', then the balance will be unstable, as one side strives to close the margin and the other to maintain it. In this way, the concept of a strategic balance can actually stimulate the arms race.

Nevertheless, Brezhnev's announcement of a freeze on the deployment of SS20s and his willingness to negotiate drastic reductions in intermediate range missiles by both sides, should be taken up much more vigorously by the peace movement and the labour movement. The response from Labour's front bench to this opportunity has been pathetic, and, with the notable exception of CND in Scotland, the peace movement has shown little enthusiasm.

There is an element of opportunism in the studied 'plague on both your houses' attitude of some people in the movement. So long as one appears to criticise symmetrically Soviet and US positions one is supposed to be 'respectable' and hopefully immune from accusations of being 'agents of the Kremlin'.

We have yet to learn how to combine *principled criticism* of Soviet policies and actions with a positive response to initiatives that correspond objectively with the goals of the peace movement. Q

Worker Co-operatives and Trade Unions: a Joint Approach

**Friday 11th to Sunday 13th June.
At Beechwood College, Elmete Lane,
Leeds 8.
Tel: 0532 720205**

A weekend conference for trade unionists to find out more about worker co-operatives, their role in the labour movement and whether there is a basis for collaboration between trade unions and worker co-operatives. Guest speakers include Bob Cryer MP, George Wright, General Secretary Wales TUG.

Price £30 inclusive.

For further information, contact Beechwood College at above address

INTERESTED IN SOCIALIST POLITICS

We could fill this space with a thousand reasons why you should find out more about the Communist Party.

Instead we will give you just one - *MARXISM TODAY*.

As the theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party it reflects our attractive, committed and open approach to socialist politics.

For the other 999 reasons complete the form below and return to Gordon McLennan, 16 St. John Street, London, EC1M 4AY. Telephone 01-251 4406.

I wish to join/wish to know more about The Communist Party /The Young Communist League.

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____