



U.S. Relations with Russia



Meet the Presidential Library Educators

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Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum

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Linking Star Wars & SDI ~ Strategic Defense Initiative



A long time ago George Lucas dreamed of a far away galaxy...

Some things become so ingrained in public consciousness we forget that they were once new. Star Wars was a low budget risky venture that changed filmmaking. Steven Spielberg noted, George Lucas “changed the look and sound of not only his movies, but everybody else’s movies.”

This is the story of how the movie Star Wars and President Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) became intertwined.

A New Generation of Thinking



President Reagan dreamed of a way to defend America. As Governor of California, being a WWII veteran, and recalling Pearl Harbor, he saw the risk to the West Coast and the Nation.

In 1967 he visited physicist Edward Teller at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory learning about directed-energy weapons (DEWs). In 1979 Reagan visited NORAD asking if an object could be tracked in space. The answer was Yes...

When asked if it could be stopped, the answer was No!

A New Generation of Thinking



Edward (Ede) Teller was a theoretical physicist and chemical engineer. He was born in Budapest Hungary in 1908 to a Jewish family. Earning a bachelors degree in 1928 from the University of Karlsruhe. Then studying physics at the University of Munich. Given the social and political climate of the era Teller transferred to the University of Leipzig receiving his PhD in physics in 1930. After Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933 Teller immigrated to the U.S. He worked on the Manhattan Project but is best known as, the “Father of the Hydrogen Bomb.”

A New Generation of Thinking



Teller became a U.S. citizen in 1941. He worked with J. Robert Oppenheimer at Los Alamos on the Manhattan Project creating the Atomic bomb. Teller was amongst the 1st to be recruited for the project. In 1954 Teller testified at U.S. Government hearings to determine if Oppenheimer was a *Security Risk*. Teller's testimony was not the determining factor. Oppenheimer's clearance was revoked, ending his career. Many prominent members of the U.S. Scientific Community never forgave Teller for his testimony. They viewed it as a betrayal to his former supervisor J. Robert Oppenheimer.

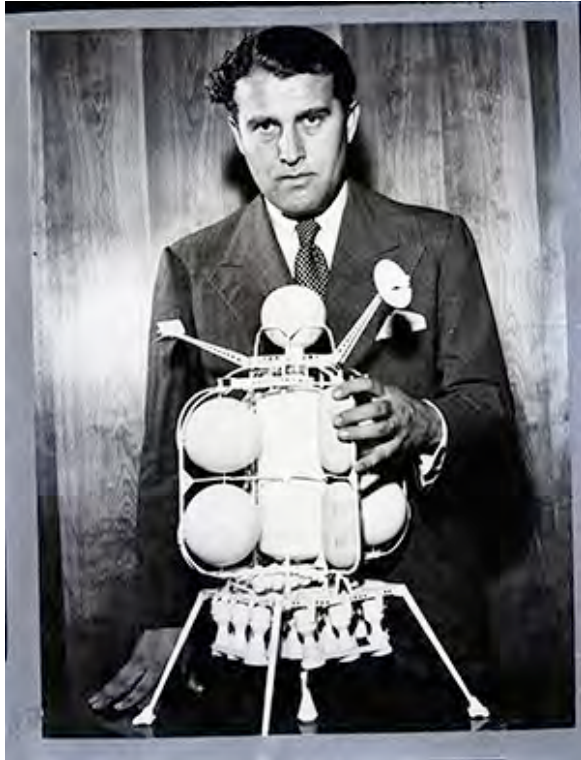
A Nuclear Menace: The Idea of SDI



Rocketry WWII to 1980s

The U.S. began researching ballistic missile defense systems in 1944 when the Nazis launched V-2 rockets at London. The 1950s saw Project Nike, BAMBI, & Defender. During the 1960s the Army's Nike-Zeus test rocket successfully intercepted a Titan missile. In the 1970s the idea of having space stations with lasers able to shoot down missiles emerged. By the time Reagan became President, the Department of Defense had abandoned it. The signing of the ABM Treaty in 1972 and SALT I was a Cold War era 1st. Both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. agreed to limit their nuclear arsenals.

