

WHY BUSH SHOULD PREPARE HIS VETO OF THE SENATE SDI PROPOSAL

George Bush promised in an August 3, 1988, campaign speech in Chicago to "determine the exact architecture [of a strategic defense] system in my first term, as the technologies are tested and proven." To satisfy this pledge, strategic defense systems closest to deployment must be thoroughly tested. This would be made impossible by an amendment by Democratic Senators Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico and Richard Shelby of Alabama offered on July 12 to the fiscal 1991 Defense Authorization Bill. They propose reducing funding for such near-ready Strategic Defense Initiative technologies as space-based missile interceptors. They would protect budgets for long-term technologies like laser weapons. If adopted, their amendment would long delay deployment of strategic defenses, avert funding to less promising technologies and possibly derail SDI by making it a pointless research program incapable of attracting sustained public and congressional support.

The Bingaman-Shelby proposal is an attempt by Congress to micromanage the SDI program. It calls for cutting \$200 million from the Administration's \$329 million request for research on *Brilliant Pebbles*, which so far is the most promising technology to emerge from SDI research. A *Brilliant Pebbles* deployment would put thousands of individual anti-missile interceptors in space. By targeting the bulk of their cuts on *Brilliant Pebbles*, Bingaman and Shelby are trying to delay progress toward deployment of a space-based interceptor system.

The Bingaman-Shelby restrictions would change the mandate of the SDI program. The aim of SDI is to help the President decide whether it is feasible to deploy a defense against ballistic missiles. Bingaman and Shelby are trying to limit the President's options and to prevent him from reaching a decision soon about the feasibility of deploying anti-missile defenses. The reason: If test funds for space-based interceptors are cut, Bush will lack the information he needs to make an informed deployment decision by 1993.

Undermining U.S. Negotiators. Bingaman and Shelby's proposal also supports Moscow's negotiating position at the Geneva Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START). Moscow consistently has tried to kill the SDI program by linking Soviet acceptance of a START treaty to continued U.S. adherence to the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Bingaman and Shelby, accepting Moscow's bluster as genuine, warn that the near-term deployment of SDI, which *Brilliant Pebbles* would represent, would force the Soviets to repudiate a START treaty, even if it is signed and ratified. As such, the Bingaman and Shelby proposal not only supports Soviet negotiating strategy on arms control, but serves the Soviet interest in delaying the development and deployment of space-based anti-missile systems.

Bingaman and Shelby say that in place of *Brilliant Pebbles* they want to place a greater emphasis on developing a smaller, ground-based missile defense called a Limited Protection System (LPS). They insist that a LPS would be more suitable for defending the U.S. against accidental or Third World missile attacks. But the space-based weapons they want to cut are likely to be essential to

deploying a LPS system. Space weapons are necessary to prevent missile warheads from "leaking" through the defense. It is far easier to overwhelm a limited ground-based defense system without space-based interceptors than with them.

Leaving U.S. Vulnerable. Bingaman and Shelby also insist that they want SDI to concentrate more on shorter-range or "theater" defenses against ballistic missiles. Theater defenses are intended primarily to protect U.S. allies from short-range missiles, which increasingly are falling into the hands of such hostile Third World nations as Iran, Iraq, Libya and Syria. But Bingaman and Shelby fail to explain why they want to defend U.S. allies against such weapons, while leaving the U.S. utterly vulnerable to Soviet missiles now and possible Third World missiles sometime in the next decade.

The two senators also say they seek a greater emphasis in SDI research on more effective, long-term laser technologies. But they seem to overlook the fact that killing near-term deployment plans for SDI will so deflate political support for the program that long-term research is likely to be terminated. Few congressmen will vote for SDI funding if they know that nothing tangible will result for decades.

To make matters much worse, the Bingaman-Shelby amendment represents pork barrel politics at its worst. It surely is no coincidence that the specific SDI projects that this amendment protects from budget cuts are located in the states of its sponsors. The theater missile defenses programs favored by Bingaman and Shelby are managed by the Army Strategic Defense Command in Huntsville; this is in Alabama, Shelby's home state. The amendment protects laser weapons programs, including the Ground-Based Laser, managed by the Army Strategic Defense Command, and the Space-Based Laser program, in which the Los Alamos National Laboratory is participating; this is in New Mexico, Bingaman's home state.

Given the threat the Bingaman-Shelby amendment poses to his ability to fulfill his campaign pledge to select during his first term those SDI systems to be deployed later this decade, and to the SDI program, George Bush needs to act swiftly. He should:

◆ ◆ **Threaten to veto the Defense Authorization Bill if it contains the Bingaman-Shelby amendment as currently written.** Ronald Reagan vetoed a Defense Authorization Bill in 1988 because of the micromanaging funding restrictions imposed by Congress on the SDI program. Bush supported him in that veto and Congress was forced to rewrite the bill. Reagan got the SDI funding that he wanted. Bush should veto the fiscal 1991 Defense Authorization Bill if it contains the Bingaman-Shelby amendment.

◆ ◆ **Reiterate his campaign commitment to choose the overall design "architecture" of an SDI system for deployment in his first term.** In the wake of his decision to reverse his position on new taxes, Bush can bolster the confidence of the American people in his campaign commitments by taking a pronounced stand against an attempt by Congress to undermine him on SDI.

◆ ◆ **State his opposition to the Soviet policy of linking SDI to START.** Bush should remind the Soviets, Congress, and the American people that SDI is a critical component of his arms control strategy. This reminder should include the warning that congressional attempts to make SDI the sacrificial lamb of a START treaty could threaten the ratification of START in the Senate.

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