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Russian-U.S. SDI cooperation still open; 'end of SDI' is Aspin's conceit

by Paul Gallagher

Secretary of State Warren Christopher made clear in testimony to the Senate on May 11 that discussion of cooperative U.S.-Russian efforts for a anti-nuclear missile defense have been taking place (see *Documentation*). These talks aim toward a global early warning ability and "theater" defenses (interception within the atmosphere) against possible missile launches by specific regional nuclear powers. Furthermore, both Christopher and Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) noted that it is the Russian side which is pushing those discussions toward joint experimentation, proposing specific areas of frontier technologies and "new physical principles" to be worked on jointly. The Russian project (the name of which was not mentioned by Christopher) is the vital "Trust" proposal made by Russian academicians and government officials at the Vancouver summit for "joint plasma weapons experiments."

Further, President Clinton specifically praised the "spin-off technology" effects of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program for the future of the U.S. economy, in remarks at Los Alamos National Laboratory on May 18.

All this debunks the worldwide "end of SDI" coverage given to the press conference held on May 13 by Defense Secretary Les Aspin. Aspin announced the change of the name of the SDI office, and the intention to favor accelerated production of off-the-shelf Patriot missile-type theater defense systems, rather than development of laser and plasma frontier technologies. But his opening assertion that these are Clinton administration changes in priorities in response to the end of Soviet power, was untrue.

The secretary acknowledged under questioning that he had in no way changed either the SDI funding request for FY 1994 or the strategic priorities for it, both were set by the Bush administration, which pushed aside the aggressive research into new scientific principles of Reagan's SDI. These priorities were set in the Ballistic Missile Defense Act passed in early 1991 (after Operation Desert Storm), while the communist regime led by Mikhail Gorbachov was still in power. Now, the new Russian proposals would take this idea of ground-based, theater defenses against limited nuclear attacks, and give it back its frontier scientific content—in particular, plasma technologies.

Aspin stated, to the surprise of reporters present, that the SDI had been the main factor in bringing about the collapse of the Soviet empire. The SDI, moreover, has never been a "large crash program," as seen by the contrasting fact that the World War II Manhattan Project to develop atomic weapons spent, on average, *$8 billion per year* in 1985 dollars.

In Russia, this proposal for a "new SDI" developed by the scientists, is now being politically debated and attacked in exactly the same terms that were used to try to stop the LaRouche-proposed SDI adopted by President Reagan and announced on March 23, 1983. The daily *Rossiyskaya Gazeta,* which attacked the "Trust" proposal on May 8, is the publication of the Supreme Soviet—the Russian Parliament. If the cynicism expressed by Aspin prevents the Clinton White House from going ahead with the Russian "new SDI" offer, this will contribute to unleashing a chauvinist nightmare on the Russian side.

Documentation

U.S.-Russian work ongoing

The following exchange between Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) and Secretary of State Warren Christopher took place during Christopher's testimony to Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 11.

Helms: With reduced numbers of nuclear weapons, the defense is usually better capable or more capable of handling the threat and not being overpowered. What is your assessment this day of SDI with the number of weapons in this treaty? . . .

Christopher: Well, I think the number of weapons that remain outstanding in this treaty for the United States provide adequate security for the United States in confronting any of its potential adversaries. The Strategic Defense Initiative is a program that goes forward, but in a very—in a reduced context, and I'm not sure that I see the immediate relationship between the two, senator, so long as our nuclear arsenal is adequate for the challenges we face in this new period.

Helms: Well, I think you are going to find a lot of people who see a relationship, and let me put the question another way. The Russians have contacted various Americans, including this senator, with the proposal that we have a joint

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Russian-U.S. SDI. Now I'm sure you know that. . . . The Russians are more worried about Libya, and Syria, and Iran, and China—to name just a few—than they are about the United States. Now does that uncomplicate my general question about SDI?

Christopher: Yes sir, it does. . . .There is—it's going under a new title now, but there is a joint U.S.-Soviet, U.S.-Russian effort to see if we can cooperate in developing systems of that kind which will help us fend off attacks from the likes of those countries that you mentioned. That effort is in its early stages, but it is an effort that we intend to pursue to see if it has some productivity, some prospects.

