

Weinberger clears the deck for beam weapons

by Robert Gallagher

U.S. Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger announced March 27 the appointment of former astronaut Lt. Gen. James A. Abrahamson as Director of Strategic Defense to carry out "a presidential directive of centralized management" for the development of "a thoroughly reliable, effective defense" for the United States and its allies against nuclear weapons.

The appointment makes final the establishment of a centralized program for beam defense spanning two executive departments—Defense and Energy. With the appointment, all authority for research and development of antiballistic-missile (ABM) systems based on directed energy-beam technologies or anti-missile missiles is removed from the hands of the cynics, the naysayers, and the occultists—like Robert Cooper, director of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)—and placed under the direction of "a space pioneer," as Weinberger described Abrahamson, "reporting directly to me."

In response to questions, Secretary Weinberger attacked the fundamental assumption of Henry Kissinger's 1972 ABM Treaty—with which the United States renounced its right to self-defense—and the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction. "I have never believed," he said, "in the idea that we have enhanced our security by giving up any attempt to defend ourselves."

A few days earlier, in the final report of the Kissinger-inspired Presidential Commission on Strategic Forces, Gen. Brent Scowcroft, a business partner and co-factioneer of Kissinger's, had attacked engineering development of an ABM system as "risky" because Soviet leaders might consider it a "breach" of the 1972 ABM Treaty. He warned the

President to proceed with "extreme caution" in pursuing his beam defense program.

'A very, very high priority'

But Weinberger emphasized that the Strategic Defense Initiative program had "a very, very high priority, one of the highest priorities of the administration and of this department." He compared it to the Apollo program of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to land a man on the Moon and to its program to build and fly the first Space Shuttle. By implication, Weinberger was discarding the 20-year timetable previously projected by the administration for making a decision on a beam defense system, not to mention building one. The Apollo program reached its goal in eight years and the Shuttle program in nine.

Thus it seems that the patriotic faction in the administration that supports President Reagan's March 23, 1983 initiative to develop beam weapons is moving out of its foxholes, under the cover of fire support from Lyndon LaRouche's presidential campaign. This might spell the beginning of the end for Kissinger's influence in the Reagan administration.

On March 28, the present Commander of Naval Operations, Adm. James Watkins, attacked the War Powers Act as unconstitutional and called for its repeal. "This nation," the admiral told the Baltimore Council on Foreign Affairs, "must be ready and must be seen as being ready to use military power when forced to do so by our adversaries." Watkins put his weight behind the Reagan beam-weapons initiative in meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Secretary of State George Shultz, however reluctantly,

joined the battle against the appeasers. On March 28, Schultz indicated before a congressional committee that a new Reagan administration just might let the SALT II Treaty expire Dec. 31, 1985—instead of dismantling Poseidon missile submarines or Minuteman II missiles to adhere to the treaty's limit of 1,200 ballistic missile launchers with multiple warheads.

Weinberger's press conference was in marked contrast to statements of Defense Undersecretary for Research and Engineering Richard DeLauer and DARPA director Cooper before Congress earlier in March. As the *New York Times* wrote March 28, "Senior technology officials in the Pentagon have told Congress *there is not now any plan to develop or deploy a defensive system against missiles*. Instead, they describe the program as a 'technology demonstration' to make possible an 'informed decision' on developing such a program sometime in the 1990s [emphasis added]." Both these persons asserted that a defense of cities was impossible.

'I'd like to see it next year'

Weinberger: "The objective is to destroy all missiles coming in. . . . I'm very impatient and I'd like to see it next year. . . . We're going to proceed [with the program] as rapidly as we can. . . . we're going to bend all of our very considerable efforts and talents and energy as a nation to do it. It is as noble a goal as we could pursue. . . . The Soviets have been working on the whole concept for a very long time and I can't imagine a more dangerous world if they should get this system and be able then to hold the world in nuclear blackmail."

The Secretary announced that two presidential commissions had examined whether building a complete defense was feasible and whether or not such a defense would make the world "safer." "The answer to both these questions was 'Yes,'" he reported.

Abrahamson told the press that "we have a nation that can indeed produce miracles and can go forward." Until April 15, he will continue to serve as associate administrator of NASA, where he runs the Shuttle program.

Defense Secretary bent on ending the missile threat

The following are excerpts from Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger's March 27 press conference in which he announced the appointment of Lt. Gen. James A. Abrahamson as Director of Strategic Defense.

