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THE ABM TREATY AND THE SDI PROGRAM

When I announced the initiation of the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), I presented my vision and hope for a future in which nations could live secure in the knowledge that their national security did not rest upon the threat of nuclear retaliation but rather on the ability to defend against potential attacks. The fundamental purpose of the SDI program is to determine whether and, if so, how advanced defensive technologies could contribute to the realization of this vision. This is a moral and noble purpose. It represents the best hope that we have for a future free of dependence on the threat of retaliation to underwrite our own security. It is an objective worthy of our nation and a goal that I intend this nation pursue with all deliberate speed.

At the same time, to our credit, we are a nation which respects law and meets its commitments. When we embarked on our SDI research, I made the commitment that this research would be conducted in full compliance with all our legal treaty obligations, and I directed, from its inception, that this program be planned to meet that commitment. Recently, we reexamined the ABM Treaty and the associated negotiating record in great detail. In the process, we have gained new insights into how this Treaty can objectively be interpreted. This, however, does not signal any lessening in resolve that this nation will remain in full conformity with its treaty obligations.

What our recent analyses have led me to believe is that, while the ambiguities involved could permit the technical, legal debate to continue, our initial and unilateral assertions about what the ABM Treaty did restrict concerning advanced defensive technologies is not clearly demonstrable in the terms of the treaty as written, nor in the associated negotiating record. Our assertions about this portion of the Treaty were not, at the time, shared by our negotiating partner. Rather, the record indicates that they were resisted by the Soviet Union. These assertions reflected more our hopes for what could result from the Treaty, made in the context of our assumptions about the future at that time, than an objective assessment of what was achieved and mutually agreed by the signed Treaty document.

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All this being said, over the last two years and working under the constraints as we interpreted them at the inception of the program, our technical community met my guidance and has designed our SDI research program to conform to a more restrictive view of our ABM Treaty obligations. This has entailed some price with respect to the speed of our progress, the overall cost of the program, and the level of technical uncertainty we face at each step in our research. But, nonetheless, they have crafted a program which, if consistently supported with the appropriate funding as requested, will permit us to achieve the goals set for it. (S)

I have carefully evaluated the price that the U.S. must pay for keeping our SDI program within the bounds of our current plans. I have weighed these costs against our overall national security requirements. Based upon this I have decided that, as long as the program receives the support needed to implement its carefully crafted plan, it is not necessary to authorize the restructuring of the U.S. SDI program towards the boundaries of Treaty interpretation which the U.S. could observe. This being the case, the issue of where exactly these boundaries should lie is moot even though in my judgment a broader interpretation of our authority is fully justified. (S)

The U.S. SDI program will continue to pursue the course currently set for it by my previous guidance. Under this course, there can be absolutely no doubt of the U.S. intention to fully meet its treaty commitments. As we do so, we will continue to demand that the Soviet Union correct its behavior and come into full compliance with its obligations, especially in those cases like the construction of the Krasnoyarsk radar and their telemetry encryption, among others, in which there are no grounds for doubt about their non-compliance. In sharp contrast to Soviet behavior, our clear and principled restraint with respect to our own SDI program, and the price we are prepared to pay in exercising that restraint, demonstrates by our deeds, our sincerity towards negotiated commitments. (S)

I can envision that in the future the day will come when our research will have answered the questions necessary to permit us to consider going beyond the restrictions that we have and will continue to observe under the current research program. At that time, based upon the conditions that we and our allies face and the behavior of the Soviet Union in the interim, the United States will have the opportunity to reassess the guidance that I have set forth in this document. At that time, in accordance with long-standing U.S. policy and after consultation with our allies, we will discuss and, as appropriate, negotiate with the Soviet Union in accordance with the terms of the ABM Treaty. (S)

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