

U.S. Plans Death Star

Star Wars = First Strike

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Media commentators have grown so fond of labeling President Reagan's mad scheme for placing laser and particle beam weapons in space "Star Wars" that it is hard to see why they have failed to extend the movie analogy logically forward and call the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) by a more appropriate name emanating from the same movie—"The Death Star." Also, the prez certainly makes a better Darth Vader than a Luke Skywalker.

The Death Star, you may recall, was an artificial asteroid whose entire complex mechanism was a massive weapon of destruction geared to obliterate the enemies of the Empire. The Reagan administration sees its SDI plan similarly: a grandiose dream of defeating the Soviet Union in an exchange of nuclear weapons which would allow the U.S. to emerge victorious and relatively unscathed, protected beneath a shield of space-age weaponry. Just as Vader's asteroid was nothing but an engine of war, so increasingly does the United States become a totally garrisonized warrior nation with an economy and ideology geared to a perpetual military posture.

The prevailing psychosis present in the ruling circles during the current war drive has the Reaganite underlings and generals fairly drooling at the prospect of the final confrontation with the Soviets. Previously, during other presidencies, these crackpots in the White House and the Pentagon were leashed by the governing balance of terror concept, aptly named MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction), which at least gave the appearance of never permitting actual war-fighting without accepting the devastation of one's own country.

The proposed Star Wars (or Death Star) technology stands on the threshold of casting aside the "shackles" of MAD and providing a war scenario for the generals which could paralyze the Soviet Union's retaliatory ability with a preemptive first strike, and has the military madmen sweating with anticipation. Most liberal critics, befuddled as usual, argue against the space weapons on the basis that "it won't work." They object that Star Wars is a system that can never be tested except at the time of actual conflict, that it will depend on over 10 million lines of error-free computer code, and point out that even the strongest proponents admit it would only stop 94% of incoming Soviet missiles allowing the U.S. to be hit by enough warheads to obliterate the country. While true within this limited context, they fail miserably to understand the war-fighting strategy being developed.

Enhanced the Myth of Defensive Weaponry

The Pentagon war planners have never reconciled themselves to the restraints of MAD after enjoying 20 years of unrivaled nuclear superiority. During that time the U.S. had used atomic weapons at the close of one inter-imperial conflict, and, at the start of another, has used the threat of them against the Soviets and their allies during crisis situations ranging from Berlin to Vietnam. Following the Soviet development of comparable strategic weapons and the firm establishment of MAD, the U.S. increased the propagation of several myths central to the war system—that our weapons are solely defensive, that it is us who is at risk from Soviet "aggression," and that it is the Russians who enjoy the strategic advantages (JFK's phony "missile gap" or Reagan's equally duplicitous "window of vulnerability").

The promotion of Reagan's Star Wars system has actually enhanced the myth of defensive weaponry since he has shrouded it in saccharine speeches about ending the nuclear threat.

The key to seeing through the official mythology is to realize that none of the recent plans "to modernize U.S. strategic forces" can be viewed in isolation from the totality of the American weapons system. When the SDI is linked with the destabilizing deployment of the MX, D-5 Trident, Midgetman, cruise and Pershing missiles, the Russians quite correctly perceive the creation of a U.S. first-strike capability which would again place them in a pre-MAD position of vulnerability. The crisis for this era is that the Soviets have stated quite emphatically that they will not allow this uneven balance of forces to re-develop, and Reagan's intransigent position on Star Wars at the current Geneva arms talks has only added to their consternation and suspicion.

What is crucial in the war-fighting strategies found in both the Pentagon and Kremlin war rooms is the protection of missile sites which would insure the ability to retaliate after being attacked—herein lies the insane logic of MAD. The determination to maintain a situation of equilibrium is contained in the treaties forbidding the widespread deployment of anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems which could allegedly provide protection for population centers held hostage by the other side's missiles.

"Figures Don't Lie"

It is unfruitful in the extreme (when confronted with the overwhelming ability of both sides to destroy one another) to count warheads, missiles, throw weight, etc. It is a situation in which "figures don't lie, but liars can figure." Whether one counts U.S. warheads alone or adds NATO and French missiles to the total, whether the Strategic weapons are land-based or on subs and bombers, it has generally been recognized that if the nuclear balance of destruction is upset, it could lead to the disadvantaged side launching a "use them or lose them" preemptive first strike.

However, destabilization is just the course the U.S. is following by instituting its new weapons systems. The Pershing and cruise deployment in Europe which places missiles 14 minutes from the Soviet heartland is provocation enough, but as bad, or perhaps worse, the MX and Trident are designed to deliver crushing strikes with pinpoint accuracy at Russian underground missile silos.

According to Howard Morland of the Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy, an American first strike today would destroy less than one-third of the Soviet land-based missile silos, still permitting a massive retaliatory strike against the U.S. However, with Trident and MX in place, strategists estimate that a first strike could take out 98% of those silos and since two-thirds of the Soviet warheads are land-based, this would drastically reduce their retaliatory capacity.

On the other hand, U.S. strategic warheads are spread equally between ICBMs, flight-ready bombers, and subs (the so-called Triad), a deployment which reduces a similar vulnerability to American delivery systems. The Soviet's powerful, but rather clumsy defense network can only be maintained through the security of their missile sites and this is exactly what the Reagan war plans put at risk.

In the March 16, 1985 *The Nation*, Morland estimates that by 1995, if all of Reagan's "modernization" programs are funded by Congress and are operational, the number of Soviet warheads which would survive a U.S. first strike would be reduced from tens of thousands to a "manageable" 700. This is where the seemingly "impractical" Star Wars system is employed. The severely reduced number of warheads that a devastated Soviet Union could launch in retaliation would then be a figure ostensibly containable by the SDI network (give or take five or ten which might slip through to Detroit and Chicago).

Ready For War

All politicians know that massive arms build-ups are always the precursors of war. To the Russians, watching the U.S. arm to the teeth all the while claiming to be militarily inferior to the Soviets, and victim of Soviet aggression, must be terribly reminiscent of the period directly preceding World War II when Stalin and the Russian peo-

ple viewed the German Wehrmacht and Luftmacht going through an identical process. The question is whether Moscow will sit still for a second time while their destruction is being engineered and so openly discussed by their avowed enemies.

The question is whether Reagan and the generals are actually planning what Western capital has dreamed of since 1917: defeating once and for all the menace from the East. Or do they see Star Wars, MX and the rest as gambits within the inter-imperial politico-military rivalries, that, if successful, would give the American empire the hegemony it seeks. The problem is that the bureaucracies of power seem oblivious to the risks inherent in their dangerous strategies and the terrible fear that both sides once expressed for nuclear confrontation recede as plans for war-fighting begin to dominate strategic thinking.

To say that sanity militates against such a view brings little comfort, yet even the most war-crazed of the rulers must realize that even with the most exacting technology (a joke in itself), it would be impossible for the United States to emerge unscathed from a nuclear exchange no matter how limited. Even if it was “possible,” enough has been written on the effects of a nuclear winter to make even a “victory” over the Soviets ring hollow as dust and radioactive fall-out would begin circling the globe from a destroyed Russia back to the U.S.

Fortunately, the people of the world are not sitting idly by waiting passively for their annihilation. The signs of opposition are plentiful, but more is needed. The peace movements of the world continue to be blind to the total system which produces a world of war and instead lurch from ‘crisis to crisis, war to war, hoping “common sense” will prevail among the world leaders—something which has never previously occurred. War and the nation state are synonymous. If we desire to live a life of peace, we can’t work for the elimination of war without striking at its cause.

We know what the rulers plan, how about us?

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