

Opinion

Star Wars: Reagan's dream, America's nightmare

Last week we had a visit from our old buddy Phil Gramm. Phil had a gift for us — a multi-million dollar gift. All Phil wants in return is for some of us to play Star Wars with him.



Karl Palmeyer

Gramm and Lt. Gen. James Abrahamson, head of the Strategic Defense Initiative program, came to Texas A&M to look us over and see if we have anything to offer Star Wars. Currently A&M is getting \$12.5 million from the government for defense research with only \$200,000 of that going for SDI research. That figure could increase by several million dollars if A&M does get a grant.

Last year the Pentagon's SDI budget was \$28 million. This year Congress granted \$96 million for SDI research. Next year President Reagan wants \$167 million. The Defense Department has been using that money to increase funding for university research. Last year \$14 million was spent on college campuses. This year that figure probably will exceed \$50 million. Gramm wants Texas schools to get a larger slice of this expensive pie.

Although colleges will be getting tons of money, not everyone is fond of the source. Nationwide more than 3,700 full-time faculty members and 2,800 graduate students at more than 100 universities have pledged not to accept SDI research funds. Fifteen Nobel laureates, including Sheldon L. Glashow and Linus C. Pauling, also have refused to work on SDI. At A&M nearly 70 professors have signed a petition that says they want no part of SDI.

A&M President Frank E. Vandiver wasn't too thrilled with faculty opposition to SDI research. When there are millions of dollars involved it's easy to see which way someone in Vandiver's position would go. But there are several moral, ethical and philosophic reasons for opposition to University involvement in the SDI program that outweigh any amount of money.

The purpose of a university is to

teach and learn. A project such as SDI would bring about new knowledge in many different areas, but there could be a problem with spreading that knowledge. With a program such as SDI there could be problems with whether new information turned up through research is classified or can be shared with the rest of the world. There also could be problems with security clearances for faculty members and others working on the SDI program.

There is a significant number of faculty and graduate students from other countries at this school. It is doubtful that the government would want a school crawling with foreigners to be involved with top secret SDI research.

Gen. Abrahamson says that most of the research done at universities will not be classified and that security restrictions would be minimal. This is the same government that not too long ago tried to stop a newspaper from running a story that showed how one could make an atomic bomb. The government felt that this was a leak of top secret information even though the newspaper received all its information by researching articles and books in a public library. Our government loves to keep secrets.

SDI research could interfere with other research at this school. A&M has limited facilities and equipment. Some other projects might not get the chance for research and experimentation if laboratories and equipment are tied up with SDI programs. When it comes time to make a decision on whether a government-funded SDI research experiment or a non-defense oriented, purely academic experiment that's not being paid for should be performed, it's obvious which way the school will go.

Most scientists agree that SDI will not work without major advancements in laser, computer, radar and other technology. It is best to destroy incoming missiles during the boost phase, the time between launch and when the missile enters space. The biggest problem with hitting a missile during the first stage its flight is that the boost phase of the Soviet's current ICBMs lasts 5 minutes — not much time for a rational decision when the future of the world is at stake. To make matters worse the Soviets aren't far away from developing a missile sys-

tem with a boost phase of only 50 seconds.

Due to the curve of the earth it is impossible for a ground-based sensing device to detect a missile during its boost phase. A space-based sensing device probably would be able to detect a missile as soon as it is launched, but such a device probably would be knocked out in the first stages of war.

It might be possible to destroy a missile during the 20 minutes it takes to make its flight through space. During this phase the missile releases the warheads that are aimed at U.S. targets and thousands of scraps of reflective metal that act as decoys. At this point it is impossible to tell which "target" is a warhead or which is a decoy. Twenty minutes is not much time to sort through all the mess and destroy the actual warheads that are heading toward the United States.

As a last resort it might be possible to destroy incoming missiles during the two minutes it takes them to re-enter the atmosphere and strike their targets. If the Soviets were to jam our radar by triggering nuclear blasts in the sky or

outfit their warheads with wings that would allow the warheads to take evasive action, it would make things even more difficult for our side. If even one warhead gets through our defenses more than a million lives could be lost.

