

## Star Wars option: a path fraught with peril

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The US "Star Wars" concept - officially the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) - is throwing strategic thinking into a state of confusion unmatched since the dawn of the atomic age. This is not surprising, since US President Ronald Reagan called in 1983 for a technological crusade which, were it to succeed, would nullify the nuclear threat and thereby effectively repeal the nuclear age.

In a written statement circulated to the press on Jan 3, 1985, the White House again set out "the facts" about SDI, contending its central purpose is to provide "a better and more stable basis for enhanced deterrence". What is the meaning of "enhanced deterrence" in this novel context?

At present, such stability as exists comes from the knowledge that nuclear weapons are so powerful they would wreak intolerable destruction on both sides in a war. In the new world of SDI, supposedly, nuclear weapons become so powerless that nations possessing them are "deterred" from using them by recognition of their ineffectiveness.

Because of the defences on the opposing side, they are supposed to say to themselves, "why bother to fire our missiles?" and subsequently, "why bother to have them?" The Jan 3 statement claims SDI research could "increase the incentives for both sides to reduce the numbers of ballistic missiles greatly."

Recently history makes this scenario highly improbable. For example: the Soviet Union has been improving its defences against aircraft for the past four decades, yet the United States, far from giving up on bombers, is modernizing its planes for missions projected to the year 2000 and beyond.

Of course, abandoning the bomber force would have represented a shift to more effective weapons. What SDI suggests is a defence so broad that the opposing side is induced to abandon not merely a particular weapon but all means of delivering weapons of mass destruction - if we reach a state of near-perfect defence, then the offence, it is being claimed, will wither away.

The White House statement gives an ambivalent view of the prospects of achieving this goal. A presidential foreword says "new technologies are

ble a truly effective non-nuclear defence". The text however, concedes that "no single concept or technology has been identified". Indeed, a recent report by the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment said the prospect of an effective missile defence was "so remote that it should not serve as the basis for public expectations or national policy".

Even if the goal is unachievable, however, this does not preclude a vigorous program designed to achieve it. Such a program is in existence. In Mr. Reagan's words, it represents a move "toward greater reliance on defensive systems which threaten no one". Whether defensive systems "threaten no one" we can best judge from the account of Soviet defensive technology given in the same White House document:

"The Soviets are ... engaged in research and development on a rapidly deployable ABM (anti-ballistic missile) system that raises concern about their potential ability to break out of the ABM Treaty and deploy a nationwide ABM defence system within the next ten years, should they choose to do so. Were they to do so ... deterrence would collapse, and we would have no choices between surrender and suicide."

Clearly, this defence system is perceived as a mortal threat. This is understandable. To whatever extent one side has defences, to that same extent the opposing side can be considered to have been disarmed.

Mr. Reagan recognized this in 1983 when he stated that ballistic missile defence must be balanced between contending parties. He then opened the door to the possibility that the United States might share its defensive technology with the Soviet Union.

Such sharing would have to be done with complete knowledge of the opposing side's research, development and deployment to prevent creating an imbalance in the reverse direction. It would also be vital to ensure that the cutting edge of US technology was in no danger of being applied to the improvement of Soviet offensive systems, or (equally threatening) to counter measures against US defences.

If these improbable requirements were met, the super powers could proceed to "disarm" one another by progressively nullifying each other's nuclear arsenals.

For this to be a balanced process, it is further necessary that they agree on the effectiveness of the defences

complex defensive system - short of testing it in nuclear war?

It seems more probable that a process of disarmament undertaken by these means would engender such fears that it would halt before it began.

Nonetheless, if we strain credulity to the utmost and suppose that each side agreed to a 50-per-cent-effective defence by the other, the two parties would have achieved a wonderful thing - a 50 per cent cutback in the level of offensive threat.

They would have achieved this at the cost of some \$100 billion, and heightened international tension. They could have achieved the same reduction at no cost, and with an increase in mutual trust, had they decided instead to embark on a verified cutback in the levels of their offensive weaponry.

The SDI proposal is so full of contradictions and so fraught with dangers that it will produce strains in the Western Alliance beside which earlier decisions on neutron bombs, cruise missiles or Pershing 2s will pale in significance.

This is deeply to be regretted. "Our vital interests and those of our allies are inextricably linked," Mr. Reagan has said. It is precisely because this is true that we cannot acquiesce in the SDI.

The whole movement toward defensive systems places the United States, and the Soviet Union to the extent that it shares these ambitions, on a collision course with the most important achievement in the history of arms control - the 1972 ABM Treaty, which in large part bans the development, testing and deployment of anti-missile systems.

Reviewing the status of the SDI recently, William Safire of the *The New York Times* expressed a view that is gaining currency: "In a sense, the idea of a missile defence has worked already...the possibility that we may be serious about building a global shield has drawn the Soviet Union back to the negotiating table."

However, it is not enough merely to sit at the negotiating table. Missile defence will have "worked already" only if there is a willingness to negotiate - to forgo the SDI in exchange for cuts in the level of offensive weapons.

As a close ally of the United States, we have an obligation to exert all the pressure we can in hope of bringing about this change in direction in the brief time remaining before the SDI - conceived as a magical cure for the world's nuclear ills - irrevocably poisons the international atmosphere.

## ALBERT ROSS ENGLISH SOCIETY COLLOQUIUM

A monthly student lecture series.

All are invited.

Wine and Cheese reception to follow.

14 February, 1985 8:00 p.m.

Alumni Memorial Lounge



On February 12th WORD (World Disarmament) is holding a Peace Vigil in the SUB cafeteria from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm. There is no special significance to this date. Our group chose February 12th simply to recognize a day in the life of our planet.

In conjunction with the Peace Vigil we will show the film *If You Love This Planet* in Room 26 during peak 'traffic periods' during the day.

A petition will be circulated throughout the cafeteria and will be available at the Peace Vigil table expressing our group's desire for responsible decision making on the part of our government as well as that of other world governments.

WORD would appreciate your taking some time out in your busy schedule and joining us in our Peace Vigil. We would also be grateful if you would sign our petition which deals with what must be this planet's primary concern; i.e. its very existence.

Thanking you in advance for your support,

Yours in Peace,

*Dr. Kaye MacPhee*

M.K. MacPhee  
President-WORD

"We have heard the rationale offered by the superpowers. We know who speaks for the nations. But who speaks for the Human species? Who speaks for earth.... If we are not committed to our survival, who will be?" Carl Sagan

WORD (World Disarmament) Peace Petition

We, the undersigned students and faculty of the University of New Brunswick and Saint Thomas University, believing that multi-lateral nuclear disarmament is imperative for the survival of our planet and life upon it, and feeling that Canada is in a unique position as an intermediate power to aid in bringing about this disarmament, hereby demand that:

1. Canada be declared a nuclear weapons free zone and that our government disallow further visits to our ports by nuclear armed submarines and naval vessels;
2. The government of Canada direct its' representative at the United Nations to vote for multi-lateral freeze on production, testing, and deployment of all nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons capable devices, and pressure both the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to also support this freeze;
3. the government of Canada nullify the "Umbrella Agreement" with the United States and end Cruise missile testing on Canadian soil.