

MORE OF THE SAME? — A CRITIQUE OF THE NEW SCHOOL HISTORY SYLLABUSES

O v d Berg (University of the Western Cape)

In an earlier article in *Yesterday and Today* (April 1982) an attempt was made to critique the existing history core syllabus from the perspective of a discussion of the aims of history teaching. Now that new core syllabuses have been finalised and are to be implemented during the next few years, it seems appropriate to compare the different documents to see what changes have been made. This is a profitable exercise in that "while we believe ourselves to be searching freely for an ideal syllabus, we are... already burdened by a traditional selection... which will always seem more natural and orthodox than any other". (Historical Association: 1932).

The existing syllabuses follow the time-honoured pattern of having three sections, *viz.* aims, content and evaluation procedures. As the new syllabuses also follow this subdivision, we shall attempt a comparison according to the same subdivisions.

AIMS

The aims of the **existing** syllabuses, constitute a very generally expressed series of propositions about the value of learning history, benefits which were supposed to accrue to pupils as they learnt a corpus of historical "facts". The aims suggest little sense of a need for pupils to come to grips with the problem of understanding history as a discipline. What is more, the aims as set out in the syllabus had no obvious impact on the way the content was selected or on the way it was meant to be handled — in fact, the aims were far better understood rather as a series of justifications for the teaching and learning of history. Where there was reference to the aim of introducing pupils to methods of historical research, this was in order to equip them to cope with the assignment in the Senior Secondary phase rather than as an overarching aim of the teaching and learning of history.

When we turn to the **new** syllabuses we find that the general aims remain in essence what they were in the existing syllabuses, although under "General Remarks" we are told that the syllabuses have been designed "to integrate the teaching of content, skills and attitudes" and to allow for "harmony between the learning process (the 'how') and the learning product (the 'what')" (JMB, 1983:3). A perusal of the syllabus content, however, offers little, if any, evidence that it was determined with such aims in mind, nor are there any suggestions regarding **how** teachers are expected to implement an approach concentrating more on the processes of history. It is probably fair to conclude that what is listed here as an "aim" is actually a **hope** expressed by the syllabus architects. In conclusion, the evidence remains strong that the aims set out in the new syllabuses — like those of the existing syllabuses — have played no significant role in the process of syllabus revision, and in fact serve rather as **post hoc** rhetorical statements. They do little to discourage the widely prevalent practice of a one-directional teaching of "facts" by the teacher, and the learning and regurgitation of those "facts" by the pupils.

Significant developments in school history, notably through the British Schools Council history project, have therefore had little influence on the architects of the new syllabuses. The trend of these new developments has

been towards concentrating upon learning "the characteristic procedures of a professional historian" and mastering "the central concepts of the historical discipline, like 'evidence', 'source' and the notion of the tentative, provisional nature of historical judgements," rather than treating history as one of those subjects having "bodies of information to be passed on from teacher to learner." (Gunning, 1978: 2, 17). As South African history syllabus are unlikely to be revised again for a decade or more, a great opportunity has been lost.

SYLLABUS CONTENT

The **existing Senior Secondary syllabuses** have, over the years, been criticized on a number of grounds. These may be summed up as follows:

1. A very considerable amount of material is expected to be taught and learnt every year. The implied approach is the superficial **survey** rather than the study of any topic in any real depth.
2. The General history sections are heavily eurocentric. Dealing almost exclusively with "Western" history, they refer to "non-Western" history only when and insofar as it is deemed to affect the Western World. So, for instance, Africa receives scant attention, except as a stage for European activity. When the 'New Africa' is studied, (Std 10) this occurs without the coverage of any African history after the partition of Africa, the latter being looked at from the point of view of the colonizers and not the colonized.
3. The General history sections also concentrate heavily on political, constitutional and diplomatic history, consistently underemphasizing social and economic history. Even the Industrial Revolution is portrayed largely as a matter concerning industrial inventors and innovators.
4. The South African history sections reflect an essentially "white" perspective of the history of the country with a strong emphasis on historical developments supposedly affecting or precipitated by "whites". Reference to people other than "white" usually occurs as "background information" (the Mfekane as a backdrop to the Great Trek, for instance), as "problems" or recipients of "policy" and/or administration, as persons having a "separate" history or as persons collectively constituting incipient or established "separate nations". There is no study of pre-colonial South African history, 1652 remaining the inevitable starting point.
5. The structure of the syllabus encourages the study of the General and/or South African history in isolation, no obvious avenues existing for the correlation of the work done.
6. The distinctions between Higher Grade (HG) and Standard Grade (SG) concern merely a differentiation in content, i.e. certain sections set down for HG study are excluded from the SG syllabuses. No advice is offered to the teacher on how the subject is to be handled at more than one level, and the aims of the two syllabuses are identical.