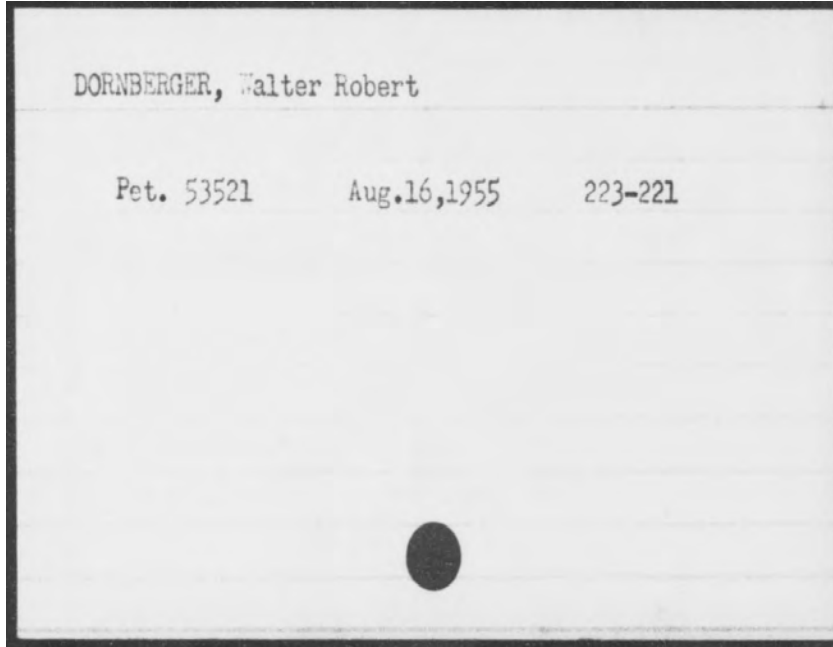
V2 Rocket-Dawn of Ballistic Missiles



The V2 a Dark History

The V2 was the 1st ballistic missile. Forerunner of modern long-range missiles and those used in space. As WWII ended both the U.S. and Russia sought V2 technology. To avoid Allied bombing the V2 was produced underground at the Mittelwerk factory using concentration camp labor from Mittelbau-Dora. By some estimates at least 10,000 prisoners died producing the V2. Controversial aerospace engineer Wernher von Braun developed the V2. Near the end of WWII, he surrendered to the U.S. The maneuver is widely seen as escaping prosecution for war crimes and the U.S.'s desire to beat the Soviets in the Cold War.

A Nuclear Menace: Guided Missiles



The V2 a Dark History

Lt General Walter R. Dornberger was the Military Director of the Nazis V2 Rocket program. Von Braun was the civilian engineer. Dornberger came to the U.S. in 1947, hired as adviser to the U.S. Air Force on guided missiles. Then for Bell Aircraft on the Dyna-Soar program—a joint effort with the U.S. Air Force. Eventually Dyna-Soar became the modern Space Shuttle program. Dornberger gained U.S. citizenship in 1955. He retired from Bell Corp. in 1965 and passed away in 1980. After arriving in the United States there was virtually no mention of his WWII Nazis military service, or the forced labor used to build the V2 rocket.

The SDI Speech

A New Hope

On March 23, 1983, in a nationally televised address President Reagan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). The speech laid out Reagan's argument for increasing defense spending and his vision of a world without nuclear weapons. Reagan directed Secretary of State Shultz to give the Soviet Ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Dobrynin an advance copy of the speech; downplaying it as "a research & development effort". Alarmed Dobrynin reportedly replied, "You will be opening a new phase in the arms race".

SDI as Policy

A Call for a Bold Defense

The contents of the speech was closely guarded. Even White House communications staff lacked details. The speech was prepared by National Security Council (NSC) personnel, Aram Bakshian, Anthony Dolan, & President Reagan. Deputy National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane & Science Advisor Jay Keyworth assisted with the SDI portion. The speech blindsided many. According to Secretary of State Alexander Haig, the next day at the Pentagon, they were all frantically asking, "What the hell is strategic defense?"