SDI opponents in Moscow

The Moscow daily Rossiyskaya Gazeta, *in a Viewpoint column by Petr Belov on May 8 entitled "We Sell Uranium, We Disclose Classified Information. . . . Who Reaps the Benefit?" opposed a joint U.S.-Russian SDI program.*

Recently the newspapers reported the sale at a fabulously low price of Russian strategic uranium reserves and the organization of a joint experiment to improve ABM defenses.

Let me remark that these deals, which are profitable only to the United States, are served up by our mass media as Russian initiatives. . . .

Our initiative on the use of plasma weapons to disable missile warheads is really dangerous to international stability. It is fundamentally impermissible, in my view, because it sets a precedent for testing ABM weapons operating on new physical principles. . . .

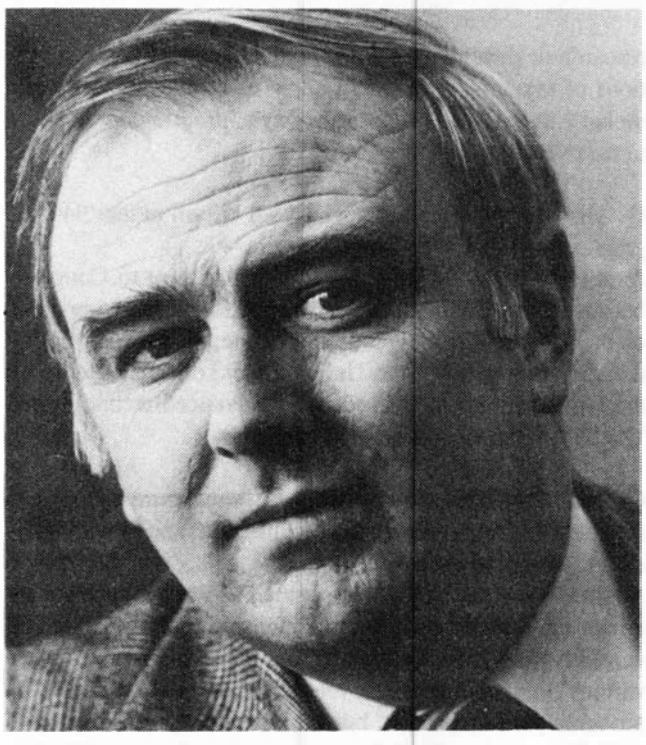
The actual idea of using plasma weapons is not new, including using them to destroy such targets as missile warheads, whose flight in dense atmospheric strata is accompanied by the formation of an area of superheated and therefore ionized gas. If such objects encounter another area of equally ionized gas in their way . . . (in our case, plasma formations) forces arise between them which can alter the warhead's trajectory and in certain circumstances even destroy it. . . .

"Our" proposal on the joint experiment will most likely not go unnoticed. But we risk not only squandering our intellectual resources, but also giving a direct motive for violating the ABM Treaty.

SDI helped end Soviet empire

The following is from Defense Secretary Les Aspin's press briefing on May 13.

We are renaming and refocusing the Strategic Defense Initiative Office to reflect the Clinton administration's changes in the priorities. From now on, the SDIO will be the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization. . . . These changes are possible because of the end of a battle that has raged in Washington for a decade over the best way to avoid nuclear war. That battle was over whether we should build a massive defense against a missile attack from the Soviet Union, or whether



U.S. Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. The changes in administration policy toward the SDI do not preclude acceptance of the Russian offer of cooperation in ballistic missile defense.

we should press for arms reductions backed by traditional deterrents. Like many Washington battles, that wasn't decided on the merits. It just went on so long that circumstances changed the terms of the debate. The fate of Star Wars was sealed by the collapse of the Soviet Union. . . .

Saddam Hussein and the Scud missiles allowed us—showed us that we needed ballistic missile defense for our forces in the field. That threat is here and now. In the future, we may face hostile or irrational states that have both nuclear warheads and ballistic missile technology that could reach the United States.

This is why we have made theater ballistic missile defense our first priority, to cope with the new dangers in the post-Cold War, post-Soviet world. After theater missile defense, BMDO's priorities are going to be the national missile defense, which is a defense of the American people from ground-based systems. And the third point of emphasis or third priority will be the follow-on technologies that offer some promise in both tactical and strategic defense. These changes represent a shift away from a crash program for deployment of space-based weapons designed to meet a threat that has receded to the vanishing point—the all-out, surprise attack from the former Soviet Union. . . .

