

Five reasons to oppose a Star Wars missile plan

Greenpeace opposes the U.S. Star Wars Missile plan because such a system would ignite a new nuclear arms race. Should the plan go ahead Americans will spend hundreds of billions of tax dollars for a technically flawed scheme that offers only the illusion of protection. There will also be increased nuclear dangers in a world where there are far more nuclear weapons as countries such as China bolster their nuclear arsenals to overcome Star Wars. "Star Wars" sole beneficiaries will be U.S. defence contractors, poised to earn billions with an expensive and faulty "solution" to a non-existent threat.

1. A new nuclear arms race

"...there's a permanent race between sword and shield. The sword always wins. The more improvements that are made to the shield, the more improvements are made to the sword. We think that with these (anti-missile) systems, we are just going to spur swordmakers to intensify their efforts."¹. French President Jacques Chirac

In the same way businesses counter to compete with innovations introduced by their competitors, nuclear weapons states will not let the United States' attempts to construct a nuclear shield go unanswered. China and Russia perceive "Star Wars" as an offensive move rather than a defensive one which is devised to make the United States immune from nuclear attack and capable of a first-strike advantage. Proponents of military expansion in Russia and China and other countries will have the fuel they need to proceed with expansion and modernization of their nuclear arsenals.

U.S. Pentagon insiders are well aware what the Stars Wars system could trigger. A highly classified report, "Foreign Responses to U.S. National Missile Defense", leaked to the U.S. media last August, predicted that if the plan goes ahead China could expand its nuclear arsenal tenfold from

¹ French President Jacques Chirac, interview with New York Times, 17 December 1999

a relatively small base of roughly 20 long-range missiles to a quantity large enough to overwhelm a land-based missile defence system.

The report warned that China's response could easily set a domino effect in motion. India, which considers China its main national security threat, may try to field an intermediate and long-range missile capability prompting Pakistan to try and respond in kind.

The classified report also cautioned that U.S. construction of a missile defence system could prompt Russia to place multiple warheads on ballistic missiles that now carry only one. This was something that Russia agreed to stop as part of the second Strategic Arms Control Treaty (START II) which it ratified last year.

Star Wars will also dismantle key disarmament treaties, most importantly the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty that many consider the cornerstone of international security. The ABM permits the United States and Russia to build only one national missile site with no more than one silo. Because a Star Wars plan would require multiple installations, the United States would clearly violate the treaty.

If that happens Russian President Vladimir Putin has said Russia will withdraw from the Start II treaty that would reduce deployed Russian strategic nuclear weapons to 2,500 to 3,000 from their current level of roughly 8,000. Putin has also said if the U.S. violates the ABM, Russia will pull out of "the whole system of treaty relations having to do with the limitation and control of strategic and conventional arms."

China has also condemned the Star Wars proposal. China's Foreign Ministry arms control director Sha Zukang last year stated: "Any efforts to amend the ABM treaty or to withdraw from the ABM treaty would not only threaten the nuclear disarmament process but would also shatter the *basis for nuclear non-proliferation and will give rise to a new arms race, including an arms race in outer space.*"

Tensions over the end of the ABM treaty could also backfire for the United States in other ways; co-operative efforts to ensure Russian weapon-usable fissile material is not stolen and sold abroad may well collapse.

All these concerns have led some of the U.S. closest allies, such as Germany and France, to publicly oppose the U.S. government plans to proceed with the deployment of Star Wars. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fisher warned at a security conference in Munich that "missile defence must not come at the expense of arms control".²

Senior politicians in countries that are key to US Star Wars plans are also concerned. Radar facilities at Fylingdales in the United Kingdom and Thule in Greenland (whose defence and foreign policy is controlled by Denmark) are essential for early warning of missile attacks against the U.S. if Star Wars is ever to work. The Danish Foreign Minister most recently said that "To us it is important – if NMD is going to be deployed – that it happens in understanding with Russia and China and not in contravention with international agreements..."³. In the UK the parliamentary foreign affairs committee last year stated: "We recommend that the government articulate the very strong concerns that have been expressed about NMD (Star Wars) within the UK. We are not convinced that US plans to deploy NMD represent an appropriate response to the proliferation problems faced by the international community."⁴

