

REAGAN'S STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE: THE U.S. PRESENTATION AND THE EUROPEAN RESPONSE

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Western Europeans reacted with skepticism to President Reagan's announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative. In this article, Timothy H. Hiebert argues that their response sprang not only from such traditional fears as that of a decoupling of Europe from American military protection, but also from the manner in which the United States presented SDI. Had President Reagan introduced SDI as a modification of NATO's current strategy of deterrence rather than as a radical departure from it, the author asserts, he might have secured broader European support. Mr. Hiebert concludes that as a result of the intra-alliance controversy over SDI, American officials have begun to adjust their public position on SDI to accommodate European concerns.

Throughout the history of the North Atlantic alliance, the continual development of new technologies has periodically led to shifts in the military strategies under which the alliance operates. As Anton W. DePorte has observed, "No sooner do the allies reach an understanding of what needs to be done, and proceed . . . to try to do it, than new weapons come along which undermine the credibility of the existing plans."¹ Each time a major new weapon is developed, the allies must again agree on strategies better reflecting current perceptions of security.

The most recent example of such a strategic shift is President Reagan's "Strategic Defense Initiative" (SDI). But unlike previous shifts, which have generally constituted variations on the theme of *deterrence* by threat of retaliation, SDI has presented the allies with doubts about the very foundation of NATO's military planning: the United States has apparently advocated a new strategy of *defense* against a Soviet attack. The method by which the Reagan administration presented this new plan to the allies, together with the proposal's implicit questioning of the entire

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1. Anton W. DePorte, *The Atlantic Alliance at 35*, Headline Series, no. 268 (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1984), p. 18.

concept of deterrence, has led to such controversy in Western Europe that *Le Monde* characterized SDI's impact as "a danger . . . of quite another dimension" from other problems recently besetting NATO, "because it could jeopardize the underpinnings of the military alliance."² While Reagan has borrowed the line "The Force is with us" from the "Star Wars" movie heroes,³ *Der Spiegel* has portrayed him on its cover as the villainous Darth Vader.⁴

West European skepticism about SDI has found expression in several familiar themes: the program might help "decouple" U.S. military power from the defense of Europe; SDI would threaten arms control; it would cost too much. But beneath these various complaints may lie more fundamental causes of European uneasiness with SDI, factors which touch on the very nature of the alliance. The debate surrounding SDI has highlighted some fundamental differences in American and European perspectives on military strategy. Had the Reagan administration been sensitive to these differences, it might have achieved greater success in securing European cooperation.

I. FROM ASSURED DESTRUCTION TO STRATEGIC DEFENSE

Since February 1965, when Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara first officially adopted the theory, "assured destruction" has served as "the cornerstone of our strategic policy."⁵ Under this doctrine, the United States planned to respond to a Soviet nuclear attack with an all-out retaliatory strike on Soviet cities; the Soviet leaders' recognition of this fact was to deter them from ever launching such an attack.

At the same time, the doctrine of "extended deterrence" was to deter Soviet aggression in Western Europe: any conventional attack would be met first by conventional forces, and then by U.S. intercontinental missiles in a strike of "massive retaliation," as the need arose.

As the Soviet Union itself began to acquire a credible second-strike capability, the system of stability between the United States and the Soviet Union soon became one of "mutual assured destruction" (MAD). During this period Secretary McNamara let it be known to the Soviet Union that the United States fully accepted its new position of vulner-

2. André Fontaine, "Du monde de demain au 'Monde' d'aujourd'hui," *Le Monde* (Paris), 27 December 1984, p. 1; translated in *World Press Review*, March 1985, p. 40. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's. See also "Healy Says NATO Could Break Up," *Times* (London), 11 March 1985, p. 1.

3. "Reagan Presses Call for Antimissile Plan before Space Group," *New York Times*, 30 March 1985, p. 1.

4. *Der Spiegel*, 12 November 1984.

