

# Moscow's denunciations of ABM defense belied by the Soviet policy record

by Rachel Douglas

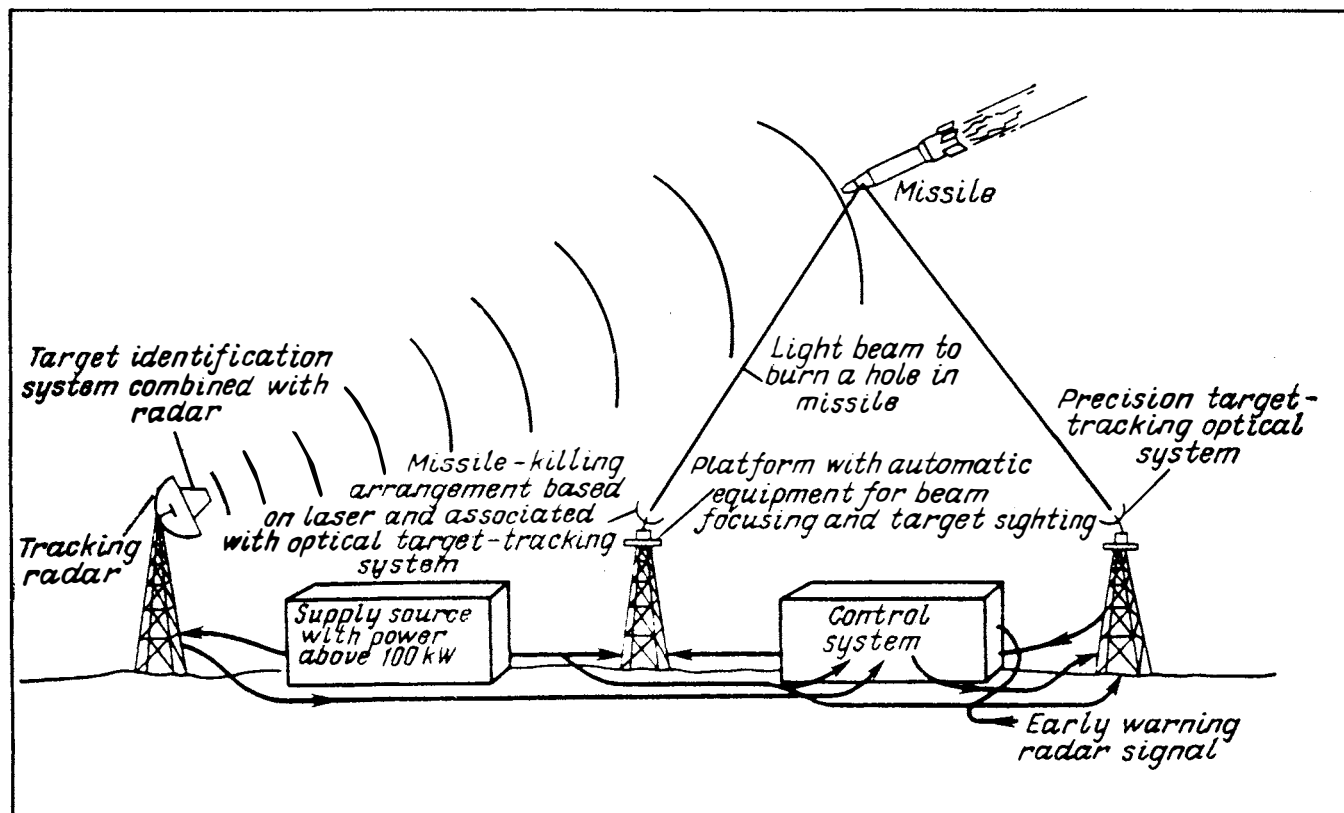
Sixteen years ago, the late Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin gave a Western audience a justification of strategic defensive weapons systems. Although brief, Kosygin's statement at a London news conference on Feb. 9, 1967 was conceptually and morally coherent with President Ronald Reagan's March 23 motivation of the U.S. development of such weapons systems. The main point was that defensive weapons could not be condemned for destabilizing the strategic balance.

This item from the recent historical record, together with manifest Soviet military policies both then and now, are enough to show the absurdity of Soviet propaganda against the Reagan policy today. Among the Soviet statements pro-

fessing outrage at the President's March 23 speech, the most curious was an "Appeal to All Scientists of the World," issued April 10 over two-hundred-some signatures of persons identified as Soviet scientists:

Based on the knowledge that we, as scientists, possess, and proceeding from an understanding of the very nature of nuclear weapons, we declare with all responsibility, that there are no effective defensive means in nuclear war and it is a practical impossibility to create them. . . .

