

A new initiative for national defense

By Sharon Watkins Lang
SMDC/ARSTRAT Historical Office

Mar. 23, 1983 — President Ronald Reagan announces his Strategic Defense Initiative. "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."

On March 23, 1983, President Reagan addressed the nation from the Oval Office and shared his vision for the future.¹ Faced with calls to reduce defense spending, Reagan warned against the apathy of the 1930s which "invited the tragedy of World War II." He urged citizens to call upon their representatives and continue to restore the nation's military strength.

Since the advent of nuclear weapons, national security policy had relied upon offensive nuclear deterrence and mutual assured destruction (MAD). The MAD theory held that neither side would pursue a first strike, given the knowledge that the opposition would respond in kind resulting in the destruction of both nations. With the exception of the command's SAFEGUARD System, deployed for a short period in the 1970s, the United States had not extensively pursued deployment of defensive options.

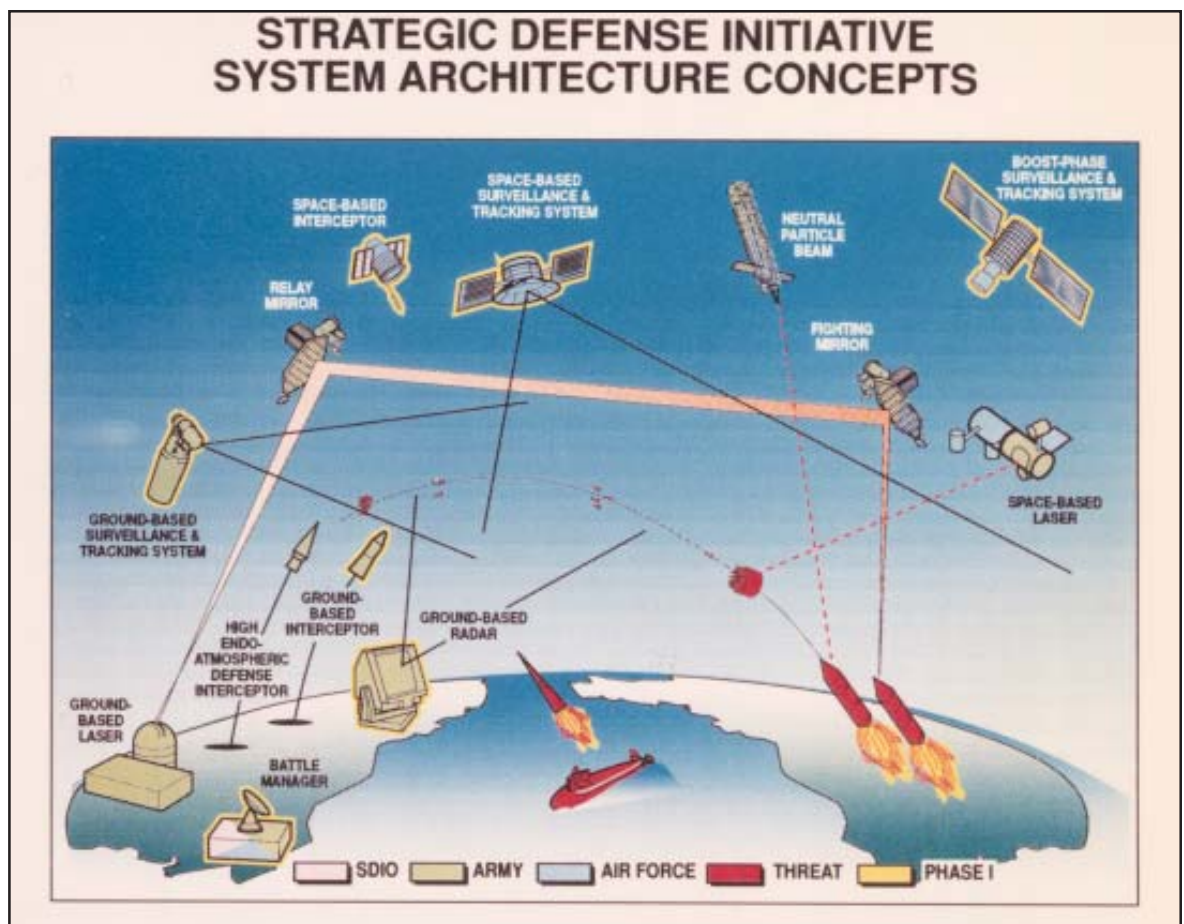
President Reagan observed that "the human spirit must be capable of rising above dealing with other nations and human beings by threatening their existence." As a result, he and his administration continued to pursue negotiations with the Soviet Union to reduce the levels of all arms.

