

# THE HERITAGE LECTURES

284

Iraq, SDI,  
and the  
Changing World

*By Henry F. Cooper*



The Heritage Foundation was established in 1973 as a nonpartisan, tax-exempt policy research institute dedicated to the principles of free competitive enterprise, limited government, individual liberty, and a strong national defense. The Foundation's research and study programs are designed to make the voices of responsible conservatism heard in Washington, D.C., throughout the United States, and in the capitals of the world.

Heritage publishes its research in a variety of formats for the benefit of policy makers, the communications media, the academic, business and financial communities, and the public at large. Over the past five years alone The Heritage Foundation has published some 1,000 books, monographs, and studies, ranging in size from 953-page government blueprint, *Mandate for Leadership III: Policy Strategies for the 1990s*, to more frequent "Critical Issues" monographs and the topical "Backgrounders" and "Issue Bulletins" of a dozen pages. Heritage's other regular publications include the *SDI Report*, *U.S.S.R. Monitor*, *Heritage Foundation Federal Budget Reporter*, *Business/Education Insider*, *Mexico Watch*, and the quarterlies *Education Update* and *Policy Review*.

In addition to the printed word, Heritage regularly brings together national and international opinion leaders and policy makers to discuss issues and ideas in a continuing series of seminars, lectures, debates, and briefings.

Heritage is classified as a Section 501(c)(3) organization under the Internal Revenue Code of 1954, and is recognized as a publicly supported organization described in Section 509(a)(1) and 170(b)(1)(A)(vi) of the Code. Individuals, corporations, companies, associations, and foundations are eligible to support the work of The Heritage Foundation through tax-deductible gifts.

*Note: Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.*

**The Heritage Foundation**  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20002  
U.S.A.  
202/546-4400

# Iraq, SDI, and the Changing World

By Henry F. Cooper

Earlier this year, President Bush said, "In the 1990s, strategic defense makes much more sense than ever before." During his speech before the Aspen Institute on August 2, he said, "What better means of defense than a system that destroys only missiles launched against us – without threatening a single life? We must push forward the great promise of SDI – and deploy it when ready."

While reducing the defense budget for many programs, in response to the changing U.S.-Soviet relationship, Secretary Cheney recommended, and the President approved, a modest increase in SDI's budget for Fiscal Year 1991, now under consideration by Congress. Secretary Cheney specifically highlighted the President's high priority for SDI in noting this increase.

And in his August 3 letter to Senators Warner and Nunn, President Bush said, "I am writing to underscore the importance of the SDI program and express my concern about congressional action to further cut SDI funds or restrict our ability to manage the program... a vote to cut SDI is essentially a vote against strategic defense for America."

One look at what is happening in the Middle East underscores the President's priority and deep concern for this vital program.

Long before his invasion of Kuwait, Saddam Hussein was signalling to the world that he was a very dangerous man. It was only a few short months ago that the government of Iraq tried to obtain forty nuclear triggers. And then, having failed at that, they tried to import a made-to-order cannon capable of firing a nuclear shell hundreds of miles away.

While all of this was going on, Colonel Qadhafi of Libya went on record as saying that Arab nations must develop nuclear weapons within the next several years. He also stated – and this should send a chill down the spine of all rational human beings – that if he had had nuclear missiles when American planes attacked Tripoli in 1986, he would have used those missiles to destroy New York City.

**Sobering Statistic.** Sadly, Libya and Iraq are not the only Third World nations seeking ballistic missile capability. A number of other nations are all actively seeking ways to either develop or enhance their ballistic missile capability. In fact, the CIA now estimates that by the year 2000, an additional fifteen nations could have the capability to launch ballistic missiles. Several of these states could have missiles of intercontinental range – armed with nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons. Quite a sobering statistic. Gone forever are the days when the United States and the Soviet Union enjoyed control over ballistic missile technology.

With Iraq, being on the front page on a daily basis, we would do well to examine their current and future missile capabilities.

