

Naval War College Review

Volume 39
Number 4 *Autumn*

Article 16

1986

The Last Frontier: An Analysis of the Strategic Defense Initiative

Anthony C. Dirienzo
U.S. Army

Gary L. Guertner

Donald M. Snow

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Dirienzo, Anthony C.; Guertner, Gary L.; and Snow, Donald M. (1986) "The Last Frontier: An Analysis of the Strategic Defense Initiative," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 39 : No. 4 , Article 16.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol39/iss4/16>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Union, and the Euro-American portions of the West (excluding the Japanese) clearly fear the prospect of East Asia's two major powers developing significant common interests, such convergence is not on the horizon—or over it. Instead, Japan is pursuing parallel interests with China in which each side uses the other but avoids a close embrace. In this sense, Japan's emerging policies are strongly influenced by U.S. policies, and vice versa. So, rather than an "axis," one might well visualize a yin and yang relationship which is divided by a major developmental gulf. For Japan the East and West have long since melded, but the "twain" separating the Japanese east from the PRC's east remains a formidable obstacle likely to preclude the scenarios the author suggests. In sum, analysts of modern Asian affairs should consider the views expressed in *Sino-Japanese Axis*, but they are unlikely to be persuaded.

EDWARD A. OLSEN
Naval Postgraduate School
Monterey, California

Guertner, Gary L. and Snow, Donald M. *The Last Frontier: An Analysis of the Strategic Defense Initiative*. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1986. 147pp. \$20

The Last Frontier fills a void in the open literature about the strategic reasoning behind the President's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). It is a work that examines the strategy and policy issues of "strategic" defense without a purposeful effort to side

with either critics or proponents. While the authors' biases are clear, they lay out a framework to begin to answer the question of why a nation ought to have active "strategic" defenses in the first place. I suggest that a careful reading of this work will bring most readers to the middle ground of the debate.

The strength of this book is the manner in which the effect of military strategy and arms control on the "strategic" offense-defense relationship is described. Clearly, the transition period from an offense-only "strategic" regime to one where defenses are dominant, is most dangerous and potentially unstable. The authors drive the reader to the question that must be answered *prior to beginning* the transition: "Would the transition to strategic defense make us more secure or would each side alter its nuclear employment policy in such a way that cities and population centers would face even greater danger than they have in the past?" The authors suggest that the answer is yes to the second half of the question; that the irony of "strategic" defense is that countervalue (cities) targeting may move from the lowest to the highest "strategic" targeting priority.

In taking the middle course, the authors present a "show me" attitude toward the current Administration's statements that active defenses and offensive arms reduction go hand in hand. They credibly present the case for Soviet offensive proliferation in the face of early U.S. SDI deployments. They propose that defensive

deployments be touted less as population protection and more as a means of mitigating the offensive threat to "strategic" forces. The former requires a nearly leak-proof defense that is subject to technical ridicule while the latter can readily be contrasted with arms control as an alternative to reducing the Soviet threat.

The book provides a framework for analysis of the SDI as presently constructed. It does not, however, offer alternatives to the popular conception that the SDI will eventually become a "shield" against ballistic missile attack. The authors clearly view this as a difficult, vastly expensive and dangerous task, whether protecting population or military forces. While "strategic" defenses may indeed be a black hole for the United States and the Soviets, an analysis of the effects of "imperfect" defenses would have been helpful. If a limited defense can cause a potential attacker to modify his attack plans so much that confidence of success in that attack is lost (and hence it cannot rationally be launched), is not that defense worthwhile?

As an aside, this very thought-provoking and helpful work is slightly marred by the technical inaccuracies of pages 14-15, i.e., the discussion of the workings and effects of the neutral particle beam weapon are incorrect. Nevertheless, the remainder of the work is a valuable addition to the debate on strategic defense.

ANTHONY C. DIRIENZO
Major, U.S. Army

Payne, Keith B. *Strategic Defense: "Star Wars" in Perspective*. Lanham, Md.: Hamilton Press, 1986. 268pp. \$20.95 paper \$9.95

Dr. Payne produces an easily read manuscript focusing on nearly all aspects of the current American debate over the Strategic Defense Initiative, "Star Wars." As he states early in the text, where a choice had to be made between clarity and detail, he clearly opted for clarity. Still, on most issues, there is sufficient detail to back up his arguments. Similarly, his use of summary sections on each chapter allows a casual reader to absorb rapidly the general concepts presented. Given this format and several point-counterpoint tables, the book should prove useful as a classroom text.

The early chapters offer an interesting and realistic crisis scenario; background in what might loosely be termed "deterrence theory," and a good history of nuclear strategies, concepts and the pace of the arms race. Dr. Payne rejects the long-standing concept of mutual vulnerability as the basis of "stability"—for which he offers a three-level definition—because this precept may only deter the United States. His conclusion that the Soviets already reject the mutual vulnerability concept is most intriguing.

By blending the oft-cited examples of Soviet civil defense, layered defense against airbreathing forces, and preparation to expand the only existing ABM network, he leaves the reader wondering how the Soviets could possibly object to ballistic