In reality, the attempt to create so-called "defensive weaponry" against the other side's strategic nuclear



This diagram of an anti-missile system comes from a book by N. Sobolev titled *Lasers and their Prospects*, published in 1974 in Moscow.

forces, which the U. S. President is talking about, inevitably yields the appearance of yet another element, increasing the American "first strike" potential. . . . Such "defensive weaponry" can do nothing for a country undergoing a massive surprise attack, since it is patently incapable of defending the overwhelming majority of the population. The use of anti-missile weaponry is more appropriate precisely for the attacking side, striving to reduce the ability to make a retaliatory strike. However it also cannot fully prevent that retaliatory strike. . . .

We are further convinced that this act will lead to a sharp deterioration of international security. . . .

Could the drafter of that statement, and those who prevailed upon some of the most eminent Soviet scientists to sign it, have been seeking deliberately to undermine the U.S.S.R.'s own defense programs? It can hardly invigorate the morale of such scientists as N. G. Basov and Ye. P. Velikhov, leaders in the Soviet fusion program whose theories and technologies are contiguous with those required for defensive beam weapons, to sign a ritual incantation they know to be false! Their names, furthermore, were published alongside those of such pseudo-scientists as B.N. Ponomaryov, party secretary for relations with communist parties abroad, and Dzhermen Gvishiani, the Soviet liaison to the anti-technology, Malthusian Club of Rome.

The U.S.S.R.'s pursuit of beam weapons technologies has been extensively documented (see *EIR*, March 15). Nor has the military doctrine that dictates their development been fundamentally changed.

The text *Military Strategy*, edited by the late Marshal V. D. Sokolovskii, appeared in its third edition, in 1968, as part of the Officer's Library series of the Soviet military publishing house. It is cited in current Soviet encyclopedias (published in the 1970s) as a reference of record. Some of its most important tenets, regarding active defense, were reiterated in writings by officers of the Soviet Anti-Aircraft Defense (PVO) forces as recently as 1977.

Maj. Gen. N. Zavyalov, a member of the author's collective of the Sokolovskii book, explained in a 1967 article that strategic defensive capability was central to Soviet doctrine:

Soviet military doctrine does not leave out of account the possibilities of defense. . . . In this, it should be stressed that we recognize not passive, but active defense, built on a new technical foundation, brought to life by the appearance of modern means of conducting war; a defense directed above all against the enemy's nuclear means of attack. Such a defense takes on extraordinarily important state, strategic significance.

### 'Not designed for attack'

This clear statement dates from the spring of 1967, when then-U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Strange McNamara had first launched the proposal to limit anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems, in 1966. That proposal was to evolve into the strategic arms limitation talks, or SALT. But the initial Soviet response was chilly. Some Soviets could not believe their ears when they first heard McNamara strenuously arguing to prevent not the Soviet Union, but the United States, from developing ABM capability. For McNamara was against ABMs for the U.S., even in view of the already-existent Soviet program; he claimed that that program existed only because of errors in doctrine on the Soviet side!

And military spokesmen swiftly declared that the U.S.S.R. had no intention of shutting down that program. Maj. Gen. N. A. Talenskii, theoretician with the Soviet General Staff and a participant in several Pugwash conferences on arms matters, wrote in the late 1960s:

Anti-missile systems are purely defensive and not designed for attack. It is quite illogical to demand abstinence from creating such weapons in the face of vast stockpiles of highly powerful means of attack on the other side. Only the side which intends to use its means of attack for aggressive purposes can wish to slow down the creation and improvement of anti-missile defense systems. . . . The creation of an effective anti-missile system enables the state to make its defenses dependent chiefly on its own possibilities, and not only on mutual deterrence, that is, on the good will of the other side. And since the peace-loving states are concerned with maximum deterrence, in its full and direct sense, it would be illogical to be suspicious of such a state when it creates an anti-missile defense system, on the grounds that it wants to make it easier for itself to resort to aggression with impunity.

Some say the construction of anti-missile defense systems may accelerate the arms race. . . . Such a development is not at all ruled out. . . . In any case, there is this question: What is more preferable for security as a result of the arms race, a harmonious combination of active means of deterrence and defense systems, or the means of attack alone?

Talenskii thereby refuted the very argument which Moscow today uses to back its allegations about American "first strike" intentions implied by building defensive weapons!

