



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

109132
81055
109132

PROCUREMENT AND SYSTEMS
ACQUISITION DIVISION

APR 18 1979

E-163058

The Honorable Harold Brown
The Secretary of Defense

950 20000

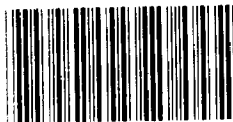
Dear Mr. Secretary:

We have completed a review of Air Force activities and plans relating to the selection and acquisition of land for basing the MX advanced ICBM weapon system. Our objective was to determine whether the Air Force has a realistic plan and is progressing toward timely site selection and land acquisition.

Although neither the basing mode nor deployment site have been selected, we assumed for our review that the MX would be based in a vertical shelter, multiple-protective structure system, primarily on land currently administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Department of the Interior. We assumed this because:

- The Air Force prefers vertical shelter basing.
- The Department of Defense directed the Air Force to continue development of multiple-protective structure basing pending the outcome of a special air mobile basing study.
- The Air Force's preferred siting regions are comprised mostly of BLM-administered public lands.

According to the Department of Defense, deployment of the MX system must begin in the mid-1980s to counter the growing Soviet threat. Driven by that milestone, the Air Force plans tentatively to select a deployment site in the summer of 1980 and begin site development in the spring of 1982, which allows



109132

004996
Public
letter report

PSAD 79-76
(951478)

about two years to accomplish the land withdrawal 1/ action. The need to meet these dates is critical. In material provided to the Defense Systems Acquisition Review Council principals in March 1979 for their consideration concerning advancement of the MX program into full-scale engineering development, the Air Force stated that delays at any point in the process of obtaining land could entail a month-for-month slip in the MX system deployment date.

Public land acquisition for a project the size of MX has a large potential for major program delay, because the withdrawal process is complex, time-consuming, and politically sensitive. The Air Force has yet to coordinate its schedule with BLM to determine if the planned dates for withdrawal necessary for timely deployment could be met. The consensus among BLM officials we contacted in Washington, D.C., and in four western states was that the Air Force's schedule was unrealistic, considering the complexities of the land withdrawal actions required by Federal statute.

We were advised by Air Force and BLM officials that no meetings have been held to date specifically for identifying potential roadblocks and corrective courses of action. The limited meetings have been for informing BLM about the MX program and not for discussing the land withdrawal process. Again, the consensus among BLM officials was that early coordination is necessary to accomplish the land withdrawal in an orderly, systematic, and timely manner, and that the Air Force has already waited too long to begin the process. Air Force officials have told us they do not want to discuss the land withdrawal specifics with BLM officials until the

1/ Generally, land withdrawals are defined as statutory or administrative actions which restrict or segregate public lands from settlement, entry, location or disposal under some or all of the general land laws and limit the use of the land to the specific purpose or purposes for which it was withdrawn.

MX program is approved for full-scale development. BLM officials, however, feel the longer the Air Force waits to coordinate a land withdrawal plan, the greater the need will be for special action by the Congress or the Administration. This action may not be acceptable to the public, especially in the affected states. Both the Air Force and BLM would like to avoid special actions to the extent possible.

We recognize that a decision has not been made on the type of basing for MX. However, on the basis of the complexity of the land withdrawal process, we feel that action must be taken now to define the problems and plan a course of action necessary to assure meeting the planned deployment date. While our concern in this letter relates to public land withdrawal, we feel that development of a course of action necessary to acquire private land may also be necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

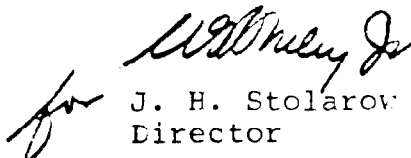
In view of the schedule for the MX program, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense take immediate steps to establish a memorandum of agreement with the Secretary of Interior, setting forth a time-phased action plan which will allow land to be withdrawn for the MX system in accordance with Federal regulations, in time to support the planned deployment date. This memorandum should also formally establish the cooperative measures and specific responsibilities necessary for implementing the plan. Where land withdrawal requirements cannot be met within the time available, agreement should be reached on the extent to which the requirements can be relaxed. Those requirements which cannot be relaxed or met within available resources should be reported to the Congress.

* * * * *

As you know, section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the House Committee on Government Operations and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report. We would appreciate receiving a copy of your statement when it is provided to the congressional committees.

Copies of this letter are being sent to the Chairmen, House and Senate Committees on Armed Services and Appropriations, House Committee on Government Operations, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, and Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources; the Secretary of the Interior; the Director of the Bureau of Land Management; and the Secretary of the Air Force.

Sincerely yours,

for J. H. Stolarow
Director