Draft
3/22/83 - 0930

S E N S I T I V E

A CALL FOR A BOLD DEFENSE

Thus far tonight I have shared with you my thoughts on the problems of national security we must face together. My predecessors in the Oval Office have appeared before you on other occasions to describe the threat posed by Soviet power ~~and~~ ^{they} have proposed steps to address that threat. But since the advent of nuclear weapons, those steps have been directed toward deterrence of aggression through the threat of retaliation -- the notion that no rational nation would launch an attack that would inevitably result in unacceptable losses to themselves. And it is true that this approach to stability through offensive threat has worked. We and our allies have been fortunate enough to live for nearly four decades in a period of relative security within our borders.

And yet, as ~~I have shouldered this awesome responsibility over the past two years~~, 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 ~~seeing~~ ^{challenging} their very existence. ~~Feeling this way~~ ^{exploring} ~~As my conviction deepened~~, I have ~~sought to investigate~~ ^{of course to} other approaches. ~~Some of them~~ ^{we are engaged right} ~~lower the level of all arms~~ ^{now in negotiations with the Soviet U. to bring about a mutual reduction}

Condemnation & Ridicule



The Opposition Strikes Back

The concept of SDI seemed far fetched. Reagan was characterized as a goofy old man who had spent too much time in Hollywood. The New York Times mocked SDI as an example of “anti-Communist paranoia.” Sen. J. Bennett Johnston said it was “absolute folly.” Sen. John Kerry called it “a cancer.” Credit for the nickname goes to Sen. Edward Kennedy. The day after the telecast, he gave a speech on the Senate floor calling SDI “misleading Red-Scare Tactics and reckless Star Wars schemes.” Despite objections from both the White House & George Lucas the moniker stuck.

Technical Feasibility the Scientific Community

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON
July 29, 1952

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: JAY KEYWORTH *JK*

SUBJECT: LETTER FROM EDWARD TELLER

The accompanying letter to you from Edward Teller addresses a potential advance in nuclear weapons technology that he feels is of particular importance. The basic concept involves using the immense energy released in a nuclear explosion to "pump" a laser, thereby directing that energy in a straight line over great distances to strike a target.

Dr. Teller feels that the Department of Energy, responsible for operation of the nuclear weapons laboratories, has been only marginally sensitive to this and other new advances in nuclear weapons technology. Further, he feels that this potential breakthrough represents a means by which nuclear weapons can be used defensively, rather than offensively.

As an assessment, I believe that Dr. Teller is well founded in his general concerns and has only expressed them to you after considerable frustration. Both I and the OMB have been seeking to strengthen our nuclear weapons research and development activities in order to permit such innovative activities. I do believe, however, that Edward's frustrations are well founded and his comments thoughtful. His attempts at encouraging an entrenched bureaucracy have met with little success.

Several weeks ago you expressed concern over Dr. Teller's comments on Bill Buckley's "Firing Line."

Since then, I have held several hours of discussion with Edward in which he revealed to me the above frustrations and his deep concern about the implications of the "nuclear freeze" movement and the Administration's ability to proceed with restoration of an adequate defense. His comments were thoughtful, constructive, and very supportive of your efforts.

I have recommended to Bill Clark that Edward have the opportunity to express his views to you personally, both in light of his exceptional contributions to the nation, and his intense support and loyalty to you. In addition, his contributions as a member of the White House Science Council have represented a significant public service, one that I consider invaluable.

