

SDI faces its most dangerous challenge yet

by Kathleen Klenetsky

The U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative faces what may be the most dangerous challenge to its survival yet, as a result of Moscow's aggressive campaign to convince President Ronald Reagan that a new arms control agreement would be well worth accepting stringent limitations on the anti-missile defense program.

Through his latest arms-control gambit, which calls for extending the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty for 15-20 years, and limiting the SDI to laboratory-only research, in exchange for cuts in the U.S. and Soviet offensive nuclear forces, Mikhail Gorbachov has succeeded in bolstering those forces in the West, including such members of the Reagan administration as Secretary of State George Shultz, who have been pressing the President to negotiate away the SDI as part of an accommodation with Moscow.

Gorbachov's "offer," which he first made public June 16, has been seized upon by these jokers to "prove" to the President that the Kremlin has "softened" its position, and is now truly interested in striking an arms-control bargain. Thus, their argument goes, Reagan must reciprocate with a goodwill gesture of his own, namely, accepting "temporary" limits on the SDI.

This is a dangerous fantasy. Reagan would be signing a virtual treaty of national surrender were he to go along with Shultz's version of Neville Chamberlainism. Knocking out the SDI has been Moscow's No. 1 strategic priority, and with good reason. The Soviet Union now enjoys a solid—and expanding—military advantage over the United States. At this juncture, the deployment of even a first-generation ABM system holds out the only hope America has of reversing its otherwise inevitable slide into Soviet serfdom. Nevertheless, Shultz and his factional allies are using every deceitful trick in the book to convince Reagan he must give way.

The fight between the Shultz gaggle and the much-small-

er grouping around Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, who remains firmly committed to the SDI, has reportedly reached its most intense level yet. The *Washington Post's* Lou Cannon, a longtime "Reagan watcher" who also functions as a mouthpiece for the State Department position, revealed July 10 that the outlines of a "grand compromise" that would see the U.S. delaying SDI development for Soviet cuts in offensive weapons have emerged in the administration.

Weinberger opposes any limits on future deployment of SDI, while Shultz is intrigued by the possibility if it leads to a significant reduction in nuclear weapons, Cannon reported. Sources cited by Cannon stressed that Reagan has reached no decision, while at the same time saying the President would insist on a 50% reduction in Soviet and American strategic arms—as opposed to the 35% proposed by Moscow—before considering any limits on SDI. Cannon's sources also claimed that while Reagan is unwilling to curb SDI research, a ban on deployment, perhaps to the mid-1990s, of any product of this research might be negotiable.

Unfortunately, the President himself has been dropping hints which could be interpreted to mean he is contemplating such a trade-off. In his latest public statement on the new burst of Washington-Moscow diplomacy, Reagan told the July 9 *New York Daily News* that the Soviet's alleged willingness to allow some research to proceed on SDI "is a concession to the extent that it is a step forward from just their one-time flat declaration that we must give up that research." "Certainly," Reagan stated, "we're going to give them the benefit of any doubt" that the nature of the Soviet proposals signals seriousness about reaching agreements.

Referring to the letter he received from Gorbachov in June, Reagan said, "Obviously, there's reason for optimism" since the Soviets "are actually talking specific percentages

... of weapons and this ... has not taken place before." He also expressed hope that his next summit with Gorbachov would take place this year, and that "we could perhaps agree upon something" there, and leave the details to underlings.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes subsequently told reporters that Reagan was preparing a detailed reply to Gorbachev's letter, which would specifically address the Soviet proposals on an offensive-defensive exchange.

Summit madness and SDI

Talk like this has set off alarm bells among SDI supporters. Syndicated columnist Bob Novak warned, in a television discussion show taped July 3, that the anti-missile program is facing "serious trouble" from "the know-nothing spirit in Congress"—as well as the President's "mad desire" for a summit. Referring to Moscow's latest "offer," Novak said, "The really dangerous thing is that the mad desire for a summit may lead the President to give a guarantee of seven years, eight years, on the ABM treaty, and would effectively ... put SDI on the shelf.

