

Sir Geoffrey Howe leads British charge against U.S. strategic defense effort

by Laurent Murawiec

“You chose dishonor to avoid war. You will have war and dishonor,” Sir Winston Churchill lashed out at Neville Chamberlain and the Foreign Office ministers and civil servants who returned from their Munich talks with Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. The same should be directed today at Foreign Office chief Sir Geoffrey Howe and his governmental head Margaret Thatcher, after Howe finally threw off the mask of diplomatic cant and rhetorical niceties on the subject of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).

On March 15, speaking to the Royal United Services Institute, a prestigious military think-tank in London—a location designed to give maximal airing to his views—the British Foreign Secretary blasted the SDI policy of the Reagan administration in terms and with arguments entirely culled from the editorial articles of *Pravda*, the broadsides of the Pugwash movement of Malthusian pseudo-scientists, and the Peace Movement’s own propaganda.

He spoke of the “danger of creating a new Maginot Line of the 21st century, liable to be outflanked by relatively simpler and demonstrably cheaper counter-measures,” an outright lie squarely denied by facts of scientific life. “We must take care that political decisions are not pre-empted by the march of technology, still less by premature attempts to predict a route at this stage,” Howe also said, expressing sentiments of horror typical of the British oligarchy at the thought indeed that a ‘science driver’ could determine strategic and economic policies, as it did at the time of NASA. At that point Britain intervened to terminate the space effort.

“Rather than die by the nuclear sword, we have lived by the shield of deterrence,” he ignorantly said, conveniently forgetting the innumerable ‘holes’ in the shield, the collapse of confidence in the strategy—and Soviet efforts of 20 years to break the apparent deadlock of deterrence through development of beam weapons. “Even if the research shows promise,” he added, “the case for proceeding will have to be weighed in the light of the wider strategic implications of moving down the defensive road.” In short, even when defense against thermonuclear missiles becomes possible, the “strategic implication,” i.e., the MAD doctrine so fanatically adhered to by Howe’s policy-masters, should take prec-

edence. What Mrs. Thatcher’s foreign affairs man also fears is that “research may acquire an unstoppable momentum of its own, even though the case for stopping may strengthen with the passage of years.”

Howe further pleaded coyly for adjusting Western politico Soviet “perceptions.” “President Reagan has repeatedly made it clear that he does not seek superiority. But we would have to ensure that the perceptions of others were not different.”

In short, the Orwellian tone notwithstanding, Howe delivered a blistering attack on the totality of the strategic conception expounded since March 23, 1983 by President Reagan and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. *Strategic war has been declared by Britain’s government against American strategy.*

Delivering to the Soviets

The timing of Mrs. Thatcher’s right-hand man’s aggression against President Reagan is no less remarkable. On Dec. 15, while Chernenko lay dying, heir apparent and singularly advertised Mikhail Gorbachov arrived in London, flanked by top Soviet beam-weapon scientist E. Velikhov. Thatcher stated “I like him, I can do business with him” at the conclusion of his voyage, a replication of Khrushchev’s 1955 trip to London. And business with Mr. Gorbachev Mrs. Thatcher certainly did.

Days later, the British prime minister flew to Washington to try and force upon President Reagan the shackles of “arms control,” “respect for the ABM Treaty,” and submit the SDI development to a virtual veto. “Mrs. Thatcher, in her disastrous behavior at the Camp David meeting with the President, has thrown away the best possibilities for the next four years of Anglo-American cooperation,” a British source commented at the time.

The same source added that “our greatest fear is that the Russians will pull the plug on Chernenko a few days before the resumption of the Geneva talks, Gorbachov will be installed firmly in control, and his influence on Mrs. Thatcher is so great, the Russians hope, that Moscow can swing Eu-

rope, with her help, against the U.S. and the SDI.”

When she addressed a joint session of Congress on Feb. 20, Mrs. Thatcher kept some diplomatic prudence. Her policy purpose was still, on the one hand, to rally Western Europe around her own Camp David “Four Point Program,” and prevent the motion expressed by Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany during his pro-SDI speech at the Wehrkunde Society in Munich on Feb. 10, from gaining ground, and, on the other hand, to lull Reagan and the U.S. administration into a false sense of security around purported British “support” for “the research phase” of the SDI. Her speech carefully nurtured the ambiguity of the “special relationship,” while preparations were being made in Europe by British diplomacy to throw all caution to the winds and come out squarely on the Soviet side of the fence.

