

The Long Road to U.S.-Russian Missile Defense Cooperation

by Marsha Freeman

On March 23, 1983, President Ronald Reagan made a stunning proposal on national television: The United States would develop a Strategic Defense Initiative, to end the age of Mutual and Assured Destruction, or “MAD,” and instead make nuclear weapons “impotent and obsolete.” The revolutionary new technologies that would be developed, using the “new physical principles” of lasers and other directed-energy systems, would be shared with the Soviet Union. That proposal, which had been formulated and then publicly discussed by Lyndon LaRouche the previous year, was turned down by the Soviet leadership.

On March 23, 1993, Lyndon LaRouche released a statement, “On the Tenth Anniversary of President Reagan’s Announcement of the SDI.” Describing Reagan’s proposal, as “an announcement which changed the course of history,” as it could only lead to either new cooperation between the two powers, or “the collapse of the Soviet empire for economic reasons, within about five years.” LaRouche noted that, “once again the time has come for similar bold initiatives.” Scientists in both the U.S.A. and Russia had been thinking along the same lines.

Discussions were already under way on U.S.-Russian missile defense cooperation. In October 1991, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on a visit by Russian Gen. Konstantin Kobets to Washington. In public discussions, his deputies proposed that, with the Soviet Union gone, there be the integration of Russian and U.S. Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) efforts, including a joint space-based defense.

The following year, a group of American and Russian scientists began discussions to define areas of potential missile defense cooperation. In a June 10, 1992 article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, entitled, “From Star Wars to a Global System for the Protection of the World Community: Boris Yeltsin Will Discuss That Topic With George Bush,” Academician Yevgeny Velikhov spelled out the strategic importance of this cooperation. Velikhov recalled that President Yeltsin had proposed, in his speech to the UN Security Council in January 1992, the creation of a global system to protect the world community, “based on the reorientation of the U.S. SDI, using high-technology systems developed within the Russian defense complex.”

Russia, “as a leading nuclear power bears a special responsibility, together with the United States, for averting the threat of nuclear war,” Velikhov wrote. The specific proposal included joint monitoring of the launch of ballistic missiles, notifying the world community of any missile attack, and

“protecting the member states against ballistic missiles.”

“Cooperation in defense technologies with the United States is in Russia’s national interests and, on the one hand, will help to maintain the country’s scientific and technical potential through investment and stem the ‘brain drain,’ and, on the other hand, will help the country’s high-technology output gain access to the world market and aid industrial conversion,” from defense to civilian production. Velikhov also emphasized the potential use of defense technologies “in the solution of a broad range of questions,” both in defense and the civilian economy.

Velikhov, having been prominently involved in leadership positions in Russian scientific endeavors, from thermonuclear fusion, to magnetohydrodynamics, to lasers, pleaded with his nation’s political leadership to preserve science. “If we destroy science, we shall never rebuild it,” he warned in 1991, “then we will have no future.”

Over a period of four decades, the Soviet Union had created the most robust manned space program in the world. When the U.S.S.R. collapsed, the very real danger existed that this globally critical capability would be lost. Discussions between the U.S. and Russia on manned space cooperation began in 1991, and in October 1992, an initial agreement was signed to fly an astronaut on a Russia Soyuz, and a cosmonaut on the Space Shuttle.

In 1993, President Clinton made a strategic foreign policy decision, agreeing to a greatly expanded cooperative program, and a virtual integration of the world’s only two manned space programs. The agreement included long-term stays of American astronauts aboard the Russian Mir space station. It also invited Russian partnership in the future International Space Station, cementing together two formerly parallel programs, now to be dependent upon one another. The \$400 million that NASA paid the Russian space agency for the use of its Mir space station through the late 1990s, kept the former Soviet manned space program alive.

On the strategic defense side, *Aviation Week* reported, on Sept. 28, 1992, on continuing high-level military/security discussions, stemming from the Bush/Yeltsin summit meeting the previous June.

‘Trust’

On April 2, 1993, an article appeared in *Izvestia* by Viktor Litovkin, titled, “On the Eve of Vancouver, Russia Proposes

to the USA a Joint Plasma Weapon Experiment.” Russian scientists told Litovkin that at the upcoming summit between the U.S. and Russian Presidents, the “Trust” program proposal would be offered to President Clinton.

This would involve use of ground-based components, such as microwave or optical (laser) generators, to produce an ionized structure, known as a plasmoid. The plasmoid would be directed and concentrated not directly on a ballistic missile target, but aimed at the area of the atmosphere directly in front of the missile, its warhead, or even an aircraft. The energy-dense plasmoid would ionize the surrounding area of the atmosphere, disrupting the flight of the target, at an altitude of up to 50 km. The target’s trajectory disrupted, it would be destroyed by enormous aerodynamic forces.