An analysis of the existing **Junior Secondary syllabuses** shows them to be subject to basically the same criticism, although there is more material dealing with social and cultural history. The major additional criticism has always been the heavily biographical approach adopted for this phase — the Renaissance, for instance, is presented via the study of a selection from twelve important figures, the Church Reformation via the study of a selection from six, and so on. Given the amount of work that has to be covered, there is no way of studying even one of these historical figures in adequate depth.

What changes can we notice in the new syllabuses? The **General history** sections of the **Senior Secondary** syllabuses are largely a rearrangement of the material in the existing syllabuses, though the introduction in Std 8 of a section entitled “The Economic Revolution: the Development of Industrialism (sic), Capitalism and Socialism, 1789 to 1859” is an important improvement. As far as overloading is concerned, there is a definite improvement, especially in Std 10, where the unofficial “spotting” of sections by teachers has now been formalised into a concentration upon a certain number of topics rather than the current breathless rush through the whole syllabus.

The other criticisms of the existing syllabuses remain valid for the new: the syllabuses remain heavily eurocentric and “Western”, even the apparently global sweep of the new Std 10 syllabus having to be understood within the framework of superpower conflict and therefore as falling within the category of “Western” history, dealing with “non-Western” nations and events only when and insofar as they are deemed to affect the Western World. A study of the history of Africa has become even more peripheral, while the emphasis on political, military, diplomatic and constitutional aspects is largely unchanged.

The **South African** history sections of the **Senior Secondary** syllabus, although again much material has been moved, regrouped or consolidated, reveal even less change than in the case in General history. The overemphasis on political, constitutional and diplomatic history and the essentially “white” perspective on the history of South Africa remain entrenched in the new syllabuses. Perhaps the most encouraging changes are the section in the Std 8 syllabus allowing for the study of an aspect or aspects of the history of one or more of the communities south of the Limpopo during the second half of the nineteenth century, and a new subdivision for Std 10 dealing with “Policy on race relations and the ensuing reactions” in the period 1948 - 70. The South African history sections also seem to offer some relief regarding the amount of material that has to be covered, thus hopefully allowing for more study in depth of the various topics.

Finally, the new syllabuses again offer very little guidance to the teacher about how to differentiate between HG and SG, apart from the usual distinctions in the **amount** of material to be covered. It seems as if the examination is intended to remain the major means of differentiation.

Turning to the new **Junior Secondary** syllabuses, and looking first at the **General history** sections, the most noticeable and praiseworthy innovation is that the much-maligned biographical approach has very largely been dropped. The Std 5 and 6 syllabuses contain little that is new, but the frenetic biographical rush in Std 7 is replaced by a most innovative set of five themes, one of which is to be determined by the relevant education department and three of which have internal options.

There is a definite reduction in the amount of material to

be covered in each year, but the syllabuses are still largely guilty of the accusation of eurocentricity: at no stage in Std 5 and 6 does the pupil meet any history not emanating from Europe and the Middle East. Africa, unless it is chosen as a special topic by a department, occurs only as a theatre for European activity or as an option within a further set of options.

The South African history sections show that the biographical approach has been dropped entirely. The essentially “white” perspective remains unchallenged and remains informed by a traditional Afrikaner Nationalist interpretation of history, the innovations in Std 7 notwithstanding. The history pupils learn also remains very largely focussed on political and constitutional rather than social and economic history. It is staggering to think that **at no stage** between Std 3 and Std 10 is the South African school pupil to encounter any precolonial South African history; the Junior Secondary starts in 1707, while the earlier years still regard 1652 as the crucial date. In this way the discredited view that there **was** no South African history before the coming of the Europeans is perpetuated, in spite of impressive recent research regarding the precolonial history of the indigenous people of the subcontinent.

Taken as a whole, then, the new syllabuses reveal little significant change from those they are to replace. While there is some relief in the amount of work to be covered and in the introduction of more options than in the past, the syllabuses remain heavily eurocentric, they continue to overemphasize political, constitutional and diplomatic history, they still treat General and South African history in isolation and they still treat South African history overwhelmingly from a “white” perspective. African history and pre-colonial South African history remain seriously underemphasized, if not completely ignored.

