The Power of Ideas: SDI Changed the World

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The tenth anniversary of President Reagan's announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative was marked by this presentation by EIR *Counterintelligence Editor Jeffrey Steinberg—"The Power of Ideas: LaRouche's SDI Changed the World"—to the International Caucus of Labor Committees/ Schiller Institute conference of March 21-22, 1993.*

Ten years ago this week, President Ronald Reagan changed the world by delivering the following brief message at the close of his nationwide televised address: "In recent months," the President said, ". . . 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."

'At Last, Hope'

The following day, March 24, 1983, in a public statement issued from Wiesbaden, West Germany, Lyndon LaRouche offered his personal congratulations and support to the President with the following words: "No longer must Democrats go to bed each night fearing that they must live out their lives under the threat of thermonuclear ballistic terror. The coming several years will be probably the most difficult of the entire post-war period; but, for the first time since the end of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, there is, at last, hope that the thermonuclear nightmare will be ended during the remainder of this decade. . . . Only high-level officials of government, or a private citizen as intimately knowledgeable of details of the international political and strategic situation as I am privileged to be, can even begin to foresee the earth-shaking impact the President's television address last night will have throughout the world. No one can foresee what the exact consequences of the President's actions will be; we cannot foresee how ferocious and stubborn resistance to the President's policy will be, both from Moscow and from the nuclear freeze advocates in Europe and the United States itself. Whatever those reactions and their influence, the words the President spoke last night can never be put back into the bottle. Most of the world will soon know, and will never forget that policy announcement. With those words, the President has changed the course of modern history.

"Today I am prouder to be an American than I have been since the first manned landing on the Moon. For the first time in 20 years, a President of the United States has contributed a public action of great leadership, to give a new basis for hope to humanity's future to an agonized and demoralized world. True greatness in an American President touched President Ronald Reagan last night; it is a moment of greatness never to be forgotten."

Lyndon LaRouche's prophetic comments on President Reagan's March 23 address were based on his own intimate involvement in the process leading up to the President's adoption of what he labeled the Strategic Defense Initiative. From Moscow to London to Washington, among the small circle of the world's most powerful political figures, friends and enemies alike, there was absolutely no doubt that President Reagan had adopted Lyndon LaRouche's strategic doctrine. Against all odds, the power of an idea, devised and promulgated by Lyndon LaRouche, had "touched" the President of the United States and a small handful of his most loyal advisors, and history was made.

EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

Three weeks after Reagan's "SDI speech" of March 23, 1983, Lyndon LaRouche addresses a conference of the Fusion Energy Foundation in Washington.

For some leading figures in Moscow, one of the critical questions left unanswered by the TV address of March 23 was whether President Reagan's adoption of the ballistic missile defense/Mutually Assured Survival doctrine also meant that he had consciously adopted Lyndon LaRouche's *Operation Juárez* proposal for a new world economic order. But on the question of ballistic missile defense (BMD), there was no doubt.

Earlier in the afternoon of March 23, at a National Security Council background briefing for the White House press corps, details of the President's 8 p.m. TV address had been filled out. At that briefing, it was made clear that President Reagan would propose that the United States and the Soviet Union work together to make the doctrine of Mutually Assured Survival a reality. Shortly after the President's speech, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger more formally conveyed the offer to Moscow for the two superpowers to work together to develop and deploy a strategic ballistic missile defense system.

Not only was Lyndon LaRouche the intellectual author of the policy concept behind Reagan's SDI. Between December 1981 and the date of the President's speech, Lyndon LaRouche, acting on behalf of and at the behest of the Reagan White House and other U.S. government agencies, personally conducted back-channel negotiations with high-level representatives of the Soviet government. As the result of those negotiations, Moscow was fully informed, well over a year in advance of the President's March 23 speech, of the details of the policy offer. And because of LaRouche's personal role in those discussions, Moscow had no justifiable reason to doubt the sincerity of President Reagan's offer.

