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Defending America's
Future:
The Strategic
Defense Initiative

By Pete du Pont



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DEFENDING AMERICA'S FUTURE: THE STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE

by Pete du Pont

Our campaign began back in Wilmington, Delaware, one year ago this month. Much has happened since then. For conservatives, too little of the news has been good.

First, our leader, President Reagan, has been beset by the greatest crisis of his presidency. The Iran-Contra incident was at best a distraction from the important business at hand. At worst, it may have been a fatal blow to the conservative agenda in these last years of the Reagan Administration.

Second, our party has placed itself on the defensive on issues ranging from catastrophic health insurance to welfare reform. Once again, it seems, we have reverted to the me-too-ism of 1970s Republican "Mainstreamers"--arguing for just a little less of whatever the Democrats want--instead of developing and advocating a positive conservative agenda.

Window of Gullibility. Third--and this is the area I want to talk about today--we seem to have fallen back into what I call the "window of gullibility" in our relationships with our adversaries. By that I mean the attitude, best exemplified by Jimmy Carter, that our enemies are pretty much like us, and if we would only treat them as friends, they would begin to act like responsible members of the community of nations. Well, President Carter learned his lesson in 1979, when his friends the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Never again, we said to ourselves, would we be so gullible as to trust the Soviets.

Never again. That, in effect, is what Governor Ronald Reagan said in New Orleans, on January 25, 1980. Never again would we place our trust in the integrity of a government that continued to violate existing treaties. Never again would we ignore human rights violations and conduct "business as usual" with a regime that thinks booby trapped toys are just another means of demoralizing the enemy.

Glasnost' Fools No One. Traveling throughout America today, I am happy to be able to report to you that the American common sense that led us to close Jimmy Carter's window of gullibility is still alive and well. Aside from a few Democratic congressmen, and Senator Alan Cranston, "glasnost" is not fooling anyone. The majority in America realizes that the world remains a dangerous place. The majority--the American conservative majority--realizes that America must remain strong if she is to remain free.

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But here in Washington, events do not seem to reflect that common sense majority. The Democratic Congress has consistently undercut our ability to negotiate from strength. And now this Administration--worn down by its seven-year war with Congress--is taking steps that hardly seem consistent with what we thought we had learned in 1979. From Central America to Europe, we find ourselves now willing to enter into agreements that depend heavily on the good will and integrity of the Soviets and their satellites.



Our campaign has been talking with the American people about a different approach, an approach that places our faith not in the integrity of the Soviet Union, but in the ingenuity of the American people.

That approach is embodied in the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). SDI represents an historic opportunity to break out of the cycle of buildup and counterbuildup that has characterized the post-war period. It offers the promise of reducing or eliminating the threat posed by nuclear weapons. For that very reason, it also offers an incentive for the Soviets to end their continuing buildup of offensive weapons.

The Continuing Soviet Buildup. Much attention has been paid in recent years to the Soviet offensive buildup, and for good reason. In 1969, when the SALT I negotiations began, the Soviets had a total of 1,500 strategic nuclear warheads. By 1979, they had nearly tripled that number, and 3,450 of those were accurate and powerful enough to endanger U.S. missile sites--that is, they were first-strike weapons. During the 1980s, the buildup has continued at full speed, with the Soviets deploying as many as 150 new ICBMs a year and upgrading their arsenal with the 200 ton, 10-story high, SS-18 and SS-19. Today, they have about 6,000 first-strike warheads targeted at slightly over 1,000 U.S. missile sites.

And the buildup has not stopped there. This year, the Soviets began deploying their new mobile SS-24 and SS-25 missiles, in direct violation of the SALT II treaty. These new missiles will give the Soviets as many as 12,000 first strike warheads by the mid-1990s. They would be able to target two accurate warheads at each U.S. strategic target--a total of about 3,000 including air bases and command and control facilities--and still have 6,000 warheads waiting in reserve for a second strike if the U.S. were to try to retaliate.

Overwhelming First-Strike Capacity. In 1979, former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown told us that the Soviets could "destroy 95 percent of our ICBMs in their silos and destroy our bombers by a barrage attack and air defenses." Today, the CIA is estimating that by the 1990s, the Soviets will have an overwhelming first-strike capacity, enough to destroy virtually 100 percent of our ICBMs.

As threatening as this offensive buildup is to our security, there is an equally serious--but less well-known--threat now being posed by the Soviets' growing defensive capabilities.