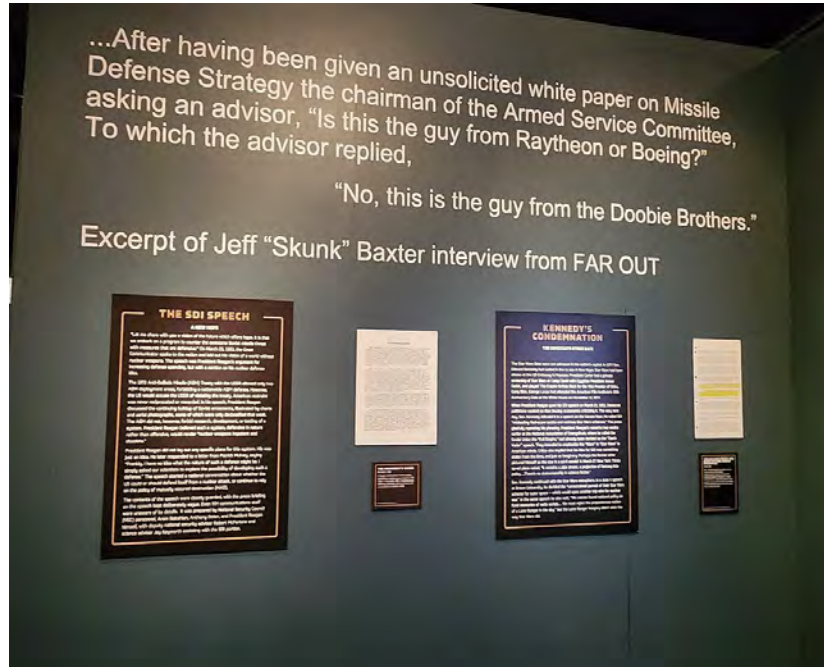
Handwritten notes:
- *Clark* (circled)
- *Don Bill*
- *We should take this*
- *and make it a rule to*
- *have the Secretary*
- *attend some of these*
- *things*

George Keyworth's-Memo to the President

In 1985, physicist Wolfgang Panofsky wrote in *Physics Today*, “ABM defense technology deserves further research within treaty limits, but the ‘Star Wars’ program is too large, too political, raises false hopes and poses grave dangers to national and world security.”

Science Advisor George Keyworth countered, “I have been asked time and time again one simple question, is it now a good time to attempt a development of a technological solution to making ballistic missiles obsolete? No more, no less. And the answer, to the best of my judgment, is yes. It is technically feasible.”

White Papers & The Doobie Brothers



Jeff "Skunk" Baxter-The Plot Grows

Most know Jeff Baxter as a founding member of Steely Dan and the lead guitarist for the Doobie Brothers. In the mid-80's Baxter had a 2nd career as a defense consultant. White Papers are brief, often unsolicited, reports that focus on complex issues. The purpose is to have leaders understand a topic, solve a problem, and make decisions.

Baxter's white paper recommended converting the Aegis missile into a broader missile defense system. In 1995 Baxter lead the Civilian Advisory Board for Ballistic Missile Defense, working with the Pentagon & the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency.

Allied Concerns



Reaction in the West

SDI shocked leaders around the world. U.S. allies in Europe especially within NATO were alarmed. During the Cold War America's nuclear arsenal was seen as the main deterrent against a Soviet invasion. At the time French President Mitterrand stated, "I am opposed to the idea of SDI-I perceive it as a potential opportunity for a 1st strike...It is obvious that SDI will not replace nuclear weapons but will become a substantial addition to the existing arsenals".