5. Robert S. McNamara, *The Essence of Security* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 52.

ability and would not attempt to change it, but pointed out that the Soviet Union too remained vulnerable to a retaliatory strike.⁶ With mutual acceptance in the SALT accords of strategic parity and the signing of the ABM treaty in 1972, the United States formally recognized the tenets of MAD as the answer to stable relations between the superpowers.

Extended deterrence, now in the form of "flexible response," continued to guide NATO's strategic policy in Europe. The flexible response doctrine stipulated that NATO would defend against a conventional Soviet attack on Western Europe not with an immediate "massive retaliation," but with a graduated amount of force — conventional, then tactical nuclear, then strategic nuclear — as the situation required. For their part, the European allies were to upgrade their conventional forces and accept the stationing of tactical nuclear weapons in Western Europe. But they were to continue to enjoy the promised use of U.S. strategic nuclear weapons, in the event those measures failed. A constant element of NATO's strategic planning throughout this period, in both North America and Western Europe, was deterrence of aggression by the threat of retaliation.

Indeed, the concept of deterrence had been a fundamental part of Western strategy since the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty itself. As Secretary of State Dean Acheson stated to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1949, deterrence was the treaty's "first, dominant, and overwhelming purpose."⁷

But thirty years later, many Americans were troubled by the knowledge that the United States' safety from nuclear annihilation depended entirely on the rationality of the Soviet leaders. Ronald Reagan, for example, viewed MAD through the idiom of "two men pointing pistols at each other's head with one man's finger tightening on the trigger." He was convinced that, somehow, "there has to be another way."⁸ During the summer of 1979, after Reagan had toured the North American Aerospace Defense headquarters in Colorado, he explained his impressions: "I think the thing that struck me was the irony that here, with all this great technology of ours, we can do all this yet we cannot stop any of the weapons that are coming at us."⁹

That same summer, Senator Malcolm Wallop of Wyoming gave Reagan a manuscript copy of an article he had written on ballistic missile

6. "McNamara Warns Soviet on Adding to ICBM Defense," *New York Times*, 19 September 1967, p. 1.

7. U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *North Atlantic Treaty*, 81st Cong., 1st sess., 1949, p. 20.

8. David Hoffman, "Reagan Seized Idea Shelved in '80 Race," *Washington Post*, 3 March 1985, p. A19.

9. *Ibid.*

defense. In his article, Wallop argued that because "technology is rendering the 'balance of terror' obsolete,"¹⁰ "[i]t is high time we lay the phantom of MAD to rest and that we turn our attention to the realistic task of affording maximal protection for our society in the event of conflict."¹¹ Reagan read the article, returned it with notations,¹² and after his election discussed the idea with his advisors.

On March 23, 1983, President Reagan made a nationally televised speech to strengthen support for the MX missile and other defense programs. At the end of the speech, in a passage he himself had drafted, Reagan advocated a shift away from the "specter of retaliation"¹³ and urged "the scientific community in our country" to "turn their great talents . . . to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete."¹⁴

The announcement was thus reminiscent of Senator Wallop's language. The phrase "specter of retaliation" resembled "phantom of MAD;" and Reagan, like Wallop, referred to technology as making nuclear weapons "obsolete." Both men, moreover, spoke disparagingly of the retaliatory plans of "at least four American presidents" and "[m]y predecessors in the Oval Office."¹⁵

Reagan's proposal differed from Senator Wallop's, however, in an important respect. Wallop had focused exclusively on a ballistic missile defense "to protect *American* lives and homes."¹⁶ But President Reagan sought to make it clear that his program was designed to protect other countries as well. Praising "our allies" repeatedly during the proposal, Reagan recognized that "[t]heir vital interests and ours are inextricably linked. Their safety and ours are one." The President emphasized that he was urging consideration of weapons which could "intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or *that of our allies*."¹⁷

Perhaps working from a copy of Senator Wallop's argument for a defense of the United States alone, the President thus sought to imbue the proposal with a commitment to NATO by sprinkling in references

10. Malcolm Wallop, "Opportunities and Imperatives of Ballistic Missile Defense," *Strategic Review* 7 (Fall 1979):13.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

12. Malcolm Wallop, letter to author, 12 August 1985.

13. *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 28 March 1983, p. 447.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 448.

