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The MX Report: A Break With the Past

The essential recommendations of the President's Commission on Strategic Nuclear Forces are a major break with the past. Accordingly, the report and the recommendations it contains deserve serious attention from those concerned with national defense and arms control.

The commission proposes that we embark on a two-part strategic modernization program for intercontinental ballistic missiles. In the near term, we should deploy a limited number of MX missiles in Minuteman sites. At the same time, we should undertake R&D on a new, small ICBM carrying a single accurate warhead that could be deployed in the mid-1980s in either sites or on a land mobile configuration. The commission has not recommended a move to a dyad with reliance only on submarines and bombers, although it acknowledges that technology, especially accuracy, should be improved to meet the threat. The new ICBM would be a significant improvement over the current Minuteman, with a smaller, more affordable warhead and an improved kill probability.

Most importantly, the MX deployment presents the United States with a unique opportunity to change the status quo in arms control negotiations. The commission argues that the current arms control regime is inadequate and that the United States must take steps to ensure its security.

Unlike the past, the American people are not being presented with a single "solution" to the ICBM problem but with a coherent program that permits alternative choices depending on the outcome of arms control negotiations. The commission also responds to our actions and technology developments.