There is a certain resistance among us to accepting the notion that the Soviets could have a workable defensive system. After all, some American scientists say it will be years before even we will be capable of having such a system. And after all, we know for certain that our technology is far ahead of the Soviets', right?

Thirty years ago next week--October 4, 1957--an event occurred that shook America out of a similar attitude of complacency. It was the launching of Sputnik. I remember well the day it happened. I was driving home from the Brunswick Naval Air Station in Maine when I heard a bulletin on the news.

Violation of the ABM Treaty. Well, the Soviets have been at work on strategic defense almost from the day they launched Sputnik. They began work on an ABM system around Moscow in 1962, and they have never looked back. Today they have the only operational ballistic missile defense system in the world--a descendant of the Moscow system they began 25 years ago--and they are upgrading it again with a new, reloadable, two-layered system.

But the Moscow system is only a small part of the overall Soviet strategic defense program. In violation of the ABM treaty, the Soviets appear to have tested surface-to-air missiles against missile warheads, with special emphasis on intercepting and destroying warheads from U.S. submarines--the only part of our deterrent likely to survive a Soviet first-strike. Thousands of these dual-use interceptors are now being produced and deployed around the USSR.

And the Soviets will soon have the radar and command capability to tie these systems together. We recently have discovered that they are building three new "battle management" radars--each the size of two football fields--that will fill the last gap in a system of nine installations ringing the Soviet Union. Each has the range and precision to pick up many incoming U.S. warheads, determine where each warhead is targeted, and signal ABM sites to send up interceptors to destroy each warhead.

Military Significance. One of these radars, the one at Krasnoyarsk, was recently visited by some U.S. congressmen. These technical experts looked around, sniffed the air, and promptly concluded that this facility had no military significance because it was not hardened against a nuclear blast. What they did not mention is that the radars that are part of the Moscow ABM system--which everyone understands to have "military significance"--are not hardened either. The fact is, it is just too difficult to harden a huge radar facility, especially when you can defend it. If Congressman Downey placed as much faith in the U.S. Defense Department as he does in Soviet good intentions, he would understand that.

These radars, combined with the Soviet ability to mass produce ABM interceptors and components, create the potential for a Soviet "break-out" from the ABM treaty in the early 1990s--several years before we could deploy our own SDI.

To improve this near-term strategic defense system, the Soviets are investing more money and manpower than the U.S. in developing laser, space-based kinetic kill and particle beam weapons. They have more than 10,000 scientists and

engineers, and more than half a dozen major research facilities and test ranges working on laser weapons alone.

No one really knows what is going on in those labs. We believe that the Soviets could build their first prototype ground-based laser for use against missiles in the early 1990s. We believe they could deploy space-based particle beam weapons capable of destroying U.S. satellites in the 1990s, and that an improved version for missile defense could be available by the end of the century. But these are estimates, and estimates have been known to be wrong.

"ERIS" Missile System. What is the U.S. doing in response to the Soviet defensive effort? The fact is, for almost a decade, we did practically nothing at all. We terminated our ABM effort in 1975, and like a hare resting while the Soviet tortoise waddled by, we did stop for a little nap. That nap ended in 1983, when President Reagan--thanks to patriots like Malcolm Wallop and Jim Courter--put America's future back on the fast track with the Strategic Defense Initiative.

On a technical level, progress in the past four years has been nothing short of phenomenal. In 1984, we successfully tested the "ERIS" missile system, which can destroy a Soviet warhead in space by hitting it with a ground-based interceptor. It was literally a bullet hitting a bullet--but it worked, and today, the only remaining challenges are engineering and production problems that we know we can solve.

Last year we took another major step, with the success of the "Delta 180" experiment, which showed that heat-seeking missiles can be used in intercepting Soviet missiles as they rise. Delta 180 indicates that we can overcome technical obstacles to developing space-based interceptors.

Almost Always Wrong. America's scientists are also working on advanced laser and particle-beam technologies, which are in earlier stages, but progressing just as rapidly. Here too, we are proving that those who doubt American technology have only one thing in common: they are almost always wrong.

All of this progress has come despite the fact that Congress has cut SDI funding by more than a third from the President's requests. The cuts have been so effective in delaying progress that the Pentagon's SDI office now says that it is not the ABM treaty that is hindering further tests, it is the lack of funds. But Congress still is not satisfied. Earlier this month, the Senate joined the House in voting to restrict tests to the narrow interpretation of the ABM treaty. Thus, Congress is insisting that the U.S. adhere to the most stringent version of a treaty the Soviets have routinely ignored.