EXAMINATION/EVALUATION

The evaluation procedures for the new Junior Secondary syllabuses represent no change. One wishes, though, that more teachers would note and take advantage of the stipulations, which state quite clearly that the same subject matter “need not be evaluated repeatedly during the year” and that evaluation can be by “testing periodically and/or tasks and/or a formal examination at the end of the year.” There is a freedom of action here that is often **not** used to full advantage by teachers. In fact, the often-voiced accusation that the syllabuses are too repetitive is often the fault of the teacher who frequently retests the same material in the course of a year. The new syllabuses, taken as a whole, also manage to eliminate to a significant degree the repetition of work done in previous years, sometimes by approaching the same historical period from a different perspective.

The new stipulations for evaluation in Std 10 are considerably more flexible than in the existing syllabuses. Examinations, we are told, may consist of **either** a formal examination **or** a year mark as well as a formal examination. Where the latter option is followed, the year mark is determined “under regulations laid down by the examining body concerned and agreed to by the JMB.” Each examining body is free to decide whether to offer an **assignment** or not, and “to decide whether the marks of the assignment will form part of the year mark or part of the examination mark.” The stipulations regarding the form of the formal examination remain, however, basically unchanged, with essay-type questions having to constitute between 70% - 80% of the total. The possibilities for more flexible approaches to the examination are rendered very largely impossible.

History has for many years been one of the most controversial school subjects, its unpopularity emerging spectacularly in the school unrest of 1976 and 1980. A question that has to be faced, then, is why the new syllabuses display only relatively insignificant changes. The answer must necessarily be sought in the realization that any educational dispensation is embedded within a social, economic and political context which it is designed to serve, and that there is as a consequence a significant interrelationship between the control of knowledge in the curriculum and the distribution of power in the broad national context. As Bernstein put it succinctly, "How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control." (in Young, 1971 : 47).

If Michael Apple is correct, that "curriculum design, the creation of educative environments in which students are to dwell. . . involves competing ideological, political and intensely personal conceptions of valuable educational activity" (Apple, 1979 : 111), then an explanation of how any syllabus comes into being necessarily requires an evaluation of the syllabus decision-making processes that exist in a given society — processes that are essentially **politically** determined in that they are devised, legislated and enforced by political rather than educational forces. The answer to the question why, if there are competing conceptions of what a history syllabus should look like, there is then so little change in the new syllabus, is in fact quite simple: the composition of the syllabus decision-making bodies has not changed in any significant way since the last round of syllabus revision.

Syllabus decisions, in terms of existing legislative and administrative stipulations, remain very largely in the hands of the "white" education authorities, more specifically the Committee of Heads of Education. While the Joint Matriculation Board is also a crucial partner in the final approval of the Senior Secondary syllabuses, its composition also ensures the perpetuation of an interpretation of history congenial to the ruling elite. The rules of the syllabus revision exercise remain so devised as to ensure that other groups have only a peripheral involve-

ment in the procedures, and no ultimate say. The apparently benign administrative concept of "co-ordination" between different education authorities allows for the subsequent extension of decisions taken by "white" authorities to the education of all South Africa's people, and this is also often misleadingly offered as evidence of the "equality" existing between the different education departments, because all use the same syllabuses.

The same strategy largely informs the distinction made in the new constitution between "algemene sake" and "eie sake"; syllabus revision as a matter of common interest remains dominated by "whites" while its operationalization, once the right ideological slant has been built into the syllabus, can safely be left as an "eie saak". Not surprisingly, the Government has shown but scant sympathy for the De Lange Report's attempts to democratize the curriculum development process. The political realities of South African life suggest that we should not be surprised to see new history syllabuses constituting basically "more of the same": those in power are never easily persuaded of the need to share or shed their power. Where a particular historical paradigm is consistently used in the legitimation of the present political dispensation, alternative historical interpretations must continue to be seen as **politically** dangerous and therefore to be avoided. Significant changes in history syllabuses can then only be expected in the wake of significant changes in the political dispensation. Until then we should not be surprised if history syllabuses remain unacceptable to the majority of South Africa's people.

