

U.S. plans MX missile 'race tracks'

Washington (AP)—Senior Carter administration officials have reached a basic consensus for a \$26 billion proposal to deploy 200 big new MX mobile missiles in widespread "race track" patterns that would minimize environmental effects.

This was disclosed by administration sources who said the Defense Secretary, Harold Brown, explained the plan in detail yesterday to a high-level policy review council, including the national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski; the Secretary of State, Cyrus R. Vance, and others.

Mr. Brown has not yet formally recommended the deployment plan to President Carter, but is expected to do so within the next couple of weeks.

Mr. Carter decided in early June to move into full-scale development of the 190,000-pound MX missile in such a way as to save it from destruction in a possible surprise attack by accurate Soviet missiles.

But he left for later a final decision on how to move and hide the new missile, this country's biggest so far, among thousands of blast-proof shelters.

Since then, Pentagon experts have been shaping and reshaping deployment concepts with the aim of satisfying both the missile "survivability" requirement and environmental concerns of governors and others in the affected Western states.

Defense authorities have said they believed the latest design concept, in which the 200 missiles would be "huttled" among about 4,600 horizontal "protective structures" in Utah and Nevada valleys, meets all the necessary standards.

Each MX missile carries 10 powerful nuclear warheads.

Meanwhile, some key Senate critics of

the SALT II nuclear arms limitation agreement with the Soviet Union have indicated their vote on ratification may hinge on pushing ahead with the MX as soon as possible.

Mr. Brown has said the MX, which would be combat-ready about 1988, is essential with or without the SALT treaty because the present force of U.S. land-based Minuteman missiles will become vulnerable to possible knockout in their fixed underground launch silos within a few years.

The plan now nearing final decision would deploy the 200 missiles in a series of closed-course patterns that look roughly like angular race tracks.

There would be 23 "hardened" shelters in each race track pattern, built on side spur roads. One missile would be moved about inside each pattern of 23 shelters so the Russians would be unable to tell where the missiles are at any given time.

The missiles would be carried aboard giant 700,000-pound transporter vehicles that would move on surface roads and which, if necessary, could "dash" from one shelter to another in emergencies. If necessary, the missiles could be fired

from these giant vehicles.

Each shelter, which would be about half above and half below the surface, would be fitted with verification doors that could be opened from time to time to permit the Russian spy satellites to "look" inside. In that way, officials said, the Russians could be assured that the United States was not cheating on the SALT agreement by hiding extra missiles.

The latest plan replaces a concept that was favored in June, but that was opposed by state officials because it called for slashing the countryside with concrete trenches instead of surface roads and because it would take more land out of public use than they were ready to accept.

Under the current plan, the number of shelters has been cut nearly in half from the original 8,800 and the net amount of land that would be taken over has been squeezed down to about 25 square miles from the roughly 100 square miles in the original concept. That plan called for building the shelters along strips of trenches in linear patterns.

As things now stand, about 200 acres around each shelter would be fenced off, as would be two sizable missile assembly bases.