

Editorial

MX missile; The expensive project nobody wants

The MX missile system has come a long way. At one time it was the boondoggle that Utah and Nevada didn't want. Now it's the boondoggle that nobody wants.

It's not like the MX hasn't been shopped around. Utah and Nevada got first crack at it, and despite the urging of several Defense Department bigwigs, they were not buying. For a very brief time there was talk of basing the MX system, or at least part of it, in western Texas, but that plan didn't seem to get very far. The Pentagon would apparently be satisfied basing the missiles anywhere, except the Pentagon.

Two administrations have had a chance to scrap this colossal mistake, but both have decided that this project is worthwhile no matter how incredibly expensive and unpopular it might be. No doubt the only argument in favor of the MX system is that we need it to keep up with the Russian military buildup.

But must the Russians be the only and constant consideration? Does it do us any good to keep pace with the Russian military if in so doing we lose track of the American economy? It is interesting that in this time of tight-fisted economics the thought of pouring billions of dollars into a product of such questionable value has not been questioned.

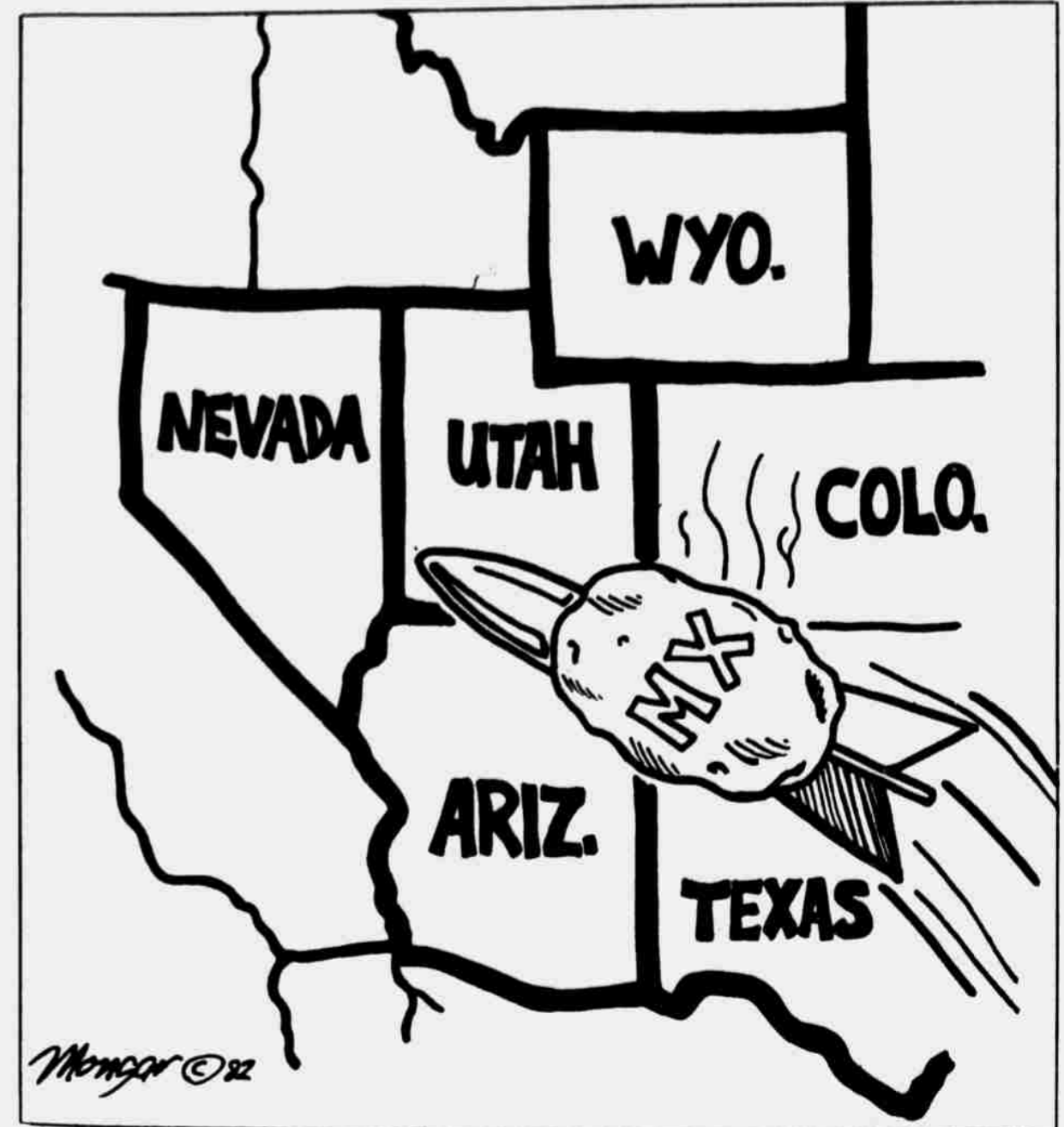
Consider what we are getting with the MX missile system. In the first place, it is

no longer the same system it started out to be, as the need to find a place to put the missiles meant the elimination of the mobile basing mode. With that big selling point gone, and rightfully so, it is hard to imagine what the big advantage to the MX missile is. Sure, it probably has the kind of accuracy that will allow you to aim it at the second floor men's room of the Kremlin, but if the war gets to the point where we are actually going to fire these things, how much will another mile of accuracy matter?

The very best thing that could happen to the MX system* if it is built is that it sits and rots and never gets used. All the MX

can do is turn Russia into a blot on the map when they turn us into a blot on the map. Every justification ever presented for the MX with the old mobile basing mode was that if the Russians should attack (we, of course, would never fire first) there would be enough MX missiles to launch a counterattack. If that is the case, it is hardly a device that will make us more secure.

