

"Holes" in Western missile argument' from The Guardian (16 August 1983)

Caption: On 16 August 1983, as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) talks continue, British daily newspaper The Guardian reports on the disagreement concerning the exclusion of British and French weapons from the talks, which are aimed at the dismantling of intermediate-range nuclear weapons by the US and the USSR.

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'Holes' in Western missile argument

From Michael Getler,
in Washington

A new congressional report suggests that there are some weak spots in the US and Allied argument that British and French missiles should not be counted in the intermediate-range nuclear arms talks between the US and the Soviet Union.

The report, by the Congressional Research Service, says that the question of whether to count the 162 missiles is "a major obstacle" in the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) talks that began in Geneva in 1981.

The Soviet Union argues that the British and French missiles are aimed at them and must be taken into account, along with the planned deployment of 572 new US missiles in Western Europe, in any agreement seeking a balance in forces on both sides.

The US, Nato, Britain, and France all vigorously oppose this view, arguing that the British and French deterrents are sovereign forces of last resort not under Nato command and meant only to deter an attack on Britain and France. They say that defending the rest of Western Europe would be left to US missiles.

The CRS report is meant to be a guide and does not draw any conclusions, yet its tone suggests that the issue has at least two sides. I also suggests that some of the Western argument may ignore formal British and French obligations under the basic Nato treaty of 1949 and the subsequent Western European Union agreement.

For example, citing British documents, the report says that all 64 of Britain's submarine-launched nuclear missiles "are assigned to Nato." Although remaining under national command during peace, they are placed under the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, "in time of emergency" and are targeted in coordination with the US Strategic Air Command.

The British have reserved the right to withhold use of their nuclear arsenal, the report points out. But so too, technically, has the US, whose forces can be used in Nato defence only on the President's authority.

The French deterrent — 80 submarine-launched and 18 land-based missiles — is much more clearly designated to remain under national control in an emergency. France, under de Gaulle, withdrew from the military section of Nato in 1966.—Washington Post.

