

On the 29th Anniversary Of Reagan's SDI Proposal

On March 23, 1983, in a national television address, President Ronald Reagan made the proposal for his Strategic Defense Initiative, which, he said, "holds the promise of changing the course of human history." Here is the relevant excerpt:

In recent months ... my advisors ... have underscored the necessity to break out of a future that relies solely on offensive retaliation for our security. Over the course of these discussions I have become more and more deeply convinced that the human spirit must be capable of rising above dealing with other nations and human beings by threatening their existence.... Wouldn't it be better to save lives than to avenge them? Are we not capable of demonstrating our peaceful intentions by applying all our abilities and our ingenuity to achieving a truly lasting stability? I think we are—indeed we must!

After careful consultation with my advisors, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I believe there is a way. Let me share with you a vision of the future which offers hope. It is that we embark on a program to counter the awesome Soviet missile threat with

measures that are defensive. Let us turn to the very strengths in technology that spawned our great industrial base.... What if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant U.S. retaliation to deter a Soviet attack; that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reach our own soil or that of our allies?... Isn't it worth every investment necessary to free the world from the threat of nuclear war? We know it is!

...I clearly recognize that defensive systems have limitations and raise certain problems and ambiguities. If paired with offensive systems, they can be viewed as fostering an aggressive policy and no one wants that. But with these considerations firmly in mind, I call upon the scientific community in our country, those who gave us nuclear weapons, to turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace; to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.... We seek neither military superiority nor political advantage. Our only purpose—one all people share—is to search for ways to reduce the danger of nuclear war.

My fellow Americans, tonight we are launching an effort that holds the promise of changing the course of human history. There will be risks, and results take time, but I believe we can do it. As we cross this threshold, I ask for your prayers and your support.