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The Case for a
Strategic Defense
Force

By Senator Malcolm Wallop



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THE CASE FOR A STRATEGIC DEFENSE FORCE

by Senator Malcolm Wallop

You asked me here this morning to discuss one concept of how best to defend our country. I do not need to elaborate on my longtime efforts in support of strategic defenses. You have heard some of them elaborated here. But you should know that the efforts began in 1978 when I was yet a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee. At that time, no concerns prevented me and others who were equally interested in defending America from using common sense to figure out that technology already existed in those intelligence machines--and I refer to sensors, pointing and tracking lasers, mirrors, and infrared technology--that would be very useful in defending against the Soviet missile threat. And that was in 1978.

Only two years later, in 1980, I and several others offered an amendment to the defense authorization bill proposing not merely researching, but building a space-based laser weapon to shoot down ballistic missiles. As is often the case, this new idea was resisted by institutions like the Pentagon that feared the implications of such a program. We lost the first vote. The subsequent three votes prior to the announcement of the establishment of SDI were all won by strong majorities in the Senate--one unanimous; one 97 to 1; and one 86 to 12.

Today, we continue to see the same pattern, most especially regarding my new bill S. 900, which is to establish a separate branch of the Armed Services whose object and purpose is to establish a defense against all aerial threats. There are deeply entrenched bureaucratic practices and customs that are now threatened by the prospect of developing a strategic defense to the point where that bureaucracy would rather promote its own narrow interests than enhance the security of the nation it serves.

A Simple Bill. Now you may wonder what kind of a bill would encounter such resistance. When I describe it, I hope you will continue to question such resistance. The bill, as I stated, merely calls for the defense of the United States. It would seem on its face not to be a very controversial concept.

It is a simple bill. It is brief. And what it does is unmistakable. It starts from the fact that our families, our homes, and our military forces and our allies have no protection against ballistic missiles that could defeat this country in war. None. It also starts from the sad fact that despite much talk about SDI, no plans now exist to provide us with protection. Today, not one of our three Armed Services or any command underneath them has the mission or any part of its mission devoted to the defense of this nation from nuclear attack.

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Let me emphasize this, because in this 200th year of our Constitution, which says quite clearly that we, the people, establish the government in the first place to provide for the common defense, no part of our armed forces has the mission to defend us against the greatest military threat we have ever faced--the Soviet nuclear-armed ballistic missile. Therefore, the bill imposes this mission on the armed forces and creates a special branch of service specifically designed to perform this protective mission.

Born of Frustration. The bill also mandates the speedy production of suitable weapons that the Pentagon has had on the drawing boards for years and for which, I might add, the technology has long existed. We have not failed to deploy these weapons because of incapability, but because of indecision. The bill also makes certain provisions to ensure that the organization created to fulfill this urgent mission is not bogged down by current procurement practices, bureaucratic rules and regulations, and customs that have made the Pentagon the subject of great criticism, even ridicule both inside and outside the congressional chambers.

There can be no denying that this bill was born out of nothing more than frustration with the Administration's handling of the SDI program. As the Reagan Administration itself points out, it regards the feasibility and desirability of anti-missile defenses as an open question.

In addition, although the Administration does not say this so loudly, many longstanding anti-missile research programs that came under SDI when it was established have not been accelerated, but rather have been decelerated and deemphasized. I am referring to programs such as the homing overlay experiment, now known as ERIS, and the airborne optical adjunct system. The space-based laser would have been ready, according to the Carter Administration, for a prototype demonstration by 1986 and deployment by the late 1980s or early 1990s. And the follow-up to our geosynchronous early-warning satellite that identifies and tracks missile boosters is in similar shape.

The bureaucracy explains these actions with two sets of arguments. First, theirs is the position that we must develop weapons and sensors not to deal with threats that exist or even those that intelligence sees coming along, but rather to deal with the worst threats we can conjure up--the worst threats that we can imagine. Therefore, whatever we can do now is by definition inadequate. Before you start, you lose. Moreover, theirs is the position that we must not build any individual weapon or sensor until part of an overall comprehensive system is ready to deploy, ready to be integrated into a single, pre-tested battle management system certified to be cost-effective--whatever that means. My only comment to this is, "Good luck."

Interpreting the ABM Treaty. Second, there are a host of conflicting interpretations as to our obligations under the requirements of the ABM Treaty. The struggle between them is all in good fun, if you want my honest opinion, because it keeps its contestants from facing one fundamental question: Do we or do we not agree with the purpose and principle of the ABM Treaty? If we do agree, then life is simple. We will not build any anti-missile defenses and that will be that. But if we disagree, life is also simple. We will serve notice as required

by that treaty that we think the treaty is a bad idea and that we are going to build missile defenses. You cannot, as the President has said and others in this Administration have said, have your cake and eat it too. You cannot develop SDI while maintaining the integrity of the ABM Treaty. The one article about which there is no disagreement and cannot be is the first article of that treaty, which says "Each nation undertakes not to construct a defense of its national territory." On one side you have it and you agree with it and the other side you do not have it and you do not agree with it. And there is not any purpose in trying to fit both into that same box. They will not fit.

