From Mo Udall,

f.y.i.

f.y.i.—for your information—is a periodic summary of legislative activity of the Congress of the United States and of proposals and general information of interest to the residents of the 2nd Congressional District of Arizona.

THE MX MISSILE

One of the issues currently being discussed in Washington is the MX missile. And it is an issue of much concern to many in Arizona as well, not only because of the wider question of whether or not we should upgrade the U.S. strategic missile force, and whether the MX is the right way to do it, but also because there is a good chance the missile will be placed in southwestern Arizona.

After a long review process, the Administration has come out in favor of a land-based missile. Two basing modes are possible, and although the Administration hasn't actually chosen one over the other, every indication is that it is leaning toward the "trench" system. This would require the digging of 20-mile long trenches, one per missile. The missiles themselves would be shuttled along the trench on rail cars, moving from one firing point to another. This is a variant of the earlier, now discarded tunnel system. That plan was abandoned when it was discovered that a hit anywhere in the tunnel would cause the entire roof to collapse. Under the trench system, steel plates would be used to hide the missiles, but not to protect them.

The other system under review is the MPS (multiple protective structure). This entails a large number of silos per missile, as many as 4500 total silos. The missiles would be moved from silo to silo, and steps would be taken to conceal the location of the weapons.

It's difficult to determine the exact cost of the MX until a basing mode is chosen, and even then it's likely that technical problems and delays, and inflation, will wreak havoc on any cost estimates. However, current guesses on the final total cost hover in the $30 - 40 billion range. But don't be surprised if that shoots up to $60 billion or higher.

The MX has other costs. What will be the effect on the fragile desert ecology of 4000 miles of trenches? And of the roads, fences, and other construction needed to support the system? Under the trench system we may have to cordon-off almost 4000 square miles, an area nearly as large as the state of Connecticut. How will that affect hunters, ranchers, and others who use the land?

However, every estimate shows that the U.S. ICBM force may be vulnerable to a Soviet first-strike by the mid-1980's. MX is a response to that threat, an attempt to use mobile missiles to offset increasing accuracy in Soviet warheads. If we do have to upgrade the U.S. strategic forces,

and the evidence points that way, then action is needed. But the land-based MX may not be the answer.

If mobility is the prime requirement for any new ballistic missile, then why are we restricting ourselves to a land-based missile? It seems to me that a sea-based missile may be the way to go. The U.S. currently has a large submarine based-missile force which is now undergoing a modernization. Soviet anti-submarine technology is poor; we have a clear lead in this area. An expanded force of submarines would provide us with a mobile, highly invulnerable missile force.

As an added consideration, I wonder if we should continue to use the U.S. as a "nuclear hostage," whether we should place an additional 200 nuclear weapons near our population and industrial centers. The Air Force hopes to place the MX in the West (one of our fastest growing regions), and Arizona is a prime candidate for this dubious honor. The Air Force has chosen Nevada-Utah as its tentative first choice for the MX's location, with Arizona a close second. Again, a sea-based force may be preferable.

Three points are raised by advocates of a land-based MX. First, that submarine missiles aren't accurate enough to do the job. In fact, the MX may be too accurate. The accuracy of the MX and the size of its warheads make it a first-strike weapon, one that invites a Soviet preemptive attack. A sea-based missile would be able to survive a Soviet attack, and still retain the ability to destroy the U.S.S.R. as a functioning society.

Second, the U.S. Navy has come under some criticism for the gigantic size and huge cost of the new Trident submarine. That criticism is justified. The Tridents weigh 17000 tons, measure 555 feet in length. We've gone too far, again, in the "bigger is better" school of thought. The Department of Defense has tentatively decided, however, that it can replace the Trident with a smaller submarine that can do the job of Trident, but at a 30% saving in construction cost.

And third, advocates of MX usually claim that the U.S. must retain a "triad," a strategic force of three different weapons systems. Yet if we go with a sea-based MX, the U.S. is projected to have, by the mid-to-late 1980's, the following strategic forces:

1) the current force of 1053 ICBM's (some reduction may be needed if the SALT II treaty is ratified);
2) an expanded sea-based SLBM force;
3) an airborne cruise missile (carried on either modified B-52's or a new wide-bodied jet);
4) forward-based aircraft in Europe (FB-111's and possibly new F-111H's);
5) forward-based aircraft with the Sixth Fleet;
6) the new Pershing II missile in Europe.

Each of these systems carries nuclear weapons., each could attack the Soviet heartland, and each would have to be defended against.

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