

## 21. CANADA-US: RESEARCH ON THE STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE

### Background

In his speech of 23 March 1983, President Reagan asked: "What if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant US retaliation to deter a Soviet attack, that we could interrupt and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies?" President Reagan then called upon the American scientific community "who gave us nuclear weapons, to turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace, to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete."

This vision of a leak-proof defence that could shield the entire population from nuclear weapons called into question previous assumptions about strategic doctrine. Nuclear deterrence rests on the assumption of mutual vulnerability - both sides accept that an attack on the other is certain to result in an unacceptably punitive response. The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, signed by the United States and the Soviet Union in 1972, reinforced the logic of mutual deterrence by prohibiting the development of a nationwide ballistic missile defence. While President Reagan insisted that this new research would remain within the limits set down by the ABM Treaty, critics have expressed concern that the SDI may mark the beginning of the end of the ABM Treaty (See the ABM Treaty).

President Reagan's request led to National Security Study Directive 6-83 which established two study groups to examine the issue and outline how such a research programme could be shaped.

Both panels rejected the idea of a leak-proof population defence but supported limited defences, which, they claimed, would enhance deterrence by increasing the uncertainties of attack for the Soviet Union. On 6