Had Moscow decided to take up President Reagan's generous offer, rather than adopt the suicidal alternative, Lyndon LaRouche would have undoubtedly been called upon to con-

tinue in his role as broker and guarantor of a new era of world peace and prosperity based on a thorough transformation of East-West and North-South relations. Tragically, LaRouche was right when he warned on March 24 about the reactions that would come spilling out of the crevices in Moscow, London, New York, and Washington. But he was also right when he said that the actions taken by President Reagan could "never be put back in the bottle."

History of the Back Channel

President Reagan's March 23 address came as the result of years of effort.

Lyndon LaRouche and his associates had been talking about ballistic missile defense, employing new physical principles, since 1977.

During the perilous years of the Carter Presidency, Mr. LaRouche had served as an unofficial channel of communication between elements inside the official U.S. intelligence establishment, and Soviet intelligence counterparts. This was part of a "fail-safe system" built up by sane individuals on both sides of the East-West divide, to minimize the danger of a misunderstanding triggering a strategic confrontation. LaRouche was solicited for this effort, in part, in response to his election-eve 1976 nationwide TV address, in which he warned of the dangers of thermonuclear war, should Jimmy Carter and the Trilateral Commission come into office.

In early March 1981, a senior Soviet diplomat posted at the Permanent Mission to the United Nations, Mr. Kudashev, approached *EIR*'s Asian Affairs Editor, Dan Sneider, soliciting LaRouche's views on the new Reagan Administration. On instructions from the same U.S. intelligence channels through which the earlier Soviet discussions had been conducted, word of that approach and a detailed summary of the discussion, was forwarded to White House counsellor Edwin Meese.

By the early Autumn of that year, Lyndon LaRouche had spelled out his proposals for a joint or parallel U.S.-Soviet strategic ballistic missile defense program. During this same period, representatives of *EIR* held preliminary discussions with a senior diplomat at the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C. named Shershnev.

As the result of these developments, in December 1981, Lyndon LaRouche was again approached by senior U.S. intelligence officials and formally asked to initiate "back-channel" discussions with appropriate Soviet representatives on the possible adoption of a modification of existing strategic doctrine—i.e., LaRouche's own Mutually Assured Survival concept. LaRouche was informed that the back-channel discussions were classified as a compartmentalized secret operation known to a select number of senior officials under a codename.

By this time, Lyndon and Helga LaRouche had met personally with CIA Deputy Director Bobby Ray Inman at the Agency's facility adjacent to the Old Executive Office Building and the White House.

In support of his back-channel efforts on behalf of the ballistic missile defense policy, on Feb. 18-19, 1982, LaRouche participated in a two-day *EIR* seminar on the subject and related topics in Washington, D.C. Of the 600 or so attendees, a number were Soviet and Warsaw Pact diplomats. At an *EIR* reception for participants in the conference, LaRouche was introduced to Mr. Shershnev, and they had the first of a number of discussions about strategic policy issues affecting the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

At their first private discussion, which took place in a suite at the Hay Adams Hotel in Washington shortly after the February 1982 event, LaRouche informed Shershnev that he had been designated by the Reagan Administration to conduct exploratory discussions, and that he would distinguish clearly when he was conveying official messages from U.S. government agencies and when he was providing his own personal evaluations.

In the early Spring of 1982, Admiral Inman announced his resignation as Deputy Director of the CIA effective several months later. The channels under whose auspices LaRouche had been carrying out the negotiations with Moscow representatives informed him at that point that the operation was for the time being aborted. Sensitive to the highly restricted "need to know" security surrounding the back-channel negotiations, LaRouche prepared a written memo to Edwin Meese seeking some guidance on how to proceed. That memo was hand-delivered by a representative of the National Security Council. With the appointment of Judge William Clark as Special Advisor to the President for National Security Affairs in January 1982, LaRouche representatives had established ongoing discussions with a number of NSC officers.

After Ed Meese failed to provide any clear response to the LaRouche memo, Richard Morris, the Executive Assistant to National Security Advisor Clark, informed LaRouche that the Council would take charge of the operation and that the sanctioned back-channel negotiations should continue uninterrupted.