15. When asked to comment on these similarities, Senator Wallop replied, "As the Communists say, it is no accident." President Reagan saw a draft of that article in the summer of 1979, and indeed penciled in some comments." Wallop, letter to author.

16. "Opportunities and Imperatives," p. 14 (emphasis added).

17. *Presidential Documents*, p. 447 (emphasis added).

to "our allies." Stressing the goal of defending against "strategic missiles before they reached our own soil," Reagan appended "or that of our allies" almost as an afterthought. He seemed not to note that the "strategic" missiles he had mentioned do not directly threaten the European allies.

Nor did Reagan apparently consider that the announced goal of rendering all nuclear weapons "obsolete" might distress the governments of France and Britain, which had undergone political challenges and great expense to maintain their own nuclear forces. The British government, in particular, was already encountering strong domestic opposition to its plans to upgrade British nuclear forces. If the new Trident submarines it planned to buy were to be "obsolete," why buy them at all?

President Reagan was likewise insensitive to the potential usefulness of the European scientific community's participation in the research effort, which might yield political as well as technological advances. He called upon only "the scientific community in *our country*, those who gave us nuclear weapons." Although this call to action was rhetorically justified, it was inconsistent with Reagan's apparent goal of attracting European support for the proposal.

II. REACTIONS IN EUROPE

Fears of Decoupling

Under headlines proclaiming a switch "from retaliation to nuclear defense," some European journals faithfully reported Reagan's reference to U.S. interests as being "inextricably linked" to those of the allies.¹⁸ Nevertheless, most critics of the plan seemingly ignored Reagan's promise that the allies too would be shielded under the new defensive strategy. Instead, Europeans complained that the proposed strategic shift overlooked their interests. In Great Britain, for example, the Social Democrat Party's foreign affairs spokesman inquired in a letter to the *Times*, "what are France and Britain expected to do about the ABM . . . roof that is supposed to be put over the U.S.?"¹⁹

In West Germany, *Der Spiegel* proclaimed that Reagan had sought a "change in the basic strategy of the USA" which would offer "total protection for the USA through lasers in space."²⁰ "Back on earth," the article continued, "Reagan then wanted to offer hope to the allies as well," through a retreat from his unpopular "zero-option" proposal at the

18. "Reagan Seeks Switch from Retaliation to Nuclear Defense," *Times* (London), 24 March 1983, p. 1.

19. Letter from Lord Wayland Kennet, *Times* (London), 25 March 1983, p. 15.

20. "Wechsel in der Grundstrategie der USA," *Der Spiegel*, 4 April 1983, p. 120.

Geneva arms talks. Thus, according to *Der Spiegel*, any hope for the allies was seen to spring not from SDI, but from progress in Geneva.

This vision of a purely U.S.-oriented defensive system, when combined with the prospect of the Soviet Union acquiring a greater defensive capability of its own, led many Europeans to conclude that the long-feared "decoupling" of U.S. power from the defense of Europe was closer than ever before.

Many Europeans feared that the superpowers, protected by defensive shields, might deliberately avoid a fateful escalation of war to an international exchange of missiles, and prefer to fight out a nuclear conflict within Europe alone. Indeed, persistent concerns have been voiced that "the defensive space shield for the nearly absolute security of the USA would necessarily decouple the European allies from defense by the USA."²¹ Such sentiments troubled German Defense Minister Manfred Woerner, for example, who fears that SDI could lead to a "Fortress America" mentality in the United States.²² And former French Defense Minister Charles Hernu even suggested that because defensive systems of the United States and Soviet Union might "rid them of any rivalry," Europeans might justifiably fear superpower "complicity."²³