The Soviet Response

The Russian Response

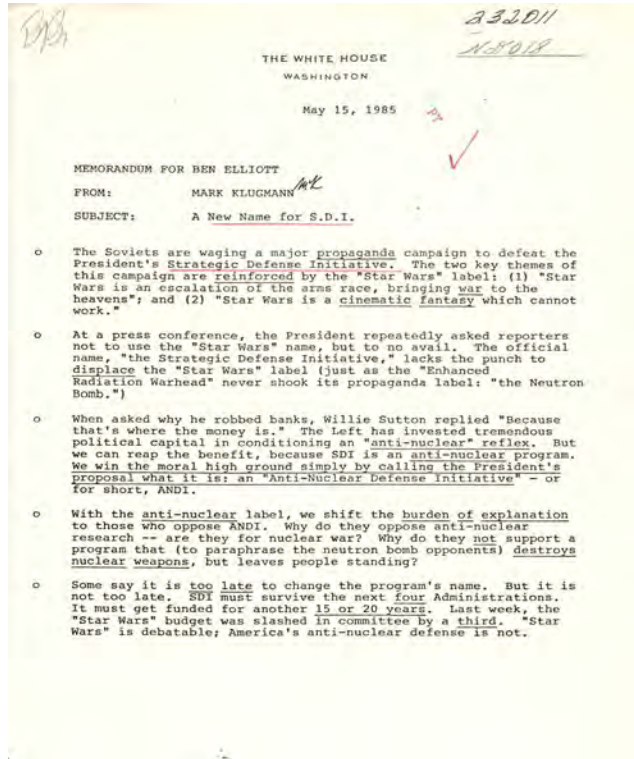


With SDI the Soviets feared being surpassed by U.S. innovation. It would pave the way toward weaponizing space and push nuclear arsenals to unseen levels. Given the novelty of SDI, its complexity, and cost, some saw it as a bluff or hoax.

The Soviets countered with an anti-ballistic missile system of their own. Launching an Energia rocket equipped with a Laser System, but it disintegrated during test-flights.

Reagan intended to share SDI with both Allies & the Soviets but all sides were skeptical.

Meanwhile...at the White House



Efforts to Change the Name

Try as they might White House staff were unable to shake the Star Wars nickname. This 1985 Memo shows the effort and reasons for changing the name.

- Counter Soviet Propaganda
- Star Wars Escalates Arms Race
- Star Wars is cinematic Fantasy
- SDI-Lacks the punch to Displace Star Wars
- SDI is anti-nuclear & changes the burden of explanation
- It's Not Too Late to change the Name
- SDI becomes ANDI anti-nuclear defense initiative

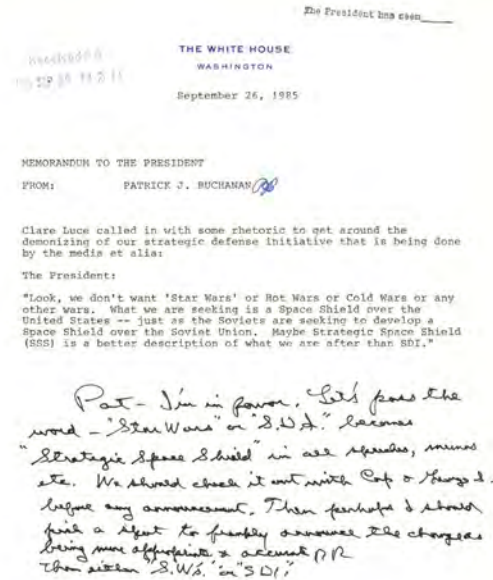
What's in a Name

Do. Or do Not. There is no Try

In the Fall of 1985, another Memo shows President Reagan in favor of renaming SDI to SSS—Strategic Space Shield. Changing the name was intended to distance SDI from nuclear warfare.

The President's handwritten notes at the bottom show he was in favor of the change.

But SSS was not used because of concerns it was too like the name for the German secret police during WW II. The SS Gestapo.



Arms Control Summits

Disarmament U.S. & Soviet Union

President Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev had four summits to address Arms Control. The President's commitment to SDI became a major hurdle in the negotiations.

Geneva 1985
Reykjavik 1986
Washington 1987
Moscow 1987

By 1987 Gorbachev agreed that missile reduction and SDI could be negotiated separately. Paving the way to a treaty.

The INF Treaty

Disarmament U.S. & Soviet Union



In 1987 the U.S. and Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. The INF treaty was the 1st agreement to eliminate an entire class of weapons. All short and intermediate range land-based ballistic and cruise missiles were deactivated. These weapons can carry nuclear warheads.

The treaty also established new protocols for verification. Allowing observers from each country to verify destruction of its arsenals.