

Funding cuts put the President's SDI program in grave trouble

by Robert Gallagher and Carol White

Funding for Directed Energy Weapons under the Strategic Defense Initiative will be 5% lower in this fiscal year (1987) than in the past fiscal year. As mandated by Congress, the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO) has made cuts totaling \$1.6 billion or 33% of the President's original budget request. The hardest hit program area has been laser and particle-beam defense weapons research. Funds available for research and development of directed energy weapons will be about \$803 million, half of the SDIO's original request of \$1.6 billion for this area, and about \$40 million less than the amount spent on lasers and particle beams last year.

Thus while the President held his own on the SDI at the Reykjavik summit, Congress is accomplishing the same purpose as Soviet leader Gorbachov, in whittling away the funds needed to make the SDI a reality. On June 9, 1986, Gen. James Abrahamson advised Congress that proposed cuts will, this time around, have a "devastating" effect on the SDI program. In a *Defense Daily* interview, Abrahamson noted that he did not have the options to make cuts this time, as he did in the past two years. Work would have to be stopped in every one of the five major areas of SDI development, he said, emphasizing that he would "have to take chunks" out of priority areas.

In order to make an early 1990s' decision on whether to proceed to development, SDI must be funded at the requested level of \$4.8 billion, and anything less will result in program delays and stretch out the determination of the feasibility of the system, he said. Three years in a row with reductions of 25% or more in the programmed budget will prevent him from keeping the program phased and on schedule for the early 1990s point of decision. In order to meet the exigencies of the congressionally mandated austerity budget, the SDIO has in fact transformed the investment profile of the program,

placing heavier relative weight upon the "kinetic energy weapons" side of the program than was the plan for their targeted appropriation. Funding for "kinetic energy weapons"—ground-based antimissile missiles and Danny Graham's space-based cans of buckshot—will jump 23%, while funding for lasers and particle beams will decline 5%.

Overall, discounting inflation, the SDI budget undergoes this year a real growth of only 13% from about \$2.8 billion to \$3.2 billion, a far cry from the 71% real growth to \$4.8 billion requested by the President, but much better than the defense budget overall, which decreased in real terms.

The President's program for the Strategic Defense Initiative has always been intended to rely upon frontier technologies. The shift in allocation of the SDI budget raises the most alarming question about whether the program is to become a mere shadow of what the President envisioned in his March 23, 1983 call to "make nuclear missiles impotent and obsolete."

Soviets speed ahead

While Soviet propagandists continue to pretend that Russia has no SDI and that the United States intends to use a defense as a shield from behind which to launch a first strike, reality is the opposite. As Jane's latest *Weapons Systems Book* verifies, and *EIR* has documented extensively, the Soviets are moving ahead rapidly with every aspect of an ABM system, including particle beams and X-ray lasers. Indeed, in their weekly report of the week of Nov. 12, *Jane's* estimated that within six months the Soviets will have completed construction of a continent-wide ABM phased-array radar defense based on mobile anti-missile missiles and radars dispersed around their country, in clear violation of the ABM treaty. Clearly their program is not being scaled back due to budgetary considerations.

On March 25 of this year, General Abrahamson warned a Senate Armed Services subcommittee that the Soviets might be as much as five years ahead of the United States in research on x-ray lasers. He disclosed that Soviet publications first carried articles about x-ray lasers in 1974, and that the Soviets conducted an x-ray laser technology test in 1982 "that we will not be able to do until 1987."

If we accept the warnings of both SDIO Director Abrahamson and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger last spring, the new U.S. budget constraints on the program, imposed in large measure by out-and-out opponents of the SDI, appear to put it in danger of being mortally wounded. According to them, cuts in the budget request by as much as 25% would be disastrous. The request was, in fact, cut by 33%.

Some concerned scientists in the program have speculated that the SDIO has been driven to short-change important experiments in favor of more showy short-term technologies which would have a greater public-relations value and create a climate in which Congress would be impelled to increase their funding.

The areas to receive the biggest boosts in funding (see table)—besides the \$140 million increase for kinetic energy weapons funding—are computer technology ("systems concepts and battle management"), receiving a \$235 million increase, and target surveillance, acquisition, tracking, and kill assessment (SATKA), receiving an additional \$405 million. Certainly the downgrading of spending for DEW must be welcome to the Danny Graham crowd, who have been using the need for early deployment of the system to push for their own Rube Goldberg variant of the SDI.

Cheaper, but a loser

While Graham's High Frontier is so impracticable as to be a sure-loser if it is ever deployed, it has the attractive selling point of being apparently cheaper. Thus arguments based upon cost-effectiveness rather than mission-effectiveness incorrectly claim energy weapons have insufficient "cost-effectiveness." That's like saying that a watch without its inner workings is cost-effective even though it does not tell the time. The only logic which might justify such an approach is the fool's hope that the Soviets can be made to swallow a deployment of High Frontier which would then become a bargaining chip in a Kissinger-scenario to bargain away the SDI, and with it the Atlantic Alliance.

SDIO Deputy Director Gordon Smith told a meeting of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics Nov. 18 that the advantages of a ground-based laser system over space-based kinetic energy weapons along Graham's High Frontier design, "are not immediately obvious," according to *Aviation Week and Space Technology* magazine, Nov. 24, even though a laser weapon's speed of target interception is the speed of light, 20,000 times faster than that imagined for the fastest kinetic energy weapon. The reason why the laser's

advantages "are not immediately obvious," is that their research and development costs more. It doesn't matter that Danny Graham's smart rocks will never do the job: They're cheaper! Thus, the AIAA heard Smith say that kinetic energy weapons "are winning by a neck" over various laser programs.

The Pentagon issued a warning to Congress on May 27 that was ignored. At that time, their spokesman, Robert B. Sims, said that it would be "a serious mistake" for Congress to follow the advice of the 46 Senators who are demanding a big cut in the President's SDI missile defense program. Sims said that the cuts Congress made in SDI last year "have narrowed the range of technologies that we can explore. Further cuts would seriously compound the problems and set back the prospects for an informed decision in the early 1990s" on whether the research justified moving into full-scale development.

As a result of cuts carried out a year ago, the SDIO already narrowed the program to development of directed-energy prototype weapons to the free electron laser. Now, even this program is threatened.

On April 30 of this year, General Abrahamson issued a statement reporting that recent tests with free-electron lasers have led military scientists to conclude that bouncing ground-based laser beams off mirrors in space can be a practical defense. On June 23, the Defense Department announced plans to begin construction of the Los Alamos model free electron laser, a \$400 million ground-based laser, to be built at the White Sands test site. But under the new fiscal '87 budget, the White Sands Missile Test Range program, to build this free electron laser to test atmospheric propagation of laser beams, has been cut from \$350 million for this year to \$158 million, according to SDI sources. The implications of this is a delay of at least two years in the initial operation of this FEL, which was scheduled for prototype demonstration in the early 1990s.

DOD portion of SDI budget

(millions of dollars)

SDI area	FY86	FY87 Request	FY87 Actual	Change 86-87
Surveillance, Acquisition, Tracking, Kill Assessment	857	1,262	960	12%
Directed Energy Weapons	844	1,615	803	-5%
Kinetic Energy Weapons	596	991	740	23%
Systems Concept, Battle Management	227	462	384	69%
Survivability, Lethality, and other research	222	454	320	44%
Total	2,759	4,803	3,207	16%

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