

# The political battle for beam weapons: a year after Reagan's historic statement

by Susan Welsh

One year ago, on March 23, 1983, President Reagan went before the nation with a televised announcement of a new defense policy which meant the end of the age of "Mutually Assured Destruction." He called upon American scientists to develop the technologies that could shoot down nuclear missiles, making nuclear weapons obsolete. How was the way for this historic decision prepared, and where does the international fight to implement the President's policy stand a year later? We trace here the highlights of this process.

Lyndon LaRouche and Dr. Edward Teller were the two key individuals who fought for and won the President's endorsement of a national effort for beam-weapons defense. Since the circulation of a pamphlet titled "Sputnik of the '70s" during 1977, LaRouche had insisted that Soviet research and development programs in this area were outstripping anything that Washington was even thinking about. The problem, he repeatedly declared, was the heritage of Robert S. McNamara in the Pentagon: the foolish doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).

At an *EIR* conference in Washington Feb. 17, 1982, LaRouche called upon the administration to launch a beam-defense program as a matter of greatest national urgency. "Disarmament doesn't work," he said. "Disarmament movements throughout this century are the prelude to general war. Peace requires an open U.S.-Soviet race to develop relativistic energy-beam ABM defenses, 'beam weapons.' Technologies can be perfected, beginning with high-power laser technologies, to knock out the proverbial 99 and 44 one-hundredths percent of ICBMs launched. War-avoidance means that one or both of the superpowers must develop this capability."

This call was seconded later in the year by renowned physicist Dr. Teller, the "father" of the American hydrogen bomb, in a speech to the National Press Club Oct. 26. Teller called the development of a U.S. anti-ballistic missile defense capability the only means to end the threat of nuclear war. "The 25-year mutual balance of terror is no longer balanced, only terror," he said. Teller urged a shift in U.S. defense spending, as soon as possible, toward "spending 95% on defensive weapons."

Sweeping aside opposition from the State Department, the arms control lobby, and parts of the Defense Department, President Reagan announced his executive decision on March 23, 1983: "Let me share with you a vision of the future which offers hope. It is that we embark on a program to counter the awesome Soviet missile threat with measures that are defensive. Let us turn to the very strengths in technology that spawned our great industrial base and that have given us the quality of life we enjoy today.

"What if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant U.S. retaliation to deter a Soviet attack; that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies? . . .

"I call upon the scientific community in our country, those who gave us nuclear weapons, to turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace: to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete. . . ."

"My fellow Americans, tonight we are launching an effort which holds the promise of changing the course of human history."

Both the President and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger emphasized that the administration was willing to discuss with the Soviet Union cooperation on the basis of the new doctrine of Mutually Assured Survival—cooperation which would give both superpowers defensive capability, and lessen the danger of nuclear war. Weinberger told reporters in Madrid March 25: "If both sides can acquire the means of rendering impotent these deadly missiles, we would really have advanced the cause of peace and humanity very, very far."

But Moscow was not interested in the U.S. President's peace proposal. Soviet President Yuri Andropov gave an interview to *Pravda* March 27 attacking Reagan's speech, and the Soviet press began the barrage of denunciations which has not abated to the present day. A high point was the Aug. 10 commentary by Andropov adviser Fyodor Burlatskii in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, calling U.S. development of space weapons a *casus belli*.

## Funding for the program

While opponents of the President's program continued to insist that beam defense was "impossible," new developments in scientific research accumulated throughout the year. At the Fifth International Conference on High Energy Beams in San Francisco Sept. 12-14, rapid progress was reported by scientists in all advanced beam-weapons technologies. Breakthroughs reported in x-ray laser research moved the timetable for possible deployment of a space-based defense system against nuclear attack forward to three years.

The Defense Technologies Commission of the National Security Council, headed by former NASA administrator James Fletcher, submitted its recommendations to the President Oct. 1. The classified report was highly optimistic about the prospects for beam-weapon development, and called for a \$27 billion budget over five years, with a \$1 billion increase in the budget for FY1985.

Two Colorado Republicans, Rep. Ken Kramer and Sen. William Armstrong, submitted a bill called The People Protection Act of 1983 (H.R.3073 and S.2021), backing the President's program. In hearings before the House of Representatives on Nov. 10, Kramer called for "a scientific, technical, military, and organizational undertaking that will dwarf anything ever before mounted by the human race—a colossal 'Manhattan Project for Peace.'"