2. Missile defence will not work

To succeed, the Star Wars missile system must distinguish between real warheads and decoys. It must confront an incoming missile that is

² "US tries defusing Allies' opposition to Missile Defense as Rumsfeld offers to help Europeans", International Herald Tribune, February 4, 2001

³ Berlingske Tidende, January 8, 2001

⁴ Eight Report of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee "Weapons of Mass Destruction" August 2, 2000, para 50

designed to fool the interceptor so it will pursue one of the sophisticated decoys accompanying the missile.

Inevitably more sophisticated, smart foils and decoys will be developed to trick and defeat the U.S interceptors, eliminating any supposed advantage to the U.S. interests claimed by the system. Within a few years, possibly a few months of deployment the whole multi-billion dollar system would become obsolete sending the Pentagon back to the drawing board and taxpayers digging deeper in their pockets.

But even factoring out whatever measures other nuclear weapons states may develop to counter Star Wars, the faulty system already seems doomed to failure.

The project has now failed two of its first three "hit-to-kill" tests in which an interceptor is supposed to destroy a mock nuclear warhead in mid-flight. The one successful attempt is mired in controversy. Dr. Nira Schwartz, a senior researcher at TRW, responsible for the system's command, control and communication systems, has filed suit against the company alleging she was fired for refusing to falsify research findings on whether a Star Wars interceptor can distinguish between a decoy and a nuclear warhead. Dr Theodore Postol of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who conducted the only scientific analysis of test data wrote a letter to the White House charging "criminal fraud" in the Star Wars testing program. He went on to show the test series now underway has been "dumbed down", making it much easier for an intercept to take place.

Even with less demanding tests the last July 8th attempt was an abject failure. After the test was delayed twice, (an incident which would obviously sabotage success in the case of a real attack) the "kill vehicle" failed to separate from the interceptor booster rocket and its sensors were never activated.

3. Star Wars is corporate welfare for defence contractors

“It’s not a defence of the United States. It’s a conspiracy to allow them to milk the government. They are creating jobs for themselves for life.”
Former TRW Engineer Nira Schwartz, quoted in the New York Times,
March 7, 2000.

Since 1983 when President Ronald Reagan launched the first Star Wars initiative, U.S. taxpayers have handed over \$70 billion for research and development of various versions of a missile system. Dominating the grab for funds are four major weapons contractors:

- Boeing, which is the current prime contractor for the Star Wars project, responsible for development and integration of all major elements in the program;
- Lockheed-Martin, which provides the launch vehicle from which the “kill vehicle” (the part which intercepts and destroys an incoming missile) is delivered;
- Raytheon, prime contractor for the “kill vehicle”;
- And TRW, which is responsible for battle management command, control and communication systems.

After years struggling with dwindling demand brought on by the end of the Cold War coupled with various management and technical problems, the revival of the Star Wars missile plan by Newt Gingrich in his 1994 “Contract for America” offered the four weapons manufacturers a new lease of life. A glitzy, complicated and expensive project offered years of lucrative contracts for research, testing and eventual deployment.

To keep the programme on Washington’s front burner the weapons contractors maintain an aggressive political lobby intricately intertwined with key members of the new Republican administration.

Behind the scenes, but definitely leading the charge, is the Center for Security Policy (CSP), which receives 25 per cent of its funding from corporate sponsors, many of which are weapons manufacturing firms. CSP encouraged Gingrich to include missile defence in the "Contract for America" and played a key role in the bill that created the Rumsfeld Commission which produced the political rationale for a Star Wars' revival: a misleading report on supposed nuclear threats posed by "rogue states."

