SDI SHOULD BE BUILT NOW

Phyllis Schlafly June 1, 1995

Thirty years ago in 1965, I was privileged to be escorted with a small group through NORAD, the great hole in a Colorado mountain where our government headquartered its systems designed to trackany object that might attack our nation from the skies. It was awesome to view what American scientific genius had developed andto know that our U.S. Armed Services had such precise technology to warn of any unfriendly action from the bad guys of the world.

After the tour was completed, the officer in charge tookus into a small room and carefully closed the door for privacy. I'll never forget his words: "If NORAD receives information that the Soviets have launched a nuclear missile at the United States,do you know what we have to shoot it down with? Not a cotton-pickin' thing."

I was shocked; and 30 years later in 1995, it is shocking that America still has no defense against enemy missiles. Despite the trillions of dollars we have spent on the military, despite all the offensive weapons we have built to kill civilians on enemy soil, we still have no way to shoot down incoming enemy missiles and save American lives.

Since the end of the Cold War, most Americans have stopped worrying about whether the Soviets might deliberately launch a nuclear attack. Yet, Russia still has over 9,000 strategic nuclear missiles and 18,000 tactical nuclear weapons, the political situation there is very volatile, and the control over those weapons of mass destruction is uncertain.

The cash-hungry Russians could sell their expensive missiles to some ofthe 25 nations that are ambitious to join the nuclear club and are trying hard to develop a nuclear capability on their own. That's not good news because many of those countries, such as North Korea, Iran, Iraq and Libya, don't like America.

Some people seem to think that the short-lived and victorious Gulf War is the model for all future wars. But just imagine how different it would have been if Saddam had had a long-range nuclear ballistic missile. Would we have dared to send our troops against Iraq if American cities were exposed to retaliation by the dictator President Bush described as a madman?

Ronald Reagan tried to remedy our nation's nuclear nudity when he announced his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in1983. Ted Kennedy immediately ridiculed it as "Star Wars" and the liberal media, chanting those words like a Greek chorus, obligingly made sure that the false name stuck.

Ten years later, in 1993, Reagan again urged Congress to build SDI,

saying "it is technologically feasible, strategically necessary, and morally imperative." So why hasn't SDI been built?

The principal objections to SDI through the years have been political (the liberals just don't like it and the Democrats don't want to give Reagan credit for it), technical (a slavish adherence to the obsolete and dangerous 1972 ABM Treaty), and cost. The political objections should have been buried in the election returns of November 1994; indeed, the Republicans promised to build SDI in their Contract With America.

The ABM Treaty, signed by Henry Kissinger in 1972 on behalf of the Nixon Administration, should have been judged unconstitutional because it pledged the United States government NOT to defend Americans against nuclear attack despite the fact that the prime duty of our government is to "provide for the common defense." In any event, since the Soviets repeatedly and flagrantly violated it, we should have long since exercised our right to renounce it with six months'notice.

The cost argument doesn't stand up, either. SDI doesn't cost any more than the costly and relatively inefficient systems we are currently using to protect limited, designated areas overseas.

Actually, building the space-based system called SDI would be the most cost-effective system we can buy for the global defense of all U.S. interests. In addition to ensuring our protection from missiles fired accidentally, or mischievously by rogue nations, SDI would keep the United States at the cutting edge of high technology and it might ultimately pay for itself by spin-offs for commercial use.

Our government has just taken the extraordinary step of closing off Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. to protect the President against any possible bomb threat, however remote. Due to the road patterns in Washington, D.C., this action will be extraordinarily costly and inconvenient to tens of thousands of Americans (besides being a national embarrassment), and it's not even clear that this decision can achieve its announced objective.

American citizens need protection, too, the kind of protection in their homes and cities that SDI will provide. Those who carp about the cost should be answered that it will be paid for by transferring funds from less important federal purposes, including less effective military projects.