

Report from Italy by Liliana Gorini

The nation goes with the SDI

A visit by the SDI chief found that the government had already created a commission, and industry had created consortia.

On Monday, Aug. 26, Lt.-Gen. James Abrahamson, head of the U.S. Office of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), the so-called "Star Wars" program announced by President Reagan in March 1983, arrived in Rome for three days of meetings with Italian government and industry representatives. The meetings' purpose was to concretize Italian participation in the SDI.

Italy's role in the SDI was first discussed during a meeting in Washington between Prime Minister Bettino Craxi and President Ronald Reagan in March 1985. Since then, the Italian government has formed a defense-industry commission, led by the premier, and composed of relevant ministers (defense, industry, foreign affairs, scientific research, and state industries). The commission has interviewed representatives of high-technology industries in Italy to learn what the nature of their contributions to SDI development might be.

Italian industries, both private and public, have responded enthusiastically. The Turin automobile giant FIAT issued a memorandum on the subject, announcing the participation of six companies linked to FIAT: Borletti, Comau, SNIA-BPD, Fiat Aviazione, Sepa, and Telettra. The public industries giant IRI and its holding company, EFIM, mobilized their specialty sector, including Aeritalia (which has produced satellite systems for NASA), Selenia, Telespazio,

Agusta, Oto Melara, and Breda. Industrial consortia have already been created in order to avoid duplication and coordinate efforts in the research program.

Many of these industries, particularly Elettronica Spa, SNIA BPD, and Aeritalia, already have contracts with the Pentagon and NASA, and could make important contributions in the fields of infrared sensors, lasers, electronic and satellite components, and computers.

On Sept. 4, the details of Italian participation in the SDI were discussed with a top-level American technical-scientific delegation which began its European tour in Rome. As Industry Minister Renato Altissimo declared in an interview with *La Repubblica* afterwards:

"For Italy to participate in the SDI project is essential in order to reduce the technological gap with the United States. The SDI is a train on which we have to jump. It is obvious that if an agreement can not be reached directly with the government, the American authorities will deal directly with the interested Italian industries. But it would be more useful if these negotiations were preceded by an agreement between the two governments."

According to Altissimo, "The committee of the five ministers will immediately create a series of consortia, like the one already formed by Agusta and the EFIM companies, in order to identify the various areas of

expertise."

In an interview with *Corriere della Sera* on Aug. 27, Abrahamson specified again that "many European industries could take the lead in the project." He gave the example of Aeritalia, which proposed to NASA its tethered satellite system project. General Abrahamson also took the occasion to polemicize against SDI opponents in the United States, who are also the main spokesmen for strategic "decoupling" of Europe and the United States—the established euphemism for American military desertion of Europe to Soviet domination.

In particular, Abrahamson singled out Carter Defense Secretary Harold Brown, Carter National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

"What Harold Brown has in mind is totally different from the SDI," he said. "It is similar to the ABM defense system which the Soviets already have or to the terminal phase of the layered SDI system. But with this method, we would never get out of the vicious circle of the arms race."

As for Brzezinski's proposal for "mixing" nuclear weapons and the SDI, Abrahamson declared that this proposal would not change the incompetent MAD doctrine, and does not reflect the true intentions of the SDI program. "The final aim, I emphasize, is to make nuclear missiles obsolete."

To a question on the "window of vulnerability" which would be opened, according to Henry Kissinger, by an SDI system which is not totally impenetrable, Abrahamson answered:

"I am sure there would be no such window of vulnerability. We have to convince the Soviets to follow our road and give more and more importance to defense, in our mutual interest. If we can manage that, we will free both from nuclear missiles."