References:

- Apple, M W: *Ideology and Curriculum*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.
 Gunning, D: *The Teaching of History*, London, Croom Helm, 1978.
 Joint Matriculation Board/Committee of Heads of Education: *Core Syllabus for History Stds 5 - 7 and Stds 8 - 10*, Pretoria, 1983.
 Young, M F S (ed): *Knowledge and Control*, London, Collier-MacMillan, 1971.

DIE NUUTSTE INTERMEDIËRE-AFSTAND-BALLISTIESE KERNMISSIELE

J Bruwer (Krygshistoriese Museum)

Wanneer daar vandag oor die moontlike uitbreek van 'n kernoorlog bespiegel word, dink 'n mens onwillekeurig aan die gebruik van kernmissiele in so 'n oorlog. Die leiers op die gebied van hierdie vernietigende wapens is die Verenigde State van Amerika en dié se aartsvyand, Sowjet-Rusland. Hierdie twee lande is in 'n wedloop gewikkel waarin die een heelyd probeer om beter en kragtiger kernmissiele as die van sy teenstaander te bou.

Daar is onlangs wye nuusdekking aan die ontplooiing van sogenaamde intermediêre-afstand-ballistiese missiele (IABM) in Europa gegee. Dit is naamlik missiele wat oor afstande van 2 500 tot 6 000 kilometer ver afgevuur kan word. Die mees moderne van hierdie klas missiele is die Russiese SS-20 Mobiele Missiel en die bekende Amerikaanse Tomahawk Kruisermisiel ("Cruise Missile") wat albei vanaf die grond gelanseer word.

Word daar na die huidige status van ontplooiing van die SS-20 missiel gekyk, sien 'n mens dat die Russe reeds 'n totaal van 243 van hierdie missiele teen Mei 1983 in die westelike gedeeltes van Sowjet-Rusland vir gebruik gereed gehad het. Die lande van die Noord-Atlantiese Verdragsorganisasie in Wes-Europa soos byvoorbeeld Frankryk, Wes-Duitsland en Brittanje dien as teikens van hierdie missiele.

Kyk 'n mens van nader na die SS-20 sien 'n mens dat die Russe hier oor 'n skrikwekkende wapen beskik. Dit weeg 16 000 kilogram voor lansering, het 'n trefafstand van 4 000 tot 5 000 kilometer en kan baie akkuraat teen teikens oor hierdie groot afstand gebruik word. Die ver naamste kenmerk van die SS-20 is egter dat dit met, na wat verwys word as drie "multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles" (MIRV) toegerus is. Dit kom

daarop neer dat die SS-20 nie slegs een enkele kernplofkop nie, maar drie het wat afsonderlik teen drie verskillende teikens gebruik kan word nadat die SS-20 missiel gelanseer is. Elk van hierdie drie kernplofkoppe beskik oor 'n plofkrag van 1,5 megaton TNT, wat beteken dat elk vyf-en-sewentig keer kragtiger is as die atoombom wat op Hiroshima gegooi was.

Die SS-20 is 'n mobiele missiel aangesien dit nie soos die ouer kernmissiele vanuit 'n lanseerbunker in die grond nie maar vanaf 'n groot en lang voertuig gelanseer word wat soos 'n monsteragtige vragmotor lyk. Die missiel word hierop vervoer, in die vuurposisie gehys en dan gelanseer.

Die hardnekkige wyse waarmee die Russe hulle SS-20 missiele sedert 1977 naby Wes-Europa begin plaas het, het die Amerikaners geforseer om vinnig na 'n teenvoeter vir hierdie missiele te soek. Hulle het hierin geslaag met die suksesvolle bou van hulle Tomahawk Kruisermissiele waarop hulle vandag baie trots is. Van hierdie missiele is onlangs op 'n nuuswekkende wyse by Greenham Common, Berkshire in Brittanje ontplooi. 'n Totaal van 464 Tomahawk Kruisermissiele sal uiteindelik in Wes-Europa geplaas word.

Die Tomahawk Kruisermissiel weeg 1 450 kilogram voor lansering, het 'n trefafstand van 2 500 kilometer en beskik oor 'n kernplofkop wat tien keer kragtiger is as die Hiroshima-atoombom.

Die Tomahawk Kruisermissiel word soos die SS-20 missiele, vanaf dieselfde voertuig gelanseer as dié waarop die missiel vervoer word. Die verskil lê daarin dat nie een nie, maar vier Tomahawk Kruisermissiele op 'n enkele voertuig vervoer en vanaf dieselfde voertuig gelanseer kan word. Die basiese Tomahawk Kruisermissiel-eenheid bestaan uit vier sulke voertuie, met ander woorde sestien missiele, en 'n bemanning van nege-en-sestig.

