

EIR National

SDI advances announced as Geneva arms talks near

by Kathleen Klenetsky

The Reagan administration is deftly exploiting the final days prior to the reopening of the Geneva arms talks to embark on a public offensive for the two weapons systems the Soviets most want the United States to negotiate away: the Strategic Defense Initiative—object of one of the most intensive Soviet propaganda drives in history; and the MX missile, designed to partially fill the yawning gap between Soviet and U.S. strategic offensive capabilities.

Both programs are major targets of Congressional budget-cutters who insist that the Reagan FY 1986 Pentagon budget be slashed, and that the MX and SDI, in particular, be sacrificed to the “economic realities” of the federal budget deficit.

In a high-profile lobbying effort aimed principally at quelling congressional resistance to the two programs, the President and key spokesmen made numerous public and private appearances over the month of February to reiterate the crucial nature of both the SDI and the MX to U.S. national security. They have managed to drop some well-timed bombshells in the process.

SDI bombshell

In a development of major significance, President Reagan's science adviser George Keyworth and Lt. Gen. James Abrahamson, director of the Strategic Defense Initiative Office (SDIO) disclosed in late February that unexpected breakthroughs in SDI research and development have significantly advanced the program's schedule. Specifically, Keyworth told a Dallas audience, the timetable for demonstration of feasibility of crucial laser-technology components of the SDI has been moved up from the previously calculated ten years to only five.

Similarly, Abrahamson told the House Armed Services Committee on Feb. 27 that a “compelling case” could be made within five years for the SDI on the basis of “convincing

laboratory tests” which could be conducted within the confines of the ABM Treaty.

This breakthrough will not only intensify pressure on the Russians to honestly negotiate arms control agreements, as Keyworth noted in Dallas; it will also undercut the SDI's foes in the United States. The fact that the SDI program is proceeding so successfully, despite minimal funding, is the best argument yet against the mobs of Eastern Establishment naysayers like McGeorge Bundy and their puppets in Congress, who have been screaming for the past two years that the technical problems involved in developing a strategic defense are insurmountable. With every new revelation from the SDIO, this gang is being nailed as deliberate, political liars.

The Abrahamson-Keyworth message is being carefully delivered to key private and professional organizations. For instance, Dr. Gerald Yonas, the SDIO's chief scientist, gave a hard-hitting briefing to a meeting of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics in Washington Feb. 27 (see page 52). Yonas singled out the Soviet ABM program for special attention, stressing that the Soviets have made great strides in both conventional and more advanced aspects of their program.

Administration spokesmen have also been targeting the Soviet program, and especially massive Soviet violations of the ABM Treaty.

Appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Feb. 25, Undersecretary of Defense Richard Perle charged the Soviets with playing “fast and loose” with arms control by violating the SALT accords and the ABM Treaty, while the United States, by contrast, must “adhere to every crossed-t and dotted-i.” Under this “double standard,” Perle asserted, the Soviets have engaged in an “unimpeded upward growth” of deployment of thousands of nuclear warheads.

Stressing that the Soviets have a “dismal record” of compliance with arms-control treaties, Perle added: “We will not

repeat the mistakes of 1972 and 1979" by signing arms control accords "that permitted significant increases in strategic weapons" and "actually stimulated the deployment of new weapons systems." He warned the senators that the Soviets would not agree to reduce their weapons arsenals "if they believe that pressure at home to achieve an agreement—any agreement—will cause our negotiators merely to superintend a march of concessions toward the Soviet position."

Paul Nitze, the administration's senior arms-control adviser, had a similar warning for the same committee the next day. Testifying on the upcoming Geneva talks, Nitze cautioned that the Soviets will attempt to hold progress in the intermediate-range and strategic nuclear arms talks "hostage to our movement in the defense and space forum where they clearly want to inhibit the U.S. research program on strategic defense." Nitze called on Congress to provide full funding for the program, since "it would be most unwise to curtail research into strategic defenses."

Nitze went on to note that the Russians continue to insist it is impossible to achieve an agreement in one arms control area without agreement in the others. "This is part of the effort," he said, "to bring about an end to American research into space defensive weapons, even though the Russians already have devoted considerable resources into this field."

Indeed, just days later, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, during a visit to Spain, declared that *only* if the U.S. "abandons Star Wars" would there be a chance for a reduction in strategic and medium-range nuclear arms.

MX: turning the tables

During the last week in February, Reagan took the opponents of the MX completely by surprise when he announced that he would seek a vote on the controversial program in mid-March. Reagan's move was diabolical: Last year, Congress had endorsed an amendment sponsored by Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), a former McNamara "whiz kid" who recently seized the chairmanship of the House Armed Services Committee, that put a "fence" around the MX program. The amendment held up funds for the 21 MX missiles approved by Congress in 1985, until both houses of Congress voted *twice* to release them. The measure mandated that the administration would first have to send a report to the Hill demonstrating that it was trying to make progress in arms-control talks with the Soviets before the funds could be allocated.

Reagan announced that he would send the report over in early March. Under the terms of the Aspin amendment, this means that Congress will have to vote on the missile shortly after the Geneva talks have opened. This has put congressional foes of the MX on the defensive—since it will be much more politically difficult to vote "no" while the arms-control negotiations are in progress.

Reagan is exploiting this fact to the limit. In a White

House meeting with members of the Senate Armed Services and Appropriations Committees on Feb. 26, Reagan bluntly stated that he is "utterly convinced we cannot get a sound agreement at Geneva" without congressional approval of the Peacekeeper. That point was seconded by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, who told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee the same day that the MX "plays a pivotal role in advancing our arms control goals" as well as being crucial to America's defense. "We must move ahead with deployment of the MX now because it represents a credible deterrent today."

"It's going to be a tough fight, no doubt about it," said Rep. Nicholas B. Marvoules (D-Mass.), a leader of the anti-MX cabal.

Battle not won

Although the administration has racked up some major points in its fight to protect the MX and SDI, the battle is by no means won. Foes of both programs may be licking their wounds, but they are also plotting counterattacks. Aspin's Armed Services Committee took testimony Feb. 28 from some of the SDI's most vocal opponents—including former defense secretaries Harold Brown and James Schlesinger, and Gen. Brent Scowcroft, a partner in Kissinger Associates. All three opined that while a missile defense system might work, the kind of universal population defense which the SDI is geared toward is "impossible."

Schlesinger made a particularly disgusting spectacle of himself. Claiming to be heartbroken at the idea "because I'm a Pentagon man myself," he nevertheless insisted that the defense budget be frozen and that "significant reductions" be made in both the "overgenerous" SDI budget and the MX because "something has to be done about the deficit."

Meanwhile, two congressional bodies, the Office of Technology Assessment (whose director, Ashton Carter, is an intimate of McGeorge Bundy), and the Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus, are preparing "studies" of the SDI which reportedly will make Soviet propaganda attacks look like approval.

But the real threat to the SDI stems from another source: the American economy. Despite the President's insistence that the outlook was never rosier, the economy is edging toward total collapse. When the phony recovery finally starts crumbling, as shortly it must, then Reagan will be hard-pressed to beat back demands from the budget-cutters that he "put the defense budget on the table" along with other federal programs.

At that point, the kind of argument put forward by Schlesinger and others—an argument that comes straight from the drawing tables at the International Monetary Fund—will have to be countered, not by nostrums, but by a Reagan break with the IMF, and the adoption of an economic policy capable of supporting a true second industrial revolution.