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Will the SDI survive? a political question

The technical successes are there, but with the White House refusing to even propose adequate funding, and Congress set to cut more, the SDI is not surviving in any meaningful form.

The Strategic Defense Initiative Organization has had two series of successful tests over the past several months. Below, Charles B. Stevens reports on important developments with the Alpha laser, and also summarizes the results of more recent tests of sensing equipment.

But the reality is, that despite its technological successes, the program is being gutted beyond the point of feasibility within the decade. President Reagan may intend to defend the SDI from his Soviet and congressional opponents, but no rhetoric can compensate for failure to adequately fund research and development.

While in 1982 and 1983, Lyndon LaRouche called for a \$100 billion crash program to develop directed energy weapons, the proposal adopted by President Reagan in March 1983 called for a mere \$5 to \$6 billion in R&D funds, toward deployment in the early 1990s. Congress has cut his program by as much as 30% over this period. As a result, no decision on deployment is planned before 1993.

The Pentagon had sought \$5.2 billion for FY 1988, but received only \$3.6 billion. In the same two-year budget, they had planned to seek \$6.3 billion, but Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci has now cut this request back by \$1.7 billion, to \$4.6 billion.

One result has been a shift in emphasis from research on directed energy weapons to off-the-shelf rocket capabilities for more limited point defense. This, of course, completely vitiates the strategic focus of the President's original conception: a multi-layered defensive shield for the United States and its Western allies.

Gramm-Rudman budget cuts in the FY 1988 for SDI ended two highly important programs. How the fiscal 1989 budget's proposed \$4.6 billion fares in Congress is any man's guess, but judging by past history, the program's enemies will demand disastrous cuts.

This year's cuts have meant that plans to build a high-power free electron laser at the White Sands Missile Test Range in New Mexico, a prototype of a functional laser missile interceptor, have been considerably delayed. A contract to McDonnell Douglas Astronautics to design, fabricate, and test a high-energy neutral particle beam device in space has also been canceled by the SDIO.

The White Sands FEL was planned to produce millions of watts of power, and to demonstrate the engineering feasibility of a system to destroy Soviet rockets in the boost phase. The neutral particle beam experiment was intended to discriminate real warheads from decoys. The neutral beam device, whose contract was awarded last May, also had the potential of being developed at a higher power, into an actual ABM weapon. The experiment was copied from a device described in Soviet literature, and presumably being developed by them. Research at the Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore labs has been cut by 25%.

The Delta tracking and targeting test of Feb. 8 was apparently successful in the main. Its announced purpose, as reported in *Aviation Week* Feb. 15, was to provide a comprehensive space sensor data base. It also demonstrated rudimentary battle management fire control computations. The main problems appear to have emerged when two computers disagreed, apparently because they could not handle the amount of data flowing into them.

One purpose was to accumulate background data which would be used to help sensors to discriminate objects against different backgrounds. This part of the test was extremely successful. The sensors were also successful in detecting the launch of a Strypi rocket from Hawaii, observing the 34-second burn of the Strypi's Star-27 third-stage solid rocket motor against the dawn light, through different atmospheric layers.