

# Reagan's Radio Address to the Nation on Production of the MX Missile

## December 11, 1982

A few weeks ago, I talked with you about our quest for peace -- for a secure world in which our children and our children's children can grow up without fear, enjoying the blessings of peace and freedom. As President, my first duty is to do everything in my power to achieve these goals.

Two of the keys to preserving the peace are deterrence and arms reduction. One of these keys has worked perfectly for 37 years. Since the end of World War II, we've prevented the outbreak of a new global war by a national policy of deterrence. To do that meant maintaining our defense forces so that any enemy knew in advance that an attack on us or our allies would bring disaster, not victory, to the attacker. Now, when a potential enemy knows that by starting a war he'll lose more than he hopes to gain, he just won't start a war in the first place. That's what deterrence is all about.

A key feature of this policy has been to maintain strong strategic forces. Our triad, as it's called -- our three-legged plan of land-based missiles, sea-based missiles, and manned bombers -- makes clear to any aggressor that if he attacks us, we will still have the strength to strike back, the ability to retaliate. That's because no potential attacker has the strength to knock out all three legs of our defense triad at the same time.

If we only had two parts to this force, then preserving the peace would be more difficult. Potential attackers might even come to believe they could launch and win a nuclear war. We must never let this happen. That's why last year I ordered all three legs of our strategic forces to be modernized.

There's no question about the need for modernizing them. Today all three are made up mainly of weapons we developed more than 10 years ago -- more than 20 years ago in the case of our bombers. Sooner or later older systems become ineffective and vulnerable. Our most pressing problem today is that the Soviet Union, because of its massive buildup of nuclear weapons, could destroy virtually all of our land-based missiles in a single nuclear attack. If we do nothing to correct that situation, we will have weakened the chances for peace. This is why we need the new MX Peacekeeper missile -- to help restore our strategic deterrent and literally to keep the peace.

The Peacekeeper is a modern missile, and it is survivable. I agree with my scientific and military advisers that the closely spaced basing plan we proposed will work. Congress had ordered us to submit a basing proposal for the MX by December 1st, which we did. However, we're prepared to review this matter with the Congress in the new year.

The basing mode is not an issue. There's plenty of time to decide on that. What we need now is a clear, positive vote on the missile itself, to go forward on production of the missile. Why? Because we're negotiating with the Soviet Union at Geneva to reduce substantially nuclear arsenals on both sides -- the other key to protecting the peace in the nuclear age. These are tough negotiations, but our team is hanging in there. However, if we just cancel the Peacekeeper, the MX -- if we say we won't deploy it -- we remove a major incentive for the Soviets to stay at the table and agree to reductions.

Look at it from their perspective. If we're willing to cancel a weapon system without getting something in return, why should they offer to eliminate or reduce weapons that give them an advantage over us?

In 1977 my predecessor sent his Secretary of State to Moscow with a proposal that the Soviets reduce the number of their heavy SS-18 missiles. At the time, we had nothing comparable to the SS-18 and no

new missiles to deploy. The result was what you'd expect. The Soviets refused to even consider the proposal. I can't believe the American people want to make that mistake a second time. The stakes are just too high.

Without the Peacekeeper, we weaken our ability to deter war, and we may lose a valuable opportunity to achieve a treaty to reduce nuclear weapons on both sides. With it, we make progress on both paths to peace. On both counts, there's no doubt that we need it.

In the weeks ahead, we'll continue to bring the facts to you, the American people, and your representatives on this vital issue. We've already done it in hearings before the Senate. I only wish the House had given us the opportunity to do the same before it voted last Tuesday to cut funds for the Peacekeeper missile. It's hard to make a good decision before you've heard the facts. And in my opinion, the House of Representatives voted without really considering the facts.

As we present our case for the Peacekeeper missile to you, I hope you'll keep in mind that by continuing to maintain our ability to deter attack, we make it less likely that the horror of nuclear war will ever occur. And by keeping our defenses credible, we offer the Soviet Union a realistic incentive to reduce tensions and to agree to significant and verifiable arms reductions.

These are vital objectives. But I can't achieve them without the support of the American people and the United States Congress. To protect the peace, we must provide the funds necessary to offset the enormous Soviet military buildup and restore a military balance, particularly in nuclear weapons. And to achieve the arms reductions we want, we must give the Soviets the incentive to negotiate. We must go to the bargaining table in a position of strength, not weakness.

My fellow Americans, with your continued support for a strong defense and for the Peacekeeper missile -- but only with your support -- we can achieve both of these crucial goals.

Thanks for listening, and God bless you.

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