Endorsement for the beam program also came from some labor leaders, like Ron Thelin, International vice-president of the Operating, Plasterers, Cementmasons International Association. "Using defensive beam weapons, we can melt and dismantle anything they throw at us while it is still in flight, and at the same time create full employment for our productive labor force. Only a traitor or a fool would be against that," Thelin declared soon after Reagan's speech.

## Mobilizing international support

Western Europe was initially hostile to President Reagan's program. Britain's Lord Peter Carrington and other advocates of a "New Yalta" deal with the Soviet Union saw that this would upset the "arms control" framework that they had nurtured for so long, and propel the United States into a new upward spiral of military and economic development. The press put out the line that Reagan's policy shift signaled the latest U.S. move to leave Western Europe in the lurch.

LaRouche and his collaborators sought to reverse this with a series of international conferences throughout Europe. Particularly significant too was the founding June 17 of the organization France et son Armée, including many respected figures from the Gaullist wartime Resistance. The organization supported Reagan's call, and promoted the idea of a European role in shaping a defensive strategic policy for the alliance as a whole.

On Oct. 5, 1983 Lyndon LaRouche addressed an *EIR* conference in Bonn, West Germany, on the implications of beam weapon defense for Western Europe. "To achieve peace,

if peace is still possible at this advanced stage of deterioration of the situation," said LaRouche, "we must restore the credibility of the alliance as an in-depth capability of defense, and must give Western Europe efficient military options for surviving a conflict should a conflict erupt." The governments of West Germany and Italy sent official military representatives as observers, and telegrams of greeting were sent by Italian president Sandro Pertini, Italian Chief of the General Staff General Santini, and Italian Chief of Staff of the Army, General Capruzzo.

The next major conference was in Rome, Italy on Nov. 9, and was attended by over 120 military and government officials and others. An international panel of experts testified to the need for U.S.-European cooperation in beam-weapons development, including former U.S. Ground Forces Commander Gen. (ret.) Volney Warner; Italian space warfare expert Gen. (ret.) Giulio Macri; Gen. Antonio Pelliccia, vice-commander of NATO's War College; Col. (ret.) Marc Geneste, known as the father of France's "neutron bomb" and currently an engineer at the Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique; Gen. (ret.) Revault d'Allonnes, one of the closest associates of the late Gen. Charles de Gaulle; Col. (ret.) Hans Seuberlich of the West German army; and Dr. Piers Wooley, economist and military expert from Great Britain.

The conference drew an unprecedented attack from the Soviet government newspaper *Izvestia* Nov. 15, which attacked LaRouche personally for the first time. "You were among the troglodytes," *Izvestia* wrote. ". . . The get-together at the Hotel Majestic showed that both Reagan and LaRouche have followers in the Old World. . . . The Reagan administration wants to bind Western Europe even more closely to its criminal policy in the areas of nuclear and space armaments."

The first elected European official to endorse beam weapons was Jacques Chirac, head of the French Gaullist opposition party, the RPR, in a speech Dec. 2 at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. He argued that beam weapons are the key to revitalizing the Atlantic Alliance. Official French government spokesmen remained cautious about the U.S. program, but Defense Minister Charles Hernu, in response to a parliamentary question Nov. 4, indicated that France itself was "spending a lot in research and development in this area."

U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger gave European leaders a detailed briefing on the U.S. beam-weapons policy at the Dec. 10 NATO meeting, emphasizing the American commitment to cooperate with Europe in the development of these weapons.