Even if all the bugs were worked out of the system, SDI would offer no defense against cruise missiles, submarine-launched missiles, bombs dropped from airplanes or any other type of weapon that doesn't leave Earth's atmosphere.

The outrageous costs of SDI is another reason to oppose the program. The '80s have been a decade of budget cuts. Reagan constantly is trying his best to cut billions of dollars out of the federal budget. Isn't it funny that the man who wants to cut funds for education, welfare, medical care, the arts and hundreds of social programs because he feels the money is being wasted, already has spent nearly \$300 million dollars and wants to spend millions more on a system that probably won't work anyway?

The basic idea behind the SDI program is escalation. SDI is supposed to keep us safe from war, but it actually puts us in danger of war.

If, by some fantastic achievement, we developed a system that could stop incoming nuclear weapons, what good would it do? Given the current trends in foreign relations the next logical step for the Soviets would be to develop an anti-SDI system. It wouldn't be hard. Then we would have to develop an anti-anti-SDI system. Then the Soviets would have to develop an anti-anti-anti-SDI system. Then we would have to develop an anti-anti-anti-anti-SDI system. You get the idea. Someday one of the countries would be forced to call the other's thermonuclear bluff.

In the face of criticism Reagan and other SDI supporters have defended this billion dollar plan as an idealistic dream that we should research and make come true. Some of us have another idealistic dream — a dream of peace. A peace that relies on trust and love instead of lasers and computers. One dream is considerably less expensive than the other.

Karl Palmeyer is a senior journalism major and a columnist for The Battalion.

Blaming it on the Fed

Frustrated by the economy's refusal to accommodate their rosy forecasts, the folks in the financial and securities business are waiting these days for the Federal Reserve to act.

John Cunniff
AP analyst

They say the Fed can fix things quickly with a cut in the discount rate, which is a basic interest rate that, in theory anyway, eventually influences just about all other interest rates.

It also would, they contend, spur the lackadaisical economy to perform more in line with the forecasts issued earlier this year that foresaw the economy performing more vigorously from the summer through the fall.

That's still the forecast of many economists in banks, brokerage houses, academia, government and corporate offices. But some of them are beginning to hedge, wondering where the evidence is to support their hopes.

Rather than blaming themselves for being too optimistic, however, a lot of these forecasters are blaming the Fed for not doing more to lower interest rates.

The fact is the economy seems to be caught in cross-currents, and not all of them can be identified.

Consumer confidence is relatively high, but retail sales are dull. Business people generally are viewed as optimistic but, based on the decline in capital spending, they aren't supporting their thoughts with their money.

Housing is popularly depicted as being in a boom period, but housing starts and building permits fell in May.

Payroll employment rose slightly in May, but the jobless rate did too. Even automobile production was off.

Manufacturing, which built America, shows some of the worst numbers.

Industrial production fell in May. Capacity utilization rates in the same month fell to 78.6 percent, the lowest since December 1983.

New orders for durable goods and machine tools fell in April. And business inventories rose.

Looking over the economic scene, forecasters find almost nothing that excites them — no current that seems likely to break the way out of the doldrums and justify the optimism that they already have sold to clients.

Therefore, the pressure on the Fed. The Fed, however, has problems of its own. Big problems.

High on the list is the value of the U.S. dollar in international trade. The dollar's value has been falling from an unprecedented high, and it is no secret that the Fed would like to keep this decline from getting out of hand.

A drop in interest rates might satisfy some domestic industries, but it also could make the dollar less attractive to foreign investors, thus worsening the U.S. balance of payments position.

Besides, the Fed is concerned that there could be too much money already circulating in the U.S. economy, and chairman Paul Volcker has indicated he is concerned that such a situation could re-ignite high inflation.

John Cunniff is a business analyst for The Associated Press.

ABM treaty's hypnotic spell cost U.S. strategic progress

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the third in a three-part series on the ABM treaty.



William F. Buckley Jr.

All the arguments with hair on their chest point to the advisability of ditching the ABM treaty. Briefly reviewed, they are:

1. Ever since 1972, the Soviet Union has been engaged aggressively in self-protection, in violation of the idea of assured vulnerability.
2. Ever since 1972 — up until President Reagan's initiation of the Strategic Defense Initiative — the United States has been inert, allowing a complete dissipation of its defensive potential.
3. The Soviet Union has violated the treaty (by building its radar site at Krasnoyarsk in Siberia).
4. Our scientists should be free to chart, or to rechart, a space-shield research program unencumbered by any of the prohibitions, fancied or real, imposed by the ABM treaty.

