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RELEASE: OCTOBER 9, 1984

STAR WARS

The expression "Star Wars" has been used for the last year as an epithet to try to ridicule President Ronald Reagan's proposal to build a defensive system to shoot down enemy intercontinental ballistic missiles before they rain fire and destruction on our cities. The inventors of the label, however, must have been fuddy-duddy middle-aged people who didn't realize that, as a piece of semantics, "Star Wars" is a positive for Ronald Reagan, not a negative.

The "Star Wars" from which the label was borrowed is a successful movie trilogy which excited young people (perhaps we should say the young at heart) with a vision of the future and the use of "science fiction" technology. But the "Star Wars" trilogy is much more than that; it is a drama of the battle between good and evil, and of the triumph of good over evil through adventure, courage, and confrontation.

It's taken the President's speechwriters months to realize this. At first, they shied away from the label. But when the President spoke to the American Legion Convention in Salt Lake City last month, he confidently adopted the label which his enemies had hung upon him.

President Reagan told the Legion: "Some call this Star Wars; I call it prudent policy and common sense." In explanation of this statement, he added, "We must pursue vigorous research on defensive technologies that can permit us to intercept strategic ballistic missiles -- fired deliberately or accidentally -- before they reach our own soil or that of our allies."

It is still difficult for the American people to grasp the fundamental fact of our nuclear-space age: The great United States, which has spent many billions of dollars on a military apparatus, has no way to shoot down attacking Soviet weapons. The legacy of the liberals is that our people and our cities are totally vulnerable to attack.

We do have weapons that can kill millions of people in the U.S.S.R. But we have no way to shoot down incoming missiles designed to kill Americans. We are, as Lt. Gen.

Arthur Trudeau once said, the world's greatest "nuclear nudist colony." Most Americans would far rather spend tax dollars to defend the lives of their loved ones in their own communities than to kill people on the other side of the globe.

When President Reagan asked the simple question on March 23, 1983, "What if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant U.S. retaliation to deter Soviet attack?", the pacifists went into a tirade, ridiculing his plan as "Star Wars."

They said President Reagan's plan will make the Soviets "react" by building more weapons of their own. But it is self-evident that the Soviets build weapons and cheat on their agreements no matter what we do or don't do.

The pacifist scientists said President Reagan's plan "won't work." But the U.S. experiment in the South Pacific on June 10, 1984 proved that a defensive vehicle can go out into space, with its computers calculating the trajectory of an enemy missile, and then intercept that incoming missile and destroy it. We saw this successful experiment (performed with a dummy warhead) on our TV screens.

But every age has had its share of pessimistic scientists who live in a closed world. There were scientists who said that heavier than air flight was impossible, that nuclear power was impossible, that intercontinental ballistic missiles could never work, and that we could never land a man on the moon. Speaking for those who know that science does not close doors, it opens them, Dr. Edward Teller says that the only way we are sure not to succeed is not to try.

The pacifist scientists said that the Reagan Star Wars plan "wouldn't be perfect," that a few bombs would get through it. As Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger said, it doesn't need to be perfect. If the Soviets know that 90% of their ICBMs will be shot down in the boost phase within minutes after launch, that 90% of those still in flight will be shot down in the second phase, and that 90% of those remaining will be shot down by our terminal ground-based defensive system, that's real deterrence.

The Kremlin bosses are not going to press the button and lose 99% of their nuclear arsenal while 99% of the U.S. nuclear arsenal is undamaged.

President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative will give us a future without nuclear war. Of the several technologies designed to achieve this goal, the non-nuclear one called "High Frontier" is ready for production. The time to start is now.