

Executive Memorandum

The Heritage Foundation

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RUSH!

5/24/93

Number 356

ASPIN'S "STAR WARS" DECEPTION

When Secretary of Defense Les Aspin announced on May 13 his reorganization of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO), he proclaimed it as the end of Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars" program. However, there is more politics than substance to Aspin's decision. Far from killing the strategic defense program, the Secretary merely is renaming it and claiming it as his own. The Clinton Administration still plans to develop and deploy anti-missile defenses. Moreover, all of the major systems Aspin sees as candidates for deployment are SDIO products.

The ten-year history of the SDI program cannot be reversed through a name change. Throughout the 1980s SDI opponents argued against anti-missile defense systems. If Clinton proceeds with his deployment plans, they, and not Ronald Reagan, will have been proved wrong.

Reagan's Challenge. When President Reagan first issued his challenge to America's scientific community to find a defense against ballistic missiles, he recognized that this would be a lengthy process and that success was not certain. His March 1983 speech did not include a commitment to deploy an impenetrable shield against missiles, as SDI opponents have asserted. Rather, SDIO was established and charged with managing research and development programs for deploying a national defense against the Soviet strategic missile threat.

When the Bush Administration inherited the SDI program in 1989, the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse. Recognizing the changing strategic context, the Pentagon shifted SDIO's focus away from countering the Soviet nuclear threat, concentrating instead on defending against accidental ballistic missile launches from the former Soviet Union or hostile attacks by less capable belligerents. At the same time, the SDIO Director announced that a deployment architecture had been developed that included defenses against short- and intermediate-range (theater) missiles, as well as long-range (strategic) missiles. This architecture included both ground-based and space-based sensors and interceptors. It was called Global Protection Against Limited Strikes (GPALS).

Aspin's Vision. So how does Aspin's May 13 announcement alter the country's effort to field anti-missile defenses? Actually, very little. The renamed SDIO, the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO), still will focus on deployable defenses against both theater and strategic missiles. *Patriot*, the Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, the Navy's Theater Missile Defense (TMD) program, the Ground-Based Interceptor (GBI), the Ground-Based Radar (GBR), the *Brilliant Eyes* sensor satellite, and even the *Brilliant Pebbles* space-based intercept program will all receive funding under Aspin's fiscal 1994 budget.

Aspin also announced that the director of the BMDO will report to the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, John Deutch. Previous directors reported to the Secretary of Defense. This action will weaken the program's clout inside the Pentagon and reduce the Secretary's ability to oversee its management. While this is a mistake, the reorganization is not all bad. Aspin implied that it will help move strategic defense programs out of the laboratory and toward procurement and deployment of specific systems, effectively validating Reagan's goals.

Aspin's vision differs from Reagan's, though. Aspin wants to deploy theater defenses first, national defenses second, and space-based defenses last (Reagan emphasized national, space-based defenses first). Aspin's priorities are flawed. Space-based sensors and interceptors are the cheapest and most effective method of defending against both theater and strategic missiles. The reason: they can provide global coverage against any kind of incoming ballistic

tic missile and remain on station continuously. By establishing his priorities as he has, Aspin apparently ignores the fact that space-based systems provide an extra measure of defense capability.

There is another problem with Aspin's approach. Despite his avowed commitment to them, he is cutting the budget of theater defense programs. The fiscal 1994 anti-missile defense budget he announced on March 27 slashes \$634 million from theater defense programs. His \$1.45 billion reduction in funds for national defenses—priority number two—effectively puts that program on hold. Assuming some deployment of theater defenses for crises abroad, the U.S. will be in the curious position of being ready to defend its allies against missile attack, but incapable of doing so for its own citizens. Worse yet, the decision to decrease funding for space-based interceptors from \$335 million to \$73 million means that Aspin is all but giving up on the best way to counter ballistic missiles.

Aspin's Challenge. Strategic defense advocates are right to be confused by Aspin's inconsistencies. His declaration that the "Star Wars" era is over does not mean the end of Reagan's challenge to develop and deploy defenses against ballistic missiles. That effort will continue, albeit with less funding. The real question is whether or not strategic defenses will be deployed soon enough to protect America from emerging missile threats from around the globe. Other questions which Aspin must answer include:

- ◆ **Will he seek adequate future funding for strategic defenses?** The indications are not good. The fiscal 1994 defense budget cuts the program by 40 percent. Adequate funding for early deployment requires a fiscal 1994 figure more like the \$6.3 billion that the Bush Administration had programmed and close to the \$47 billion slated from fiscal 1994 through 1999.
- ◆ **Will Aspin develop bipartisan support for strategic defense in Congress?** As a member of a Democratic Administration, Aspin can rebuild the bipartisan coalition that passed the 1991 Missile Defense Act, which established specific target dates for deployment. Building this coalition will require that he and the President expend some political capital.
- ◆ **Will the Secretary commit himself to providing missile defense for Americans first?** Aspin's emphasis on theater defenses will produce missile defenses for citizens of other countries, but not for Americans. Such an outcome is unacceptable. Aspin must make an unequivocal commitment to defend the American people.
- ◆ **Will Aspin recognize the indispensable role space systems play in ballistic missile defense?** Aspin has denigrated space systems as part of Reagan's "Star Wars" vision. But space systems are indispensable for all types of missile defenses. For example, early warning satellites were used to support *Patriot* crews during the Gulf war. Aspin should commit to including space systems in future deployment plans, starting with space-based sensors and including options for deploying space-based interceptors.
- ◆ **Will Aspin seek to ease ABM Treaty restrictions?** The 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty all but bars the deployment of anti-missile defenses. After years of opposition to U.S. strategic defenses, the Russians now see global missile defenses as a source of cooperation. During the April 1993 Vancouver summit, Yeltsin endorsed such cooperation. Success in this endeavor will require mutual agreement to ease ABM Treaty restrictions.

Aspin's dramatic announcement that "Star Wars" is dead represents a dual deception. It attempts to deceive strategic defense opponents into believing that the Clinton Administration will not seek to develop and deploy anti-missile systems. And it attempts to deceive supporters by assuring them that important elements of the program will go forward, despite drastic funding cuts.

Aspin may think this will buy him the time and political capital to develop a new mandate for the program. More his flawed vision will undermine its political support. If so, Aspin's deception will be an irresponsible political move that ill serves the nation.

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