
Documentation

'On the Strategic Defense Initiative'

The following speech by President Reagan was delivered to supporters of the Strategic Defense Initiative in Washington, D.C. on Aug. 6, 1986.

Thank you very much. And greetings to Secretary Weinberger and General Abrahamson. I hope you haven't said everything I'm going to say. I'm grateful to have this opportunity to speak with you and to thank you for all you're doing to keep America in the forefront of scientific and technological change.

Our country's security today relies as much on the genius and creativity of scientists as it does on the courage and dedication of those in the military services. It also relies on those with the wisdom to recognize innovation when they see it, and to shepherd change over the obstacles and through the maze. It takes a special person, endowed with vision and tenacity to overcome political and bureaucratic inertia. And many of you here today are just this kind of special people. And I want you to know that your President and your country are grateful. And if I'm not being too presumptuous, I think history will remember you too.

There are three stages of reaction to any new idea as Arthur C. Clarke, a brilliant writer with a fine scientific mind once noted: First, it's crazy, don't waste my time. Second, it's possible but it's not worth doing. And finally, I always said it was a good idea. When I notice how much support tax simplification seems to have attracted as of late, I can't help but think of Clarke's observation.

Well, one sometimes has to live with opposition to proposals such as changing the tax code, but when the same kind of skepticism stands in the way of the national security of our country, it can be perilous. Clearly intelligent and well-meaning individuals can be trapped by a mind-set, a way of thinking that prevents them from seeing beyond what has already been done and makes them uncomfortable with what is unfamiliar. And this mind-set is perhaps our greatest obstacle in regards to SDI.

We're at a critical point now on national security issues

and we need your help. Many of our citizens are still unaware that today we are absolutely defenseless against the fastest, most destructive weapons man has ever created, ballistic missiles. Yet there are still those who want to cut off or severely cut back our ability to investigate the feasibility of such defenses. Congressional action on the Defense Authorization Bill is coinciding with increasing diplomatic activity with the Soviet Union. Yet, at the same time, we are in the midst of a budget fight which could take away the very leverage we need to deal with the Soviets successfully.

Back in 1983, I challenged America's scientific community to develop an alternative to our total reliance on the threat of nuclear retaliation, an alternative based on protecting innocent people rather than avenging them, an alternative that would be judged effective by how many lives it could save rather than how many lives it could destroy.

All of you know that during the past three decades, deterrence has been based on our ability to use offensive weapons to retaliate against any attack. Once an American President even had to make the excruciating decision to use such weapons in our defense. Isn't it time that we took steps that will permit us to do something about nuclear weapons, rather than simply continue to live with them in fear? And this is what our SDI research is all about. And there could be no better time than today, the 41st anniversary of Hiroshima, to rededicate ourselves to finding a safer way to keep the peace.

Many people believe the answer lies not in SDI but only in reaching arms control agreements. Trust and understanding alone, it is said, will lead to arms control. But let's not kid ourselves. It's realism, not just trust, that is going to make it possible for adversaries like the Soviet Union and the United States to reach effective arms reduction agreements. Our SDI program has provided an historic opportunity, one that enhances the prospects for reducing the number of nuclear weapons. Technology can make it possible for both sides realistically, without compromising their own security, to reduce their arsenals. And the fear that one side might cheat, might have a number of missiles above the agreed-upon limit, could be offset by effective defenses. Clearly, by making offensive nuclear missiles less reliable, we make agreements to reduce their number more attainable. Particularly is that true where one side now is an economic basket-case because of the massive arms buildup that it's been conducting over the last few decades—the Soviet Union.

There has been progress. There's a serious prospect today for arms reductions, not just arms control. And that, by itself, is a great change, and it can be traced to our Strategic Defense Initiative. SDI can take the profit out the Soviet buildup of offensive weapons, and in time, open new opportunities by building on today's and tomorrow's technologies. I say this, fully aware of the Soviet campaign to convince the world that terminating our SDI program is a prerequisite to any arms agreement. This clamoring is nothing new. It also has preceded steps we've taken to modernize our strategic forces. It

was especially loud, for example, as we moved to offset the unprovoked and unacceptable Soviet buildup of intermediate-range missiles, aimed at our allies, by deploying our Pershing IIs and cruise missiles.

When I made it clear that we would no longer base our strategic-force decisions on the flawed SALT treaties—and let me add that that action was taken when there was ample evidence that the Soviet Union was already in clear violation of key SALT provisions—the cry went up that it was the death knell of arms control, and the beginning of a new, even more destructive nuclear arms race. Well let me just point out, in case no one noticed, the nay-sayers' predictions have been about as accurate as the time my old boss, Harry Warner of Warner Brothers film company, said when sound films first came in, "Who the hell wants to hear an actor talk?" [laughter]

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Well, today we continue to negotiate with the Soviets and they are negotiating with us. In fact, their recent proposals, in stark contrast to those gloomy predictions, are somewhat more forthcoming than those of the past. We're giving serious consideration to what the Soviets have recently laid upon the table in response to our own concrete reduction proposals. Also, we're looking toward the next summit between General Secretary Gorbachov and me, as we agreed upon last November, where nuclear arms reduction will be one of several significant issues to be discussed.

Forecasting is not useful, but let me just say again, I am optimistic. It's demonstrably in the interest of both our countries to reduce the resources that we commit to weapons. If the Soviet Union wants arms reduction—strategic, chemical, or conventional—the United States stands ready to commit itself to a fair and verifiable agreement. As for SDI, let me again affirm we are willing to explore how to share its benefits with the Soviet Union, which itself has long been involved in strategic defense programs. This will help to demonstrate

what I have been emphasizing all along, that we seek no unilateral advantage through the SDI.

