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Space defense cheaper in Europe

By Bill Gertz
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A global space defense against nuclear attack could be established in Europe at a fraction of the cost of similar proposals and with greater accuracy, says Klaus Heiss, an aerospace scientist and economist.

In a forthcoming research paper, Mr. Heiss asserts that a defense against intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe — using a combination of laser guns and missile interceptors — would provide a practical first step in a larger global strategic defense program.

Mr. Heiss was instrumental in developing the U.S. space shuttle during the 1970s and succeeded in raising \$1 billion from private sources for an additional commercial-use space shuttle. His proposal was rejected by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Mr. Heiss states that President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, popularly known as "star wars," could be adapted for initial use in Europe at a cost of about \$5 billion

to \$6 billion over the next five years. The Reagan administration plans to invest \$26 billion in the U.S. "star wars" program.

A part of his proposed European "star wars" system could be deployed by using the space shuttle at a relatively low altitude of about 200 miles, he states. By contrast, elements of a global SDI system must be deployed in orbit 20,000 miles above the earth.

Manfred Hamm, a European defense expert with the Heritage Foundation, said the idea of a Euro-"star wars" initiative would be a more practical initial phase than a global SDI program.

"The technology is much closer to completion [for theater strategic defense]," Mr. Hamm said in a telephone interview. "Moreover, the technology is more feasible for the mission."

The term European Defense Initiative (EDI) was coined by former West German Defense Minister Kai-Uwe von Hassel during a speech last June in the Netherlands.

Mr. Hamm said he believes Mr. von Hassel's views on EDI reflect

official West German defense ministry attitudes toward the strategic defense program.

The State Department said last week that the ongoing espionage scandal in West Germany would not lead to the cancellation of scheduled global space defense talks in Washington this week between West German officials and private industry representatives and U.S. defense officials.

"We are engaged in close and continuing discussions with a number of allied governments regarding their potential participation in SDI research program," State Department spokesman Charles Redman said.

Since the beginning of 1985, the strategic balance in Europe has favored the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact by a 2-1 margin, Mr. Heiss states in his paper. He estimates that the Soviets have deployed 1,700 intermediate range missiles with a total of 2,200 warheads vs. 435 land-based NATO missiles and warheads.

If United States, British and French sea-based forces are included in NATO's intermediate-range nuclear force, the balance remains "better than 2-to-1 advantage of Soviet forces," Mr. Heiss writes.

He envisions several overlapping strategic defense concepts that would be included in EDI.

He says one defensive "layer" involves missiles and sensors based on the ground that would knock holes in Soviet missiles before they leave the atmosphere.

Other components include space-based laser and atom-particle beam guns capable of knocking holes or disrupting warhead electronics as weapons enter space on trajectory paths toward Europe.

Still another system would provide "terminal defense" with a combination of conventional and nuclear arms against warheads as they enter the atmosphere on their way to targets.

Because of the smaller area of theater nuclear warfare, Mr. Heiss believes the effectiveness of directed-energy weapons — lasers and other types of arms — would be vastly improved.

"If directed energy weapons defense is possible in SDI global ranges, EDI capabilities are possible with 100 times that assurance," Mr. Heiss states.