

# **STAR WARS AND U.S. NUCLEAR STRATEGY: BUILDING THE SHIELD, SHARPENING THE SWORD**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Greenpeace's origins as a peace and environmental organisation were built from its founding rationale: its opposition to the testing of nuclear weapons. This led to the development, over 30 years of campaigning, of a fundamental opposition to weapons of mass destruction, and most particularly, nuclear weapons. The intellectual and ethical rationale for Greenpeace working to eliminate nuclear weapons has been clear: not only is the production and development of nuclear weapons damaging to the environment, the proliferation and use of such weapons risks the health of the planet and all its inhabitants and ecosystems.

The US Star Wars programme heralds a new era in the role and purpose of nuclear weapons. Contrary to the Bush Administration's promotion of the programme as a kind of pleasant post-Cold War and solely defensive system, Star Wars is inextricably linked to maintaining a continued future for nuclear weapons, not to nuclear disarmament. It is the underpinning for a radical shift in U.S. policy: negotiated, multi-lateral attempts at disarmament and non-proliferation are seen as both too restrictive on the US and too ineffective in reducing proliferation. Instead, unilateral military counter-proliferation has been adopted as the fundamental bedrock of U.S. policy.

## **BUILDING THE SHIELD, SHARPENING THE SWORD**

The 1991 Gulf War seems to have had a seminal influence on US military thinking, and since then the US has been steadily developing strategies to use nuclear weapons against countries it believes have, or are working to develop, so-called weapons of mass destruction. While Star Wars provides a "shield", these new strategies and the weapons being developed to fulfil these new roles are the "sword" on which the Bush administration is focussing considerable, if less public, effort. "Deterring nuclear attack and containing communism have given way to a more diverse, flexible strategy which is regionally oriented," a 1993 Joint Chiefs of Staff report noted. New regional targets have been adopted and nuclear and conventional weapons of greater accuracy and precision are being developed to target rogue states and "sub-national" terrorist groups who may pose a risk to the US mainland.

"The best form of defense is offense" is a platitude of sport, but it applies equally to US nuclear strategy, and unfortunately, is likely to also drive other countries' response to Star Wars. The risk is that they will strive to increase their capacity to overwhelm the Star Wars "shield" by developing their own more sophisticated

missiles, including multiple-targeted warheads which can deliver decoys and other counter-measures. In this way, Star Wars creates an proliferation dynamic.

Meanwhile, as part of its own re-thinking of offensive nuclear warfighting strategy, the Bush Administration appears to be strongly backing the military's call for a development of a "leaner, meaner" nuclear arsenal that could actually be used to target "rogue" states. While President Bush pledged unilateral cuts in warheads and missiles during the election campaign, his revised strategic doctrine will emphasise a more streamlined nuclear offensive capability: "We need new concepts of deterrence that rely on both offensive and defensive forces....Nuclear weapons still have a vital role to play in our security and that of our allies." (President Bush, 1 May 2001)

## **MODERNISING NUCLEAR FORCES – INDEFINITELY**

So while Bush's shift in nuclear forces is being sold as a disarmament move, the reality is that the US has retained the Stockpile Stewardship Programme -- a multi-billion dollar programme to retain the capability to design, develop, produce and deploy new nuclear warheads -- and continues to upgrade and modernise existing systems, such as the Minuteman III missile and new nuclear weapons for submarines. Not only could the US nuclear arsenal destroy the planet many times over, but it will be configured in a way that is potentially even more dangerous and "usable" than the Cold War's "Mutually Assured Destruction" (MAD) posture.

In the early 1990s, U.S. labs ended the production of new warhead types and nuclear testing for new warhead types and Congress banned the Department of Energy from conducting research and development on nuclear weapon types with of yield of 5 kilotons or less. This ban was specifically to stop the development of nuclear weapons that blurred the distinction between nuclear and conventional war, which would make the eventual use of nuclear weapons more likely – a process President Mitterrand called the "banalisation" of nuclear weapons. Now, these policies are under review and Congress has asked DoE and DoD to assess requirements and options for defeating "hardened and deeply buried targets" using low-yield nuclear weapons that could penetrate deep into the earth before detonating. Rather than deterring warfare with another nuclear power, however, these weapons are aimed at use in conventional conflicts with third-world nations.

The US Department of Energy's proposed Fiscal Year 2002 budget for designing, developing, maintaining and producing the US nuclear weapons stockpile has been increased by \$230 million to a total of \$5,300 million compared with the previous year. There is increasing concern that pressure from the weapons laboratories and the military could result in a return to nuclear testing in order to guarantee the usability of new weapons developed for warfighting.

While most of this new nuclear weapons development is going on invisibly in the weapons laboratories, the most obvious example of US nuclear modernisation is the upgrading of the Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) which form one leg of the Strategic Triad of bombers, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and ICBMs that provide strategic nuclear deterrence for the United States. There are currently ongoing tests of the Minuteman III's guidance and propulsion systems specifically to upgrade their accuracy. These tests are critical to the maintenance and modernisation of the US nuclear arsenal.

