

**RUSH!**

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## THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE'S ABOUT FACE ON THE MISSILE DEFENSE ACT

The Senate Armed Services Committee voted on July 24 to cut funding for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), to delay the deployment of ground-based anti-missile interceptors, and to all but eliminate research on future space-based anti-missile interceptors. These actions violated the committee's pledge in last year's Missile Defense Act (MDA) to provide the SDI funds necessary to deploy ground-based defenses as soon as technologically feasible. It also reversed a prior agreement to keep open options for deploying space-based weapons at some later date. The result is not only the collapse of the bipartisan coalition that crafted the MDA, but a weakening of America's commitment to defend itself against missile attack.

Painstakingly cobbled together by the Senate Armed Services Committee last July, the MDA was signed into law by George Bush on December 5, 1991. The bill contained many compromises which were essential to its final approval. First, the MDA established the goal of deploying advanced defenses against shorter-range (tactical and theater) missiles by the middle of the 1990s. Second, it committed the United States to deploy a single site of 100 ground-based interceptors, as allowed by the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, to defend the U.S. against long-range (strategic) missiles by 1996 or earlier. The plan envisioned adding future sites to provide complete coverage of U.S. territory. Third, the MDA directed the Administration to undertake immediate negotiations with the Soviet Union to ease ABM Treaty restrictions on the development, testing, and deployment of anti-missile defenses. Negotiations also were needed to clarify several ambiguous ABM Treaty provisions, including defining limits on the testing of future ABM technologies. Finally, the MDA called for "robust" funding for the development of follow-on strategic defense technologies, including the *Brilliant Pebbles* space-based interceptor system.

The MDA sets an ambitious agenda for the SDI program. The Pentagon's timetable for the first deployed site was shortened by four years, from 2000 to 1996. Further, the early development and deployment of defenses against theater-range missiles were to continue at the same time as the program to field defenses against long-range missiles in the U.S. Given the ambitious goals established by the MDA, its successful implementation required full funding of SDI by Congress and waiving standard Pentagon acquisition procedures. The latter requirement was explicitly stated in the House-Senate conference committee report accompanying the MDA. The report stated, "...acceleration of normal acquisition processes and procedures is required in light of the very high priority of these [MDA] objectives."

**Promises Broken.** The Department of Defense Authorization bill drafted this year by the Senate Armed Services Committee either implicitly or explicitly reneges on important parts of last year's compromise. First, it cuts funding for the SDI program by \$1.1 billion from Bush's \$5.4 billion request. The House of Representatives voted on July 2 in its own Defense Authorization bill to cut the same amount. At this reduced funding level, MDA's basic goal of deploying anti-missile defenses as soon as technology allows cannot be realized. Instead anti-missile defenses will be built only as the money becomes available. Moreover, the committee says now that the first SDI site will be constructed in 2002, not in 1996, as promised last year, or in 2000, as the Pentagon has planned.

The committee's "go slow" approach may be based on the false assessment that Third World dictators will not obtain long-range missiles capable reaching U.S. territory until well after the turn of the century. But a delegation of Russian military leaders warned their U.S. counterparts in Washington last October that half of the roughly twenty Third World nations possessing missiles by the year 2000 likely will have missiles of intercontinental range.

The committee has reneged on more of its promises. It allocated only \$350 million for the development of the *Brilliant Pebbles* space weapon system, an almost 40 percent reduction from Bush's \$579 million request. This falls far short of the robust funding level called for by the MDA, which SDI supporters demanded in exchange for their support. Worse, this inadequate funding level certainly will be reduced even more in the impending House-Senate conference because the House version of the Defense Authorization Bill unwisely eliminates all funding for this program. Finally, the Senate bill seeks to reimpose on the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO) cumbersome Pentagon acquisition procedures that will slow the deployment of strategic defenses. In short, the Senate Armed Services Committee's action leaves last year's delicate compromise in a shambles.

**Veto Threat.** George Bush needs to confront Congress on SDI in order to salvage the Missile Defense Act and the SDI program. Therefore, he should threaten to veto the Department of Defense Authorization Bill unless SDI funding levels are restored and cumbersome acquisition procedures are removed. The veto threat has been used to protect the SDI program in the past, specifically in 1988 when Ronald Reagan, with George Bush's support, vetoed the Department of Defense Authorization Bill because it contained provisions damaging to the program. Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney stated in a July 22 letter to the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, John Warner of Virginia, that he may recommend that Bush veto the Defense Authorization Bill. Cheney cited his concerns over the bill's SDI provisions as one of the reasons why he might make such a recommendation.

Bush should follow Cheney's lead and threaten to veto the Department of Defense Authorization Bill. He should tell congressional leaders, including the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sam Nunn, the Democrat from Georgia, that he will veto the bill unless it authorizes \$5 billion for the SDI program, allocates the requested level of \$579 million for the space-based interceptor program, and waives standard Pentagon acquisition procedures to allow the deployment of both theater and strategic defenses as soon as technological developments permit.

The demise of the Missile Defense Act is a tragedy. Many in Congress were hoping that the often bitter and confrontational debates surrounding the SDI program were a thing of the past. Apparently they are not. Trust is an essential ingredient for achieving a compromise between the legislative and executive branches. The actions of the Senate Armed Services Committee demonstrate that the Administration cannot count on Congress to honor its commitments. The responsibility now rests with Bush to come to the defense of the SDI program. He must press Congress to stand by its commitments made last year. Otherwise, he should veto this year's defense budget bill.

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