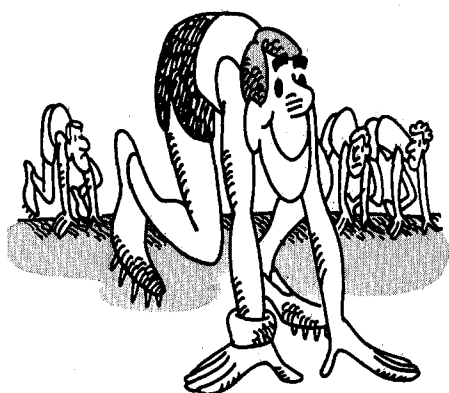


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LETTERS

The Missile Debate

R. Jeffrey Smith's articles on U.S. strategic thought and the MX missile (News and Comment, 2 Apr., p. 30; 9 Apr., p. 150; 16 Apr., p. 270; 23 Apr., p. 388; 30 Apr., p. 492; 7 May, p. 596; 21 May, p. 828) make a commendable contribution to the current debate over the nuclear arms freeze. These articles expose the faulty thinking behind the Reagan Administration's claims that the Soviet Union has achieved superiority over the United States in nuclear weapons.

However, Smith dismisses too lightly the question of why the Administration is trying so hard to sell the United States on a nuclear arms race on the basis of such a deception. . . . In the book *Protest and Survive* (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1981), Daniel Ellsberg argues that the Reagan and Carter administrations have been deliberately seeking a first-strike capability in order to threaten the Soviet Union with annihilation in case of a confrontation over a Third World country like Afghanistan, Iran, or El Salvador. . . . Striving for a first-strike capability today is not just a ticket for an incredibly expensive arms race in the face of the law of diminishing returns. If the Administration ever believes the first-strike capability has been attained, then the slightest miscalculation during a Third World crisis could turn into a nuclear war. That is one reason why millions of people here and in Europe are taking actions to stop the nuclear arms race.

JOSEPH BOWMAN

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Science and R. Jeffrey Smith are to be congratulated for the superb News and Comment series on basing modes for the MX missile. However, beyond the exorbitant expense, the environmental danger and the Strangelovian nature of the whole affair, there is another, more basic problem that is not mentioned: whereas the basing mode has received the bulk of political, military, and technical scrutiny, the MX missile itself has remained relatively unscrutinized. Ironically, the arguments against the missile—whatever its basing mode—are even more cogent than those already raised against the various plans for its deployment.

Like the planned Trident II, the MX possesses such hard-target lethality as to make it a credible first-strike weapon

and a threat to Soviet land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM's). . . . An important commandment for survival in the nuclear age should read "Thou shalt not threaten thy neighbor's deterrent." Whether the MX is based in a vulnerable or invulnerable manner, it violates that commandment and must be opposed.

DAVID P. BARASH

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The recent series of articles by R. Jeffrey Smith are among the clearest and most detailed analyses of the topic it has been my pleasure to read.

While reasonable persons may differ in their view of the necessity or lack thereof of an arms buildup, no thinking person should arrive at a conclusion without at least reading these articles. . . .

MARTIN ROEDER

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In response to Smith's article "Carter's plan for MX lives on" (News and Comment, 30 Apr., p. 492), could it be that "BMD" stands for "Bury Me Deep," where the "Me" could mean missile, me, the citizenry, or even civilization?

Or, maybe it means simply "Big Money Defense."

KARL L. LOCKWOOD

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Fossil Maize Pollen in Mexico

The report of maize pollen 70 meters under Mexico City in a layer of Pleistocene age has been publicized (1) and discussed (2-3) enough to warrant reexamination of the evidence. At the request of its finder the identity of the pollen has been checked and confirmed (2). To suggestions that the supposed Pleistocene pollen is a contamination brought down from younger levels in coring, it can be pointed out that the pollen was found in samples taken from the intact interior of precision cores.

Overlooked meanwhile have been (i) the basis for assuming that the 70-meter level is of Pleistocene age; (ii) the effect of the well-known subsidence of the area cored; and (iii) ample evidence elsewhere in the Basin of Mexico of two