The Reagan administration has tried to soothe such apprehensions through repeated assertions that "the security of the US is inseparable from the security of Western Europe,"²⁴ and that "America could not live in a world in which Europe was overrun."²⁵ Indeed, Secretary Weinberger has suggested not only that the envisioned strategic defense "will be equally effective" for Europe, but even that the initiative might "secure earlier success in dealing with intermediate range missiles than strategic range weapons."²⁶ Yet although Reagan's SDI speech in 1983 specifically included suggestions that a missile defense system would shield the allies, European journals reported as novel Secretary Weinberger's remarks in February of 1985 that "if the initiative works, it will work against intermediate-range as well as intercontinental-range [missiles], so there should be no suggestion of decoupling."²⁷ *Der Spiegel* articulated a com-

21. "'Krieg der Sterne' — Krise im Bündnis," *Der Spiegel*, 18 February 1985, p. 108.

22. James M. Markham, "Bonn is Worried by U.S. Arms Research," *New York Times*, 14 April 1984, p. 3.

23. George C. Wilson, "French Minister Warns against 'Star Wars' Plan," *Washington Post*, 10 February 1985, p. 17.

24. Caspar W. Weinberger, Speech before the Foreign Press Center, Washington, D.C., 19 December 1984, quoted in U.S., Air Force, *Selected Statements*, No. 84-4 (December 1984), p. 14.

25. Caspar W. Weinberger, Question and Answer Period following Speech, *ibid.*, p. 15.

26. *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

27. Quoted in George C. Wilson, "Weinberger Says 'Star Wars' Would Protect Europe, U.S.," *Washington Post*, 9 February 1985, p. 12.

mon concern: "How this protection is supposed to be realized technically is unclear even to the experts. Short- and intermediate-range weapons would, in their extremely short flight time, . . . have to be identified, located, and destroyed."²⁸ According to some, the implementation of strategic defense would highlight a remarkable shift not only in the strategic policy of NATO, but also in the underlying purposes of the alliance itself. From an organization devoted to using America's military strength to protect Europe from a Soviet attack, NATO would have evolved into an organization which, because of the difficulty of intercepting intermediate range missiles, *risks* European security for the protection of North America.

The Geneva Arms Negotiations

In November 1983, in the face of NATO's insistence on placing new ballistic and cruise missiles in Western Europe, the Soviet Union refused to continue the INF and START arms negotiations with the United States, begun in November 1981, and June 1982, respectively. But in late 1984, the Soviet Union announced that it was ready to return to the Geneva talks, this time with the express intention of stopping SDI. The renewed prospect of dialogue on arms control was welcomed in Western Europe, but with increasingly mixed emotions. To be sure, it was apparently SDI which had brought the Soviet negotiators back to the table, but the Soviets' enthusiasm for preventing the program now seemed matched by the Americans' determination to proceed with it.

Unlike some other American projects, SDI appeared to be no mere "bargaining chip" designed to secure Soviet arms reductions. On the contrary, President Reagan seemed singularly committed to his plan. Evidence mounted that the American domestic debate over SDI had degenerated from an exchange of rational arguments to an emotional, unreal dispute. Support for SDI had become, in the United States, "a touchstone of loyalty to the president."²⁹ As *Die Zeit* concluded, "There is no indication that President Reagan wants to abandon his vision. As things stand now, the question of space weapons stands in the way of arms talks like a huge rock."³⁰ In February 1985, after Reagan had revealed his intention to continue the research program even if the Soviet

28. "Krieg der Sterne" — Krise im Bündnis," p. 109. See also Sidney D. Drell, *The Reagan Strategic Defense Initiative: A Technical, Political, and Arms Control Assessment* (Stanford, Calif.: International Strategic Institute at Stanford, 1984), p. 75.

29. Leslie H. Gelb, "Vision of Space Defense Posing New Challenges," *New York Times*, 3 March 1985, p. 10.

30. Christoph Bertram, "Ein Traum gegen eine Hoffnung," *Die Zeit* (Hamburg), 4 January 1985, p. 3, translated in *World Press Review*, March 1985, p. 37.