Considering the state of flux the MX missile system seems to be in, it is not too late for President Reagan to avoid the mistake President Carter made and unload the MX missile system. An administration that rolled into Washington claiming a mandate from the people should realize the fact that no state wants to house the MX system represents another mandate — a mandate to scrap this expensive and irresponsible project.



The proverbial hot potato

Reagan's arms sale policy beneficial to Taiwan

The Reagan administration's decision in the matter of arms for Taiwan appears to have annoyed both Taipei and Peking, but not, in either case, quite to the point of unendurability.

The Nationalist government has insisted that it needs F-16s, America's most advanced jet fighters, in order to defend Taiwan and its neighboring straits and islands against Red China. The Red Chinese, however, have threatened to have a terminal case of hysterics if America



William
Rusher

sold those powerful planes to the Nationalists. The Reagan administration, torn between its ideological partiality toward Taiwan and its desire to keep Peking oriented against Moscow (e.g., in such matters as the current crackdown in Poland), dithered a bit, and has now come forward with a decision that in effect splits the difference: it has reaffirmed its right and intention to keep on arming Taiwan, but will not sell it the particular planes that Peking objects to so strenuously. How wise was this decision?

The name of the game, as far as Chinese air power is concerned, is control of the 100-mile-wide Strait of

Formosa that separates Taiwan from the Chinese mainland. Currently the skies over the strait are patrolled, and controlled, by F-5E fighters of the Chinese (Nationalist) Air Force, which are superior to most of the planes possessed by the Communists. These fighters are manufactured right on Taiwan under license from North Aviation. As long as they continue to maintain air superiority over the Strait of Formosa, any possibility of a successful Communist invasion of Taiwan dwindles to the vanishing point.

But fighter aircraft, like all of technology's children, are forever being rendered obsolete as improvements in design occur. And Taipei claims to have gotten wind of a Peking plan to start producing a new fighter that, when it takes to the skies in three or four years, will be capable of outperforming the F-5E. That, Taipei contends, is why it needs the F-16s now — for it will be too late to sell the Nationalists these aircraft in 1984 or 1985 and start then the long process of training Chinese pilots in their use.

But it is precisely here that the administration's decision to equivocate may conceal certain advantages for the Nationalists. For according to my information, Taipei will be permitted to upgrade the performance characteristics of the F-5E in various technical respects. The plane that Nationalist China will be flying over the Strait of Formosa by 1984, therefore, may still be called an F-5E,

but it will have many of the attributes of a F-5G, which is a distinctly better plane (albeit no F-16) and believed to be quite capable of taking on anything Red China is likely to put in the air.

Meanwhile the administration clearly has decided to stand firm on the far more basic issue of its right to sell arms of any kind to Taiwan. Such sales are authorized under the terms of the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, which was enacted by Congress after President Carter's rabbit-punch "derecognition" of Taipei in December 1978. But Peking has insisted that American's acknowledgment that Taiwan is a part of China make it improper, under international law, for the United States to sell arms to what Peking regards as mere rebels on its island province.

The Reagan administration flatly disagrees, and has reaffirmed its intention to go on selling the Nationalist government a variety of military items and the spare parts necessary to keep them functioning at top efficiency. In the long run, Taipei needs this assurance far more than it needs F-16 fighters or any other specific piece of equipment, and that is why, despite the Nationalists' thoroughly understandable disappointment over their failure to get the F-16s the administration's overall stance is almost certainly, on balance, in their favor.

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Letter policy

The Daily Nebraskan encourages brief letters to the editor from all readers and interested others.

Letters will be selected for publication on the basis of clarity, originality, timeliness and space available in the newspaper.

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Submit all material to the Daily Nebraskan, Room 34, Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb. 68588.

Concerns international

Serious abuses of human rights, ranging from exile or imprisonment of political opponents to government-

sponsored kidnapping, torturing and murdering are widespread throughout the world. It is thus appalling, though not unusual, to see Amnesty International, the London-based, Nobel prize-winning human rights organization, criticized by people like William Rusher (Daily Nebraskan Jan. 14) for its efforts to publicize and fight such abuses. Rusher himself, like other right-wing ideologues, attacks AI for focusing on abuses in countries allied with the U.S. Meanwhile, Communists and other left-wing ideologues criticize AI equally often and with equal vehemence for focusing on abuses in the USSR and its allies or in unaligned third-world nations.

The fact of the matter is that AI is concerned about abuses of human rights wherever they occur, regardless of the political or economic orientation of the government responsible. Contrary to Rusher's claims, this can easily be seen merely by noting the diversity of the countries discussed in any AI newsletter or annual report.

David Moshman
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Letters

Publications are balanced

On Jan. 14 you carried a column by William Rusher criticizing Amnesty International. Mr. Rusher attacked AI for providing "a propaganda tool of immense utility to the Communists" by criticizing at times the human rights policies of the United States and its authoritarian allies.

In the January issue of "Amnesty Action," the lead story is about an AI appeal to Polish authorities because of the large-scale detention of civilians under martial law. On the inside is a story about repression in communist China, as well as about AI communications to President Brezhnev concerning the detention and mistreatment of Andrei Sakharov in the Soviet Union.

In sum, AI is a valuable human rights organization which is careful about balance in its publications. It requires balance in the activities of its sections, requiring them to "adopt" foreign political prisoners from different political camps — Western, Eastern, and Third World.

David P. Forsythe
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