
Defense Report

AUSA



Strengthening NATO's Theater Nuclear Forces—A Continuing Commitment to Freedom

Five years ago the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) adopted a plan to counter rapidly growing Soviet deployments of mobile SS-20 intermediate range ballistic missiles and nuclear-capable Backfire bombers which can strike from within the Soviet Union against any European target. The NATO alliance agreed to modernize its theater nuclear forces by deploying 108 Pershing II missiles in West Germany and 464 cruise missiles there and in Britain, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. The 1979 commitment was hailed as the most important agreement reached by the NATO allies since the acceptance of West German armed forces.

No other action in the more than three decades that NATO has helped to preserve peace in Europe has prompted such vitriolic threats from the Soviet Union and such violent demonstrations on the part of antinuclear activists. An aggressive propaganda campaign was mounted by the Soviets, beginning with letters from Leonid Brezhnev to Western heads of state and culminating in a massive effort to influence the West German elections shortly before the first of the modernized Pershing II missiles were to be deployed in Germany. During 1983, Yuri Andropov, Mr. Brezhnev's successor, made outright demands that the West European nations reject the U.S. missiles they had requested.

When it became apparent that these ploys had failed, the Soviets unilaterally terminated all ongoing arms control talks, refusing to continue negotiations on intermediate-range nuclear forces, strategic arms reductions or mutual and balanced force reductions (in Europe) unless NATO allies acceded to Soviet demands that all U.S. Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles be withdrawn from Europe. Despite the Soviet threats, the NATO allies have steadfastly proceeded to deploy their missiles according to plan. Although the Dutch government has postponed deployment of the 48 cruise missiles planned for the Netherlands until 1985, the NATO countries' resolute determination has added a new dimension to their ability to deter Soviet aggression in Europe and has acted to remove a potential source of Soviet nuclear blackmail.