In addition to their role in modernising nuclear capability, the tests have a specific technical link to the Star Wars programme: they form a vital rehearsal for the Star Wars test flights. The Star Wars programme has agreed with the airforce a series of Risk-Reduction Flights (RRFs), which are essentially associated operations with Minuteman III test flights. The Minuteman tests provide an environment in which elements of the Star Wars system, such as discrimination of incoming objects, radar and communications and parts testing can be undertaken.

In terms of long-range nuclear weapons on submarines, the current submarine-launched ballistic missiles are being replaced by the longer-range and more accurate Trident II D5 missile. Originally scheduled to begin retiring in 2019, the Trident II is being upgraded to extend its service life. The upgraded missile, which is considered a "variant" of the existing D5, rather than a new missile, will be designated the "D5A." Funding is expected to begin in 2005, purchase of motors is planned for 2010-2012, and production is expected to START in 2015. The navy is also hoping to deploy a new class of submarines by 2025.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL CO-OPERATION AND THE RULE OF LAW**

Meanwhile, the traditional diplomatic route of non-proliferation – the multilateral arms control measures such as the CTBT, Biological Weapons Convention, Start talks, ABM treaty and regional confidence building deals such as in North Korea is spurned by the Bush Administration. Negotiated, legally binding and irreversible arms control is being abandoned in favour of unilateral cuts that can be reversed at any stage.

Star Wars is thus the most public symptom of a new policy that undermines the international rule of law and the international norm of non-proliferation in favour of a unilateralist "World's policeman" approach. These changes in nuclear policy have profound implications for not only the ABM treaty, which the Bush Administration has already unilaterally rejected because it would prohibit the Star Wars programme, but also the future of the Non Proliferation Treaty, for example. Linking nuclear weapons strategies to Third World contingencies and counter-proliferation scenarios is an expansion, not a reduction, in the role of

nuclear weapons. It is another sign that the United States has no intention of fulfilling its Article VI obligations, which call for all the nuclear weapons state to “pursue negotiations in good faith” on nuclear disarmament. This obligation, reinforced by the International Court of Justice’s ruling that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is generally illegal and that states should thus strenuously pursue disarmament, is clearly not on the US agenda. Instead, the Star Wars programme and increased planning for the possibility of using nuclear weapons in regional conflicts threatens to increase North-South animosity.

Moreover, the Bush administration’s attitude to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty – President Bush opposed its ratification as a presidential candidate and administration officials have said they have no intention of submitting it for ratification to the Senate – and the a confidential Bush administration review earlier this year recommended the US not accept the internationally-negotiated verification protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) -- underline the administration’s rejection of the rule of law and its reliance instead on military solutions rather than negotiation to deal with proliferation.

These attitudes have been institutionalised through the appointment of well-known hawks within the Administration, for example, John R. Bolton as the administration’s chief arms-control official. Mr Bolton, the undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, has reportedly described the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and other arms control agreements “as unenforceable treaties which provide illusory protections.”

## **STAR WARS AND NON-PROLIFERATION**

The reliance on a “Star Wars” shield, no matter how technically remote or unfeasible, means that diplomatic efforts to promote non-proliferation are getting short shrift in favour of military force – that is, counter-proliferation. For example, while the nuclear weapons budget is increasing, the Department of Energy has proposed an 11.5 percent cut in the joint non-proliferation programme with Russia which seeks to guard from the threat of “loose nukes” – proliferation of nuclear material because of poor storage and security. Meanwhile, the US’ s long-standing opposition to commercial plutonium reprocessing, adopted originally because of the proliferation risks plutonium production poses, may be reversed. Political capital built up within multilateral institutions and agreements over many years is thus being expended swiftly. It appears that the Bush administration sees no virtue in diplomatic or political efforts to stop non-proliferation when they believe they will ultimately either be “safe” behind a shield, or be able to blast away any possible threat with “bunker buster” nuclear weapons.

## **THE MILITARISATION OF SPACE:**

Space is perhaps of all places, universally perceived as a global commons. For most nations, co-operation in space is contingent on the demilitarisation of space. Clearly, the way humans explore and relate to the rest of the universe could either repeat the mistakes we have made on earth or see new patterns of cooperation and co-existence. However, that is not the way the U.S. military see it. Star Wars – while it is unclear whether Bush's conception of it currently includes space-based lasers -- is another step toward the US military's plans for the domination and militarisation of space. "We know that the military is going to be moving out more into space," one official said earlier this year. "We realize that to maintain the high ground for superiority, space is going to be the place to do that. It may lead to new concepts of viewing and fighting wars."

The U.S. has consistently opposed multilateral efforts to ensure that space remains a demilitarised zone. The development of space-based components to the Star Wars programme will sorely hamper any resolution of this issue in favour of peace in Space.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Star Wars programme is fundamentally destabilising of global security because it is part of an overall military nuclear strategy that relies on the rule of force, not the rule of law. Missile defense is defensive only insofar as it targets incoming missiles; its political and strategic effect is highly offensive. It dangerously undermines efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament and a more peaceful world.