In the interim, Reagan's vision of the future introduced a new national policy which rested upon strategic defense. He argued that current technology, despite its limitations, was at a level to begin this initiative. Although it might take years or decades to complete, the investment in this initiative was necessary "to free the world from the threat of nuclear war." Reagan then challenged the scientific community "to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete."

Implementing the Initiative

With this speech a new era began. Two days later, President Reagan issued National Security Decision Directive #85. In it he called for a study to define an intensive research and development effort, conducted in accordance with the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, to eliminate the threat posed by nuclear ballistic missiles. Two commissions were actually appointed to explore this initiative, one addressed Defensive Technologies and the other Future Security Strategy.

Composed of political scientists and analysts, the Future Security Strategy



Study addressed the strategic and political implications of the program. The "Hoffman Report" included two primary decisions both of which supported the concept of a national missile defense. The first held that missile defense could enhance deterrence. The second was more specific. It concluded that anti-tactical ballistic missiles systems could serve as a first step toward a national defense system.

'Wouldn't it be better to save lives than avenge them?'

— President Ronald Reagan

A group of fifty scientists and engineers, including the command's former Technical Director Dr. James R. Fisher, developed the 7-volume Defensive Technologies Study. The "Fletcher Study" presented two models for a missile defense research program. The favored program was to be technology constrained and called for a funding level of \$1.405 billion in 1984 increasing to \$4.766 billion in 1989. The alternative program, funded at a lower level, was referred to as the fiscally constrained program. The technology program consisted of five basic research areas: Systems; Surveillance, Acquisition Tracking and Kill Assessment (SATKA); Directed Energy Weapons;

Kinetic Energy Weapons; and Supporting Technologies (Survivability, Lethality, Space Power, Space Logistics; Communications, Computers and Software). The technology constrained program became the guide for the Strategic Defense Initiative.

One year after his introductory speech, President Reagan issued NSD Directive 119 formally establishing the Strategic Defense Initiative. The Secretary of Defense was assigned responsibility for this new program, which was to emphasize non-nuclear technologies. The Secretary in turn created the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization², a multi-service agency, which would oversee the development of a layered missile defense system. Given the advances already made in missile defense technology, the lead in many cases was given to the Army. The Army's contributions to this endeavor were made by this command, known then as the U.S. Army Strategic Defense Command.

(Footnotes)

¹ Note: The full text of President Reagan's speech can be found at <http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/offdocs/rrspch.htm>.

² The Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO) became the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization in 1993. It is now known as the Missile Defense Agency. (Note: This BMDO is separate and distinct from the Army organization that became the U.S. Army Strategic Defense Command in 1985.)

SMDC/ARSTRAT leaders receive media training

During March, media training was provided for nine SMDC/ARSTRAT senior executive service members. George W. Snyder, new director for the Sensors Integration and Test & Evaluation Directorate within the SMDC/ARSTRAT Technical Center learned how to work with and react to electronic and print reporters and was briefed on proper methods for conducting on-camera interviews. He used role playing to capture newly learned skills. The training was provided by Scott Stearns, Office of the Chief for Army Public Affairs, and John Cummings from SMDC/ARSTRAT's Public Affairs Office. Their critique of Snyder was positive. They were surprised to see how at ease he was in front of a camera and how well he maintained eye contact.



Snyder and trainers review his presentations to critique body language, eye contact, voice volume, speech clarity, operational security and inclusion of a commander's message.

Photo by Diane Schumacher