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Letters

Defining Soviet defense spending

Richard Garwin stated in his Sept. 24 letter that I was all wrong in saying the CIA has reported Soviet spending on strategic defense to be 10 times the size of the Strategic Defense Initiative program.

Here is the CIA testimony, presented by Robert Gates in the June 25 Senate hearings: "Strategic offensive and defensive forces account for about one-fifth of total [Soviet] defense spending — about one-tenth each." The Soviet defense budget is about \$350 to \$400 billion in terms of the amount the United States would have to spend for the same programs. That means Soviet expenditures on strategic defense are \$35 to \$40 billion, or about 10 times the requested SDI funding of \$3.7 billion, as I stated to Diana West.

Dr. Garwin further says that Soviet spending on military lasers — about \$1 billion per year, according to the CIA testimony — is "just about the magnitude of our own." But actually, this Soviet laser program is nearly three times the current SDI expenditures on lasers, which are \$342 million, according to the latest SDI report to Congress.

Further, the CIA estimate of \$1 billion per year for the Soviet laser program is too low, according to Pentagon sources. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger has stated that the Soviets have 10,000 defense scientists and engineers working on lasers, which is about five times the current level of effort in Gen. James A. Abrahamson's laser program.

Nothing in the discussion of SDI is more important than the enormous Soviet effort in this area, which parallels the SDI program in lasers, particle beams, and every other line of research and dwarfs the American program in magni-

tude. If we don't get cracking on SDI at the full funding level recommended by the Fletcher panel and requested by the Reagan administration, we can find ourselves in the 1990s in a world in which the Soviets have a defense against American missiles, but the United States has no defense against Soviet missiles. That's a very dangerous prospect for America.

Dr. Garwin was wise to challenge my numbers for Soviet spending on strategic defense, because they indicate that his advice to the senators to cut SDI funding from \$3.7 billion back to \$1.4 billion is very bad advice indeed. It is fortunate for America that the Senate did not heed his counsel.

Regarding the number of laser satellites needed to counter a Soviet nuclear attack, Dr. Garwin's latest answer — 79 satellites — is close to the result computed by defense scientists doing research in this field, but 30 times smaller than the 2,400 satellites which was his original answer. It has taken Dr. Garwin nearly a year, reducing his results with each new report and sliding down his personal learning curve, to come up with the answer accepted all along by the defense theorists working full-time on these problems.

With laser satellites estimated to cost \$1 billion or so apiece, the difference between 2,400 satellites and 70 satellites is a big piece of change. It makes all the difference in the world for the critically important marginal cost ratio — i.e., how many dollars we have to spend on defense for every dollar the Soviets spend on offense.

Dr. Garwin said in his letter that we would need many more of these

expensive satellites if the Soviets were to scrap their present arsenal of SS-18s and SS-19s and also the SS-24s and SS-25s which are about to go into service, and build a new arsenal of "fast burn" missiles. In his Senate committee testimony, Dr. Garwin estimated that this could be done by the Soviets in as little as six years. When Sen. Warren Rudman pointed out that Gen. Abrahamson, director of SDI, had testified it would be well into the next century before the Soviets could deploy these missiles, Dr. Garwin replied, "Gen. Abrahamson, although a fine officer, is new to this field."

In other words, Gen. Abrahamson doesn't know one end of his anatomy from the other in regard to these vital technical matters in his program. I don't think Dr. Garwin will find anyone to agree with him in that judgment of Gen. Abrahamson's technical competence.

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