
Defense Report

AUSA



The Army's Stake in SALT II— Its Ability to Modernize

In the broad scheme of the United States' military establishment the Army is a "general purpose force," capable of doing many things but playing no direct role in the planning for strategic warfare involving the long-range, nuclear-armed planes and missiles of the Air Force and Navy. To be precise, the Army has some PERSHING missiles poised in Germany that could reach the Soviet Union in response to an attack by the Warsaw Pact into NATO territory but the primary mission of the missiles is to attack tactical targets so they were not included in the limits set in recently completed negotiations for a strategic arms limitation treaty.

Nevertheless, the Army has a great interest in the ramifications of the SALT II treaty, going far beyond the very natural and proper desire to reduce the possibility of nuclear terror, shared by just about everyone. The Army must watch carefully to make sure that actions evolving from SALT II do not reduce its ability to perform the general purpose missions.

One of the developments that seems sure to fall out of the SALT II treaty will be the design, testing and fielding of a mobile, ground-based strategic missile system, popularly referred to as the **MX**. There are several notions about the way to make a missile and its launcher invulnerable to an enemy first strike but the **MX** concept seems to be narrowing down to two: missiles mounted on railroad car/launchers that can periodically be moved to random locations, or; a vast field of underground silos, in and out of which the missiles can be shifted so the enemy target planners are never sure which holes the missiles occupy. Either application involves the expenditure of many billions of defense dollars. In gross terms the cost could amount to between one tenth and one third of a year's total defense budget.

Every indication so far from the White House Office of Management and Budget leads to the conclusion that the **MX** will have to be developed within the limits of the existing defense budget, after adjustments for inflation. This means, obviously, that something already in the budget is going to be dropped out. To the Army this means that modernization of its combat equipment by procurement of the new XM-1 tank, for instance, could be slowed or stopped, money earmarked for ammunition procurement could be denied, or the budgeteers might opt to cut back on the number of people in the Army. Hopefully the burden would be shared by all the services in the interests of maintaining something close to a balanced force structure. In their efforts to provide for a nuclear stand-off the White House, the Department of Defense and the Congress must be mindful of the need to maintain a fully-capable defense establishment.