Elke Tomahawk Kruisermissiel beskik oor 'uitswaai'-vlerke wat op die middelromp van die missiel voorkom, 'n rigmeganisme en kernplofkop in die voorseksie-eenheid en 'n turbine-waaier enjin in die agterseksie-eenheid. 'n Vuurpyl-aanjaagmotor kom aan die stertkant van die missiel voor.

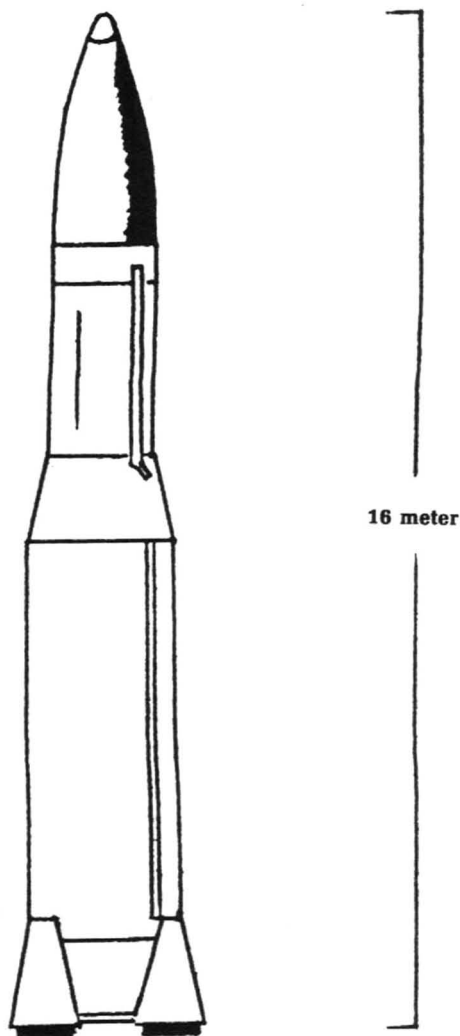
Dit is die werk van die vuurpyl-aanjaagmotor om die Tomahawk Kruisermissiel gelanseer te kry. Ongeveer dertien sekondes na lansering het die missiel reeds sy kruissnelheid van ongeveer 880 km per uur bereik, het die vlerke van die missiel reeds na hulle vliegposisie uitgeswaai, en word die uitgebrande vuurpylaanjaagmotor afgewerp. Die turbine-waaier enjin kom dan in werking om die missiel vir die res van sy vlug aan te dryf.

Die interessantheid van die Tomahawk Kruisermissiel lê daarin dat dit op 'n besondere lae hoogte, naamlik 200 meter bokant die grond vlieg en sodoende baie moeilik deur vyandelike radar opgespoor kan word. Die missiel in vlug volg die natuurlike kontoere van die aarde deur oor berge te 'klim' en weer te daal wanneer dit oor byvoorbeeld valleie vlieg.

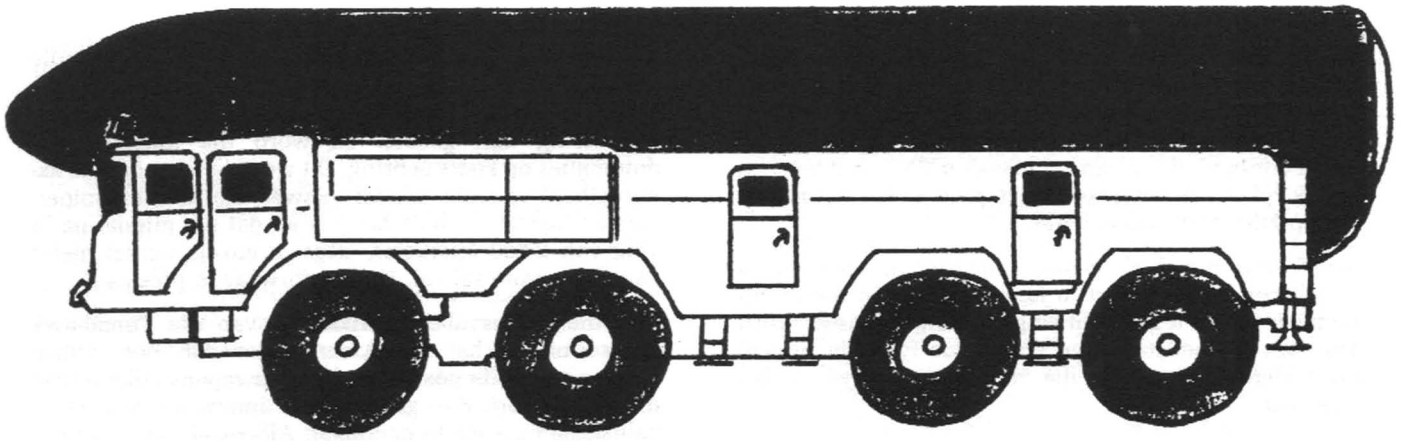
Die tweede interessantheid in verband met die Tomahawk Kruisermissiel is sy hoogs-ontwikkelde navigasie rigstelsel wat vir die 'stuur' van die missiel na sy teiken verantwoordelik is. Dit word die terreinkontoer-aanpassingstelsel genoem. Die terrein waarvoor die missiel vlieg word in hierdie stelsel met 'n kaart van die terrein vergelyk wat voor lansering aan 'n rekenaar van die missiel se rigmeganisme gevoer is. 'n Radarmeganisme in die missiel self skakel by voorafgeprogrammeerde stadions op die missiel se vliegroete aan en lees die gradiënte in die kontore van die terrein