The defence contractor lobby also enjoys support from Vice-President Dick Cheney, a former board member of TRW; his wife is still a board member. The country's new Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has been awarded the industry's "Keeper of the Flame" award.

To ensure its political interests are right at the forefront, the four weapons manufacturers have doled out \$3.7 million in financial contributions to members of Congress; soft money contributions to parties total \$2.1 million for the same time period. And for their lobby team in the Washington the group spent \$34 million.⁵

Altogether the program is paying off; in the past two years the four companies have already earned \$2.2 billion in contracts with massive payoffs ahead, should the new administration proceed with an even more expansive Republican program. Despite the failure of the Star Wars program thus far, Boeing has just had its contract renewed through till 2007, which if fully realized will have a value of \$13 billion.

4. Manufacturing a military threat

The rationale for a Star Wars missile program is that the United States is under threat of attack from long-range intercontinental ballistic missiles to be developed by North Korea, Iran and Iraq – countries labelled "rogue states" by the 1998 Rumsfeld Commission, later softened by the

⁵ William D. Hartung and Michelle Ciarroca, "Tangled Web: The Marketing of Missile Defense 1994-2000", <http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/reports/tangled.html>

US State Department to “states of concern”. The conclusion is based on the faulty assumption that worst-case scenarios theoretically possible in these countries are likely to be probable.

In a letter written by five prominent American physicists to Republican Star Wars supporters, the group pointed out that “ballistic missiles are the least likely method a developing country would use to deliver an attack” because they are more expensive and technically difficult to build and deploy than other methods of delivery (for instance smuggling a nuclear device into the country on a boat or in a briefcase).⁶

This view is supported by the CIA with one analyst stating before the Senate that “ U.S. territory is probably more likely to be attacked with weapons of mass destruction from non-missile delivery means than by missiles, primarily because non-missile delivery means are less costly and more reliable and accurate. They can also be used without attribution.”⁷

Even if ballistic missiles of sufficient range and accuracy were to be acquired by North Korea, Iran or Iraq and they were able to build a nuclear, chemical or biological warhead to arm it these weapons are more likely to be used as a political and/or defensive tool rather than as a weapon of war – a view backed by the US National Intelligence Council in its latest report.⁸

After all what possible gain could come to a small, impoverished state like North Korea if it decides to directly attack the United States. In all likelihood such an attack would provoke devastating retaliation.

To reduce any perceived or potential threat from nascent nuclear weapons programs in North Korea, Pakistan and India, the United States would be much wiser to launch a diplomatic offensive, not a missile

⁶ Union of Concerned Scientists letter written June 27, 1995 - <<http://www.ucsusa.org/security/ltr.physicist.html>>

⁷ CIA Analyst Robert Walpole before the US Senate

⁸ National Intelligence Council Report, “Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States through 2015”, September 1999

defensive. Past efforts to negotiate with North Korea about their missile program have resulted, for example, in an agreement whereby nuclear weapons material production has been halted in return for oil and technical assistance to develop a civil nuclear program.

5. Star Wars will destroy chances for the elimination of nuclear weapons

There are almost 36,000 nuclear weapons in the world, thousands on hair-trigger alert, with more than a third of them ready to launch on a moment's notice, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The chance of miscalculation or accidental launch is ever present. Meanwhile a growing number of countries are lining up to join the nuclear club, increasing the chance that a nuclear catastrophe will happen somewhere on the planet.

The solution does not lie in the vain hope the United States might one day knock incoming nuclear missiles out of the sky. Instead the U.S. government must demonstrate leadership in the international nuclear disarmament process because the elimination of all nuclear weapons is the only truly "reliable" defense against the threat of mass destruction. Rather than pursue a costly, unworkable Star Wars plan, the U.S. government should revive efforts to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and pursue deep reductions and the eventual elimination of the world's nuclear arsenals keeping to a commitment pledged over thirty years ago in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty.