

SDI: Enhancing Security and Stability



United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Following is an address by Edward L. Rowny, Special Adviser to the President and the Secretary of State for Arms Control Matters, before the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis Conference on the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), Washington, D.C., March 14, 1988.

My introduction to what has become the Strategic Defense Initiative dates to my conversations with then-Governor Reagan during the 1980 campaign. The "Governor" had a rhetorical question. Why, he asked, should we and the Soviet Union be content to sit like two people with pistols pointed at one another's heads? How could we change this inherently dangerous situation? I answered that there were two basic approaches to bring about a change. We could agree to put the pistols down—to reduce arms—or we could put on helmets—defend ourselves. At that time, however, technology was not sufficiently advanced to support the "helmet option."

This conference is evidence that the situation has changed. In the 5 years since President Reagan's speech launching SDI, we have seen great progress in the technology of strategic defenses. Indeed, the Defense Acquisition Board has approved six key SDI technologies for demonstration and validation.

But I will leave the technology to the scientists. My remarks will focus on SDI in its strategic context—how it fits in with our defense and arms control goals. I will also address how the Soviet Union responds to these goals.

Pursuing both of the approaches I discussed with him in 1980, two of the highest priorities on President Reagan's agenda are SDI and START [strategic arms reduction talks], a treaty which would reduce strategic offensive arms. The President is deeply committed to developing effective defenses against ballistic missiles and to working toward a strategic arms reduction treaty that will cut in half existing U.S. and Soviet nuclear arsenals in a manner that contributes to stability.

The common theme uniting these goals is security and stability. Future strategic defenses offer us hope against the threat of ballistic missile attack. A good START treaty will reduce that threat, too. The overarching link between these objectives is the goal of enhancing deterrence. Both seek to reduce the risk of war.

However, the popular debate on the role of strategic defense and deterrence often centers around the notion that START and SDI are competing objectives. But they must not be viewed as competitors. In fact, the United States pursues the two goals in such a fashion as to make them mutually reinforcing: fewer strategic offensive weapons simplifies the task of defending against while the prospect of effective

strategic defenses discourages Soviet reliance on their preemptive offensive nuclear strategy. This, as I will discuss later, is not the approach now taken by the Soviets.

Again, the common theme in START and SDI is enhanced security and stability. A treaty reducing the strategic nuclear arsenals of the United States and Soviet Union can contribute to the goal of enhanced security, but only if it provides for stabilizing reductions—that is, reductions in those Soviet weapons and delivery systems with the greatest first-strike potential. To use an appropriate cliché, any strategist worth his salt will tell you that it is more important to decrease first-strike incentives than it is to decrease weapons inventories. And given the Soviet record on compliance and the high national security stakes of a START agreement, it is critical that these reductions be carried out under a verification regime that provides confidence for the United States that the Soviets are complying with the agreement.

Strategic defenses meeting the stringent criteria of the United States—military effectiveness, survivability, and cost effectiveness—will contribute to those very goals of improved security and strategic stability furthered by a good START agreement.

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Inhibiting Soviet First-Strike Planning

What about SDI and deterrence? It is important to recognize that deterrence can be enhanced even with a partially effective strategic defense system. This is because of the havoc such effective strategic defenses could wreak on a potential attacker's first-strike plans. Planning a nuclear first strike is a highly complicated effort with specific military objectives. Soviet military strategy has been based on the preemptive use of nuclear weapons in the effort to destroy or neutralize Western nuclear assets and to disrupt our command and control systems. Their overall objective in a nuclear war would be to deny the United States the option of effective retaliation, thereby preserving the Soviet Government and their elite.

The weapon best suited to this goal is the large, MIRVed [multiple independently-targetable reentry vehicle] ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missile], which constitutes the backbone of Soviet strategic forces. Effective American strategic defenses would severely inhibit the military utility of the Soviet planner's favorite weapon and greatly contribute to the uncertainty of the Soviet attack plan. As Soviet planners come to realize the decreasing utility of the ballistic missile in this critical strategic role, they will have no incentive to acquire greater numbers. Rather, they will be led to reduce their reliance on that weapon and alter their doctrine.

Denying Soviet ballistic missiles a free ride to their targets can throw a monkey wrench into the best-laid plans of the Soviet General Staff. And it is in our interest to see to it that no Soviet planner could contemplate a first strike under any circumstances with any confidence. This is what enhancing strategic deterrence is all about. SDI contributes to this goal.

Our experience since 1983 has shown that SDI has reinforced and continues to reinforce the American position at the negotiating table, especially in START. SDI played a key role in getting the Soviets back to the negotiating table in 1985 and has helped keep them there since. The record has shown that the Soviets take arms control seriously only when it is clear that the United States is prepared to do what is required to preserve the military balance. The INF [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] Treaty is an excellent example of what can be achieved in arms control when the United States and its allies are ready to meet their security needs by their own action.

In the strategic arms field, continued modernization of U.S. strategic offensive forces, coupled with a vigorous strategic defense program, gets the message to the Soviets that their drive for strategic superiority will not be tolerated by the United States. SDI promotes Soviet seriousness at the bargaining table. Moreover, deployed strategic defenses would actually strengthen a START regime. While they would not decrease the importance of cheating, effective defenses could reduce its impact by providing a margin of safety as a hedge against a clandestinely deployed offensive force.

A Cooperative Transition to Defenses

Just as clearly, a good START treaty supports our goals for SDI. It's as simple as realizing that fewer offensive ballistic missile warheads—a smaller threat—make the defensive job that much easier. This is another reason we pursue a START treaty—and why we reject the Soviet effort to kill or cripple the Strategic Defense Initiative as the price of that deal.

