



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

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Dear Charles,

The US Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI)

With the Prime Minister's forthcoming meeting with President Reagan in mind, the Foreign Secretary feels it would be useful for her to see the enclosed article, which appeared recently in 'Foreign Affairs' magazine. Of the four authors (George Bundy, George Kennan, Robert McNamara and Gerard Smith) McNamara as US Defense Secretary was responsible for preparing the political ground in the United States which made possible the ABM Treaty, in the wake of the first "strategic defence" debate in the late 1960s; and Smith was the chief US negotiator of the SALT I Agreement concluded between President Nixon and Mr Brezhnev in 1972.

Two points are of particular interest. First, there is the article's central proposition, that it is impossible for the US to pursue with success both ballistic missile defence in the terms conceived under the SDI and agreement on strategic arms control. The Americans were the first to insist on the logic of the offensive/defensive link which the Russians have now belatedly acknowledged. But they still appear reluctant to accept that the linkage will inevitably require mutual restraint on BMD, if reductions in offensive forces are to be achieved.

There is of course another, political rather than strategic, linkage. At her meeting with senior Ministers on 7 November the Prime Minister drew attention to this linkage, and to the leverage US efforts to develop BMD should provide in extracting concessions from the Russians in the nuclear arms negotiations. These two elements of linkage are brought out in greater detail in the paper on SDI and ASATs which was commissioned at that meeting and which has now been completed as part of the preparations for the Prime Minister's meeting with President Reagan on 22 December.

Secondly, the article stresses the need to reaffirm and even strengthen the ABM Treaty. Apart from individual compliance issues (such as persisting uncertainties over the Krasnoyarsk radar), the Treaty draws a very fragile line between permitted research into BMD and field-testing of new

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systems. If the Treaty - a key security interest for the UK - is not simply to be rendered irrelevant by the march of events over the next few years, a better basis for US/Soviet confidence in its future seems required.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram.

*Yours ever,*

*Len Appleyard*

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"THE PRESIDENT'S CHOICE: STAR WARS OR ARMS CONTROL"

Summary

I

1. SDI biggest nuclear arms competition and arms control issue since 1972. Well intentioned but unrealistic: a danger to mankind. Duty of Congress and US public, as well as of victorious President, to see it is radically constrained. (pp264-5)

II

2. Basic flaw: SDI technically unachievable. No prospect of a leak-proof defence against ballistic missiles, let alone other nuclear systems. President's concern to reduce nuclear peril understandable, but has stirred false expectations. In contrast to conventional arms, destructiveness of nuclear weapons means even minimal leakage in defence system is unacceptable. Apart from the President and Mr Weinberger, Administration spokesmen admit perfect defence unattainable. (pp265-7)

3. Improved US defences certain to provoke determined Soviet effort to ensure missiles will get through. Regardless of technicalities involved, Star Wars defence fraught with technical problems eg:

(i) Must work perfectly first time without prior testing;

(ii) Must function automatically, without political control;

(iii) Space-based assets inherently vulnerable to prior or counter-attack;

(iv) Defences ineffective against cruise missiles, bombers and pre-positioned warheads. Hence would provoke Soviet shift from ballistic missiles to other delivery systems. (pp267-9)



III

4. Partial defence as unacceptable as comprehensive defence envisaged in President's speech. Would:

- (i) Destroy ABM Treaty;
- (ii) Stimulate Soviet offensive and defensive force proliferation;
- (iii) Deepen East/West mistrust.

Size and time-span of "Star Wars" programme ensures strong Soviet response. Combination of defensive efforts with modernisation of US offensive nuclear forces provocative, stimulating fears of a first-strike strategy. (pp269-272)

5. Conceivable that SDI might deny Russians a first-strike capability. But already denied by US survivable forces and existing attack uncertainties. Even local defence of missile fields would damage ABM Treaty regime and provoke fears of future expansion of defences. (p272)

6. President's offer to share SDI technology with Russians would amount to giving away key to US defences. European Allies recognize certainty that SDI would provoke large-scale competition in both offensive and defensive systems. US risks repeating past mistakes. (pp272-3)

IV

7. By outlawing offensive systems ABM Treaty a safeguard against unbridled arms competition. Threatened by SDI. Even hardware demonstrations during research phase could infringe Treaty. Congress should monitor programme carefully and block funds for activities that threaten Treaty while urging Administration to insist on Soviet compliance (eg, over Krasnoyark radar). But serious discussion of compliance issues impossible if SDI non-negotiable. (pp273-6)



8. Congress should guard against overcommitment of financial/scientific resources to SDI: even though doomed to failure, project could still cost hundreds of billions of dollars. But prudent research on defence possibilities should continue as insurance against a Soviet breakthrough. (pp267-7)

V

9. Unless President changes course, no alternative to damage-limitation by Congress. But arms control is President's second-term priority. Choice lies between SDI or arms control: the two not compatible. Pursuing SDI implies rejection of basis for seeking reductions in offensive forces. President should opt for arms control negotiating options eg:

- (i) Re-affirmation and improvement of ABM Treaty;
- (ii) Exploration of possibilities for agreement on peaceful uses of space;
- (iii) Renewed attempt to cap strategic warhead levels;
- (iv) Improvement in high-level communication with Russians on basis of common interests in reducing nuclear threat. (pp277-8)