Union met his demands on reducing offensive missiles, one German journalist lamented that this statement demonstrated precisely "how little prospect for success the Geneva arms reduction talks with Moscow have." This "space mania" afflicting the Americans would inevitably get in the way of clear-headed bargaining.³¹

Although the Geneva talks have been a cause for grumbling about SDI, however, they have also served to prompt some expressions of *support* for Reagan's plan: at this time when a united front would help the U.S. negotiators, most European leaders agree with the Americans that "now is the time for alliance solidarity."³²

Yet if "now is the time for alliance solidarity," one wonders what the future holds. The Reagan administration has been pressing the allies hard for vocal SDI support. But as European officials demonstrate public solidarity, they may be harboring private resentment at the insistent attitude of the Americans.

In mid-March 1985, for example, Secretary Weinberger set a sixty-day deadline within which other countries were to announce whether or not they wanted to participate in SDI research.³³ Although later characterized as a misunderstanding, this apparent imposition of a two-month time constraint on the already difficult process of building domestic political consensus struck many Europeans as an unnecessary irritation. Yet there seemed little choice but to abide by the request. The West German government seemed unable even to condition its participation on U.S. acceptance of certain face-saving measures regarding technology transfer. The Americans, according to a German journalist, "demand a clear yes or no answer." By the time of the Bonn economic summit meeting in May 1985, it was thought, President Reagan desired "to announce to his public at home that now the Europeans too share [his] bold vision . . . and with no ifs, ands, or buts."³⁴ This explanation, whether accurate or not, illustrates the likelihood of increasing intra-alliance tensions, which may find sharp expression if the Geneva talks cease to exist as a unifying influence.

Economic Considerations

In addition to questioning the military and diplomatic wisdom of SDI, Europeans have worried that the plan may impose unnecessarily heavy

31. "'Krieg der Sterne' — Krise im Bündnis," p. 109.

32. Bernard Gwertzman, "Craxi and Reagan Discuss Arms Plan," *New York Times*, 6 March 1985, p. B9, quoting President Reagan.

33. "U.S. Asks Allies to Join Space-Weapons Effort," *New York Times*, 27 March 1985, p. A12.

34. "Was Weiss Ich Denn," *Der Spiegel*, 8 April 1985, p. 22.

financial burdens. Britain and France, as countries with their own nuclear deterrents, are particularly concerned with the impact of Reagan's expressed goal of making all nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete." The possibility of a new Soviet defensive system to counter SDI could require a massive shifting of resources to their long-neglected conventional forces, at enormous expense.

Moreover, such concerns about the costs of Europe's conventional forces arose precisely at a time when influential U.S. senators — Ted Stevens of Alaska and Sam Nunn of Georgia, in particular — were accusing the Europeans of spending too little on conventional defense.³⁵ In December 1984, partly to placate these senators, the NATO defense ministers approved a \$7.85 billion program for improvements over the next six years. Even without a change in strategic policy, then, European taxpayers are likely to complain about the high costs of satisfying American demands.

Against the possible costs of SDI, however, several European leaders have weighed the potential economic rewards of going along with Reagan's plan, and they have offered their qualified support for SDI research, on the understanding that their countries would be able to participate in that research. Italy's Prime Minister Bettino Craxi, for example, has cited the "mutual advantages in the scientific and technological field" which SDI research promises.³⁶ Even the French, who have expressed only hostility to SDI, found themselves in the difficult position at the 1985 Wehrkunde Conference of simultaneously attacking the Reagan plan and welcoming the research opportunities. According to one U.S. delegate, "The French cannot be bought, but they can be rented."³⁷

West Germany, too, with its "growing sense of economic recession and technological lag,"³⁸ has felt the need to avoid being "technologically decoupled" from the research program, as Chancellor Kohl put it.³⁹ According to Kohl, "SDI will give the United States a big technological advantage whether or not the research leads to its intended goals. Highly industrialized countries like West Germany and the other European allies must not be left behind."⁴⁰

35. See George C. Wilson, "Nunn to Broaden Debate on NATO by Arguing War Plans Are Flawed," *Washington Post*, 21 February 1985, p. 8.

36. "Craxi and Reagan Discuss Arms Plan," p. B9.