## CIA reveals Soviet escalation

While the Soviet press began calling Reagan a "new Hitler" for his advocacy of ABM defense, the CIA issued a classified report to the President on the likelihood of an early Soviet "breakout" from the ABM Treaty. According to *Avia-*

tion Week Jan. 16, an administration spokesman declared that "The CIA's position on Soviet ballistic missile defense activity is unusual in its strength and clarity—an alarm bell that we must watch the situation very closely. . . . The U.S. has essentially limited itself to research and development with ballistic missile defense technology while the Soviets bought the time they needed to develop a layered defense system with the ABM Treaty. . . . What seems clear is that there is in progress a pattern that places [Soviet] activity very close to the line in terms of a breakout. . . . We might find this year that we have zero time to respond to an ABM Treaty breakout by the U.S.S.R. with no way to provide in a timely way a parallel capability." The CIA report cited the following advances in the Soviet program:

- Construction of new Pushkino phased-array antiballistic missile defense battle management radars.
- Pechora-class ballistic missile detection radars located at sites around the periphery of the Soviet Union.
- Production of SH-04 and SH-08 nuclear armed interceptor missiles with deployments of the weapons in silos around Moscow.
- Tests of the SH-08 interceptor in rapid reload configuration, firing two of the missiles from the same silo within two hours.
- Production of tracking and missile guidance radars designed modularly so that components can be produced and stored until required. They can be concealed and assembled rapidly.
- Testing of the SA-12 surface-to-air missile against ballistic reentry vehicles. The SA-12 is called a strategic air defense or tactical ballistic missile defense system.
- Netting of command, control, communications systems, air defense, and ballistic missile defense radars to tie together elements of a national defense system.

While the battle with the Congress over the defense budget continued, President Reagan quietly signed a National Security Decision Directive Jan. 6, officially launching the beam-defense program. The full contents of the directive are classified, but leaks in the press indicated that the directive included reorganization of the Defense Department, with the creation of a new post to oversee the Strategic Defense Initiative.

When the Reagan administration's proposed FY1985 defense budget was submitted to Congress Feb. 1, it called for an increase of a mere \$250 million for anti-ballistic missile defense, to be added to the \$1.5 billion previously planned. The President had originally called for a \$590 million increase, but cut back the request to avoid presenting a large target to Congress in budget hearings in an election year. The administration now plans to increase funding in the later years of the five-year spending program, adding \$13 billion to the previously planned \$12 billion, bringing the total close to the \$27 billion recommended by the Fletcher Commission—assuming, of course, that the President is reelected.

Yet even while President Reagan was bending to his domestic opposition, major statements of support for his program came from abroad—most of them ignored by the U.S. press. Japanese Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe declared Feb. 20, in response to a question in hearings in the Lower House of the Diet, that Japan could provide technology for the U.S. space defense program. Since the U.S. program is of a defensive nature, he said, it can be subject to the Japan-U.S. agreement on military technology transfer.

A team of U.S. defense and intelligence experts and scientists toured Western Europe in February to brief the allied governments on President Reagan's ABM policy. Presidential Science Adviser George Keyworth, part of the delegation, said he believes "that the small area of Europe can be defended from ballistic missiles easier than the huge territory of the United States," according to a report in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* newspaper.

French President François Mitterrand, in a speech in The Hague, Holland on Feb. 7, called for a joint European effort to build a manned space station for defense purposes. This effort would work in tandem with the United States, he emphasized. "We must now look beyond nuclear systems if we don't want to be late for a future closer than is generally believed," he said. Mitterrand cited the need to develop lasers, advanced electronics, and projectiles traveling at the speed of light.

The West German government has abandoned its earlier belief that the U.S. beam weapons effort would accelerate the decoupling of Europe, senior Bonn military officials told *EIR* in March. "The old reticence to even deal with beam-weapons defense here has been replaced by the recognition that this is where science is going, and you just cannot stop scientific progress," said one official. "If the United States is committed to developing beam weapons, and the Soviets do it too, then we have to take a look at what has to be done in the short- and medium-range missile area," said another. West German Defense Minister Manfred Wörner, at a conference March 9, declared that he no longer believes beam-weapon defense to be impossible. "I see beam defense differently than I did before," he said. "Before I thought it was a pipe-dream, but this is no longer the case. Still, I am against them."

The *EIR* is presently conducting a series of conferences throughout Europe on the implications of beam defense for the alliance. A meeting in Brussels Feb. 22 drew over 50 NATO and other allied military officials, industry representatives, Belgian parliamentarians, and press. A conference in Milan a week later was attended by 100 people. One participant in the discussion, Claudio Pollastri, chief of the Foreign Policy department of the Italian Social Democratic Party (PSDI), recalled *Izvestia's* attack on LaRouche and anyone who supports beam defense as "troglodytes," declaring that he and his party therefore wished to be enrolled in the "Troglodyte group."