The decision had clearly been taken by the Royal Family by the time they sent Mrs. Thatcher to Chernenko’s funeral on March 13. She admitted to having discussed the matter with the new Soviet leader. Shortly after that, British military intelligence reports were leaked in the London press according to which “Britain does not accept American claims that a huge phased-array radar installation which the Soviet Union is building in central Siberia is a clear breach of the 1972 ABM Treaty.”

The *Times* of London concluded its editorial attacking Howe’s outburst as “a political act whose consequences, if they are only half as damaging as they now appear, could well go down in history as one of the most ill-fated British decisions since the era of appeasement.” Further, Howe’s speech “may have done untold damage to the cohesion of the Atlantic Alliance. . . . it was mealy-mouthed, muddled in conception, negative, Luddite, ill-informed and in effect if not in intention, a ‘wrecking amendment’ to the whole plan. In the circumstances of Geneva, it might more appropriately be described as the ‘Gorbachov amendment.’ Sir Geoffrey has handed Mr. Gorbachov all the best lines with which to oppose SDI and drive a wedge between Europe and America. . . .”

Luddite alliance

What can be added to the scathing analysis of the London *Times*’ editor concerns the unanswered question: *Why* did Her Majesty’s Government decide at such a crucial strategic juncture to jump ship on the issue rightly considered the most fundamental by Washington, Moscow, and the world as a whole? Why should Britain refuse assured survival, the technological revolution brought about by the SDI, the perspective of strategic stability, and that of finally being able to defend Europe against overwhelming Soviet superiority? What is considered of higher value than such objectives in London (the alibis of ignorance, stupidity, confusion, and opportunism must all be brushed aside, their relevance in particular cases notwithstanding)?

In the last few days, former British defense Minister Denis Healey stated in the House of Commons (March 10)

that “the NATO Alliance could break up if the U.S. insisted on pursuing the SDI. . . .” and that “if the so-called ‘Star Wars’ research risked deep cuts in the nuclear stockpile, then Europe should be prepared to *stage an almighty row with the Americans.*” Is it not precisely what Howe did—to the comforting applause of Thatcher herself on March 19 in the same House? Former Prime Minister Edward Heath stated on March 12 that the SDI would be “decoupling, destabilizing, and a diversion of resources,” during a speech at the influential Royal Institute of International Affairs. In Parliament, Thatcher even lost her nerve, as well as good form, when she assaulted the London *Times* editorial.

The Bishop of Bath and Wells in the U.K. sent a letter to the *Times*’ editor blaming the latter’s “hysterical reaction to Sir Geoffrey Howe’s most welcome speech” which “voiced the feelings of millions of Americans, Russians, and British.”

Former Chief Defense Adviser Sir Ronald Mason also spoke of an “emotional, almost hysterical outburst” to characterize the *Times* piece. Mason has been one of the individuals most intimately involved in plotting a decoupled European reaction against the SDI.

A grand alliance of Conservatives, Labourites, Liberals and Social-Democrats, the Church of England and the Royal Society of Sciences has thus coalesced to stop the SDI. “Luddites” is the most precise characterization of the policy intent, the strategy behind it being the formation of a British-led European bloc, decoupled and independent from the United States. Immediately, Thatcher’s impudent coup aims at delivering a death blow to Reagan’s strategy: Drop the SDI or lose Europe, is her message, repeated by the myriad mouthpieces of the British oligarchy’s mainstream current.

Total review needed

President Reagan is going to have to review all strategies in the light of the implications or Mrs. Thatcher’s betrayal. All illusions have to be swept aside, not only concerning strategic and military policy, *but also in the field in which Thatcher claims most expertise and greatest influence on Reagan—economics.* And the State Department’s unforgivable lie that “no major differences existed” between Washington and London on the SDI as of nearly a week after Howe’s speech must be overruled.

In Europe, Howe’s éclat has suddenly reinvigorated not only the Soviet ‘negotiating’ posture at Geneva, but also those appeasers willing to drop any defense for the sake of pleasing Moscow—as exemplified by Germany’s Foreign Minister’s immediate public testimony. It begs the same critical reexamination: British strategy for all practical purposes must be considered an adjunct to the Soviet grand design of decoupling Europe.

In Britain, those minority figures who have for some months supported Britain’s joining of the SDI are placed squarely in front of their responsibilities. Chamberlain gave Adolf Hitler the ammunition to start World War Two. Will London give Gorbachov’s victory in Europe without a fight?