

Issue Update

From Congressman Les AuCoin

July, 1983

MX: Missile Without A Mission

Shortly after the Fourth of July, debate will resume on one of the most important defense and arms control issues to face the nation, ever.

This is the \$20 billion question: Should the nation invest a \$2.6 billion downpayment on the MX missile? Each missile will have 10 nuclear warheads. The full cost of testing, building and deploying all 100 MX missiles is expected to exceed \$20 billion.

I believe it would be a horrible mistake to build the MX. We don't need it. It won't make us safer. It will make nuclear war more likely. And it will hurt the economy.

These are some of the major factors:

(1) With budget deficits over \$200 billion a year for the foreseeable future, the MX is a millstone on our hopes for economic recovery. Without the MX, the federal government is already borrowing 75 percent of the total savings pool in the U.S. — pushing private borrowers out and raising interest rates. With the MX, we increase the risk that recovery will be choked off, making our economic problems extremely serious.

(2) To move firmly against the gains of the Soviets and other international opponents, our defense budget must be spent more effectively — such as making up a critical shortage of combat replacement aircraft for the Navy. As President Eisenhower once said: "If we put one more dollar in a weapons system than we should, we are weakening the defense of the United States."

(3) The MX cannot survive a Soviet first strike. Even the proponents of the MX admit that. Therefore, the MX must either be launched first, or it must be launched immediately upon warning of a Soviet attack in order to survive. "Launch on warning" means launching when you think you're under attack rather than when you know you're under attack, thus introducing even more risk into the arms race. As McGeorge Bundy, the former national security advisor to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson put it: "If there was ever a 'use it or lose it' system, ill-designed for stability in crisis, it is this one."

I believe that with the military capacity of each side to obliterate the other, the primary target of a strategic weapon is no longer an enemy weapon, but the mind of the enemy leader. We must make him answer the question: "If I strike first, what will it cost me?" If we go ahead with the silo-based MX, here is the message we will send to Mr. Andropov:

"If you attack us, you will wipe out our very accurate MX missiles and keep the use of your own weapons for a time. But if you don't attack, at any moment we may beat you to the punch, catch you by surprise, and destroy the ICBMs which carry the bulk of your strategic strength."

"We don't need the MX: It won't make us safer. It will make nuclear war more likely."

Such a message does not deter enemy attack. It invites attack. To send this message to our adversaries violates the traditional American principle of nuclear deterrence. In the most fundamental way, it violates the American people's right to be secure from nuclear attack.

It is asserted by proponents of the MX that we will never use the MX or any other nuclear weapon in a first strike. As an American, of course I want to believe this. But what I or any other American believes is beside the point. What matters — national security may hinge on it — is what the Soviets conclude as they watch deployment of a weapon which, despite the claims of its

proponents, cannot effectively be used in any way other than a first strike.

The idea that Congress can use the MX to "bargain" with the Administration for arms control is a mirage.

Achievement of major strategic arms control agreements is, even with the most intense dedication, a difficult and arduous process. It cannot and will never be achieved by an Administration whose view of arms control could most politely be described as ambivalent. Strategic arms control might be compared to running a four-minute mile: If the runner fails, nobody but he can ever know the real reason for the failure.

An Administration dedicated to arms control doesn't need to be bargained into it. An Administration not dedicated to arms control cannot be bargained into it.

Throughout the debate so far, some have conceded that the MX makes no sense as a weapon, but then claim we need this vulnerable missile as a demonstration of national will. It remains to be explained how our enemies, our allies, or anyone else will be favorably impressed by the sight of our determination to build a weapon that cannot stand on its own merits.

The Soviet Union and the United States have more than 7,500 nuclear warheads apiece right now. The U.S. has about 5,000 of its warheads on submarines, which are safe from attack, and about 2,100 on land-based missiles in fixed silos, which are vulnerable. The Soviet Union has about 6,000 warheads on land-based missiles, and about 1,500 on submarines. By adding 100 MX missiles with 1,000 highly accurate, silo-busting warheads to our arsenal, there is simply no reason to believe we will convince the Soviet Union to shift its arms control policy in our favor.

Never in history has a major strategic weapon been permanently canceled after being approved for the level of funding MX now faces. The time to decide is now. Using the comments card below, I would very much appreciate knowing your views.

MX COMMENT CARD

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THE AuCOIN REPORT

Claims Vs. Fact on the MX Missile

ICBM Basing Solved?

Claim: "We rejected MX last year because Densepack was a poor basing system. Now that the basing problem has been conquered we should go ahead."

Fact: On the contrary, the Scowcroft Commission has failed to recommend a survivable MX basing mode. It has returned with a basing mode proposal that was roundly defeated by Congress last year for its vulnerability. Silos are even less survivable than Densepack. To "solve" a problem by pretending to rise above it is an interesting debating technique but unlikely to impress the Soviets.

Deterrence

Claim: "We need MX for deterrence."

Fact: Deterrence is based on threat of retaliation. Since silo-based MX cannot survive to retaliate, it is useless for that purpose and is no deterrent. As a first-strike only weapon, MX is a radical departure from all past U.S. practice.

Stability

Claim: "We need MX for stability."

Fact: Stability is based on convincing the other side it will be worse off if it attacks than if it does not. MX sends the opposite message: If the Soviets attack, they can expect to protect

themselves from MX by destroying it. Assuming the Soviets would find Minuteman with its three warheads per missile an attractive target, MX with its ten warheads per missile would be far more so. If they don't attack, they run the risk that we will first-strike them with our very lethal MX force. Thus, MX gives the Soviets an incentive to strike first, rather than a deterrent against such a strike.

Forcing Soviets to Bargaining Table

Claim: "We need MX to force the Soviets to the bargaining table."

Fact: Both sides are already at the bargaining table, but progress has been nil, in part because of inflammatory rhetoric and actions by both sides. Additional first-strike momentum by either side will make arms control more difficult rather than less difficult to achieve.

National Will

Claim: "We must build MX, regardless of its strategic uselessness, to show our national will, resolve, and cohesion."

Fact: Will and resolve in the absence of wisdom produce vigorous movement in the wrong direction. For the sake of national survival, let us hope we will never have national cohesion on a policy which can't be justified on its merits.

Composition of the Commission

Claim: "Putting 100 MX's in Minuteman silos is the unanimous recommendation of the broad-based Scowcroft Commission."

Fact: The Commission is made up of some distinguished individuals, and it is bipartisan, but in no sense is it broad-based. A majority of its members and consultants had strong previous commitments to MX. In no sense was this an impartial or balanced jury.

U.S. Need for First Strike

Claim: "We need a first strike capability to deter the Soviets from a first strike. We need to threaten their ICBMs because they threaten ours."

Fact: Reality does not work that way. While both sides can build a first strike capability, only one will ever get to use it: the one who strikes first. If we don't go first, it doesn't matter how many first-strike weapons we've built; they're merely targets the other side can destroy before we use them. Since we must assume the Soviets are more willing to strike first than we, the deployment of bilateral first-strike capabilities helps the Soviets, and is equivalent to unilateral disarmament for us. We need to counter Soviet first-strike capability; this cannot be done by matching it.

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