waarvoor die missiel besig is om te vlieg. Hierdie gradiëntlesings word met dié van die rekenaar vergelyk. Indien die missiel ietwat van koers af is, word die nodige aanpassing dan gedoen en word die missiel weer outomaties op koers gebring. Dit word beweer dat die akkuraatheid van die missiel vanweë die 'terreinkontoer-aanpassingstelsel', baie hoog is en dat die missiel na 'n vlug van 2 500 kilometer, slegs 'n enkele tiental meter vanaf sy teiken sal val. Dit is voorwaar 'n prestasie!

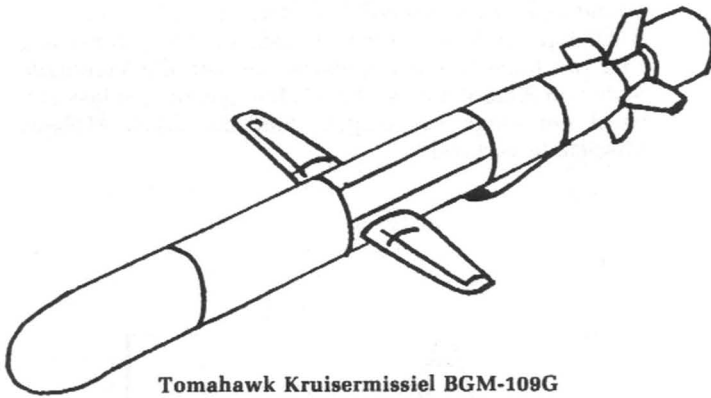
Met die suksesvolle ontwikkeling van die Tomahawk Kruisermissiel het die Amerikaners dan ook daarin geslaag om hulle posisie in die kernwapenwedloop teen die Russe op die gebied van intermediêre-afstand-ballistiese missiele te handhaaf. Alhoewel die SS-20 oor 'n groter kernslaanekrag en trefafstand as die Tomahawk Kruisermissiel beskik, het die Russe nogtans baie hewig teen die bou en ontplooiing van die Tomahawk Kruisermissiel te velde getrek. Die rede hiervoor is dat die Tomahawk Kruisermissiel anders as die SS-20, 'n goedkoop missiel is om te bou. Daar sal dus somer nog baie van hulle in die wapenarsenale van die Verenigde State van Amerika en sy NAVO-bondgenote geplaas kan word om enige heerskappy deur die SS-20 Mobiele Missiele te verhoed.



