

1 The MX and Nuclear War

The true security problem . . . is not merely man against man or nation against nation. It is man against war When we get to the point, as we one day will, that both sides know that in any outbreak of general hostilities, regardless of the element of surprise, destruction will be both reciprocal and complete, possibly we will have sense enough to meet at the conference table with the understanding that the era of armaments has ended and the human race must conform its actions to this truth or die.

Letter written by President Eisenhower on April 4, 1956, Archives, Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

No threat to the future of civilization compares with the threat of nuclear war. No national goal is more important than the goal of avoiding the outbreak of a nuclear conflict. No governmental actions require greater scrutiny than those actions that could increase the chances that nuclear weapons will be used by anyone, anywhere on this earth.

The decision to procure and deploy the MX land-based intercontinental ballistic missile is just such an action. It could have more influence on the likelihood of nuclear war than any weapon decision of the past decade. It is a weapon that can be both a means to launch an atomic strike and a magnet to attract an atomic strike against it—and against us.

The MX missile system is a weapon that can be described only by hyperbole. It is already, and will continue to be, the most controversial military program on which this generation of politicians will have to take a stand—more so than the B-1 bomber, more so than the Safeguard antiballistic missile defense system (ABM), which was the subject of a major national debate in 1969, and more so than missiles with multiple warheads (MIRVs)*, which slipped through without any major public outcry in 1970.

The MX will be the largest construction project in our history, larger than the Panama Canal or the Alaskan pipeline. It is the most expensive weapon system for which our citizens have ever

*A MIRVed missile is a missile that can carry multiple reentry vehicles with warheads, each of which can be independently aimed at separate targets.

been asked to pay taxes. Its 200 missiles could easily cost more than \$100 billion to deploy. It will exact a higher price from the society and the environment in regions in which it will be deployed than any previous military project. Forty thousand square miles of nearly virgin land will never be the same again, and the construction will profoundly alter the social structure in Utah and Nevada, or wherever the MX is based in the United States.

But these costs are of secondary import beside the risks that the MX missile system can create for the future of humanity. It is the most dangerous weapon on which decisions will have to be made in the next few years. It will not ensure that the land-based intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) third of our strategic deterrent triad will survive a Soviet attack,* yet this is the ostensible justification for its procurement as the replacement for our existing Minuteman ICBMs. Unless it can assuredly survive, it is only a lure to invite a Soviet strike.

It is itself a first-strike weapon, which can threaten a major portion of the Soviet strategic deterrent force but which will be militarily ineffective if not used to start a strategic nuclear war. It will be an incentive for Soviet initiation of a nuclear conflict either by accident or preemption in time of crisis.

The MX is an invitation to an accelerated and endless strategic arms race with no winners, one in which we will never know whether we are ahead or behind. It will make verifiable arms limitations a fading dream.

With weapons to start and fight a large-scale nuclear war, for the first time man has in his grasp the seeds of his destruction. The MX is a prime example of a nuclear war fighting weapon that can lead us closer to the catastrophe of an atomic holocaust.

This book explains in nontechnical terms what the MX is,

*The other two-thirds of our strategic forces are submarine-launched ballistic missiles and intercontinental bombers.

what it is supposed to do, and how it might be modified by the Reagan administration. The nuclear facts of life and the strategic concepts that were the bases for the original Carter administration decision to proceed with the MX are included as a necessary preamble for a public evaluation of the rightness of that decision. To support the stark conclusions that have been laid out here, I have analyzed the MX first in terms of its effects on national security and on the risks of a nuclear war. The material and social costs can then be viewed in the perspective of our real security needs. Finally, any appraisal of the MX must include a look at alternatives: How do their costs and benefits compare with the proposed basing of the MX missile on land. All these factors help to establish the relationship between the MX and nuclear war, the "true security problem" referred to by President Eisenhower.