37. Quoted in George C. Wilson, "Hard Sell to Skeptical Audience," *Washington Post*, 12 February 1985, p. 12.

38. Christoph Bertram, "Europe and America in 1983," *Foreign Affairs* 62 (Special Issue 1984):619.

39. George C. Wilson, "French Minister Warns against 'Star Wars' Plan," *Washington Post*, 10 February 1985, p. 17.

40. James M. Markham, "Kohl Gives the U.S. Guarded Support on Space Defense," *New York Times*, 10 February 1985, p. 1.

The day following Chancellor Kohl's remarks, Defense Minister Woerner revealed the extent of Germany's ambitions. Citing the strict U.S. policy of restricting transfers of high technology abroad, he remarked that Germany would participate in the research only if the restrictions were lifted and "there are no more secrets between allies."⁴¹ Chancellor Kohl reiterated these sentiments when he tentatively endorsed the research program in April 1985: he insisted on "full participation and guaranteed free exchange" of research findings.⁴²

So far, the United States has encouraged the perception in Europe that participation in the research phase may offer enough economic rewards to offset the domestic political risks of endorsing SDI. But as Assistant Defense Secretary Richard Perle has noted, joint research with the Europeans may be "slowed" by U.S. concerns that sensitive technologies might leak to the Soviet Union.⁴³

In recent months the situation has been complicated by a French-originated plan known as "Eureka," a plan for cooperation in high technology research among the West European countries themselves.⁴⁴ According to President Mitterand, the program's ultimate goal is "the technological independence of Western Europe." The proposed areas of research include telecommunications, robots, biotechnology, and solar energy. Unlike SDI, Eureka's focus is strictly civilian; any militarily useful developments would occur only as side benefits. The plan thus holds much of the same attractiveness as SDI for the Europeans, but without SDI's politically controversial aspects. And Eureka is a European plan, not an American one. It thus appeals to the natural desires of those wishing to re-establish a sense of European self-sufficiency.

At a time when Eureka's specific goals are vague and its financing uncertain, eighteen nations have already agreed to take part in the plan.⁴⁵ France has promised to contribute \$125 million to the effort, and even such neutral countries as Switzerland, Austria, Finland, and Sweden have expressed support for the plan. Compared to the Europeans' lukewarm support for SDI, Eureka's popularity is thus striking.

41. David Fouquet, "US Seeks Europe's Support for 'Star Wars,'" *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 February 1985, p. 11.

42. "Bonn Backs Research into Space-Defense Arms," *Boston Globe*, 19 April 1985, p. 9.

43. Tim Carrington, "U.S. Addresses Allies' Doubts on Star Wars," *Wall Street Journal*, 11 February 1985, p. 27.

44. See Philippe Lemaître, "Paris invite l'Europe à relever le défi américain," *Le Monde* (Paris), 19 April 1985, p. 1.

45. Participants include Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and West Germany.

III. SDI AND DETERRENCE

In light of the various European responses to SDI, one wonders whether President Reagan might have presented his program in a manner more likely to win over his European audience. Specifically, might he have launched SDI while at the same time demonstrating a commitment to accepted alliance strategies? A look at SDI's compatibility with the strategy of deterrence suggests that he might have.

Ballistic missile defense can fit into either of two images of military protection. First, it can be viewed as a shelter from attack, a *physical* protection from a nuclear onslaught. Second, it can be viewed as a means of discouraging a nuclear attack to begin with, a *psychological* protection from Soviet planners who might otherwise expect some gains to be had from launching their missiles. According to this image, ballistic missile defense would *deter* aggression not by rendering it unreasonably dangerous, but by rendering it ineffective. Or at least the greater degree of *uncertainty* which missile defense would instill in potential aggressors would make them less likely to launch an attack: the costs — political, economic, and physical — would outweigh the now less likely benefits of aggression.

In general, SDI has been viewed according to the first image: although deployment of a defensive system might strengthen the threat of retaliation, the plan emphasizes technological rather than psychological protection.

