

Defense secretary wages war on SDI

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Those supporters of the Strategic Defense Initiative who may have been taken in by Defense Secretary Richard Cheney's claim that he is a "strong advocate" of the beleaguered system, are receiving a rude awakening. Less than three weeks after being confirmed as defense secretary, Cheney has used his powerful position to open up a new line of assault against the SDI.

Cheney began his offensive March 28, with four back-to-back appearances on the morning television talk show circuit, in which he denigrated the SDI, and affirmed that the program's budget will be severely cut.

Although he claimed to support the SDI, and talked about the possibilities of eventually deploying some kind of strategic defense, the new Pentagon chief put himself squarely in the camp of those who have attempted to degrade the SDI from the comprehensive, high-tech population shield originally proposed by President Reagan in March 1983, to a narrowly delimited system that would be geared toward maintaining, not replacing, the immoral and militarily incompetent doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).

Program deliberately misrepresented

"Oftentimes during the Reagan administration, it [the SDI] was described in terms that, frankly, I think oversold the concept," Cheney bluntly stated on NBC-TV's "Today" show. "We have this notion that occasionally was mentioned, the idea of a total, complete shield that would be absolutely leakproof and block all incoming missiles. If you think about it in those terms, it's going to be an extremely remote proposition."

Like other members of this faction, Cheney attempted to discredit the SDI, by deliberately misrepresenting its original conception. Contrary to Cheney's implication, no important SDI advocate—not Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger nor SDIO director Gen. James Abrahamson, nor such non-governmental figures closely identified with the proposal as *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche—have ever maintained that the SDI would be 100% foolproof. They have argued, however, that to provide a truly effective defense against nuclear war, the SDI must deploy the most advanced technologies possible, and must be used to move the world away from MAD.

Cheney clearly wants no part of such an SDI. During his talk-show tour, he stated that any strategic defense system

which the United States might deploy in the future, would be limited to protecting U.S. strategic missiles from either a Soviet nuclear attack, or from poison gas missiles other nations are expected to deploy soon.

If you "look at it as a system that could interfere with a Soviet first strike on the United States, and thereby increase deterrence," Cheney said, "then it becomes a very different proposition and has to be evaluated against other ways to modernize our land-based ICBM force."

Bush's 'final solution'

The defense secretary strongly hinted that President Bush shares this view, and that he will almost certainly treat the SDI as part of the decisions on the future of the land-based strategic deterrent, which he is scheduled to make within the next month. These decisions have to do with the future production levels and basing mode of the MX and Midgetman missiles.

According to several reliable sources, the Bush administration is likely to "solve" both the SDI and ICBM-basing controversies, by proposing deployment of a thin defense system, which would provide limited protection to the ICBM force.

Such a proposal has been put forth by several prominent Bush officials, including Vice President Dan Quayle and National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, a political ally of Henry Kissinger.

In the administration's eyes, it would have numerous benefits: First, it would keep the SDI restricted to a mode acceptable to Moscow; second, it would allow for the MXs to remain in fixed, underground bases, thereby resolving the decade-long debate over how to make them mobile; and third, it would permit Washington to abide by an offer which former President Reagan made to the Soviets to ban mobile long-range missiles.

While Bush may be patting himself on the back for coming up with such a practical solution, the fact is that it represents a major, potentially fatal, concession to the Soviets. By effectively denying to the United States the possibility of developing and deploying an advanced-technology SDI, Bush is handing the Soviets a crucial advantage which will make the U.S. virtually indefensible.

Even the administration's apparent commitment to developing a point-defense system is suspect, given the significant funding cutbacks which the Strategic Defense Initiative is facing.

During his round of the talk shows, Cheney confirmed that the \$5.6 billion which Reagan proposed to spend on SDI in FY 1990, will be reduced. Calling the system "very expensive," Cheney said that the SDI will undergo a "very thorough scrub" in the budget and strategic reviews the administration is now carrying out. The SDI "like every other program—aircraft carriers, Army divisions, tanks, airplanes—is subject to review," he said.