COLD WAR CARD 4

PRESIDENT REAGAN AND THE COLD WAR

Strategic Defense Initiative

Background:

President Reagan first proposed the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program in his "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security." In the address, he discussed his dual dream of funding scientists to research and develop a multi-faceted defense system against nuclear weapons including x-ray lasers and satellites. President Reagan strongly felt that the nation needed to create and use new technology to change the accepted approach to nuclear weaponry which was called Mutual Assured Destruction or MAD. This was the concept that American citizens were protected by the knowledge that both the Soviet Union and the United States could strike the other first. The concept was used to try to create a sense of safety given the danger of destroying both the Soviet Union and the United States.

President Reagan wanted to eliminate the physical threat of nuclear weapons rather than just relying on the rational good will of other leaders and states to prevent nuclear war.

This idea had its supporters and detractors. Those who did not agree with President Reagan included both conservatives and liberals. Conservatives who disagreed were concerned that focusing on a weapons defense system would detract from an arms race and weaken the United States. Liberals who disagreed called the plan a "Star Wars" program, after the popular science fiction movie, to imply that SDI was a waste of money and impossible to achieve.

Quotes:

"The defense policy of the United States is based on a simple premise: The United States does not start fights. We will never be an aggressor. We maintain our strength in order to deter and defend against aggression – to preserve freedom and peace." President Reagan, March, 1983

"Excuse me, Mr. President, but I do not take your idea of sharing SDI seriously…" General Secretary Gorbachev, October, 1986

"…We want to accomplish three things: One, we want the Americans to withdraw conventional forces from Europe. Two, we want them to withdraw nuclear forces from Europe. Three, we want the Americans to stop proceeding with Strategic Defense Initiative."
General Secretary Gorbachev, November, 1987

Questions:

- Do you think it is a good idea for the government to spend money developing a strategic defense system? Why or why not?
- Why do you think President Reagan was so attached to the idea of a strategic defense system?
- Why do you think General Secretary Gorbachev did not want the United States to develop a strategic defense system?

Research:

- Why did SDI become an important aspect of negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union?
- Which scientists first discussed the idea of SDI with President Reagan?
- Was SDI successful? Explain.
- Discuss the modern ways in which a Strategic Defense system is now being researched.
- Which presidents have supported a strategic defense system since Reagan? How did they pursue their initiatives?

Activities:

- Find and summarize an article from the 1980s which supported SDI.
- Find and summarize and article from the 1980s which did not support SDI.
- Which article makes the most sense to you? Why?

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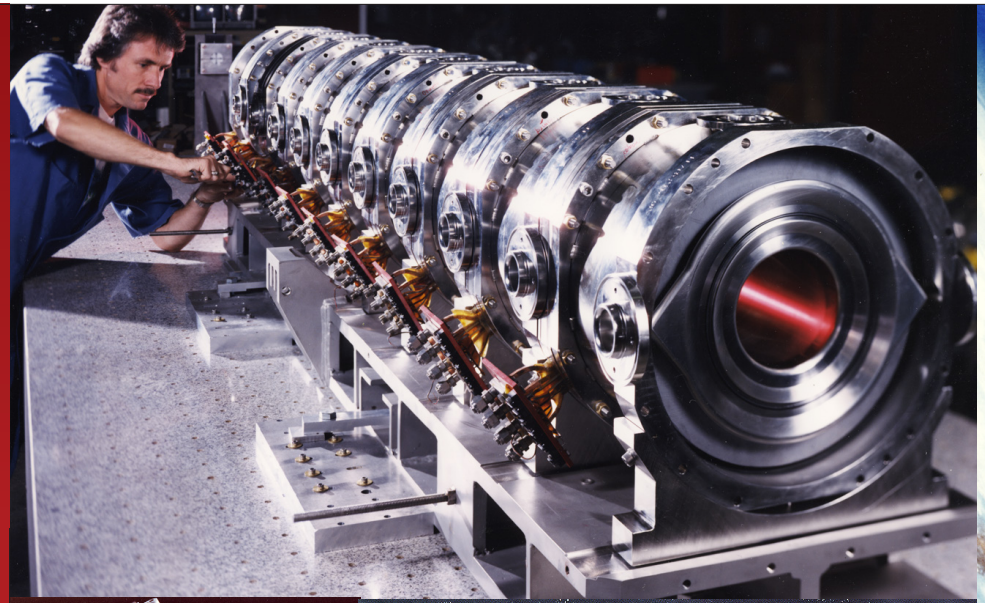