It would all appear to be clear-cut, but there is a mystique that surrounds treaties with the Soviet Union that touch on arms, and even people wonderfully situated to remark the deterioration in our position since signing the ABM treaty have become choirboys in the disarmament chorus. The best example of this is Ambassador Gerard Smith, who did much of the negotiating at the time the treaty was signed.

Although he served public notice on the Soviet Union, at the direction of the Nixon administration, that any prolongation of the ABM treaty, five years down the road, probably would not harmonize with U.S. interests, just recently he was writing nervously and sarcastically in the *Washington Post* deploring any consideration of repealing the treaty he had said probably should be repealed if progress was not being made in the reduction of strategic weapons back when the ABM treaty was signed. And where there is Gerard Smith, there is bound to be Paul Warnke not far behind, and then Robert McNamara and the whole disarmament lobby that appears to be afraid of everything save the mounting power of the Soviet Union a) to bring off a first strike and b) to defend itself against retaliation.

Now it generally is supposed that if the moment should come when Gen. James Abrahamson, who is in charge of the SDI program, should approach the president, in the company of Caspar Weinberger, and say we have reached a point beyond which we simply can't travel so long as ABM is still on the books — then at that point, Reagan would proceed to repeal the treaty.

But there are difficulties here. The first is that the longer we go without repealing it, the more it will rise in symbolic importance, making it harder and harder to annul. Who is talking now about deploying the neutron bomb? Or about repealing the Helsinki Accords? Yet the arguments for the neutron bomb are as valid now as they were when the arguments for its deployment were made to Jimmy Carter. And the Helsinki pact is no longer anything but an excuse for us to meet in a European capital for the purpose of reminding the Soviet Union that it has not lived up to its obligations. A waste of time.

Not only would Reagan find it harder in 1988 to repeal the treaty than he'd find it to do now, following, say, a rip-snorting speech on Soviet violations of the same treaty, he ought to consider this: The choice may not be his. The Strategic Defense Initiative is a program that will take many years to explore fully, let alone deploy. The time is bound to come when we will need to test, and this we can't do under the prevailing reading of the ABM treaty. Reagan's successor may be a Democrat pledged to "respect all our disarmament treaties" (I can hear it now). And — who knows? — it might be a Republican, maneuvered during the campaign into pledging to keep the ABM treaty alive.

Certainly there would be shrieks of pain if we abandoned the ABM treaty. If you get hooked on a placebo, you are going to have withdrawal symptoms when they take away that placebo. But the ABM treaty is worse merely than a placebo. Under its hypnotic spell we have lost years during which we might gradually have dug our way out of the mutual assured destruction that continues to serve as the spinal column of our deterrent posture. Those who look on the ABM treaty as an instrument that contains the Soviet Union are (or should be) struck dumb by the mere mention of Krasnoyarsk, an almost exhibitionistic violation of the treaty by the Russians. Yet the superstition survives that we should never renounce a treaty that a) is made with the Soviet Union and b) deals with arms.

But Ronald Reagan is a genuine leader. And he should now free us from that grave strategic millstone around our neck.

Copyright 1986, Universal Press Syndicate

The Battalion
(USPS 945 360)

Member of
Texas Press Association
Southwest Journalism Conference

The Battalion Editorial Board

Michelle Powe, Editor
Loren Steffy, Opinion Page Editor
Scott Sutherland, City Editor
Kay Mallett, News Editor
Ken Sury, Sports Editor

Editorial Policy

The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting newspaper operated as a community service to Texas A&M and Bryan-College Station.

Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the Editorial Board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Journalism.

The Battalion is published Monday through Friday during Texas A&M regular semesters, except for holiday and examination periods. Mail subscriptions are \$18.75 per semester, \$32.25 per school year and \$55 per full year. Advertising rates furnished on request.

Our address: The Battalion, 218 Reed McDonald Building, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.

Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Battalion, 218 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station TX 77843.