Last Friday marked the first anniversary of the President's speech to the nation in which he called for a national effort to rid the world of the threat of nuclear-armed ballistic missiles. In the year since he made his call, we've done a great many things and made a substantial amount of progress.

Last spring, two independent teams of experts began to grapple with the President's vision of a world that would be free of ballistic missiles. We asked two central questions: Do defensive technologies provide a real promise as a means of ending the threat of ballistic missiles? And, if so, would a world in which such technologies were deployed be safer and more stable than the world we face today? After several months of intensive effort which began with a good deal of healthy skepticism, the scientific and policy experts concluded that the answer to both these questions was "yes," that defensive technologies do hold considerable promise for eliminating the effectiveness of ballistic missiles and the achievement of this goal could significantly enhance deterrence and world stability. . . .

On the basis of the studies and the consultations with Congress and our allies, the President decided, as you know, to proceed with a Strategic Defense Initiative program whose goal it would be to enable this nation to proceed to the development and deployment of an effective defense against ballistic missiles.

The Strategic Defense Initiative program which the President submitted to Congress calls for a total of \$2 billion in FY85. . . . From the beginning, it was clear that the successful completion of our program will require the cooperation of many different organizations within government and all the military services. To accomplish this, the President recently directed that the program be conducted by a centralized management office, within DOD, under a strong program manager reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense. . . .

We looked for an individual who has not only earned a reputation as a space pioneer but is totally dedicated and committed to find a way to use our knowledge of space to protect mankind from the threat of nuclear weapons.

Weinberger then introduced General Abrahamson; excerpts follow from the Secretary's remarks:

. . . This is a great privilege to share in the President's vision of the future. I think he's outlined a strategy of hope for all of us, and in my career as a technologist, I think it is very, very well founded. What I've seen in this country is that we have a nation that can indeed produce miracles that can go forward; if you see the shuttle fly, each time there is ample, visible evidence of those miracles, and those are not the only ones. They are also in the weapons systems and in the people that are behind that technology. So I think, sir, that we are ready to go about your task and the President's task. . . .

Weinberger made the following remarks in answer to questions from the press.

Ultimately, we want a thoroughly reliable system against nuclear weapons, against ballistic missiles, and against cruise missiles. We have at this point had two major studies, both of which have come in with favorable responses to the questions, can it be done, and should it be done, and we are going

to proceed from that. . . . We obviously are in the situation we were before we went to the moon with that project. We're in the situation that we were in before we had a shuttle flying with respect to that project. . . . The idea is to have a concentration on a thoroughly reliable, effective defense against these nuclear weapons. It is, I think, something that can be achieved and it's something on which we're going to spend all of our very considerable efforts, talents, and energy as a nation to do. . . .

What we're trying to do is exactly what we've described. It's to have a thoroughly reliable defense. It is to free the world of the shadow that has hung over it since these weapons were first introduced and it is, I think, as noble a goal as we could pursue. I think it is the only one, really, that offers the genuine hope of the world of improving the situation that we have. . . .

One of the reasons we have to do this is because the Soviets have been doing it, have been working on it since 1967, and they've made substantial progress. It's very important that we not have a situation in the world in which the Soviets, with all their philosophy, and all of the military might that they have amassed of an offensive nature, have this system first. If they had it first, then we would indeed be in an extremely perilous situation, so it is vital that we do all that we can to develop and get this system. We can talk about sharing it at a later time, but the goal is to have a situation in which the threat of these weapons and the effectiveness of these weapons is removed. . . .

Does the program make the modernization of existing strategic forces and the follow-on forces that are planned any less necessary, and do you see a time when such a program as the SDI would be a total replacement for offensive nuclear weapons?

Clearly this will not have any effect on [the modernization of existing strategic forces]. We have briefed all of our allies. . . . Should the system become totally effective, as we hope it will, then we could decide at that time what to do about other weapons.

In response to a question on whether the administration's proposed programs violate the United States's 1972 ABM treaty with the Soviet Union:

We don't face that at all because, at the moment, we're talking about the research and the work necessary to tell us whether we can effectively and successfully deploy such a system. The ABM treaty goes to deployment. But the Soviets have not been troubled by that in the work that they have done on this type of strategic defense, and the treaty itself provides that it should be reviewed and reexamined and either government signatory to it is perfectly capable and perfectly able to call attention to whatever necessary revisions events may prove desirable.

In response to a question as to the timetable the administration is operating on:

I'm very impatient and I'd like to see it next year, but I'm

also realistic enough to know we can't do that. We're going to proceed just as rapidly as we can, and it's hard to say because each year may open up new avenues which when pursued may lead us to a conclusion a lot more quickly than we thought we could do otherwise. Bear in mind that, in the past, we have managed to do a lot of the things that people said were either impossible or couldn't be done under any circumstances, in a relatively short time. I don't have any timetable on it. We have, as you know, in the budget this year a substantial amount for looking at a number of different things that are required for the total system. We obviously will push that just as hard as we can and next year we will know much more how to make up a budget for the second year of it because we'll have some of the results then.

In response to whether the administration is terming the defensive weaponry program an "emergency program":

No, I don't think it's an emergency program in the sense that it's something that has a deadline that has to be completed by December or anything of that kind, but it's a program of very high priority. It's one of the highest priorities of the Administration and of this Department, and the President's directive is that it be managed in the way that he said; that is, with a single manager to pull the whole program together, reporting directly to me. This is evidence of the importance that's attached to it.

On whether it would be important for the program manager to be able to shift funds from one technology program to another, as development took place:

. . . It's hard to do in the Congress, but it's not so hard to do in this building, particularly when you have a presidential directive of centralized management. . . . Next year's budget will probably look somewhat different than this year's because we will have a centralized place for it. But this year we're reprogramming a lot of things that were designed to support research and perhaps more of the terminal phase than the boost phase, so to speak.

Question: "When Drs. Iklé, DeLauer, and Cooper [senior Pentagon officials] testified on the Hill, they were asked whether they imagined this system could do away with the need for an offensive retaliatory capacity. DeLauer said 'no' and the others didn't disagree. . . ."

We're now starting . . . to try our best to develop a strategic defense initiative that is thoroughly effective and reliable. If we can do that, and I believe we can—I don't have any doubts about our ultimate ability to do that, if our commitment is strong enough—then we could face questions of the kind you've just raised. . . .

On whether the aim is to achieve a point defense or fuller protection:

. . . It's an attempt to destroy incoming missiles. We don't care what label is on the missiles, we don't care where they're targeted; we want to get them, preferably as they come out of their silos, with non-nuclear means. . . . The objective is to destroy all missiles coming in.

Question: "Would you be in favor of the development of a defensive system even if it became apparent that it would not be 100% [effective] but its main purpose would be just to shift to defense?"

We aren't going to face that kind of prospect until we're told definitely and completely that you can't do it [have a 100% effective system] and I think we can. . . .

Question: "But do you think the effort is worthwhile alone, if you just shift the emphasis from offensive missiles to defensive?"

I think the effort is worthwhile to develop a thoroughly reliable, effective defense. I've always thought so. I have never believed in the idea that somehow we enhanced our security by giving up any attempt to defend ourselves. I've also always thought that it was far more effective and far more moral and noble, if you like, to try to destroy weapons rather than people. And that is why I would very much hope we would have the support of the scientific and academic community as well as the total support of the Department of Defense which we now have.

In response to a question on the alleged "tremendous cost" of the program:

. . . I would suggest respectfully that you might want to add up the cost of all the offensive weapons since 1945, and I would think that that cost would be slightly higher, perhaps in magnitudes of 100 times, whatever the cost would be to develop a system to protect people. I don't find the cost of a system to protect people to be prohibitive.

Question: "Senator Nunn was one of those who said that that's a lot of money to pay for something you don't know whether is going to work or not."

Well, we've put a lot of money into things we didn't know would work or not. One of them was a venture to the moon, one of them was a shuttle; and nothing ventured, nothing gained. I think that we owe it to ourselves, our children, and to mankind to pursue this with every bit of energy at our command. I think it offers the most hope to mankind and I can't believe that the cost of it is going to exceed, or even come close to, the cost we put into offensive systems, and will have to put into offensive systems because we don't know if we can get this. But we do have to do everything we can to preserve the peace and protect our people. I, for one, have always felt that the idea that somehow you were safer if you gave up all defense was not only absurd, but dangerously absurd.

In response to whether the defensive program might "bump against the ABM treaty":

I don't know. It depends on how rapidly we progress, how much success we have, how soon we are able to find paths that offer the greatest promise. We think we have some idea of that now. . . . But as I say, the Soviets have been working on the whole concept for a very long time and I can't imagine a more dangerous world if they should get this system and be able then to hold the world in nuclear blackmail.

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Phone: (212) 247-8820 ext. 745

In Europe

MCS Comtech
Strandvägen 7
S-191 45 Stockholm
Sweden
Telex: 14024
Phone: (468) 7510195