

Dominating inner space

Opposition to President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative (Star Wars) has assumed a theological intensity. Plans to create a space-based anti-missile system have become a new rallying point for partisans of the left, eclipsing acid rain, Nicaragua and those nasty cruise missiles.

Our Canadian newspapers are filled with anguished columns denouncing the SDI plan. Even *The Globe and Mail* warned Canada not to become a Star Wars "accomplice," as if efforts to defend the U.S. and Canada against nuclear attack were war-mongering incarnate. Brian Mulroney at least supports the SDI concept. But, at the same time, Joe Clark has gone on record that Canada will not allow any of its components in our territory.

Even so noted a luminary as the astronomer Carl Sagan has taken to writing me, patiently explaining why my support of SDI is mistaken. Our TV newscasters frown each time they mention SDI, sounding very much like they are announcing the Day After.

The critics of SDI are saying that the system won't work; even if it does, its implementation will likely provoke a war. Here is the scenario: Moscow learns that the U.S. is about to loft a constellation of laser battle stations into space that will neutralize its offensive missile force. Confronted with the "lose them or use them" choice, Moscow opts for war rather than face strategic surrender.

So, the U.S. is being urged not to develop a system that will protect itself, in part or in full, from a Soviet nuclear attack. Better, say the critics, to live under the threat of nuclear destruction than to tinker with the balance of terror.

What all of these critics have failed to grasp is that Russia has had a SDI in place for decades — and no war has ensued. The Soviet SDI has been built in inner space, from ground level to 100,000 feet altitude. Here is why.

The U.S. has a total of about 10,800 strategic nuclear warheads. Russia has about 9,000. The Soviet warheads are, on the average, far more powerful than those of the U.S. For example, the monster Soviet SS-18 missile can deliver a 16,700-lb. warhead as opposed to the U.S. Minuteman's 2,400-lb. warhead.

Over 60% of Soviet warheads — and 75% of explosive force — are carried on their large, land-based missiles. By contrast, almost 50% of U.S. nuclear warheads — and probably 70% of explosive power — are carried on B-52 bombers. What this means, simply, is that elderly American bombers, rather than missiles, are still the key nuclear striking force of the U.S.

During the late 1940s, Russia began construction of a vast national air defence network. In the ensuing decades, Russia has poured as much as 25% of its entire military budget into air defence — defence against the U.S. bomber force.

Today, Russia's air defence forces, the Voyska-PVO, include some 600,000 troops, 1,250 interceptors, 10 TU-126 radar planes, 13,000 ready-to-fire anti-aircraft missiles, 9,000 guns and over 7,000 radars.

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In addition, Russia is building a wall of new SA-12 radars atop steel towers designed to intercept low-flying cruise missiles. Backup is provided by MiG-25M Foxhounds with look-down, shoot-down radars and missiles.

This massive defensive system is designed to do one thing — shoot down intruding U.S. bombers. U.S. defence experts consider the Soviet system to be effective. This means that Russia has in large part neutralized the major portion of U.S. nuclear strike forces — bombers. U.S. plans to now rely on cruise missiles rather than penetrating bombers confirm Soviet defence capabilities.

Russia has thus done in inner space precisely what President Reagan is trying to accomplish in outer space. Unlike American bombers, Russia's missiles can only be stopped in outer space. In this offensive/defensive nuclear equation, America is at a serious disadvantage.

Did Russia's successful defence of its inner space provoke war? Of course not. The U.S. simply accepted it and sought ways to slip around thickening Soviet defences. Today, Russia's population is relatively safe from massive bomber attack. At the same time, all of North America, with hardly any air defence left, is terribly vulnerable to the growing threat posed by new Soviet bombers.

Of equal interest, the U.S. and Russia agreed in 1972 that each side could deploy one anti-ballistic system (ABM) — the precursor to Star Wars. The U.S. opted to abandon its safeguard system. Russia, by contrast, went ahead with a system around Moscow. Today, the Soviet capital is protected by radars and 32 SH-4 and SH-8 interceptor missiles which are now being improved.

In 1985, it was revealed that Moscow had also fielded new anti-missile radars and what appeared to be components for an ABM system protecting its SS-18 missile silos in Siberia. Clearly, Russia was moving ahead with its own SDI — while complaining that Star Wars was "aggressive" and "war-like."

Those who denounce SDI should ponder this reality. Moscow has already protected itself against bomber and some cruise missile attack. It is constantly improving its air defences. The defence-minded Russians would certainly have moved to space defence if their technology had permitted.

Now that the U.S. is trying to catch up, and safeguard its own population and key military targets, Moscow is mounting a huge propaganda campaign to neutralize America's technological lead — and right on cue our press responds with deep alarm.