The U.S. approach to strategic stability and enhancing deterrence is directly reflected in our arms control positions at the nuclear and space talks. We are working toward a stabilizing and verifiable 50% reduction in strategic offensive arms, while advancing in the defense and space talks a treaty that would help provide for predictability in the strategic relationship and for the possibility of moving cooperatively toward a more stable, increasingly defense-reliant deterrent regime.

The Soviet Union, however, has not adopted a similarly progressive approach. The Soviets would like to preserve their offensive force advantages while they pursue their own strategic defense programs. So the Soviets still maintain their linkage between START reductions and crippling restrictions on the U.S. SDI program, limits they seek to impose on SDI above and beyond those already agreed by the sides in the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] Treaty. They continue to hold offensive reductions hostage to U.S. compliance with Soviet-defined limits on strategic defense work. They do this even though Soviet strategic weapons are now four times the number they were in 1972, when the United States concluded the ABM Treaty in the belief that it provided the premise for reducing the

then-existing strategic offensive nuclear arsenals.

The Soviets don't impose linkage because they object to strategic defense in principle. They have their own strategic defense program, estimated to cost about \$20 billion annually, the existence of which they categorically denied until General Secretary Gorbachev's off-hand admission of it to Tom Brokaw.

The Soviet strategic defense effort, in fact, is comprehensive and longstanding. It consists of the permitted 100-interceptor system deployed around Moscow, which the Soviets are now upgrading; a comprehensive passive defense program for the protection of the Soviet leadership and key industry; massive strategic air defenses (over 12,000 SAM [surface-to-air missile] launchers); and programs investigating many of the same advanced strategic defense technologies under investigation in SDI.

This advanced technology program is, moreover, no "response" to SDI. Its various elements have been in place since the 1960s, and it represents, as a whole, a much greater investment of plant space, capital, and manpower than does SDI. The Soviets are investigating weapons technologies for kinetic energy, particle beam, radio-frequency, and laser weapons.

Soviet investment in their laser weapon program is especially interesting and instructive, since the Soviets so often denigrate the prospects for these advanced technology weapons. The Soviet military laser program involves some 10,000 of their top scientists and engineers and would cost us \$1 billion a year to duplicate. It is centered at Sary Shagan, where the Soviets also conduct other ABM activities. The Sary Shagan facility features several air defense lasers and two lasers probably capable of damaging some components of satellites in orbit. One of these lasers is suitable for ballistic missile defense feasibility testing.

"Semantic Infiltration" Opposing SDI

It stretches one's credulity to reconcile the aggressive Soviet strategic defense program with Soviet rhetoric on SDI. The Soviets have charged that SDI is a U.S. attempt to gain strategic superiority, to generate a new round in "the arms race," to "militarize space," and to undermine the basis for offensive arms reductions. However, in Geneva, the Soviets have shown themselves unwilling to engage in open discussion of

key issues, such as the nature of strategic stability, the possible contributions of defenses to stability, measures for ensuring predictability in the strategic relationship, and the offense-defense relationship.

No state is so strong a proponent of strategic defense in practice as the Soviet Union, yet none is more strongly opposed to SDI in public. Standing Soviet rhetoric side-by-side with their strategic defense efforts, one is led to conclude that the Soviets are far more interested in stigmatizing the U.S. defense effort than in engaging in a reasonable and constructive dialogue on the future of the strategic relationship and the role of strategic defenses in it.

The Soviets have recently adopted the theme that the issue in the defense and space talks is not SDI but the ABM Treaty. They have downplayed their polemical attacks on SDI in favor of arguing for "stability," which they say means an unconditional commitment to the ABM Treaty. But changes in Soviet public statements, in my judgement, reflect more of a shift in the style than in the substance of their position.

If there is one thing that Gorbachev and his new team in Moscow represent, I believe, it is the realization that one can draw more flies to honey than to vinegar. So the Soviets are practicing their time-honored technique of semantic infiltration by employing some of our lexicon to serve their political ends; for example, by emphasizing the word "stability," by which they mean the United States observing the ABM Treaty on Soviet terms, although the Soviets themselves are violating the treaty. They have toned down some of the harsher aspects of their rhetoric. But their goal remains the same—killing SDI, quickly or slowly. In their well-orchestrated public campaign of antipathy to the U.S. investigation of strategic defenses, the Soviets even trot out the very same Soviet scientists who develop Soviet strategic defense technology to allege that "it can't be done" and "it's destabilizing." This must be recognized as another cynical attempt to undermine a legitimate effort that "threatens" only a Soviet military advantage.

We must look to our own interests. The American people overwhelmingly support the idea of defense against ballistic missile attack. Yet the U.S. Congress has been unwilling to provide the funds necessary to move the program as fast as the technology will permit.

It is clear now, 5 years from President Reagan's visionary speech, that SDI's future depends not so much on the ingenuity of our scientists or the limits of technology as it does on our willingness to meet the political challenges posed by the possibility of effective strategic defenses. The road ahead is difficult, and we can expect the Soviets to remain uncooperative. We must demonstrate to them our resolute determination to move forward to a strategic balance incorporating defenses which threaten no one. There is no reason we should be wedded to an uneasy balance of nuclear terror. Rather, we should recognize that the incorporation of effective strategic defenses in the balance could serve to decrease both the chances and the threat of war. This is the real challenge of SDI. ■

Published by the United States Department of State • Bureau of Public Affairs
Office of Public Communication • Editorial Division • Washington, D.C. • April 1988
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