

Instead of pursuing a strategic defence which would spur the Soviet Union to deploy more missiles and more warheads, the United States should be pursuing the security that would result from adherence to the ABM Treaty, a ban on anti-satellite and other space weaponry and a massive reduction in nuclear weapons on both sides.

7. Discussion and Comments from the Floor

Several participants argued that the claims made by the Reagan Administration regarding the current Soviet strategic defence program evaporated when examined closely. For example, it was suggested that US figures for the Soviet strategic defence budget included inflated estimates of civil defence expenditures. Furthermore, a recent CIA assessment of directed energy research, which was leaked to the press earlier this year, concluded that the United States had a five year lead over the Soviet programme.

SDI research had been supported by claims that research into these exotic technologies would provide important commercial spin-offs. Many participants suggested that this claim was unsupportable. It was pointed out by John Pike that these "technological orphans" had been wandering the halls of the Pentagon for years, unable to find a home. If the military could find no use for them, it was unlikely that civilian enterprises would.

One particularly undesirable side-effect of SDI was emphasized: the reponse time would have to be very rapid. In time of crisis this would mean programming the systems to respond automatically upon detection of an adversary's missile launch. Given the number of errors which occur in computerized warning systems, an automated response would be exceedingly dangerous; it could lead to an unintended nuclear war.

The following key questions were posed by participants: What does the United States want to defend, cities or silos? At what cost? Can the United States sustain that cost over time? Will Soviet counter-measures, such as deployment of many more offensive missiles, nullify any benefits of a defence system? Is it worth jeopardizing the ABM treaty to push ahead with SDI? It was acknowledged that many of these were *policy* questions which the engineers trained in investigating questions of feasibility, were not competent to address.

Charles Thomas, Deputy Assistant Secretary in the US State Department, asserted that the United States was not seeking a "leak-