

1-1-2001

Strategic Defense Initiative

Robert J. Bunker
Claremont Graduate University

Recommended Citation

Bunker, Robert J. "Strategic Defense Initiative." *Europe Since 1945: An Encyclopedia*, Ed. Bernard A. Cook. New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 2001. 1197.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the CGU Faculty Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in CGU Faculty Publications and Research by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

Because of these criticisms, it has been argued that the START I Treaty allowed the Soviets to use the rubric of arms reductions to achieve strategic offensive force modernization while at the same time denying such an option to the United States. With the demise of the USSR and the signing in January 1993 of the START II agreement as yet unratified, many of these criticisms may be alleviated. The START II treaty eliminates all MIRV-equipped ICBMs and limits the overall number of warheads to 3,500 or fewer.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Clark, Mark T. "START and the Bush Initiative." *Global Affairs* (Winter 1992): 132-49.
- Kartchner, Kerry M. *Negotiating START: Strategic Arms Reduction Talks and the Quest for Strategic Stability*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1992.
- U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. *START: Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991.

Robert J. Bunker

Strategic Defense Initiative

The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was a research and technology development program established by the United States in January 1984. The Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO) was created in April 1984 to explore five research concepts relating to a defense against ballistic missiles. Two of these concepts were based primarily on forms of advanced nonnuclear weaponry, directed-energy weapons (DEW): lasers and particle beams, and kinetic energy weapons (KEW): electromagnetic and rail guns. The three other research concepts were surveillance, acquisition, tracking and kill assessment (SATKA), systems analysis and battle management (SA/BM), and survivability, lethality, and key technologies (SLKT).

The Reagan administration's primary rationale behind SDI was originally to protect the population of the United States and that of its allies by a "missile shield"; however, the emphasis shifted to one of deterrence and thereafter to lower Soviet capacity for preemptive strike capability against U.S. retaliatory forces.

The USSR did not respond to the SDI. Rather, the SDI was a response by the United States to the strategic missile defense program of the USSR. For years prior to the SDI, the Soviets had been actively creating and deploying strategic missile defenses, at times in violation of

the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Defenses for the Soviet capital, Moscow, represented the only fully operational ABM system deployed in the world.

Soviet doctrine and strategy emphasized strategic defense as a complement to the use of overwhelming offensive forces. The SDI directly challenged Moscow's preemptive strike capability and, as a result, placed its entire military strategy in jeopardy. Further, the SDI threatened to take the Cold War to a new threshold and place the USSR in a no-win situation. A ballistic missile defense race would place such an immense strain on the Soviet economic and political system that it would be unable to compete effectively against a technologically advanced West unless it adopted a market economy. The adoption of this type of economic system would discredit and ultimately undermine the ideology of the Soviet Communist regime.

In response, an intensive propaganda and disinformation campaign was directed against the SDI by the USSR. This well-coordinated campaign was conducted on a number of levels, including overt government arms control efforts, propaganda, and KGB-promoted active measures that focused on the SDI.

The SDI program was reoriented in 1991 under the Bush administration to defend against limited ballistic missile threats and became known as global protection against limited strikes (GPALS). This program in turn was reorganized under the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO) by the Clinton administration. The BMDO focused on theater missile defense (TMD) and contained very modest strategic ballistic missile defense research.

The SDI was also known derogatorily as "star wars" because of the science fiction-like weaponry it would require. This type of weaponry, of which lasers are one example, is currently beginning to be deployed by U.S. ground forces.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Clark, Mark T. "The Soviet Political Campaign Against the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative." (Ph.d diss, University of Southern California, 1989).
- Mikheev, Dmitrii. *The Soviet Perspective on the Strategic Defense Initiative*. Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1987.
- Yost, David S. *Soviet Ballistic Missile Defense and the Western Alliance*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Robert J. Bunker

SEE ALSO Arms Control Treaties and Agreements