This emphasis on technological protection may have resulted from Reagan's discomfort with the image of the countries with nuclear weapons as "people facing themselves across a table, each with a cocked gun, and no one knowing whether someone might tighten their finger on the trigger."⁴⁶ The administration's focus on technological protection may also have resulted from perceived analogies drawn between SDI and the Manhattan Project forty years before. The success of that all-out effort to win a technological advantage over the United States' World War II adversaries taught Americans that scientific efforts could help secure an early peace.

But history has taught the Europeans a different lesson: to avoid the ravages of war in their countries, war must never be allowed to start. Europeans have thus accepted as an article of faith the tenet that *detering* the Warsaw Pact countries from attack is the only acceptable approach to military planning. As Johan J. Holst wrote in 1969, the European attitude toward deterrence is a function of "both the *realization* of the

46. David Hoffman, "Reagan Seized Idea Shelved in '80 Race," p. A19, quoting President Reagan at News Conference of 25 March 1985.

extreme vulnerability of all the states of Europe to the power of other states and a *reconciliation* with that position which . . . has been part of their historical predicament for centuries."⁴⁷ Former French Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson has well illustrated the perceived historical significance of the current system of stability: he reportedly praised nuclear deterrence as "the biggest advance in civilization since the advent of warfare."⁴⁸

Even Margaret Thatcher, who supports SDI, found it necessary to remind the U.S. Congress of the meaning of deterrence to Europeans: "We are in the front line. The frontier of freedom cuts across our continent." Quoting Winston Churchill, she warned, "Be careful above all things not to let go of the atomic weapon until you are sure, and more than sure, that other means of preserving peace are in your hands."⁴⁹

In light of these differing perspectives, the negative European response to Reagan's rejection of retaliatory deterrence has been understandable. Yet one wonders whether this reaction might have been avoided if Reagan had chosen to portray SDI according to the second of the two images — as merely a new, and in the event of its failure, a safer, form of "deterrence."

Instead of ominously "launching an effort which holds the promise of changing the course of human history," and "ask[ing] for your prayers" "[a]s we cross this threshold,"⁵⁰ the President might have sought merely to insert the idea of victory denial into the common understanding of deterrence. He might, for example, have amplified his statement earlier in the speech: "'Deterrence' means simply this: making sure any adversary . . . concludes that the risks to him outweigh any potential gains." The President was speaking here of the need for new offensive weapons. But by focusing on the "potential gains" side of the deterrence equation, rather than the "risks" aspect, he might convincingly have fit SDI into current strategic policy. The initiative would thus have appeared less revolutionary, less disruptive of the "established images and prejudices" which have traditionally influenced political interpretations of ballistic missile defense.⁵¹ Reagan's strategic product, in this different packaging, might thus have been easier to sell in the international marketplace.

47. Johan J. Holst, "Missile Defense: Implications for Europe," in *Why ABM?*, eds. Johan J. Holst and William Schneider, Jr. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1969) p. 196.

48. Quoted by Steven Erlanger, "In Europe, Dubious Acquiescence," *Boston Globe*, 10 March 1985, p. 20. Cf. Secretary Weinberger's remark that SDI offers mankind "the greatest hope of any strategic concept of at least 100 years." "Weinberger Says 'Star Wars' Offers Greatest Strategic Hope," *Washington Times*, 26 September 1985, p. 5.

49. Speech before Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C., 20 February 1985, in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 15 March 1985, p. 1.

50. Speech of 23 March 1983, in *Weekly Compilation*, p. 448.

51. Johan J. Holst, "Missile Defense," p. 187.

This is not to suggest that such a change in the active vocabulary of administration members would have been easy. Indeed, most American officials seem to perceive "deterrence" and "threatened retaliation" as exact synonyms. Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle, for example, seems fully to have accepted McNamara's insistence that "assured destruction is the very essence of the whole deterrence concept."⁵² In countering the suggestion that a new strategic policy has already been implemented, he revealed his perception that deterrence implies destruction: "It is not true that we've already made the decision to abandon mutual assured deterrence [sic] or the policy that seeks to achieve security by the threat of retaliation."⁵³