Since its inception in 1984, SDIO has reported directly to the secretary of defense. The new arrangement has the BMD Organization reporting to the undersecretary of defense for acquisition and technology, which is John Deutsch. This shift reflects the fact that the program will be shifting from

research to development—to the development and acquisitions of systems. And it will allow us to manage our work on ballistic missile defense in a way appropriate to its place in the overall defense program.

Q: Do you still intend to spend $3.8 billion in the '94 program, or do you have some savings in—
Aspin: No, the '94 program is as it was sent to Congress because it is focused in this new direction of heavy priority on theater missile defenses, number one; the second priority is national defense of the United States, missile defense of the United States; and third is the advanced technologies. The $3.8 billion program in '94 still stands.

Q: Mr. Secretary, how quickly do you figure to go into acquisition, from research into acquisition, and how quickly do you expect to have a defense?
Aspin: We have, as you saw in the Patriot, we have something that you can make into a defense right now. We have currently four different theater missile systems that are at various points along the development process. We need to probably pare that down, but I think we may not want to—well, I'm sure we do not want to pare that down until we've got a better idea of where the strengths are. But the theater missile program is going ahead, and that will be the first effort that will show results. In fact, we do have something that works right now.

Q: Mr. Secretary, but did the American people get their money's worth out of the program?
Aspin: I think that we learned a lot if we can pull something from the experience that we had and apply it. I think if it helped to bring about the kind of changes that we had in the Soviet Union, I think the answer is yes.

Clinton lauds SDI spinoffs

At Los Alamos National Laboratory on May 17, President Clinton cited technological spinoffs from the SDI program. Clinton cited the example of "plasma ion implantation," which he described as follows: "It involves a steel vacuum chamber containing high-energy ions which can be pumped into metal surfaces or plastic surfaces and used to harden them so that they will last longer and do better work. This could revolutionize America's ability to manufacture automobiles and other machines, to keep going and to have higher productivity longer and lower costs so we can once again begin to [create] high-wage manufacturing jobs. . . .

"And this technology was a direct outgrowth of the research done on the Strategic Defense Initiative, the so-called Star Wars initiative, which means that no matter whatever happens there and whatever happens to the final shape of that project, something good came out of it because people were looking to break down frontiers in the human mind and to explore unexplored territory."

Mandatory sentencing laws under attack

by Edward Spannaus

The United States, which has the highest known rate of incarceration in the world, is continuing to outdistance its nearest competitors. Once again, newly released statistics show that the U.S. prison population has reached record levels; the total number of persons in prisons and jails in the United States is now over 1.3 million. Drug cases were a major source of the increased number of prisoners in 1992, according to the U.S. Justice Department. In 1990, the last year for which precise statistics are available, about one-third of those sent to jail were drug offenders. Most of these are low-level users and dealers, which has had no effect in stemming the overall drug plague.

The soaring rise in the prison population is one of the factors impelling calls for a review of the mandatory sentencing laws passed by Congress in the 1980s as part of efforts to "get tough on crime." Attorney General Janet Reno has criticized the mandatory sentencing laws, especially as they apply to drug cases, and she recently ordered a Justice Department review of federal prosecutive and sentencing policies to determine the impact that these policies are having on the prison system.

"I have a concern because there may be situations in which minimum mandatories are causing federal offenders to serve 10 or 15 years for being minor participants on a drug boat deal," Reno told the *Washington Post*. But at the same time, she said, "murderers, rapists, and robbers in state courts are serving drastically reduced sentences because there are not enough prison cells."

Record levels

During 1992, the number of persons being held in state and federal prisons in the United States reached the record level of 883,593, an increase of 7.2% over 1991. Since 1980, the number of prisoners has risen 168%, from about 330,000 to the current figure of 883,593. Of these, federal prisoners make up about 80,000, and state prisoners a little over 803,000.

However, the federal prison rates are increasing almost twice as fast as state rates. The rate of increase for federal prisoners was 12.1% from 1991 to 1992, and was 12.5% from 1990 to 1991.

Add to this between 400,000 and 500,000 inmates in jails