Farther than ever from SDI. So I no longer know why President Reagan spoke as he did on March 23. Evidently, it was not because he wanted to build anti-missile defenses. More time has passed since March 23, 1983, than elapsed between Pearl Harbor and VJ Day. During that time, this country built and armed most of the world, developed a huge technical infrastructure necessary to construct the atom bomb from scratch. Yet four years after the President's 1983 announcement, we appear no closer to a strategic defense. Indeed we are farther from committing this country and its resources to the strategic defense we so vitally need.

Recently, Lt. General Abrahamson, head of SDIO, testified that the nation could deploy capable, cost-effective, and survivable defenses against current and projected Soviet missiles by the mid-1990s. Yet on the pages of the *Washington Post* last April, Special Arms Control Advisor Paul Nitze declared that we do not yet know enough to make these judgments. I would trust General Abrahamson's technical judgment over that of Paul Nitze. I am not sure that others would. But that is not the point. These two absolutely antithetical Administration views of what can be done to provide defense for the American people are a symptom of the confusion and disarray that plagues the nation today and it is why I offered this legislation to begin to eliminate the confusion, to force clear choices and, above all, to force action.

Always "Maybe Tomorrow." Several other Senators and I originally raised the question of strategic defenses in July of 1980 when we posed a simple question: Do you want an accelerated program that would initiate an American defensive laser in space by November 1986 or not? Our amendment lost by 34 to 51. But at least and at last we had raised the question and now, through S. 900, I am raising a similar question: Do we want to defend our country against Soviet strategic missiles or do we not? The question must be asked. And even more important, it must be answered. Who can say that despite all the talk about SDI, our government is preparing as quickly as single-minded individual human ingenuity will allow to protect us against ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, or alas even bombers.

Those supporting S. 900 have been proposing that we build anti-missile weapons for the past eight years and always the Pentagon through various Administrations says, "Maybe tomorrow." But surely, even absolutely, not today. The prime example of this is the initiation at my request of the report requiring the Secretary of Defense to analyze the effect a less restrictive interpretation of the ABM Treaty would have on the SDI program. That it took a Senator's request to

initiate such a report is illustrative of one important fact: that the bureaucracy is content with only research and not deployment of strategic defenses.

I say this for two reasons: first, the issues to be studied at my request should already have been analyzed absent my request. Second, the report and therefore its most important findings are classified. The classified status of this report now called "the Wallop Report" has impeded any informed debate on the technical and fiscal feasibility of deploying strategic defenses in the near term. Whoever is tempted to hint that our government's attitude toward ballistic missile defense has been dictated by shortages of technology, let him look at the Soviet Union's anti-missile preparation and be ashamed. The Soviets already have deployed a ballistic missile defense system with the potential for a nationwide defense. A defense, I might add, in complete and blatant contradiction to the ABM Treaty no matter what interpretation is used. And just recently, the Soviets tested a space-based booster yielding far greater lift capacity for future space-based systems than anything we have in hand or in planning. This very morning, I heard on the radio that Jane's, a British-based defense organization, has now concluded that the Soviets are substantially ahead of us in strategic defense capability, in particular in capability with lasers.

Born and Bred on B-52s. Therefore, again I will say, who can object to the mission that this bill sets forth, which is to "defend the United States from all type of aerial threats including aircraft, ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and other types of missiles"? Surely, many will say that although they agree with the premises of this bill and the mission that it sets forth, they do not agree that the logical requirement is the creation of a new branch of the armed forces to accomplish this mission. But if these objectors are in such agreement against our premises, and yet are committed to the mission of protecting the American people, why have they not already proposed any means--let alone a better means--of accomplishing this mission? And what alternative to the bill do they propose then?

The odds are that they will propose having the Joint Chiefs study the mission. The JCS, that graveyard of initiative, that monument to inertia and that black hole that swallows up reports, investigations, and analyses, indeed it would be the JCS who would suggest that the current military structure could handle the assigned mission. I would then respond, "Who, the Air Force?" Its leaders, born and bred on B-52s and Minuteman missiles, regard an anti-missile defense as they do the plague. It ruins a career of capability--good, solid, honest capability--much like the cannon that was lifted onto the top of Fort Jefferson down in the place called the Dry Tortugas, the cannon that they lifted to the top of that fort was itself the means by which the fort would be destroyed.

Guardians of the High Frontier. It happens in the evolution of warfare. But there are both bureaucratic and doctrinal reasons in the Air Force and everybody knows that. So why not go to the Army? There the reticence is less marked. But the Army consists of established communities--the infantry, the artillery, armor, and so forth--whose pressure for funds would necessarily detract from the performance of this new mission. Besides, both the Army and the Air Force are mired in the web of regulations that waste huge chunks of time and money. Why start a new mission on so wrong a foot?

What about a joint command? Now that clearly would combine all the inconveniences of the Army and the Air Force, adding to them one more level of bargaining and compromise and a joint command would mean even more time and money wasted. Just take, for example, the recently created space command. Although the command's motto is "Guardians of the High Frontier," its mission has been carefully crafted to ensure that it does not encroach on any of the Services' prerogatives and is written in classic bureaucratic tradition. I quote to you: "The Space Command mission is to manage and operate assigned space assets, to centralize planning, to consolidate requirements, to provide operational advocacy, and to ensure a close interface between research and development activities and operational users of Air Force space programs."