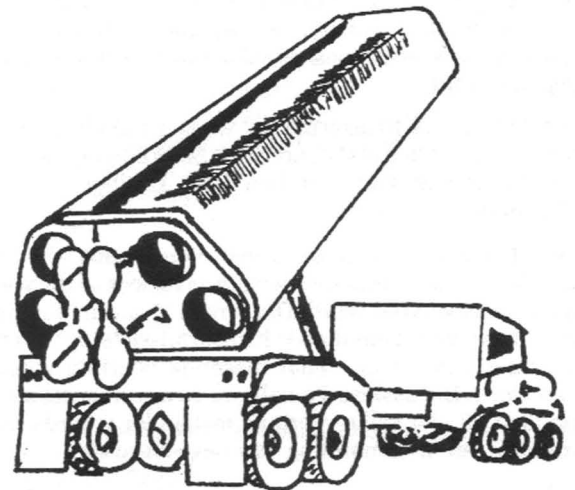
SS-20 Mobiele Missiel



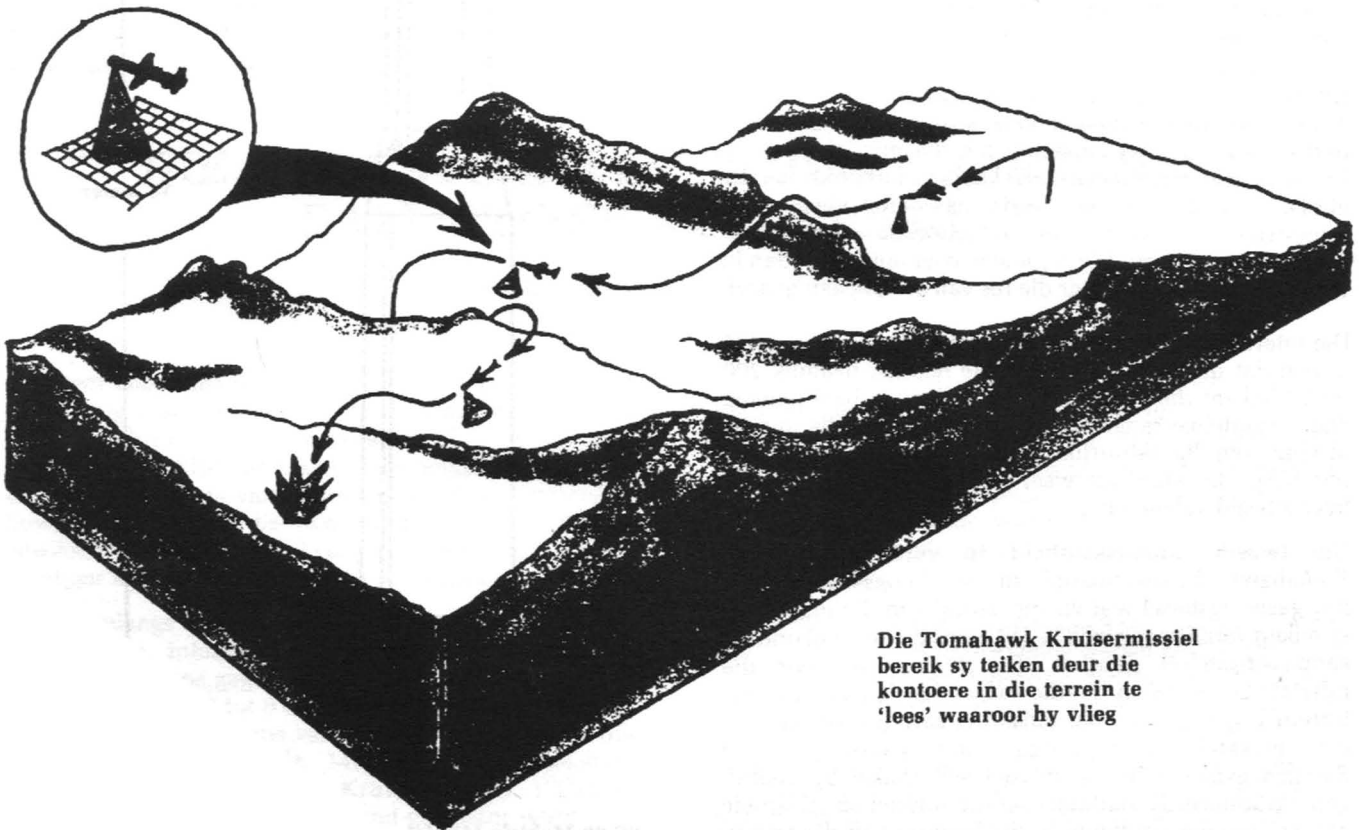
SS-20 Missiel in omhulsel op vervoer/ophys/lanseer-vragmotor



Tomahawk Kruisermisiel BGM-109G



Vragmotor waarvandaan Tomahawk Kruisermisiel gelanseer word



Die Tomahawk Kruisermisiel bereik sy teiken deur die kontoere in die terrein te 'lees' waaroor hy vlieg