

Sam Nunn threatens to restructure SDI

by Kathy Klenetsky

The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) will face some of its roughest sledding yet when the new Congress convenes Jan. 6. Although the SDI's budget has been slashed by Congress every year since it was first launched by President Reagan in March 1983, the program's basic premises, as well as its budget, are now under assault.

A coterie of "pro-defense" Democrats, led by Sen. Sam Nunn (Ga.), has developed a new line of attack against the SDI. Rather than opposing the program wholesale, Nunn and his allies, notably House Armed Services Committee chairman Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.), are trying to force a fundamental shift in SDI's orientation.

Arguing that President Reagan's vision of a strategic defense that would protect the populations of the United States and its allies is "impractical" and "too expensive," Nunn et al. propose that SDI be limited to the more "realistic" objective of providing a near-term defense of missiles and command-control centers.

There is little perceptible difference between Nunn's plans and those of Lt.-Gen. Danny Graham and his Heritage Foundation-backed "High Frontier." One of Graham's Capitol Hill devotees, Sen. Dan Quayle (R-Ind.), a self-proclaimed champion of strategic defense, has been screaming at Reagan and Weinberger to stop fooling around with "exotic" technologies, and to orient SDI into a missile-defense program based on existing technologies.

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, as well as the President, have spoken out forcefully against such a reorientation. Weinberger has correctly emphasized that only a system based on the most advanced technologies, and a multi-layered design, makes any sense, both from the scientific-technological standpoint, and in light of the Soviet Union's ambitious strategic defense program. He also warns that diverting SDI's limited resources into near-term point-defense could easily sabotage the more advanced, and more efficient, technologies.

Nevertheless, Nunn has already chalked up some partial successes: In 1986, he amended the FY1987 defense authorization bill to stipulate that SDI's emphasis should be on the "realistic" goal of protecting U.S. nuclear forces and wartime communications, not on protecting the population. Nunn led the fight in the Senate to cut the SDI's budget by \$2 billion.

With Nunn slated to assume the chairmanship of the

Senate Armed Services Committee, in a Democrat-controlled Senate, the SDI's chances of escaping further deep damage are expected to nose dive. Much of the inspiration for Nunn's new line of attack comes from the Aspen Institute, the Denver think-tank which spawned the NATO "decoupling" operation, in which Nunn has also played a key role.

Aspen has provided many of the scripts used by the SDI's enemies. Particularly active on this front has been Aspen's Strategy Group, which is co-chaired by Dr. William Perry (former undersecretary of defense in the Carter-Mondale administration) and Lt.-Gen. Brent Scowcroft (ret.), who now heads Henry Kissinger's consulting firm, and whose members include such anti-SDI zealots as Dr. Sidney Drell, Dr. John Steinbruner, Prof. George Rathjens, Prof. Paul Doty, as well as Sam Nunn and Les Aspin.

Last month, the Strategy Group issued a report, "The Strategic Defense Initiative and American Security," which will serve as Nunn's blueprint. Declaring, "We see virtually no prospect of building a significant and effective population shield against a responsive enemy inside this century, and there is great uncertainty about the long term," the report recommends the following: 1) "Up through the early 1990s, our main interest in strategic defense should be . . . to preserve options for selected defenses of our retaliatory forces," a task to which "SDI is not well-suited." 2) "Focus SDI experimental work on technology development, not engineering development or field demonstrations"; 3) "Continue to adhere to the traditional interpretation of the ABM Treaty"—which would prohibit work in the most promising defensive technologies; and 4) "Establish a framework accord with the Soviets for deep cuts in offensive arms and continued restraint on defense."

One key reason that the Aspen gang—Nunn included—has decided to drop all-out opposition to the SDI, in favor of a show of conditional support, is that they've finally woken up to the fact that the vast majority of Americans support the concept of strategic defense. That fact was duly recognized by Hoover Institution fellow Gregory Fossedal, who put forth an "SDI for Democrats" scheme in the Nov. 17 issue of the *New Republic*.

Fossedal, who is close to the Heritage Foundation, called on Democrats to become "supporters" of the SDI by promoting High Frontier against Reagan's "peace shield delusion." Given the popularity of SDI with the electorate, Fossedal advises the Democrats to "devise a position for themselves that captures much of the public sentiment behind Star Wars, yet rallies it behind something different." How about this proposal? 1) Cut funding for the present SDI research effort in half, largely by eliminating work on some laser beams and other exotic "kill mechanisms." 2) Use the money saved actually to build an advanced defense "using less futuristic technology." Such a system, he comments, "would be a military reformer's design for strategic defense: using simpler, cheaper systems instead of high-tech weapons."