

What would be the effect of strategic defence deployment on the risk of nuclear war? The proposed technologies would probably be more effective against a second-strike rather than a first-strike, because a second-strike would be less coordinated, with fewer weapons: the so-called “ragged response.” Thus, in a time of crisis, the existence of strategic defences would increase the “attractiveness” of going first. Carnesale caricatured the notion that defensive weaponry was stabilizing by presenting the following theorem: “There are weapons and technologies that are destabilizing and dangerous — *his*. My weapons are good”. If the Soviet Union were to start deploying a defensive system, even one designed to defend only their ICBMs, US strategic analysts would denounce it as part of their first-strike strategy and therefore destabilizing. “They might even be right.”

What did morality have to do with all of this? The choice had been presented as one between “mutual, assured destruction (MAD), or mutual, assured survival.” But Carnesale believed it was improper to put this forward as if it were a choice between alternative options; rather it was a comparison between a condition of the real world, namely that nuclear war meant assured destruction, and a *wish* that we could and would survive such a war. One was the reality, the other merely a hope.

What should be done? The most important thing, said Carnesale, was to promote a more rational debate. He summarized the polarized views on SDI which had arisen in the United States. The right said that SDI was the only path to peace; the left said that it was destabilizing. The right claimed it would enhance deterrence; the left that it was part of a first-strike capability. The left asserted that the technical requirements were impossible and that the cost would be too great; the right, that the United States could do anything and that, whatever the cost, it would be worth it. The left claimed that SDI was the death-knell for arms control; the right, that it was the rebirth. To the left it was a “cruel hoax”; for the right “a moral imperative.” None of these absolutist, polarized views could be correct.

What would Dr. Carnesale do? In his opinion, the greatest danger was the gathering political momentum behind SDI. He recommended reaffirmation of the ABM Treaty. The United States should counter potential Soviet missile defences, not by building its own defence, but through the use of penetration aids.