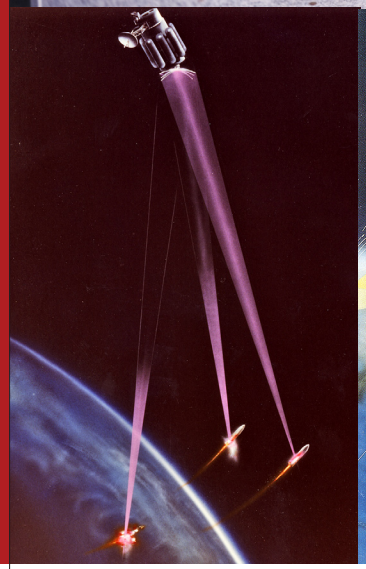

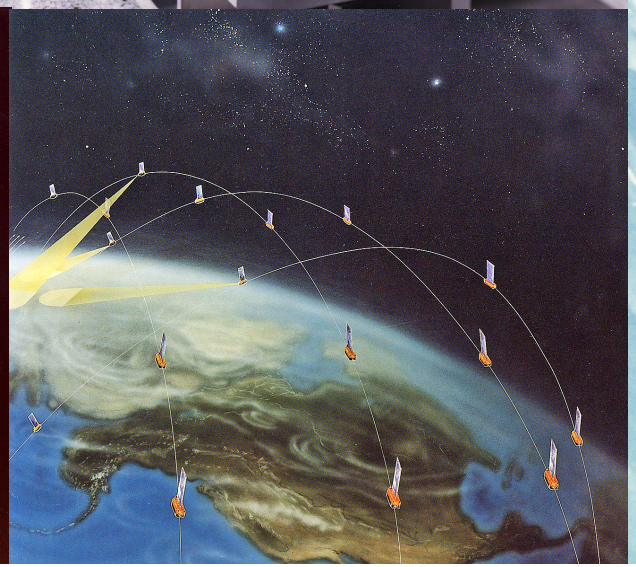

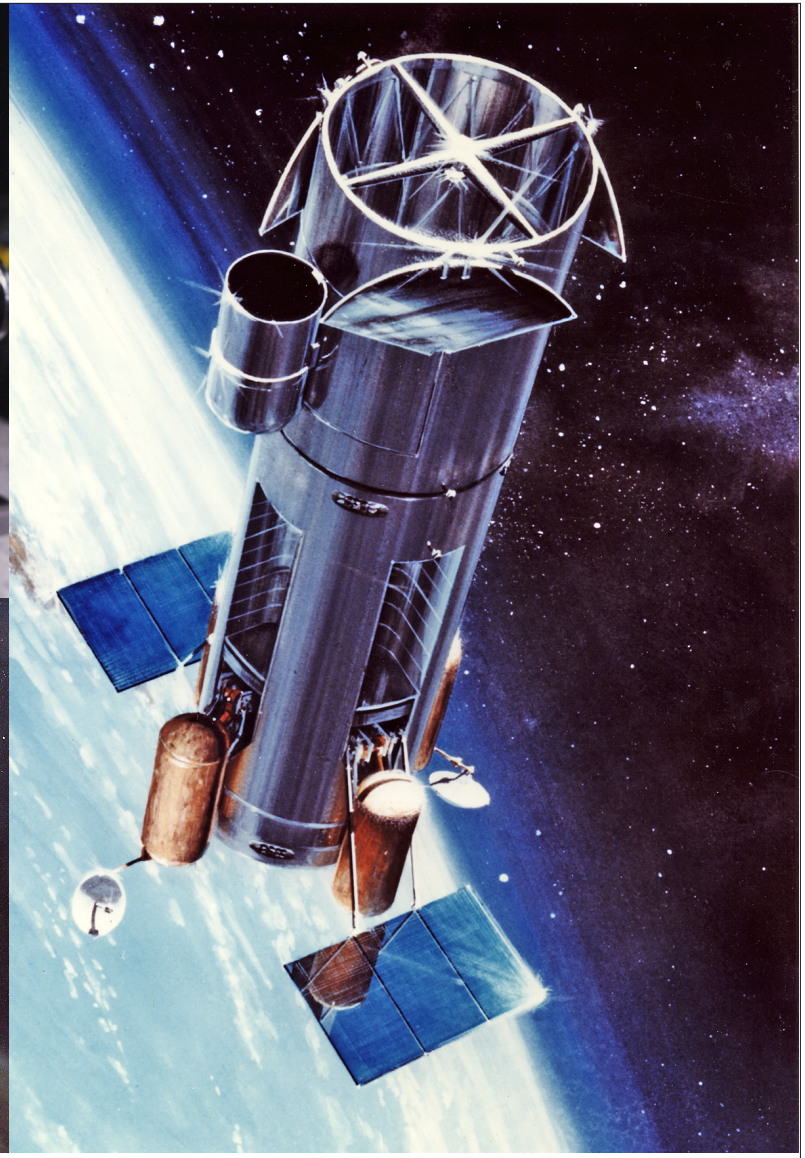

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