

Les AuCoin

How Many MXs? How About Zero?

Last week my colleague Les Aspin wrote a column in this space ["How Many MXs?" May 16], and the House of Representatives responded by voting 218-212 to buy more MX missiles, albeit at a slower rate than President Reagan would like. This week we will reconsider that very close decision.

Taking Exception

Its more thoughtful supporters agree the MX itself is a monster. It's fundamentally different from anything supported by previous presidents, who sought a deterrent: an ICBM basing mode that could survive Soviet attack and retaliate with overwhelming force. Instead, Reagan now proposes a vulnerable but devastatingly powerful missile: the long-recognized formula for provoking, not deterring, nuclear war.

The significance of this reversal of all previous American policy cannot be understated. As Les Aspin himself wrote in this newspaper a year ago, MX will put a hair trigger on nuclear war.

Rationally, that fact alone should put an end to the MX, as surely as nuclear war would end your life and mine. But this missile has somehow been resuscitated by the argument that it's needed as an arms-control bargaining chip.

Whether we are supposed to be bargaining with the Russians or with the Reagan administration is not clear. Aspin says buying 30 MX missiles this year would give away the store to the administration, buying zero would give it away to the Soviets, so let's buy 15.

It won't work.

We can't bargain with Reagan. All the evidence tells us that under his administration there will be no arms control. Period. It's wishful thinking to pretend otherwise. I take no pleasure in saying this. But the facts bear out my colleague Tom Downey's suggestion, also stated in this newspaper a year ago, that the Reagan administration "knows in its bones that *real men* don't control arms, they build them."

Reagan's chief strategic arms negotiator is Gen. Edward Rowley, who says "we've placed too much emphasis on the *control* of arms and too little on the *provision* of arms" (his italics), only this month boasted, "We've tried in the Reagan administration to distance ourselves from making arms control the centerpiece of our foreign policy." Yes indeed.

My friend Les Aspin would like to think these sentiments are not dominant within the Reagan administration. Other colleagues have told me they're holding their noses on the MX in the belief that Ronald Reagan will do a Nixon-China-style arms control reversal. But here again, the facts give us no comfort.

Which arms control treaties successfully negotiated with the Soviets has Reagan supported, either before or after taking office? None.

Which policy-level officials in this administration, from the president on down, favor ratification of SALT II? None.

Which administration officials favor concluding the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, in which the Soviets

have agreed to accept intrusive inspection? None.

The nuclear freeze? None. An anti-satellite treaty? None. A space weapons treaty? None.

And so it goes.

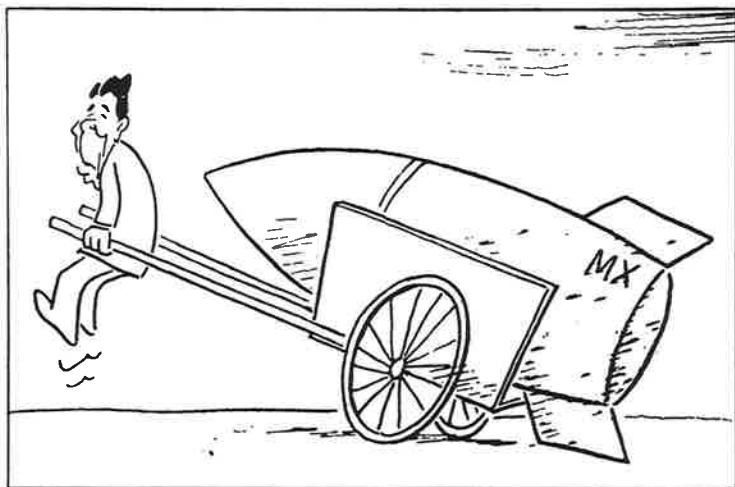
But because the administration has no use for arms control does not mean it has no use for arms control *rhetoric*. On the contrary, Reagan understands that if there were no mirage of arms control, there would be no MX. The MX uses arms control rhetoric as its first booster stage: indispensable to getting off the ground, but to be discarded when no longer needed.

Now let's look at MX as a bargaining chip with the Russians. Administration spokesmen have told us repeatedly that they intend to build at least 100 MXs regardless, and that the missile is *not* a bargaining chip. But at the same time, we are told we have to build the MX or the Russians won't bargain. It is not clear to me how a missile we won't negotiate is supposed to make the Russians negotiate.

Apparently it's not clear to the Russians either. Rather than scaring them into accepting our arms control position, it is scaring them into new and more capable classes of weapons.

But setting that aside, consider that before we start laying in chips, we need to have a position worth bargaining for. We do not have that today.

The administration's START and build-down proposals permit Soviet weapons to become quicker and more accurate—that is, more capable of first strike—without limit.



By BAS

The nuclear freeze, in contrast, is infinitely more consistent with deterring war; it would prohibit flight testing of ballistic missiles, thereby clamping a tight lid on major destabilizing "improvements."

The Soviets already say they want the freeze. Precisely what do they mean? Are they sincere? We don't know; the administration refuses to sit down and negotiate serious qualitative arms control.

So let's set delusions of near-term arms control aside. We need to get back to judging weapons as weapons. It is time to stop evading the fact that the MX, as Aspin says, will put a hair trigger on nuclear war.

Without MX, we can have more security for less money.

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