One sign that such thinking may not be universal was Secretary Weinberger's apparent recognition that Europeans have been reluctant to accept SDI precisely because the plan "challenges conventional thinking."⁵⁴ Indeed, in a speech before the Foreign Press Center in Washington, D.C., he took steps to accommodate conventional thinking: "Defenses that could deny the Soviet missiles the military objectives of their attack, or deny the Soviets confidence in the achievement of those objectives, would discourage them from even considering such an attack, and thus be a highly effective *deterrent*."⁵⁵

Ambassador Paul Nitze apparently shares this new understanding of European attitudes. In a speech before the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, he stated:

A popular view of deterrence is that it is almost solely a matter of posing to an aggressor high potential costs . . . But deterrence can also function effectively if one has the ability, through defense . . . , to deny the attacker the gains he might otherwise have hoped to realize. Our hope and intent is to shift the deterrent balance from one which is based primarily on the punitive threat . . . to one in which . . . defenses play a greater and greater role.⁵⁶

But it is regrettable that this identification of the dual nature of deterrence did not come earlier. In February 1984, Secretary Weinberger clearly distinguished deterrence from defense; "not content to rely on

52. "Text of McNamara Speech on Anti-China Missile Defense and U.S. Nuclear Strategy," *New York Times*, 19 September 1967, p. 18.

53. Leslie H. Gelb, "Vision of Space Defense Posing New Challenges," p. 10 (emphasis added).

54. Michael Getler, "Pressure Grows for Early Use of 'Star Wars' Technology," *Washington Post*, 14 February 1985, p. 1. See also "Secretary Weinberger: SDI Violates Conventional Wisdom," *Defense Daily*, 12 August 1985, p. 226.

55. *Selected Statements*, p. 13 (emphasis added).

56. Paul H. Nitze, "The Objectives of Arms Control," 1985 Alistair Buchan Memorial Lecture, at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 28 March 1985.

deterrence alone, we have begun in earnest to search for a . . . *defense* against Soviet missiles. . . ." Deterrence, he said, is founded on "NATO's ability to retaliate against the Soviet Union."⁵⁷ Although he later outlined SDI in detail, he drew no connection between that plan and the strategy of deterrence.⁵⁸ Indeed, as late as the Winter-Spring 1985 issue of the *SAIS Review*, Secretary Weinberger wrote a short article on "The Nature of Deterrence," but made no effort to emphasize SDI's compatibility with deterrence.⁵⁹ Thus, during most of the two years following Reagan's March 1983 speech, SDI became firmly established as evidence of Reagan's "antideterrence."⁶⁰ More recent statements to the contrary have not dislodged that perception.⁶¹

IV. CONCLUSION

If in the past the development of new technologies has prompted reassessment of NATO strategies, the controversy surrounding SDI may represent the impact of new *ideas* on military planning. SDI's apparent rejection of deterrence, based on technologies not yet developed, was an idea for which the alliance was unprepared: Europeans reacted to the plan with open skepticism and renewed questions about the sincerity of the American commitment to NATO.

But the United States too has gone through a period of reassessment, and has come to a new understanding of European thinking on defense matters. Once seeking only to persuade Europeans of the merits of the U.S. position, some American officials seem themselves to have been persuaded that they should take into account European perspectives on defense. Far from destroying NATO, then, SDI may ultimately contribute to its strength: the program has introduced a period of reflection on both sides of the Atlantic about each continent's interests in the alliance. And despite the current anxieties about a strategic shift, that period of reassessment may contribute much to future cohesion and mutual understanding.

57. U.S., Department of Defense, *Report of Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger to the Congress*, p. 30.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 267.

59. Caspar W. Weinberger, "The Nature of Deterrence," *SAIS Review* 5 (Winter-Spring 1985):27.

60. Steven Erlanger, "In Europe, Dubious Acquiescence," p. 20, quoting unnamed European diplomats.

61. See, e.g., Christoph Bertram, "Strategic Defense and the Western Alliance," *Datadatus* 114 (Summer 1985):294-95.