By the Autumn of 1982, momentum had built up inside sections of the U.S. military and intelligence establishment in support of Lyndon LaRouche's ballistic missile defense proposals. General Volney Warner, a retired head of the U.S. Army's FORCECOM, told LaRouche associates in October 1982 that the policy was winning strong support among some of the President's key advisors. Also in October, Edward Teller, a close personal friend and science advisor to President Reagan, threw his support behind BMD, citing recent breakthroughs at Lawrence Livermore Labs on some of the very "new physical principle" approaches advocated by LaRouche. Significantly, Teller also advocated sharing these scientific and technological breakthroughs with Moscow.

LaRouche publicly alluded to his role in the back-channel process in a Dec. 12, 1982 *EIR* Memorandum titled "The

Cultural Determinants of an Anti-Missile Beam-Weapons Policy": "During the months since I first announced the proposed beam-weapons policy, since February of this past year, I have had a number of occasions to discuss this policy with Soviet and other East Bloc representatives, both in person and through relayed communications. In such discussions one must acknowledge that the Soviet representative in question is speaking as a representative of his government to me as a person whom that representative views as connected to policy influencing agencies of the United States. Therefore, the kinds of discussions which occur have two functional aspects. In one aspect, each of us is speaking for the record. I am careful to indicate what I believe to be my government's policy, as well as I know that policy, as for the record. My Soviet discussion partner in each case will do the same. Then, apart from such statements of policy for the record, we are able to enter into a more or less frank discussion of possible other, additional policy options."

LaRouche again addressed all of these issues in his Dec. 31, 1982 speech to the International Caucus of Labor Committees conference in New York City. Referencing his beam defense program, LaRouche observed: "If we succeed, if President Reagan does this thing, in the coming weeks, then we shall have administered to that ancient foe of our people and of the human race—the Harrimans, et al., the Malthusians—not a killer blow, but a very deadly defeat: a sharp reduction of the Malthusian power internationally. We shall have cleared the decks, weakened the enemies of humanity, to the point that those who are not the enemies of humanity are given a greater latitude for making decisions without having to submit to the Harrimans and that crowd in the period ahead.

"It is in that sense, in that act, which, I believe—in this great tragedy through which we are now living—that choice, is the *punctum saliens* of our age. Either we can grab it, or I know not what we can do."

In the early weeks of February 1983, back in Washington, Lyndon LaRouche again conferred with Mr. Shershnev—this time in a suite at the Sheraton Carlton Hotel. In that discussion, Shershnev delivered a three-part message to LaRouche and, through LaRouche, to the Reagan White House, straight from Moscow.

1. The Soviet government would reject SDI.

2. Soviet studies of LaRouche's BMD proposal had proven that they were sound and viable. However, under conditions of "crash development," the Soviet economy would be incapable of keeping pace with a revived U.S. economy. Therefore, it was principally on economic grounds that Moscow would reject the package.

3. Through other channels of discussion with the highest levels of the Democratic Party, Moscow had been informed that LaRouche's BMD proposal would never reach the desk of President Reagan, and that, therefore, there was no danger of the Reagan Administration ever actually adopting the plan. Under those circumstances, since Moscow found the back-channel talks with LaRouche useful, they would be continued.

Efforts To Sabotage Reagan's Speech

March 23, 1983 hit Moscow like a ton of bricks. Closer to home, the combat had already begun in earnest.

In his autobiography, President Reagan gave a hint of the battle: "March 22—Another day that shouldn't happen. On my desk was a draft of the speech on defense to be delivered tomorrow night on TV. This was one hassled over by NSC, State and Defense. Finally I had a crack at it. . . .

"March 23—The big thing today was the 8 p.m. TV speech on all networks about national security. We've been working on the speech for about 72 hours and right down to the deadline. . . . I did the bulk of the speech on why our arms buildup was necessary and then finished with a call to the science community to join me in research starting now to develop defensive weapons that would render nuclear missiles obsolete. I made no optimistic forecasts—said it might take 20 years or more but we had to do it. I felt good."

