



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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MISSION ANALYSIS AND  
SYSTEMS ACQUISITION DIVISION

FEB 25 1982

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The Honorable Caspar W. Weinberger  
The Secretary of Defense

Attention: Director, GAO Affairs

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Subject: Issues Concerning The Survivability And  
Capability Of The ICBM Force (MASAD-82-21)

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On March 2, 1981, we advised you of our plans to survey DOD's efforts to modernize the land-based Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) force. This assignment was conducted under assignment code 953010, and it was nearly completed when the President announced his programs for modernizing our strategic forces.

As you know, the ICBM modernization effort (especially the MX) has received a great deal of publicity, and many of the issues currently being addressed by DOD have been repeatedly addressed in the news media and during congressional hearings. In view of this and because many of the specific details concerning the ICBM modernization effort have not been finalized, we will not be issuing a report to the Congress at this time. However, we are providing as an enclosure to this letter a brief list of some issues that we believe deserve your attention. These issues concern the survivability and capability of the ICBM force.

The Mission Analysis and Systems Acquisition Division will continue to monitor the developments within the land-based leg of the strategic TRIAD but we will not be keeping code 953010 open for this purpose. You will be notified of plans to initiate new assignments in this area.

(953010)

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My staff and I wish to express our appreciation for the cooperation of your staff and that of the Department of the Air Force during this assignment.

Sincerely yours,

*C. William Moore*

*for* W. H. Sheley, Jr.  
Director

Enclosure



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ISSUES CONCERNING ICBM FORCE MODERNIZATION

President Reagan's announcement in late 1981 concerning the programs that will be undertaken to modernize the strategic TRIAD represents a significant step forward after several years of indecision. There are some issues concerning the survivability and capability of the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) force, however, that remain to be resolved. For ease of presentation, we have divided these issues into three major time segments.

SHORT-TERM ISSUES - -

This segment represents the time from the present to the initial deployment of the MX--currently targeted for 1986. The issues are:

1. The cancellation of the Airborne Launch Control System Program, Phase III, will significantly reduce the capability for providing damage assessment for U.S. ICBM fields (i.e., identifying which Minuteman III's survived), retargeting and launching the survivors, and confirming the launches were successful.
2. The deactivation of the Titan force will significantly reduce the U.S. ICBM warhead megatonnage. The issues regarding this loss are classified. It is not clear what steps, if any, will be taken to offset this reduction in ICBM capability.

MID-TERM ISSUES - -

This segment represents the time from initial deployment of MX missiles in existing silos until they are deployed in their own survivable basing mode. The issues are:

1. The C3 capability with MX in existing silos will have the same limitations as the existing Minuteman III system.
  - Limited targeting and retargeting options.
  - No survivable two-way direct communication capability between national command authority and surviving missiles.
  - Limited postattack endurance.
2. Placing MX missiles in existing silos, not hardened for increased survivability, will not narrow the "window of vulnerability."

3. Consideration is being given to installing a lower yield warhead on the MX. This would appear to degrade its hard target kill capability.

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A.D.)  
LONG-TERM ISSUES - -

This time segment begins with the deployment of MX missiles in their own survivable basing mode. ← The issues are:

1. The basis for options selected for possible long-range survivable basing is unclear. Variants of these options have been studied and rejected in the past.
  - Air mobile basing has previously been assessed by DOD as too costly to acquire, operate, and maintain. It also has some postattack endurance limitations.
  - Deep underground basing has previously been assessed by DOD as having a slow reaction time and potentially vulnerable communications system.
  - Ballistic missile defense of fixed sites has previously been assessed by DOD as not achievable within the specified by the President's program.
2. The critical decisions that are needed and when they must be made for the President to have a sound basis to select a survivable basing option in 1983 must be clearly defined and closely monitored.