Well, my friends, the guardians of the High Frontier are at their post.

It is hard to tell what they might be guardians of except perhaps the Air Force. Moreover, in the unlikely event that a joint command or the Army were to nurture successfully an organization manning thousands of pieces of anti-missile equipment on the ground and running a hundred satellites in space, that organization would inevitably split off as surely as the Air Force was split off from the Army in 1947. So why not save the time and money and the trouble and the expense and start out doing the right thing right away, especially in light of the circumstances which the country now faces from the strategic imbalance.

Waste of Talent, Time, Money. Another step in the right direction is the bill's provision that the U.S. defense force would be exempted from Pentagon regulations for at least ten years. There is now near universal recognition that those regulations waste human talent, human time, and human money. And it seems that everyone is proposing a plan to tinker with them at the margin. What would happen if we just wiped the board clean and let someone responsible for building the new force quickly go about it in a reasonable manner. Our bet is that the result would be a tremendous increase in speed and a huge drop in cost. Such drastic means have always worked in the past. They are not new to us. They have worked in the days when giants like Admiral Rickover and General Shriver were allowed to use American ingenuity and enterprise outside the bureaucratic structure and achieved for us things which have provided long, long years of American security. The technique is used today on a smaller scale in many of our black programs.

Unswervingly Stagnant "Progressives." I expected bureaucratic opposition to this provision and I have found it interesting to see how so many prominent people who have styled themselves as military reformers and champions of efficiency have, in this instance, managed to stand up for the present Pentagon system. It is even more interesting that those who called themselves progressive are really those who are unswervingly stagnant and resistant to change, even such logical changes as those embodied in this proposal.

I was also looking forward to seeing expressed in public the objections to the bill's mandate to design weapons and procedures to defend the U.S. against current military threats as defined by the best intelligence available to the United States. The practical American people, I know, will wonder why we even bother to stipulate

such a requirement. They would ask, "Is that not common sense?" And the answer is, "No, the Pentagon normally acts precisely in opposition to this bit of common sense." And so sadly, yes, the provision is common sense not only in the anti-missile field, although the practice is most blatant here. The Pentagon designs weapons and procedures not against enemy weapons that exist or against these weapons that U.S. intelligence can see on the horizon. Rather, it designs weapons against a mythical enemy--weapons that our own weapons designers' unconstrained imaginations can conjure up. In other words, they design against the ever-changing phantoms of their own imaginations and their own creations. They call this way of doing things addressing "the responsive threat." It is a symptom of the Pentagon's proclivity to goldplate everything. And no wonder the costs have been skyrocketing. One can always conjure up one last threat to prevent deployment and keep the national research labs in business.

Echelons of Pentagon Bureaucrats. We now have to change, I think, the conventional way of doing things to start over, to let our best technical talent set its own pace unhindered by echelons of Pentagon bureaucrats who exist only to make certain that their own parochial interests are served by whatever weapon is under design. Perhaps the objections to this bill will be over the list of weapons that we propose to build.

I look forward to anyone in the Administration or in the Senate Armed Services Committee or in the House Armed Services Committee, or anywhere else to argue that any of these weapons is unfeasible. I would like only to ask that for the sake of public accountability certain items of information relevant to the programs now ongoing in each of these fields be declassified. For instance, the declassified conclusions of the Wallop Report illustrate that with a broad interpretation of the ABM Treaty, more capable and reliable tests would result in a faster progression of confidence in defense feasibility and thereby permit far earlier decisions on the deployment of these defenses. In addition, the broad interpretation of the ABM Treaty would significantly reduce overall costs by some \$3 billion and would allow for greater program efficiency.

These conclusions are indeed important. But conclusions without supporting evidence are easy to question, easy to debunk, easy to deny, and difficult to support and more difficult to sustain. Therefore, the classified status of the Wallop Report has not only created confusion where greater continuity could exist, but it has also prevented any kind of an informed debate on the more compelling issues of strategic defenses. It is beyond us to be able to do this when the public or even the Senate, which is not interested in informing itself in detail on these issues, can come to grips with real questions. As an example, the opposition has renounced our timetable for testing both on technical and political grounds. While I wholeheartedly disagree with their technical evaluation, I am the first one to admit that our schedule is unrealistic given the current procedures in force in the Department of Defense.

The Constitution vs. ABM Treaty. The very point of this bill is to establish an organization in which the accomplishment of the mission to protect the American people will be more important than the procedures. And today, unfortunately, things work the other way around. Some of the bill's opponents have pointed out

that a vote for this bill would declare the intentions of the United States to abandon the ABM Treaty. In this case, the opponents are entirely correct.

As the sponsor of this bill, I am offering a choice between fulfilling the purpose of the U.S. Constitution and common sense on the one hand and the ABM Treaty and Soviet decisions about our safety on the other. I can think of no easier choice and no better way to commemorate the 200th anniversary of our Constitution than to make our government do what it is supposed to do: provide for the common defense.

