

Expand the debate over beam defense

by General Alberto Li Gobbi

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As the last scheduled speaker on this panel I can now stress briefly what I liked very much in the previous policy papers and briefly mention what I did not fully agree with.

First, as a European, what I liked and subscribe to almost 100%. Everything that was said by everybody but, especially, by Todenhöfer in his appeal for an active participation by Europeans.

Second, of what was I not completely convinced? The danger pointed out by Liebig that if we do not reach an agreement with the Russians on "beam weapons"—and Reagan, nevertheless, insists on doing it alone—Russian military attack on NATO will be inevitable.

I have accepted, in the past year in Italy, several invitations by Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, and veterans organizations to try to explain to them what the program was. During the discussion period that followed every presentation, the audience was divided down the middle between "supporters" and "objectors." So I adopted the tactic of making them fight each other.

The principal "objections" of the "enemies" of beam weapons can be summed up as follows:

Objection 1: Admitted and not conceded that the U.S. project if it is realized, will assure a 95% protection against arriving nuclear missiles in the U.S.A. and, perhaps also in Europe, the remaining 5% which succeed in filtering through are more than enough to wreak incalculable harm. Therefore, the "detractors" conclude, the value of the protective beam weapons shield against nuclear warheads, both for Americans and for Europeans is practically non-existent.

Objection 2: The acquisition of a "beam weapons" defense system, would be a further escalation, in the field of arms and would certainly be interpreted by the Soviets and world peace movement as a *provocation*.

Objection 3: The enormous economic effort needed to carry out the project is, at this time of economic crisis and hunger in the world, an unforgivable waste of money which could be better used for suffering humanity.

Objection 4: Finally, the adoption by the United States of the so-called "Strategic Defense Initiative," made possible by beam weapons, replacing the "Flexible Response" doctrine, would perilously destabilize the balance of terror which,

up to now, has assured "peace" between the two superpowers.

During the "fight" the "supporters" of the beam weapons used the following ammunition against the above "enemy" objections. Let's take them in order:

Against Objection 1: Whoever thinks that beam weapons could be the absolute weapon, the impenetrable defensive shield of the future, is mistaken. In the eternal fight between shield and cannon, no one has ever won 100%. The new weapon, shield or cannon, whatever it is, does not nullify the adversary but can only decrease its effectiveness, more or less seriously. In World War I, for example, the trenches, combined with machine guns and barbed wire, stopped all infantry attacks and froze the front in Europe for years. The tank didn't destroy such a defense system but only succeeded in downgrading it very badly and gave new mobility and maneuvering ability to the attacking forces, where the terrain allowed it.

If the beam weapons shield could downgrade the importance of nuclear weapons by only 50%, it would have already achieved formidable defensive success on political, military, and psychological grounds.

Against Objection 2: The acquisition of a shield to somehow stop, in a more or less effective way, the mortal blows of the adversary can be considered "provocative" only by an adversary who wants to destroy us at all costs. "How do you expect me to kill you, damn it, if you don't stand still and you stop my knife?"

Against Objection 3: The enormous economic expense for the space defense program could probably be better used, but certainly not for those pathetic motives of hunger in the world or similar causes bandied about by every demagogue. These are problems which certainly exist, but could be better solved by the inevitable technological spinoff of the projects and the new considerable increases in productivity in various sectors, and the relative progress of humanity.

Against Objection 4: After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for nearly 15 years there was neither a "nuclear balance" nor "nuclear imbalance." There was a "nuclear monopoly" by the United States. Despite this, and despite the well-known provocations of the U.S.S.R., no nuclear war broke out. The destabilization of the "balance of terror" is only dangerous when it is in favor of the the potential murderer, and not the potential victim.

Proposal: In my experience in several fights between "objectors" and "supporters" of the beam weapons, the number of supporters has always increased at the expense of the number of objectors.

So I propose that all European sections of the Schiller Institute organize several small "conferences" or, even better, several informal "round tables" on the themes: beam weapons; peace for all humanity; destroy weapons not people, and so forth. We ought to invite the national and international experts on beam weapons, and the local press, and the maximum number of citizens.