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CIA: Soviets are developing their own 'star wars' system

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A new CIA report on Soviet defensive weapons technology reveals that many Soviet scientists critical of U.S. space weapons research have been leading the Soviet Union's directed-energy weapons program.

The CIA assessment of Soviet efforts that are counterparts to the Reagan administration's Strategic Defense Initiative — or "star wars" — found Soviet programs on a par with and well in advance of U.S. research. It indicates the Soviet Union is on the verge of launching a

major directed-energy weapons development program.

Directed energy refers to a variety of beam weapons — laser, radio frequency or particle beam arms.

The March 1985 paper titled "Soviet Directed Energy Weapons — Perspectives on Strategic Defense" provides details on top Soviet scientists in the program. A copy of the paper was obtained by The Washington Times.

The CIA reports that many of these Soviet scientists have been outspoken opponents of the SDI program while they have been involved for decades in advanced research toward Soviet ballistic-missile defense.

One Soviet physicist, Yevgeniy Velikhov, who has been identified in the Western press as the vice president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, is described in the report as a "central figure" in Soviet laser and particle-beam weapons research.

In a Washington Post opinion article last June 24, Mr. Velikhov wrote that strategic defense is "a dream that can't come true." He charged that the United States is spending money for research on directed-energy weapons that "won't work" and urged that development of space-based weapons "must be stopped immediately."

The CIA paper notes that Mr. Velikhov is a leading science policy-

maker and runs the Kirchatov Atomic Energy Institute. For several years, he also directed the Troitsk Institute of Atomic Energy which developed "lasers for strategic and tactical applications."

"The Soviet lobbying and criticism of SDI is the cheapest and least risky approach to undermining congressional and public support for SDI," the CIA paper states. It adds that the Soviets would prefer to undertake their strategic defense program without real competition from the United States.

A month after President Reagan announced the SDI program in 1983, the New York Times published a letter from a large group of Soviet scientists denouncing the space defense program, the CIA stated. It found that more than 200 of the Soviet signatories, including Mr. Velikhov and Soviet Nobel laureates Nikolay Basov and Aleksandr Prokhorov, helped develop conventional and exotic ballistic defense systems.

The CIA said it believes Mr. Basov and Mr. Prokhorov are scientific advisers to Soviet laser weapons programs.

Other Soviet scientists who signed the anti-SDI advertisement in the New York Times were identified only by last name in the CIA report but were linked by specialty to development of Soviet weapons systems including ICBMs, SLBMs, military aircraft, nuclear submarines and Soviet military nuclear energy programs.

One signatory, "Academician Avduyevskiy," is the head of "a number of projects for the military use of space, including a space-based laser weapon," the report states. Soviet scientists opposed to SDI and identified only as Grushin, Semikhin and Bunkin are also described as leaders in development of Soviet strategic defense.

The CIA report said a group of Soviet scientists published a report last year that was "written and disseminated to serve as a propaganda tool against SDI." The report, widely distributed in the West, was not circulated in the Soviet Union.

All Soviet research on directed-energy weapons is under the direction of what has been called the PVO Strany (Air and Space Defense of the State) — a separate branch of the Soviet military, which handles strategic and tactical defense, according to a knowledgeable intelligence source.

"These are not just research programs, but production programs

run by an operational military force that is not part of the Army and not part of the Air Force," the source said.

The PVO Strany, the source said, runs the Soviet air defense network, the space defense program and the Anti-Ballistic Missile program.

The Soviet Union operates the world's only ABM system, the Galosh missile system ringing Moscow. Galosh missiles are capable of hitting targets as high as 100,000 feet.

The Soviets also operate the only anti-satellite weapon, an orbital interceptor capable of striking satellites in space.

The energy-directed research and development facility at Saryshagan, in the south-central Soviet Union on Lake Balkash, contains a prototype laser weapon the intelligence community believes "could be used to interfere with U.S. satellites."

"In the late 1980s, the Soviets could have prototypes of ground- and space-based laser weapons for use against satellites and ballistic missiles," CIA concluded.

The CIA believes the Soviets have concentrated their development efforts on gas and chemical laser weapons, but have made "impressive" gains with exotic particle beam development.

The CIA expects the Soviets to test a beam weapon capable of disrupting satellite electronics sometime in the 1990s.