---

Henry F. Cooper is Director of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization.

He spoke at The Heritage Foundation on August 29, 1990.

ISSN 0272-1155. ©1990 by The Heritage Foundation.

- ◆ As of now, Iraq possesses a wide variety of surface-to-surface missiles, including the *Scud-B*, *Al-Hussein*, and *Al-Abbas* missile systems.
- ◆ The *Scud-Bs*, with a range of 300 km, were acquired from the U.S.S.R. and other sources.
- ◆ The *Al-Hussein*, with a range of 650 km, is a modification of the *Scud* made by increasing the fuel carried and decreasing the weight of its warhead.
- ◆ *Al-Abbas*, with potential range of 850 km, is a further modification of the *Scud* missile.

As for future ballistic missile capability, Iraq is currently undertaking several missile research efforts, including the *Al-Abid/Tammuz-I* and *Condor-II* programs.

- ◆ The performance of the first stage of the three-stage *Al-Abid* space launch vehicle was tested in late 1989.
- ◆ It is believed that this launch vehicle is also the *Tammuz-I* IRBM with a range of 2,000 km.
- ◆ Iraq has also been active in the *Condor-II* IRBM program development with a number of countries.

It should be understood that once an ability to place satellites in orbit is achieved by any nation, it is not an extraordinary technical challenge to deliver weapons of mass destruction to essentially any place on earth.

Lest anyone think that Iraq would never actually launch ballistic missiles, we would do well to remember that during its war with Iran it launched hundreds of missiles into Iranian population centers. It employed chemical weapons on the battlefield in the closing stages of the Iran-Iraq War – and is also believed to have employed chemical weapons against the Kurdish minority in Iraq.

Developing and deploying effective defenses against this kind of threat to ourselves and our allies – and even our adversaries – is entirely consistent with the SDI program rationale and objectives. Our program has always addressed allied and even Soviet concerns and has always factored in the threats from missiles of all ranges.

The most effective defense would include layered defenses, with both space-based and ground-based components. This is exactly the architecture we have been pursuing since the outset of the program. The details have changed from time to time – but the underlying “layered” architecture has remained the same.

**Early Deployment.** The most recent change was the inclusion of “Brilliant Pebbles” as the space tier of the architecture. This innovation permitted a substantial reduction in cost and system complexity. And if Congress provides the necessary funding and permits me the necessary flexibility to direct the program efficiently, development and deployment could begin several years earlier than previously planned.

“Brilliant Pebbles” have world-wide coverage and could be designed to counter ballistic missiles launched from anywhere in the world, provided their range was greater than 800 to 1,000 km. Ground-based defenses would be required to counter shorter-range ballistic missiles.

Such a capability would be a byproduct of developing and deploying an initial strategic defense system, which remains our primary SDI objective. I wish to emphasize this point. The paramount reason to research, develop, and deploy a strategic defense system



continues to be the threat posed to the U.S. and its allies by the strategic offensive forces of the Soviet Union.

**Enormous Soviet Capability.** While it is true that our relationship with the Soviet Union has never been better, we cannot bury our heads in the sand and pretend that the Soviet threat to our homeland no longer exists. We must never forget that the Soviet Union maintains an enormous military capability. And unfortunately for us, that capability is getting stronger in one area that most threatens the welfare of our Republic – strategic nuclear weapons.

Admittedly, under the Soviet foreign and domestic reforms brought forth by President Gorbachev's *perestroika*, they have begun to reduce their conventional threat, and cut back on defense spending as a whole. However, they are still pursuing a major strategic modernization program. The evidence is quite clear.

The Soviets are now building two different kinds of mobile ICBMs – the rail-mobile SS-24 and the road-mobile SS-25. They are also hard at work improving their SS-18s. The SS-18 is the massive multiple warhead system in fixed silos. Its improvement and basing mode make it more suitable than ever for a preemptive first strike.