There has been some speculation that in my recent letter to General Secretary Gorbachov, I decided to seek some sort of grand compromise to trade away SDI in exchange for getting the Soviets to join with us in the offensive reductions. Now to those who have been publicizing what is supposed to be in that letter—aren't offended to find out that they don't know what's in that letter, because no one has really told them. I know. Let me reassure you right here and now that our response to demands that we cut off or delay research and testing and close shop is, "No way." SDI is no bargaining chip. It is the path to a safer and more secure future, and the research is not, and never has been, negotiable. As I've said before, it's the number of offensive missiles that needs to be reduced, not efforts to find a way to defend mankind against these deadly weapons.

Many of the vocal opponents of SDI, some of them with impressive scientific credentials, claim our goal is impossible. It can't be done, they say. Well, I think it's becoming increasingly apparent to everyone that those claiming it can't be done have clouded vision. Sometimes smoke gets in your eyes. Sometimes politics gets in your eyes. If this project is as big a waste of time and money as some have claimed, why have the Soviets been involved in strategic defense themselves for so long? And why are they so anxious that we stop?

I understand that General Abrahamson has already briefed you on the progress we've made. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the general and his team. They're all first-string and doing a terrific job.

Jack Schweigert, an astronaut, an American hero of the first order—well, I think I'm getting ahead of myself there. I should continue with what I was saying, and say that I'm more than happy with the strides made in our ability to track and intercept missiles before they reach their targets. The goal we seek is a system that can intercept deadly ballistic missiles in all phases of their flight, including, and in particular, the boost phase, right where they're coming out of the silos.

Our research is aimed at finding a way of protecting people, not missiles. And that's my highest priority and will remain so. And to accomplish this, we're proceeding as fast as we can toward developing a full range of promising technologies.

I know there are those that are getting a bit antsy, but to deploy systems of limited effectiveness now would deter limited funds—or divert them—and delay our main research. It could well erode support for the program before it's permitted to reach its potential.

Now I'll talk about Jack Schweigert, an astronaut, an American hero of the first order, who once said, "I was privileged to be one of the few who viewed our Earth from the Moon, and that vision taught me that technology and commitment can overcome any challenge." Well, Jack tragically died of

cancer and was cut short from the great contributions he would have made to his country and to mankind. He was the kind of individual who made this the great land of freedom and enterprise that it is. His "can do" spirit is alive and well in America today.

We and the other free people of the world are on the edge of a giant leap into the next century. That turning point in 13½ years will not only mark the end of a century, but the beginning of a new millennium. And the free people of the

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world are ready for it. Our research on effective defenses helps to point the way to a safer future. The best minds from some allied countries are already working with us in this noble endeavor, and we believe that others will join this effort before too long.

In SDI, as elsewhere, we've put technology that almost boggles the mind to work increasing our productivity and expanding the limits of human potential. The relationship between freedom and human progress has never been more apparent. But our freedom and security, as we are solely aware, depend on more than technology.

Both diplomacy and our internal debate are at a critical juncture, and your active support is imperative. Together, we must make it plain that this is the worst time to undermine vital defense programs and take away America's needed negotiating leverage. If we cut back on our own forces unilaterally, we will leave our adversaries no incentive to reduce their own weapons, and we'll leave the next generations not a safer, more stable world, but a far more dangerous one. The future is, literally, in our hands, and it is SDI that is helping us to regain control over our own destiny.

Just one last little incident, if you aren't aware of it already, that might be helpful to you and some people that you might be discussing this subject with. Back when Fulton was inventing the steamboat, and came into reality, there was an effort made to sell it to Napoleon in France. And that great general, with all his wisdom, said, "Are you trying to tell me that you can have a boat that will sail against the tide and the currents and the winds without any sails?" He said, "Don't bother me with such foolishness." Well, we know where the foolishness lay. And let's not make the same mistakes.

I want to thank you all again for all you're doing to keep our country out in front and to keep her secure and free. And, don't let up. And God bless you.

Do You Have the Latest Ammunition To Fight for the SDI?

Japan and the SDI: An Inside Look

Japan's full-scale participation in the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative could shorten the research time for deployment by a full two years, and bring enormous economic and defense benefits to Japan.

How this can happen is detailed in the just-published transcript of a two-day conference in Tokyo, "SDI: Military, Economic, and Strategic Implications," sponsored by the Fusion Energy Foundation and the Schiller Institute on April 22-23, with 180 members of Japan's scientific and political elite in attendance.

The consensus at the end of the two days was that Japan's participation in the SDI as an equal partner is both necessary and urgent. As Prof. Makoto Momoi of the Yomiuri Research Center put it, "Every day that Japan does not participate in the SDI is another day lost" in the battle to counter the Soviet threat.

Top U.S., European, and Japanese scientific, military, and political representatives discussed:

- the latest technologies of the SDI;
- specifically what Japan can contribute;
- the political climate in Japan;
- the nature of the Soviet threat.

Fully documented at the conference is how SDI technologies will bring about a 100-fold leap in energy flux density, abruptly reversing the decline in productivity in industry.

Now, the full proceedings of the conference are available in a transcript. Order your copy for \$100.00 by writing the Fusion Energy Foundation, P.O. Box 17149, Washington, D.C. 20041-0149. Or call (703) 771-7000 to place your order by telephone. Visa/MasterCard accepted.