Because the plasmoid is travelling at the speed of light, Russian scientists explained, it is a “practically invulnerable weapon, with guaranteed defense against any attack from space, or from the upper or lower layers of the atmosphere.” Such a system would be able to offer protection against offensive weapons in space, or those used by nuclear terrorists.

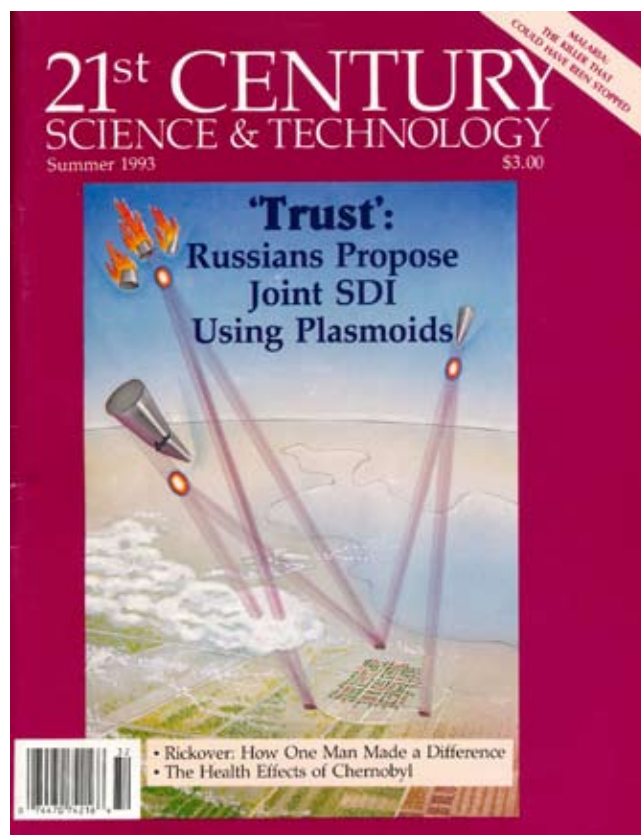
To do joint testing of this new capability, Russia, it was proposed, would send the required equipment, including microwave generators to create the plasmoids, by ship to America’s Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific Ocean. The target missiles could be launched either from Russia or the U.S.A., and the United States would provide the solid-state electronics and computer technology for the experiments. Litovkin’s article was accompanied by a drawing of a coordinated land and sea, anti-ballistic missile system, demonstrating the “Trust” plasmoid concept.

While the U.S. press ridiculed the proposal, at a press conference in Rome on April 20, Dr. Leonid Fituni of the Center for Strategic and Global Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, was asked by *EIR* to expand on his comments on the “plasmoid weapon” proposal. He explained that it was designed as a Soviet “secret weapon”; as the unconventional response to the American SDI. He said there was no possible countermeasure, and that “Trust” could become a major point of future joint talks.

But implementation of the “Trust” proposal never moved forward. As Lyndon LaRouche explained on July 10: In 1993, at the outset of his Presidency, Clinton was briefed on LaRouche’s role in Reagan’s SDI, and adopted the concept of cooperation with Russia. Later, Yeltsin raised the prospect of cooperation with Clinton, and the idea was moving ahead, until Vice President Al Gore sabotaged it, in 1996. At the time, LaRouche was in Moscow engaged in critical discussions with leading people about the revival of SDI cooperation.

Even though President Clinton backed down from missile defense cooperation with Russia at the time, and an historic opportunity to revive the LaRouche-Reagan SDI was missed, the idea did not die. This was the prelude to the developments during the recent Bush-Putin summit.

Following the capture of Congress by the Gingrichite neo-



conservatives in 1994, Clinton came under increasing pressure to proceed with a near-term, in fact ineffective, limited ground-based kinetic-kill vehicle program, with the commitment to decide on deployment of the interceptor system by 2000. President Reagan’s Soviet-partnership SDI became a *national* missile defense program, without “new physical principles” or Russian cooperation. The revolutionary directed-energy technologies that would have created entirely new industries as well as an actual defense, were de-funded.

By the end of the 1990s, as the U.S. deployment decision was nearing, the Russian military was warning the United States that it could revitalize its nuclear arsenal, deploying “unconventional” capabilities, to overwhelm any limited anti-missile defenses. In response, Clinton, as reported by NBC’s Tom Brokaw in June 2000, said that he was willing to share U.S. anti-missile technology. In a June 1 interview, President Putin proposed “pooling” U.S. and Russia efforts to protect against emerging missile threats, concentrating on boost-phase intercept, which could protect against missiles as they are fired. But this effort went nowhere.