Years after that historic date, I received a firsthand account from one of the key figures at the National Security Council of what actually happened on March 23.

James Baker III, as the White House Chief of Staff, was officially the last person assigned to review the President's speeches before the final version was passed on to Reagan for approval. The SDI portion of the speech had been written under the auspices of Judge Clark by a White House speechwriter, Aram Bakshian, who had been in contact with *EIR* for some time—initially, courtesy of Richard Morris. When Baker saw the ballistic missile defense section of the speech, he personally went ballistic. He removed the entire final section, eliminating any mention of the SDI.

Fortunately, Judge Clark was alerted to Baker's perfidy, and in a total violation of protocol, bypassed Baker, slipped into President Reagan's office and alerted him to the deleted portion of the speech. Reagan reinserted the SDI announcement. James Baker didn't find out about it until about 8:20 that night, when the President read those fateful words to the American people.

Ironically, from Wiesbaden, West Germany, Lyndon LaRouche had such a pulse-beat sense of the fight surrounding his strategic defense policy, that even after being informed of the late-afternoon White House background briefing in which the SDI announcement was prominently featured, he warned us back in New York to watch the 8 o'clock telecast to be sure that nothing had been done at the last moment to sabotage the President's public announcement.

I can assure you that there are leading figures from the Reagan Administration, who stood with us in the SDI fight, who will probably never forgive James Baker for what he tried to do that day.

In one of those fortunate quirks of scheduling, *EIR* and the Fusion Energy Foundation had arranged a conference on

the strategic defense plan for mid-April in Washington, D.C. at the Vista Hotel. The event had been scheduled prior to the President's March 23 speech. It was a standing-room-only crowd of 500 or 600 people. Mr. Shershnev sat in the front row. Afterwards, in a meeting with *EIR*'s Washington bureau chief, Shershnev conceded that his and Moscow's hard-line attitude towards LaRouche's strategic defense proposals had been a mistake. He added that with the President's March 23 announcement, the situation was now too big for him to handle. He reported that he had recommended a face-to-face meeting between LaRouche and Georgi Arbatov, the head of the U.S.-Canada Institute. This recommendation was at that very moment being reviewed at the highest levels back in Moscow.

Two weeks later, the back channel was abruptly shut down on orders from Moscow. Shershnev was, shortly thereafter, summoned back home.

Now More Than Ever

In a few moments, Rachel Douglas will pick up this chronology from the eye's view in Moscow. I just wish to end with one final postscript.

Even after the Soviet government's rejection of the SDI policy, Lyndon LaRouche never abandoned the idea that this was the last, best hope for mankind. On Sept. 2, 1983—the day after the Korean Airlines 007 downing—LaRouche wrote to Georgi Arbatov:

"There is no possible route to war-avoidance," LaRouche said, "except the general strategic doctrine I have proposed. . . . Since we must either end up agreeing to what the President has offered on March 23, 1983, or destroy one another, the only worthwhile discussion is a discussion of means to reach such war-avoidance agreement. . . .

"I am not in the least insensitive to the deep implications of the leading point I propose to discuss. I know there are aspects of this matter which are most painful by their nature to the Russian world-outlook, the issue of the 1439 Council of Florence, the issue of Plato versus Aristotle. Yet, experience shows that unless Soviet thinkers in responsible positions can fight through precisely these issues with me, avoidance of war may be impossible, since the philosophical basis for conducting such negotiations may be impossible. How much psychological discomfort of this sort would your associates be willing to endure for so unimportant a matter as perhaps saving the Soviet Union from thermonuclear holocaust?"

These blunt but hopeful words, so typical of the vision that Lyndon LaRouche brought into all of his dealings with Moscow, spoke of axiomatics that are as valid today as they were a decade ago.

Now more than ever, the world needs Lyndon LaRouche—in the flesh and blood, free to shake things up and pull together the kind of international combination of people of good will that passed the world—albeit imperfectly—through the *punctum saliens* of 1983.