This was not merely the voice of a military lobby. Kosygin, in the February 1967 London news conference cited above, replied to President Lyndon Johnson's announcement of the McNamaraesque proposal to the Soviets for ABM limitation. Asked, "Do you consider it possible to agree on a moratorium on the development of anti-missile defense systems and, if so, on what conditions?"—Kosygin replied:

This is an important question in the military sphere. I should not like to answer it directly, but want in turn to ask the person who submitted it—I understand that he represents the British Institute of Strategic Research [the International Institute for Strategic Studies—IISS] the following: Which weapons should be regarded as a tension factor—offensive or defensive weapons? I think that a defensive system, which prevents attack, is not a cause of the arms race but represents a factor preventing the death of people. Some persons reason thus: Which is cheaper, to have offensive weapons that destroy cities and entire states or to have defensive weapons that prevent this destruction? At present the theory is current in some places that one should develop whichever system is cheaper. Such “theoreticians” argue also about how much it costs to kill a person—\$500,000 or \$100,000? An anti-missile system may cost more than an offensive one, but it is intended not for killing people but for saving human lives. I understand that I am not answering the question that was put to me, but you can draw appropriate conclusions yourselves.

The McNamara proposal touched off a storm in Moscow right away, as the domestic treatment of Kosygin’s press conference demonstrated. Two days later, the party daily *Pravda* published an article much more favorable to ABM limitations, in which Kosygin’s words were toned down. The author was one Fyodor Burlatskii, which sheds some light on the grain of Soviet propaganda a decade and a half later. Burlatskii was a charter member of a team of Central Committee foreign policy analysts, on which disarmament specialists Georgii Arbatov and Aleksandr Bovin also worked; during its first years, in the early 1960s, the team answered to Central Committee Secretary Yuri Andropov. At that time, however, other Moscow circles leaked the word to Western reporters that Burlatskii’s article was not official policy. The next month, on March 31, 1967, Maj. Gen. Zavyalov published his article in the military daily *Krasnaya Zvezda* about the “extraordinary state significance” of ballistic missile defense.

Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) opened in 1969, but it took a relationship cozier than McNamara’s with Kosygin to secure Soviet agreement to ABM limitation—Henry Kissinger’s with the Kremlin under President Richard Nixon, which culminated in the Soviet-American ABM limitation treaty of 1972. Kissinger singled out the ABM treaty for special efforts, using the so-called “back channel” of negotiations with the Politburo via the Soviet embassy in Washington. Prime Minister Kosygin, incidentally, took a less and less active role in hammering out SALT, until his portfolio was handed over to General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev more or less completely in the spring of 1971. That, close observers of the Soviet negotiating positions believe, is when the U.S.S.R. made the final decision to

conclude the ABM treaty and not just talk about it indefinitely.

## Laser defense

But did statements on the feasibility, nay desirability, of ballistic missile defense cease after the ABM treaty? No, they did not. Soviet military writers still write frankly about war-fighting and war-winning, including “defense of the homeland.”

The crucial element was new technologies. In this realm, excluded from specific limitations by the ABM treaty, the Soviets saw the future. In 1974, two years after the ABM treaty was signed, the Mir (Peace) Publishing House in Moscow issued in English a pamphlet by N. Sobolev, entitled “Lasers and Their Prospects.” In an ample chapter on military applications, from which the accompanying drawing is taken, Sobolev explained rudiments of ground-based beam-weapon defense against nuclear missiles:

To destroy an enemy missile, not to let it reach the target, it is sufficient to put its control system out of action. This can be done by burning through the missile shell or rudders by a laser beam. This will cause vibrations in the missile and result in its complete destruction.

Figure 81 shows a block diagram of an anti-missile system based on the use of lasers. Such a system must have a receiving unit for processing the signals incoming from the early warning and target tracking radar stations. These signals contain information on the coordinates of the approaching missile. The tracking station must aim at the target an optical radar in which a laser serves only for determining the distance to the missile.

Such an optical radar can furnish very precise data on the coordinates of the target, and these data are used to actuate another system employing a high-power laser, designed for destroying the target. The optical radar will focus and aim a powerful laser beam at the most vulnerable point of the missile during a period of time required for a hole to be burnt through the missile. . . .

Another possible anti-missile laser defense system is a project of an orbital space station equipped. . . as well with lasers. . . .

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Zavyalov, N. “On Soviet Military Doctrine,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, March 31, 1967.

Talenskii, N. A. “Anti-Missile Systems and Disarmament,” printed in English in *The Future of Soviet Military Power* ed. L. Whetten. New York; Crane, Russak & Co., 1976.

Kosygin was quoted in Arms Control & Disarmament Agency documentation cited in *Ballistic Missile Defense* by Benson D. Adams. New York; American Elsevier, 1971.

Sobolev, N. “Lasers and Their Prospects.” Moscow; Mir Publishers, 1974.