In fact, last year, in 1989, the year many opponents of SDI said there was no longer a need for strategic defenses, the Soviet Union produced and deployed 140 new ICBMs to our twelve. So the Soviet capabilities to threaten the United States and our allies continue to grow – and the need for strategic defense continues accordingly. It should be understood that, as recently pointed out by the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, even the completion of a START treaty will likely not change this fact of life.

**Positive Impact.** But SDI has already had a positive impact on U.S.-Soviet relations and on the negotiations at the Nuclear and Space Talks. Indeed, it was the Soviet concern for SDI, particularly space-related SDI activities, that brought the Soviets back to the negotiating table in 1985 after they had walked out in late 1983. And I believe SDI was a great motivating force in getting the Soviets to agree to reduce by about one-half their ballistic missile RVs – a greater reduction than anyone believed possible when the talks began.

During her visit to our national test facility in Colorado Springs, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher gave SDI credit for encouraging a broader change in Soviet attitudes. She said:

I firmly believe that it was the determination to embark upon the SDI program and to continue with it, that eventually convinced the Soviet Union that they could never, never, never achieve their aim by military might, because they would never succeed.

I believe that led, too, to an assessment of the poverty of their own system and to require them to admit that it produced neither prosperity nor human dignity and therefore led to the reassessment and the enormous change in East-West relations that we are seeing now.

But ladies and gentlemen, there is always and will always be evil in human nature and we never know where the next threat may come from. Indeed in the last two days we have had vivid evidence of that. [Here, she was referring to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.] So we must always keep our technology well ahead.

I therefore remain firmly behind this program. I am very pleased and proud that we have a few people from our country associated with it.

I want to observe that this changing world scene is leading to a visible debate in the Soviet Union about the positive role of strategic defense. There are clearly voices within the Soviet Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Defense – as well as among the technical community – who see the merits of strategic defense and a number give credit to the U.S. SDI program. A favorite quotation of mine is from a July 20, 1989, article in *Pravda* entitled “From Secrecy to Trust.” There Professor V. Etkin first questioned the capabilities of space-based ABM systems in what he called a global conflict and went on to argue:

But what if the conflict is not global? What if we are talking about guarantees against accidental launches, or above all, missile launches of extremist groups? Such a limited system including ground- and space-based positions for combatting extremist missile launches is within the bounds of technical solutions.

Etkin argued for moving from a “Balance of Terror” to a “Balance of Trust.” If adopted in Geneva by the Soviets, this approach would be very compatible with the U.S. objective of a treaty implementing such a cooperative transition to a two-layered, ground- and space-based SDI system. In my view, this possibility should not be ignored.

Far-fetched, you say? I do not think so – especially if we press our advantages in developing SDI as well as in the negotiations. And I would emphasize again that there is evidence of an internal Soviet debate among Foreign Ministry and Defense Ministry officials regarding possible shifts in the Soviet position that would encourage mutual deployment of nationwide strategic defenses. This evidence suggests a weakening in Soviet resistance to longstanding U.S. proposals for a cooperative change in the status of the ABM Treaty that would allow both parties to deploy defensive systems in a phased and coordinated manner. This is in contrast to the barrage of criticism Soviet commentators long have hurled against the Strategic Defense Initiative.

**Toward A Safer, More Secure World.** I cannot overemphasize the importance of maintaining a robust SDI program to achieving this objective of a negotiated cooperative transition to a safer, more secure world for ourselves, the Soviet Union, and everyone else. We at SDIO will do our part provided the Congress permits us to do the job the President has asked of us. If Congress provides the proper funding needed and does not restrict my flexibility in directing the program, I believe we can and will deliver.

As of now, we spend over \$5 billion a year not to grow crops in this country. Over \$20 billion on soft drinks. The 1991 SDI budget request is \$4.6 billion. Isn't spending this amount of money to protect ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren from the horrifying effects of a ballistic missile attack a worthwhile investment? Those we have elected to serve us will soon have to answer that very important question.