Today we face two challenges. First, we have to win the battle in Congress. Only then will we be able to meet the Soviet challenge in strategic defense.

There is only one way to persuade Congress to go forward with SDI. As governor of Delaware, I learned that the job legislators do best is to hold up their fingers and read the direction of the wind, and the job of the chief executive is to

make the wind blow. If it takes a hurricane, we are going to make sure Congress understands that the wind is blowing for SDI.

We can do that, so long as we frame the debate correctly. The question before the nation today is this: shall we defend ourselves against Soviet missiles? Shall we defend ourselves against Soviet missiles, or not?

Lawyers' Arguments. The mistake we have made in recent months is to allow this fundamental debate about defense policy to be pre-empted by a few lawyers at the Defense and State Departments--and some would-be lawyers on Capitol Hill--arguing over the "narrow" versus the "broad" interpretation of the ABM treaty.

Next week, the thirtieth anniversary of Sputnik, is also the fifteenth anniversary of the implementation of the ABM treaty. It is an appropriate time to put an end to the broad vs. narrow debate once and for all by taking a simple, dramatic, and sensible action. Let us, based on clear and unchallenged evidence of Soviet treaty violations, invoke Article 15 of the treaty and declare it null and void. It is the right thing to do, and the right time is right now.

The press will scream, I know, and congressional liberals will be frantic. But we should not run from controversy. Let the liberals take their case to the public: they will argue that the U.S. should continue to adhere to a treaty that endangers our national security and that has been repeatedly violated by the Soviets. They will argue that peace is better served by American weakness than by strength. They will argue that we do not have the right--let alone the ability--to defend ourselves.

That is the right debate to have in America, and I think we can be confident of the outcome, don't you?

Target Date Needed. Once we have the direction of the wind cleared up, we can get down to work on SDI. The Department of Defense has indicated that we should be able to begin deploying a full U.S. defense system--including the space-based, boost-phase component--by the mid-1990s. Such a system would be composed of three layers, and would rely heavily on mature technology like the ERIS system I mentioned earlier.

The President of the United States ought to be committed to deploying such a system, and ought to be willing--as this Administration has not--to set a target date for getting it done. That date should be the end of his or her second term, 1996. Today, I am making that commitment.

The next President should also be firmly committed to going forward with the technological research and development needed to ready the second, and third, and fourth generation defensive systems. One important component of that process is working with our allies, including Israel, to continue developing anti-tactical ballistic missile defenses, which rely on some of the same kinds of technology that make up SDI. Our commitment is to defend America not just today, but for as long as the Soviet threat remains.

There will be those who argue that SDI is an acceleration of the arms race. It is just the opposite. It is an opportunity to replace Mutually Assured Destruction with another, far superior theory: Mutually Assured Defense. The invention of armor made the bow and arrow obsolete, and machine guns ended the offensive power of the cavalry. Now we can end the offensive potential of nuclear weapons.

The Basis for Effective Deterrence. Some will argue, I know, that SDI cannot guarantee 100 percent effective protection. That is true--and it probably will always be true. But a defense that is 90 or 80 or even 50 percent effective would throw a question mark into the Soviet calculus of first-strike--and that question mark, after all, is the basis for effective deterrence.

Others will argue that SDI is too expensive. The estimates are that the first phase system I have discussed would cost about \$120 billion over the next ten years. That is less than 5 percent of the defense budget. But suppose it costs twice as much, or more. Should we, as I asked earlier, defend ourselves against Soviet missiles? Of course we should. Is it worth that to defend the United States against nuclear attack? I think it is, don't you?

You know, I have the privilege every day of traveling throughout America and talking with the American people. Every day we pick up the newspaper--out there--and we read about the latest developments in Washington. Frankly, it is a little puzzling.

We are puzzled by politicians who tell us we cannot replace welfare with work, or end our failed farm programs--or even talk about Social Security.

We are puzzled by those who say there is nothing we can do to get drugs out of our schools.

Our common sense tells us that we can solve these problems, just as it tells us that we can, and must, build a system to defend ourselves against nuclear attack.

After today, we will be taking our campaign back out there--outside "the beltway." But we will be back, and when we come, we will be carrying a fresh supply of American common sense, and a message: it is time to make some changes around here.

