

News from Congressman Les AuCoin

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CLAIMS VS. FACT ON THE MX MISSILE

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Twenty-three U.S. Representatives who oppose the MX missile have circulated a letter to their colleagues in the House rebutting claims in favor of deployment of the missile.

The "Dear Colleague" was signed by Les AuCoin (D-Ore.), Bill Green (R-N.Y.), Nicholas Mavroules (D-Mass.), Tom Downey (D-N.J.), Tim Wirth (D-Colo.), Claudine Schneider (R-R.I.), James Shannon (D-Mass.), Howard Wolpe (D-Mich.), Robert Carr (D-Mich.), Berkley Bedell (D-Iowa), Bruce Morrison (D-Conn.), Robert Mrazek (D-N.Y.), Martin O. Sabo (D-Minn.), Jim Leach (R-Iowa), Don Edwards (D-Calif.), George Miller (D-Calif.), Mike Lowry (D-Wash.), Barney Frank (D-Mass.), Marty Russo (D-Ill.), Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), and Robert Toricelli (D-N.J.).

The text of the letter follows:

BEFORE YOU COMMIT ON THE MX, READ THIS

Dear Colleague:

Since the President's endorsement of the Scowcroft ICBM Commission's report, you have probably been asked to support one of a number of "compromise" positions on the MX missile. We hope you will have the time to discuss it with us in detail during the next week or two. In the interim, here are some thoughts on the claims being made for the MX.

(1) 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 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.

(2) 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.

(3) 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.

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(4) MX NOT A FIRST STRIKE WEAPON

Claim: "MX isn't a first-strike weapon because we will only have 100 missiles with 1,000 warheads, and a first strike needs at least 2,000 warheads."

Fact: The MX program cannot be viewed in isolation from other strategic modernization programs such as Minuteman modernization with Mark 12A warheads, and, more importantly, the Trident II D-5 hard-target warhead. MX is clearly not the lone hard-target-capable missile being pursued.

(5) US FIRST-STRIKE POLICY

Claim: "The Soviets know we won't strike first; that isn't our policy."

Fact: Then why are we spending many billions for a weapon that can't be used for anything else? We ourselves believe in our government's good intentions. But how can we persuade the world to listen to our words and disregard our actions?

(6) 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.

(7) FORCING SOVIETS OUT OF SILOS

Claim: "MX will be stabilizing because it will force the Soviets out of their silos into more survivable basing."

Fact: Why spend billions we don't have for a weapon we don't need, just so the Soviets can neutralize it? If this circular strategy goes into effect we'll wind up where we are now except poorer.

(8) 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.

(9) MX AS BRIDGE TO MIDGETMAN

Claim: "MX makes no sense, but we need it to get to Midgetman." (Note: this is the explanation some Commission members give in private discussion.)

Fact: Rather than being a bridge to Midgetman, MX will more probably be a barrier to it. The Air Force bureaucracy prefers MX, and is already padding Midgetman's cost and delaying its operational date (which could be within a year of MX) to make MX look good. If MX is killed and Midgetman becomes the only game in town, the Air Force will get on with it. But so long as the MX production line is open, the Air Force will drag its feet on Midgetman and create roadblock after roadblock until it has several hundred MX's and the "window of vulnerability" -- to whatever extent it exists -- will have been open for an additional decade. Under SALT II, we can have either MX or Midgetman, but not both.

(10) ICBM MODERNIZATION

Claim: "We need to modernize our ICBMs no matter what."

Fact: Modernization is not an end in itself. We must ask the MX advocates exactly what MX does for national security that the present Minuteman ICBMs do not do.

⊙ (11) PUSHING THE ADMINISTRATION TOWARD ARMS CONTROL

Claim: "We need the MX to push the Administration toward arms control." (Another privately-expressed rationale of Commission members.)

Fact: An Administration determined to achieve arms control does not need to be pushed into it. An Administration hostile to arms control cannot be pushed into it.

(12) PUSHING THE ADMINISTRATION TOWARD STABILITY

Claim: "We needed the destabilizing MX to get the Administration to accept the stabilizing Midgetman." (Still another privately-expressed explanation from the Commission.)

Fact: This may be true, but it's not the House's problem. We have the power to take Midgetman and leave MX.

(13) COMPROMISING ON FEWER MX MISSILES

Claim: "A reasonable compromise would be to build a smaller number (20 or 50) MX's."

Fact: Such a compromise is unlikely to hold. The start-up cost of MX is relatively high; the cost of additional MX's is relatively low. After the 20 or 50 MX's were funded, there would be irresistible pressure to continue production through several hundred on cost-efficiency grounds. Even if the compromise were to hold, a small MX force would share the following disadvantages of a large force:

- SALT II incompatibility with Midgetman.
- Bureaucratic incompatibility with Midgetman.
- World perception of U.S. as a first-strike power.
- No additional deterrence.
- High cost.

(14) 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.

(15) 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.

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