"I think we're in a critical state for the nation's future," Novak stated. "What's at stake is what is Ronald Reagan, because it's inconceivable that the greatest advancement he has made in strategic thinking, the SDI, that he would throw down to have a little piddling summit meeting so this butcher [Gorbachov] can come over here and see the United States." Novak said he was nevertheless "afraid" Reagan will agree to limit SDI.

Reagan himself denied this when he met with French President François Mitterrand over the Fourth of July weekend. According to Larry Speakes, the President told Mitterrand that while he believed the Soviets may be more serious than ever about an arms agreement, he underscored his position that the SDI was "non-negotiable, not a bargaining chip."

It is conceivable that Reagan may be sending out ambiguous signals deliberately, to keep alive the prospects of a summit. There is no question but that the upcoming November elections—in which the Republican Party could lose control of the Senate—may be one reason why the President is now playing lovey-dovey with Moscow.

But even if this is all a charade, Reagan's new-found friendliness toward Moscow is certainly feeding into the growing anti-SDI momentum on Capitol Hill. Sources in Congress have told *EIR* that any suggestion from Reagan that the Soviet proposal for an offensive-defensive trade-off has some merit, can be used to force deep cutbacks in the SDI's funding. "If Reagan concedes there's even the slightest movement on Moscow's part on Star Wars, then we'll be able to argue that it would be silly to give anything like full funding to the program. If Reagan is going to delay the program for political reasons, then Congress sure as hell isn't going to keep giving it money," said one congressional staffer who is deeply involved in the anti-SDI fight.

Weinberger indirectly warned of this in a television in-

terview June 4. Stating bluntly that the Soviet proposal is "against the national interests of the United States" and "an attempt to kill the SDI by the side door," the Pentagon chief warned: "The Soviets know you can't get funding for a program if you've said you're not going to use it for 10 years." Accepting the Soviet proposal for extending the ABM Treaty would cause SDI research "to lose a great deal of momentum" and cause a "loss of all public support or the possibility of ever deploying a strategic defense."

A similar point could be made about the administration's acceptance of the congressional budget resolution, which slashed a whopping \$28 billion from the administration's proposed Pentagon budget for next year. By acquiescing in such disastrous cuts without making a national stink about it—Larry Speakes actually called the resolution "acceptable"—Reagan is undermining his arguments about the need to increase military spending.

Pressure on the SDI is going to grow massively in the weeks to come. Through a combination of diplomatic niceties and outright terror, the Soviets are moving rapidly to extirpate all support for strategic defense in Western Europe. The assassination of Karl Heinz Beckurts, a West German scientist closely associated with the SDI, signals unmistakably that the Soviets have decided to pull out all the stops to derail the SDI. As the Soviet army daily *Krasnaya Zvezda* declared the day Beckurts was killed, the U.S.A. will never achieve the SDI because Moscow will take all measures needed to counter it.

Moscow is enlisting the help of various European heads-of-state in this effort. French President Mitterrand emerged from a tête-à-tête with Gorbachov in Moscow July 10 to tell the press that the Kremlin believes, and he agrees, that the SDI is the one remaining obstacle to a U.S.-Soviet arms accord. The situation is not hopeless, the French leader continued, because Soviet proposals to allow some research into SDI provided a basis for negotiation! Further Soviet blandishments toward Europe were expected during Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's visit to Britain for three days beginning July 13.

As for the U.S. Congress, that body hardly requires any encouragement when it comes to destroying the SDI. The House and Senate Armed Services Committees have already voted substantial cuts in the Administration's proposed \$4.8 billion SDI allocation. It is not at all impossible that, once what passes for the congressional budget process winds up in September, the SDI will have been savaged even further.

In the latest anti-SDI initiative, eight Democratic congressmen announced on June 28 that they will attempt to freeze SDI funding at the current year's level of \$2.8 billion. The eight, including Majority Leader Jim Wright of Texas and assistant Democratic leader Tom Foley of Washington, are circulating a "dear colleague" letter expressing "concern" that the armed services committee had allocated too much for the program. If they are successful, the SDI will be a dead letter.