President George W. Bush’s accession to office the following year put the kinetic interceptor anti-missile program on a deployment fast-track. Having reached no agreement with Russia on treaty modifications, the Bush Administration unilaterally abrogated the ABM Treaty in December 2001. In a further provocation, in 2004, the Bush Administration was

discussing placing anti-missile interceptors in Poland, at Russia's doorstep.

RAMOS

One joint U.S.-Russian anti-ballistic missile project that did get off the ground was the Russian-American Observation Satellite, or RAMOS. The U.S. team on RAMOS was sponsored by the Defense Department's Ballistic Missile Defense Office (BMDO), through the Space Dynamics Laboratory at Utah State University. The objectives were to develop new, advanced sensors to measure mid- to long-wave infrared Earth background radiance and structure, measure the polarization of short-wave infrared Sun glint from high-altitude clouds, and use stereo observations, in order to be able to detect and track moving objects against the background radiation of the Earth. Two satellites taking measurements simultaneously would allow stereoscopic imagery.

Preliminary measurements occurred between 1995 and 1997, using existing Russian and U.S. satellites.

Although the deadline was approaching for President Clinton to make a decision on BMD deployment, which would necessitate changes in the ABM Treaty, cooperation was still on the table with Russia. At a press briefing on Jan. 21, 1999, Robert Bell, Space Assistant to the President for National Security and Arms Control, was asked if there were consideration of cooperation with Russia on the limited ABM system the Clinton Administration was developing, for deployment against "rogue states."

Bell responded that joint exercises had been carried out using theater missile defense systems with the Russians. The U.S., he said, was "proposing missile-data-warning sharing to allow them to use the information we have about incoming threats that their Theater Missile Defenses could counter."

Even at the national missile defense level, Bell stated, "there has been a program of collaboration with the Russians." A "major exercise" was being planned in Alaska, with Russian participation, to test methods of discriminating warheads reentering the atmosphere. The BMDO is "pursuing important collaborative programs with the Russian Academy of Sciences," he reported.

Two months later, *Aerospace America* reported that, "At the last U.S.-Russia summit, there was an agreement to have a shared early warning arrangement between the two countries. The Administration was considering whether to move to the next step in the RAMOS project, for a space surveillance demonstration. Another program, called the Advanced Plasma Experiment, involving sounding rocket flights from Alaska, was planned for early 1999, with both sides taking measurements.

But just weeks later, testifying on the FY2000 budget for the BMDO, Gen. Lester Lyles said that the estimate to complete the program, and build the two observational satellites, was about \$250 million. The BMDO decided that against that level of funding, in light of the limited resources available for technology development.

The curtailment of the RAMOS project was not due to a lack of progress. In March 1999 Defense Department Congressional testimony, it was reported that, in the previous two years, newly developed American and Russian sensors had been jointly tested aboard a U.S. aircraft, and the first joint images taken from space.

At a press conference following a U.S.-EU economic summit, on March 31, 2000, President Clinton said that the United States would share missile defense technology. "We've done a lot of information-sharing with the Russians," he said. "We have offered to do more, and we would continue to." He described as "unethical" the position that such technology would not be shared.

Bush Ends Cooperation

Statements continued to be made by representatives of the Cheney/Bush Administration on the potential for cooperation with Russia, following the U.S. abrogation of the ABM Treaty at the end of 2001. But actions spoke louder than words.

On May 22, 2003, President Putin sent a letter to President Bush, proposing to expand cooperation in missile defense. Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said that Russia was ready to start talking about cooperation. But the following year, the United States began discussions with Poland, on stationing interceptor missiles in Russia's backyard.

The end of U.S.-Russian ballistic missile cooperation, and of the only program still functional from the 1993 Russian Trust proposal, finally came in February 2004. In its FY05 budget request, the Missile Defense Agency cancelled the RAMOS program. About \$120 million had been spent on it, and it was projected to cost an additional \$550 million to build the two observational satellites. To no avail, Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) and other members of Congress urged the Pentagon to continue the program, citing it as the most important military cooperation project with Russia.

Putin's recent offer, to make the Gabala radar in northern Azerbaijan, as well as an upgraded radar in southern Russia, components of a joint global missile defense system, is perhaps the last opportunity for a strategic partnership.

In an official briefing just before the Kennebunkport summit, Gen. Alexander Yakushin, from Central Command Space Troops, explained to Western journalists visiting the site, that the radar's 6,000 km range could detect launches from the Indian Ocean, to the Arabian Sea, to the Middle East. He said that it had been used during the Iran-Iraq War, and in Iran missile tests in January.

On June 22, representatives of the Russian Duma, who were visiting the United States, were given a briefing and tour of the Airborne Laser Laboratory aircraft at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, upon the invitation of Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.).

It is past time to pick up where the SDI left off, more than 20 years ago, and make nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete."