

Reagan backs Weinberger: Save cities, not missiles

by Vin Berg

President Reagan is not flinching in the face of Soviet ultimatums and a hostile cacophony of demands from the Eastern Establishment press that he bargain away his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), the program for beam-weapon defense against missile attack, in "arms control" negotiations with the Russians. Reagan has backed to the hilt his outspoken defense secretary, Caspar Weinberger, who has proclaimed the program "the only thing that offers hope to the world; we will not give it up."

The Soviets are virtually threatening to begin military operations against the United States should the SDI not be traded away in Geneva. One of the most notable ultimatums came from Kremlin "Crown Prince" Mikhail Gorbachov who, standing beside Margaret Thatcher in London, gave President Reagan 90-days to agree that the SDI was a "bargaining chip" in arms talks, or see those arms talks broken off completely (see article, p. 38). Mrs. Thatcher dutifully brought that message to the President when she visited Camp David on Dec. 22.

But the day before her arrival, on Dec. 21, the President told reporters who asked about Gorbachov's ultimatum that the Soviet Politburo heir-apparent "doesn't know what he's talking about. I know there's probably a reason why he doesn't know what he's talking about," Reagan added, "but we're going to be very pleased to let them know exactly what it is that *we're* talking about. And I think they'll see that maybe it's better if we have a world in which you've got some kind of defense that maybe can destroy weapons without killing millions of people."

The President elaborated: "Today, the only defensive weapon we have is to threaten that if they kill millions of our people, we'll kill millions of theirs. I don't think there's any morality in that at all, and we're trying to look for something

that will make these weapons obsolete."

Hostile reporters complained to the President that Thatcher and France's President François Mitterrand were highly critical of beam-weapon defense. Reagan shot back: "Well, I'll get *them* to understand it."

Again on Dec. 23, under questioning from hostile reporters who asked if it wasn't the case that the SDI would "only defend missiles, not people," the President replied sharply: "This is not going to protect missiles. It's going to destroy missiles."

On Dec. 28, in an interview with the Japanese newspaper, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Reagan again indicated that he would not be cowed by Soviets threats: Arms negotiations, beginning with a Jan. 7-8 meeting between Secretary of State Shultz and Foreign Minister Gromyko, will "involve hard bargaining" that could extend far beyond the meeting. "We must temper our expectations with realism," Reagan said. "A two-day meeting cannot solve the complicated issues before us. We hope it will be a constructive beginning for further detailed negotiations. But . . . *we are not seeking an agreement for its own sake.*"

Press exposed

The President's firm and unequivocal statements left the major news media exposed as purposeful liars. In the days before Secretary Weinberger's strong and clear exposition on the SDI before the Foreign Press Club (Dec. 19, see text, p. 56), the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other media had been reporting that the program was now "scaled down," that it was only designed to protect missile silos, that it would be treated as a "bargaining chip" in Geneva, that "overwhelming opposition" to the program in the Congress and the administration itself had convinced the President of

this, and so forth.

The campaign reached fever pitch the day of Margaret Thatcher's arrival, Dec. 22, to brief the President on her meeting with Gorbachov. The next day, while radio and television reported that she had induced Reagan to "compromise" on the SDI, the *Times* and *Post* ran front-page articles claiming the program had been "scaled back."

That same Sunday, Dec. 23, Weinberger appeared on ABC-TV's "David Brinkley Show" and was asked by White House reporter Sam Donaldson: "There are reports this morning that this SDI, the Strategic Defense System, is going to be scaled back as far as your immediate goal is concerned. And that you are now going to try to develop it so it can protect our silos; our offensive weapons. Is that correct?"

"No, that is not correct," Weinberger replied. "The SDI is not designed to protect any particular target. It is designed to destroy incoming missiles before they can get to a target. It is not designed to just protect a particular silo or something of the kind."

When subsequent questioning suggested the President viewed the SDI as a "bargaining chip," Weinberger insisted:

"The President has said that he will not give up the Strategic Defense Initiative or the opportunity to develop it. It offers too much hope. It is the only thing that offers any real hope to the world. We will not give it up. We will certainly discuss it. We will discuss it in the context of offensive and defensive systems. And the Soviets have a great many defensive systems themselves."

The press could not restrain itself in its fury at Weinberger, outdoing even *Pravda* and TASS. "Cappy the Talker," complained James Reston of the *New York Times*, "is a great admirer of Winston Churchill. This may help explain his arrogant assurance, his contempt for everybody who differs with him, and his garrulous lectures . . . especially when he's in one of his Churchillian moods, defending Western civilization from the barbarians." Reston, whose anger was such that he perhaps did not notice that he had just compared his own view to Neville Chamberlain's, wailed that Weinberger is winning factional battles with the State Department and budget cutters "mainly because of his long and close association with Ronald Reagan, who admires and believes in him."

David Gergen of the *Washington Post* and the Los Angeles Times Syndicate chastised the President because, "Rather than listening to Washington's latest political wisdom, he still prefers to rely on instincts and beliefs from his past as the best guide to the future. . . . If all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't change him on defense, he won't be an easy mark on arms control either."

Henry Kissinger's syndicated press agent Joseph Kraft, and David Broder of the *Washington Post*, conceding in Broder's words, that "Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger is the strong man of the Reagan administration," urged Congressional budget cutters to make the SDI "Reagan's Vietnam."

But the *New York Times*, as usual, takes the cake. It began the wishful lying of its lead Dec. 27 editorial, "The Moon and the Mirage," with the assertion: "'Eliminating the threat posed by strategic nuclear missiles' . . . can't be done. But Mr. Reagan won't take no for an answer."

The *Times* then went to the incredible length of insisting that its lies about the President's policy of previous days were true, and that Mr. Reagan's statements about the policy were false! The President does not understand his own policy! The actual SDI now being researched is only to protect missile silos! Quoting the President's insistence that the SDI is "not going to protect missiles, it's going to destroy missiles," the *Times* charged that the President has "misunderstood the nature of the challenge posed by a Star Wars defense. . . . Unlike the Moon landing, which was mainly a struggle against the laws of gravity [!], a Star Wars shield would be vigorously opposed by Soviet countermeasures."

The *Times*' arrogance was a little too much for even some news sources. The *Dallas Morning News* backed Reagan and Weinberger against the *Times*, quoting the *Times*' lying reportage, and Weinberger's straightforward refutation.

Second thoughts

The effect of forceful clarity by the President and his defense secretary was even visible in Margaret Thatcher, who was compelled to back away from her earlier love-in with Gorbachov. The *Daily Telegraph* reported "mounting anxiety on both sides of the Atlantic that the Prime Minister and other Ministers had handed Moscow a diplomatic coup by their praise of Gorbachov," and "had done little to correct Soviet claims that she was now siding with Russia in urging Reagan to call a halt to the Star Wars Program." Thatcher told the BBC on Dec. 23, "Mr. Gorbachov knows . . . that there is no possibility of separating me from the U.S." But she continued to defend the MAD doctrine.

On the U.S. side, even those in the administration who had been quoted as sources for the SDI cutback stories trimmed their sails. White House science advisor George Keyworth in the Dec. 24 *Washington Post* ripped into the "Gang of Four" arms controllers, McGeorge Bundy, Robert McNamara, Gerard Smith, and George Kennan, who authored the Council on Foreign Relations report attacking beam defense. Said Keyworth: "Each of these four men played a key role in shaping the situation we face today. As such, their legacy is hardly reassuring. Soviet resolve to achieve superiority exceeded the gang's wildest imagination, and their arms control theory has provided little restraint as the Soviets have continued to build. The president's commitment to achieving real reductions in strategic arms deserves more than bitter sniping from those who have failed in the past."

On television Dec. 23, National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane insisted that the idea of using the Strategic Defense Initiative as a bargaining chip "is not the way to go," and that Geneva should be a place to explain to the Russians "why we would be better off with defensive systems."