Jes · to the NEWS

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B-1 CANCELLATION

When interviewed after President Carter's decision to cancel production of the B-1 bomber, one union worker who will lose his job said ruefully, "I voted for Carter; I thought he was too smart to do this."

It is hard to understand how the worker could be surprised. Carter campaigned against the B-1, and he kept his promise.

How "smart" Carter is, is indeed one of the issues in the B-1 decision, as House Minority Leader John Rhodes also detected when he leveled his charge of "rank amateurism."

The most amateurish part of the Carter decision was his statement, "I can't deny that was a factor," when a reporter asked him if his decision might signal the Kremlin that he is striving for progress in the SALT II talks. The Soviet bargainers would be far more apt to be reasonable if we were building instead of scrapping the B-1.

The other evidence of amateurism is Carter's apparent belief that we can rely indefinitely on the aging B-52s to deliver the proposed cruise missile. Our B-52s are great planes, but they are 20 years old, they are subsonic, and they had hard usage in Vietnam.

Nobody says, "Don't build any new-model passenger planes or automobiles or computers because 20-year-old models are adequate!" Near the end of the Vietnam War, 14 slow B-52s were shot down in two days by surface-to-air missiles that were then 10 years old.

President Carter argued that we don't need the B-1 because we are developing the cruise missile and it is a more effective weapon. In the first place, the B-1 is a bird in the hand, while the cruise missile is a bird in the bush. It isn't ready for production as the B-1 is.

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In the second place, those who oppose building the B-l are the same people who oppose building the cruise missile. They are pitting the B-l as a competitor to the cruise missile and hoping to bury both.

Those who can remember back to 1962 have an ominous feeling of deja vu. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara canceled the great long-range heavy bol]ber called the B-70, despite full funding for its development by Congress and its spectacular successes in flight tests at mach 3. He said that we did not need the B-70 because the B-52s equipped with Skybolt missiles could do the same job more "cost-effectively."

That sounded plausible then. Skybolt was a marvelous long-range air-to-surface missile with inertial guidance that could fly a thousand miles. But a few months later, McNamara canceled Skybolt.

So now President Carter has canceled the supersonic B-1, telling us that we can rely on the subsonic B-52 to carry the cruise missile. If history repeats itself, we can now expect the cruise missile to be canceled or surrendered in SALT II.

The probability of history repeating itself is enhanced when you remember that Carter's chief advisers on the B-l and SALT are highly experienced in canceling U.S. weapons. Both Defense Secretary Harold Brown and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance were principal lieutenants of the same Robert McNamara who gave the double whammy to the B-70 and Skybolt.

The cancellation of Skybolt brought Winston Churchill out of retirement to issue a warning to the West which is still valid today: "Sometimes in the past we have committed the folly of throwing away our arms. Under the mercy of Providence, and at great cost and sacrifice, we have been able to recreate them when the need arose. But if we abandon our nuclear deterrent, there will be no second chance. To abandon it now would be to abandon it forever."

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