

WHITE HOUSE ISSUE BRIEF

THE IMPORTANCE OF SDI

"What is totally unacceptable...is the Soviet tactic of holding...reductions hostage to measures that would cripple our Strategic Defense Initiative.... We won't bargain away SDI."

--- President Reagan
November 4, 1987

President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) offers our best hope of a safer world -- where our security and that of our allies would no longer rest on deterrence through the threat of mass annihilation.

The Reagan Administration has had a well-defined strategy for countering the threat posed by the Soviet offensive nuclear buildup. Our goal is to build a safer peace and to ensure a stable strategic balance over the long term.

This strategy has three key elements:

- o Modernization of our strategic deterrent because, to keep the peace, we still rely on the threat of retaliation with nuclear weapons;
- o Pursuit of deep, equitable, and effectively verifiable reductions in U.S. and Soviet nuclear arms; and
- o The search, through the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative, for a safer and morally preferable means to deter war, by increasing reliance on defenses to enhance our security.

SDI is a research and technology program to demonstrate, by the early 1990s, the feasibility of effective defenses against ballistic missiles for the U.S. and our allies. The most promising concepts involve layered defenses for intercepting an attacker's missiles in all phases of their flight -- boost, mid-course, and terminal.

- o Our commitment to SDI is firm. As the President has stated: "SDI is not a bargaining chip. It is a cornerstone of our security strategy for the 1990s and beyond. We will research it. We will develop it. And when it is ready, we'll deploy it."

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SDI serves a number of vital purposes:

- o Through SDI, we seek a defensive means of deterring aggression based on systems protecting the U.S. and our allies against ballistic missile attack.
- o SDI helped to bring the Soviets back to the nuclear arms negotiating table in early 1985, after their late-1983 walkout.
- o SDI underwrites the integrity of any new arms agreements by diminishing Soviet incentives to cheat. The record of Soviet violations of past arms control agreements makes this especially important.
- o SDI provides a strong incentive to the Soviets to agree to the President's proposal to reduce strategic arms by 50 percent.
 - Even if 50 percent strategic arms cuts are achieved, SDI will remain essential in persuading the Soviets to reduce further.
- o Finally, SDI is insurance against an accidental missile launch or possible future ballistic threats -- nuclear, conventional, or chemical -- from outlaw countries.
- o The potential benefits of SDI far outweigh the dollar costs. Expenditures for SDI from fiscal years 1984 through 1988 will amount to about \$12 billion, or approximately \$13.00 per year for each American citizen -- a small price to pay for a safer future.

The importance of SDI is underscored by the Soviets' long-standing and extensive strategic defense programs.

- o In contrast to our own far more modest expenditures, the Soviets have spent roughly \$200 billion on their strategic defense programs over the last ten years, roughly the same as they have spent on their strategic offensive forces.

The Soviets' programs include:

- o The world's only anti-ballistic missile defenses, surrounding Moscow, which the Soviets are steadily improving;
- o Construction of a large, phased-array radar near Krasnoyarsk, in violation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty; and

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- o Research, development, and testing, including a \$1 billion annual program on laser weapons -- employing some 10,000 skilled scientists and engineers.

We cannot let the Soviets have a monopoly on strategic defenses.

- o Possessed by both sides, strategic defense systems can be stabilizing and reduce the threat of war. Possessed by the Soviets alone, such systems would threaten peace by undermining the credibility of our deterrent.

-- This would be devastating to Western security.