

The Politics of Outer Space: Superpowers' Perception of SDI During the Cold War Period

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The Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) was a proposed missile defence system intended to protect the United States from attack by ballistic strategic nuclear weapons (Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles and Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles). The concept was first announced publicly by President Ronald Reagan on 23 March 1983. The Strategic Defence Initiative Organization (SDIO) was set up in 1984 within the United States Department of Defence to oversee development. Russia reacted by proposing 'Star Peace', while secretly pursuing ballistic missile defence programme.

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On 23rd. March 1983, Ronald Reagan, President of USA made a speech that was stunning and portentous, in which, he called on American scientists to create a total defence against ballistic missiles that would have features and potentials such that it could support a radical change in nuclear strategy. This controversial and seemingly fictional science proposal was officially named as "Strategic Defence Initiative" (SDI), euphemistically called, 'Star Wars'. It opened a new vista of warfare, that was beyond the land and the high seas. The outer space became the theatre of war.

The concept of SDI came about mainly because of an idea that Edward Teller put forth before Reagan, where he proposed building a type of ray that will use the nuclear explosion to produce intense x-ray that will be able to exterminate Russian missiles targeted towards the USA and would have the ability to destroy weapons in space. The idea opened a new vista of warfare and the vicious arms race. SDI was conceived as a research and development effort carried out to examine the technical feasibility and development of hardware systems for an advanced ballistic missile defence (BMD) system directed against Russia. The system was conceived as both terrestrial and space-based with several layers of defensive weapon systems, which included, *inter alia*, lasers, particle beams, microwave/radio frequency devices, kinetic energy weapons and ground-based endo-atmospheric and exo-atmospheric missiles. The envisaged four layers of the system envisioned successful surveillance, target acquisition, tracking, the guidance of the weapons and kill mechanisms bundled with advanced space-based command and C³I (Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence). It was supposed to provide fool proof area defence against Russian ICBM and SLBM attack against USA and NATO allies. The Strategic Defence Initiative Programme (SDIP) consisted of five major programme elements, that is, Surveillance, Acquisition, Tracking and Kill Assessment (SATKA), Directed Energy Weapons (DEW), Kinetic Energy Weapons (KEW), Systems Concepts and Battle Management and Survivability, Lethality and Key Support Technology.

The SDIP blueprint was indicative of the fact that it was far just a defensive system. The programme involved, among other things, Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), Anti-Satellite (ASAT) capability and Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD). BMD became the *sine qua non* of SDI. Indeed, it was slated to rely on military technology programme, and everything except defensive and, therefore, SDI began the process of militarisation of outer space. The USA viewed space as the next military frontier guaranteeing invulnerability from nuclear attack weapons and at the same time directly terrestrial targets.

The vicious strategy of Star Wars is evident from the declassified documents of the CIA. Tom E. Bearden, in 'Star Wars Now' described how scalar waves would be produced as it travels through space, using the 'Aharonov-Bohm Effect' to unleash nuclear bomb-level forces. This, in essence, would hide the electrical and magnetic sources and produce two identical beams of energy, which cannot be heard (if kept at identical 180°). This has to be synchronised with an electrical wave signal so that signals cannot be sensed by normal receivers. This type of signals is called scalar waves which produce no electrical or magnetic changes as it

travels through space. Concurrently the enemy transmitter will be jammed, and if the jamming source is tried to be blown by the enemy, it will have a counter effect where the enemy population will be blown away (it will have the effect of self-goal like that in a football match, that is counter-unproductive)

In spite of the high-profile use of scientific technology to usher in SDI, USA was behind Russia in Charged Particle Beam devices (CPBs), albeit both had equality in High Energy Laser (HEL) programmes. The Russians were assumed, by CIA, to be ahead in areas of CPBs based military weapons application and many other critical Particle-Beam Weapons (PBW) technologies (of Star War). It was generally thought that Russian space weapons research was closely parallel to that of USA as of 1983. Arguably the Russians had deployed Anti-Satellite Weapons (ASWs).

CIA director Stansfield Turner felt that it was important that the USA advance Star War programme before Russia getting the leverage, given the advantages the latter had on laser technology. Indeed 'Star war' became the bargaining chip for both countries. The long-standing Russian calculus of argument against SDI centred around the assertion that SDI would not guarantee invulnerability from nuclear weapons and hence will stand in the way of elimination of nuclear arsenal. Gorbachev expressed fears that SDI will up the arms race in all areas and the threat of war. It was in consonance with the new thinking of Gorbachev, which emphasised on looking for a way out of the nuclear dead lock and not creating a new super weapon by keeping weapons out of the outer space. No wonder the Russians advanced the proposal of 'Star Peace'. Kremlin was not in a position to pump unlimited money to space war programme whereas; the Reagan administration sought SDI as the bait to bail it out from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty. The hawks in the USA cried out loud for SDI because the 'defensive shields' could detonate any missile but would not be dangerous to the people being shielded. Given the billions of dollars spent on laser weapons research by both the countries, it was highly unexpected that the two countries would back away from creating their areas of influence in the outer space and weaponize it. The space game had begun, and there was no going back.

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