

SDI budget request: shift from lasers

by Robert Gallagher

The Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO) is requesting \$500 million less for Defense Department programs to develop laser and particle beam technology for Fiscal Year 1988 than it requested in January 1986 for the current fiscal year. The request for funding of directed energy weapons is the only one of the five Defense Department SDI program areas that is not higher than the amount requested last year (see Table 1). SDIO now places equal emphasis on directed energy weapons and "kinetic energy weapons," which are designed to destroy their targets by direct impact or explosion of a nonnuclear warhead.

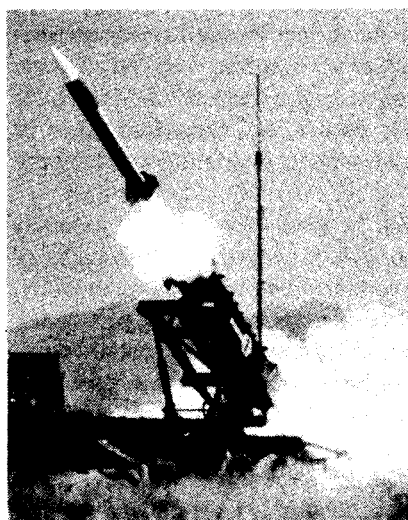
This shift in emphasis appeared in the aftermath of congressional action last summer that simultaneously (and contradictorily) slashed last year's request by \$1.6 billion while demanding that the program move toward "early deployment" of a partial strategic defense. Now the request for funding for directed energy weapons is only one-fifth of the total Defense Department SDI budget request, whereas it was one-third, last year.

Sources close to the SDIO report that the decision has been made to focus on development of "space-based kinetic kill vehicles," small chemical-fueled rockets stationed in orbiting satellites, for a first-generation system to intercept Soviet ballistic missiles in their boost phase, the first few

minutes after they are launched. This proposed design was first made in 1959 under Project Defender and was dusted off in 1980 by Danny Graham's High Frontier project to deploy "off the shelf" technology for an ABM defense. In the years since Graham made his unfortunate proposal, the United States could have developed the laser technology required for "early deployment" by 1990, had the resources been allocated. Instead, not only did President Reagan refuse to adopt the required "Apollo program" approach to the SDI, but Congress then massively cut the meager funds he requested. There remains little doubt that "early deployment" of kinetic energy weapons is entirely a budgetary question, not a technological one.

However, good can come out of bad. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger has used the opportunity opened by the calls for early deployment, to demand funding for a heavy-lift launch vehicle capable of lifting 100,000 to 150,000 pounds into earth orbit, a capability we need anyway to move out to space in a colonization program and which *EIR* called for in our second quarter 1986 *Quarterly Economic Report*. Weinberger requested \$250 million for development of space transportation technology in a December 1986 request for a supplement to the 1987 SDI budget, and is asking for another \$300 million for 1988. About half of this money is intended for development of the new launch vehicle.

Sources close to the Pentagon report that the Patriot anti-aircraft missile system will be upgraded into a full-blown antitactical ballistic missile (ATBM) system, to provide some defense for Western Europe, Japan, South Korea, and Israel against the intermediate range SS-20s, SS-21s, SS-23s, and so forth. Others report that this upgrade has already been made, but is now being publicly announced to counter the move toward decoupling Western Europe and the United States. (Such a system is allowed under the 1972 ABM Treaty.)



Department of Defense

Testing of a Patriot anti-missile missile.

TABLE 1
New SDI budget request confirms shift in program
 (in millions of dollars)

SDI area	FY86 Act1	FY87 Req.	FY87 Act1	Change 86-87	FY87 Suppl Req.	FY88 Req.	% Change vs. Req.	FY87 Act.
Surv, Acq, Track, Kill Assess.	857	1262	960	12%	70	1490	18	55
Directed Energy	844	1615	803	-5%	70	1100	-42	37
Kinetic Energy	596	991	740	23%	60	1070	8	45
Systems Concpt Battle Mgmt	227	462	384	69%	40	627	36	63
Surv, Lethality Support Tech.*	222	454	320	44%	260	900	98	181
Total	2759	4803	3207	16%	500	5220	8.7	63

*Includes space transportation technology research and development: \$250 million for FY87 supplemental and about \$300 million for FY88 request.

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