

# Radio Address to the Nation on the MX Missile

## March 9, 1985

My fellow Americans:

I'd like to talk to you today about the deep desire we all share to keep America free, secure, and at peace. In 3 days' time, American and Soviet negotiators will meet in Geneva to explore ways to reduce nuclear arsenals and lower the risks of war.

No issue concerns me more and none has taken up more of my time than our quest for a breakthrough on arms reductions. I do so willingly because as your President and as a husband, a father, and a grandfather, I know what's at stake for everyone. And I'm pleased that the Soviets, after staying away for more than a year, have agreed to return to the bargaining table. The renewal of these negotiations is an important step in the right direction, and America will be ready to move forward on all promising avenues for progress.

As I speak to you, our team is in Geneva. I cannot think of a more welcome message to give them than a strong vote of confidence from you the people and the Congress. I know that all Americans stand foursquare behind our negotiating team and wish them every success. In fact, you're the reason that the Soviet Union returned to the negotiating table. The Soviet leadership has seen your patience and your determination to keep America strong. They've seen the renewal of your spirit and the rebuilding of a robust and expanding American economy. They know we're going to continue moving forward to protect our freedom and our way of life.

I want to believe the Congress will follow your lead, but that's not yet certain, and I need your help. Each House of Congress will soon vote on an issue that will directly and, perhaps, dramatically affect the outcome at Geneva -- that vote concerns the modernization of our strategic forces with the MX Peacekeeper missile.

Let me take a moment to explain what that vote is all about. Nearly 2 years ago after a decade of indecision, confusion, and endless debate over the merits of modernizing our aging land-based strategic missiles, our political process forged a bipartisan consensus that united us in our common search for ways to protect our country, reduce the risks of war, and work for dramatically reduced levels of nuclear arms.

The MX Peacekeeper missile has been part of the consensus and with good reason: Time and again, America exercised unilateral restraint, good will, and a sincere commitment to arms reductions. As a result, many of the missiles protecting our security at this very moment are older than the Air Force men and women taking care of them. They're missiles of the sixties, originally equipped with 1950's aerotechnology. It's sort of like a 1963 jalopy with some new parts. You know as well as I do that in many States automobiles that old will soon qualify as antiques, but the Soviets don't deal in antiques. Their response was the same as it's always been: no restraint, just build, build, and build. While we debated and delayed, they developed three new types of land-based intercontinental missiles, and they've added to their arsenal 800 new missiles with more than 5,000 nuclear warheads.

It took us too long to realize there is no easy, cheap way to buy security. In 1983, based on the recommendations of a distinguished blue-ribbon panel, the Scowcroft commission, the Congress joined with us to approve the MX Peacekeeper program -- 100 up-to-date missiles that will replace aging Minuteman missiles. Since that time, the MX Peacekeeper has finished seven successful flight tests, and the Soviets are back at the bargaining table.

Well, once again, the moment of truth is at hand. As I mentioned a few minutes ago, each House of Congress will soon vote on whether to release the MX funds they approved last year and continue production of the missile. The Soviet leadership views the current debate on the MX as a key test of American resolve.

If the Congress acts responsibly, our negotiators will have a chance to succeed, but if we don't have the courage to modernize our land-based strategic missile systems, the Soviets will have little reason to negotiate meaningful reductions. And why should they? We would be signaling to them that they can gain more through propaganda and stonewalling than through serious negotiations. The time is now to send a signal loud and clear that a united and resolute America backs our negotiators at Geneva, and that could be the real key to a successful outcome.

My fellow Americans, the stakes are so very high. The vote on the MX Peacekeeper isn't a budget issue; it's about our nation's security. And when it comes to protecting America's security, we can't afford to divide ourselves as Democrats or Republicans - we must stand together as Americans. It's up to you to let your feelings be known. Your voice matters; let it be heard.

Until next week, thanks for listening, and God bless you.

*Note: The President spoke at 12:06 p.m. from Camp David, MD.*