



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on November 2, 2018

U.S. Nuclear Missile-defense Test Successful

On March 23, 1983, President Ronald Reagan delivered a nationally televised address entitled “Defense and National Security” in which he unveiled his goal of building a space-based defense against intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), which he dubbed the “Strategic Defense Initiative” (SDI).



Criticism was immediate, with newsman Sam Donaldson dismissing it as a “dream,” and others ridiculing it as “Star Wars,” after the movie series very popular at the time. In the 1984 presidential campaign, Reagan’s Democratic opponent, Walter Mondale, even tried to take issue with the proposed program as increasing the chances of having a nuclear war in “the heavens.” But after Reagan’s lead in the polls only increased after those ads ran, Mondale’s campaign took them down.

What Donaldson dismissed as a “dream” is now a reality — or, at least, it could be, as the U.S. Missile Defense Agency (MDA) announced last week that U.S. Navy sailors aboard the U.S.S. *John Finn* successfully conducted an intercept of a medium-range ballistic missile during a test flight off the west coast of Hawaii.

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MDA Director Lt. General Sam Greaves praised the successful test in a release from the Missile Defense Agency: “This was a superb accomplishment.... My congratulations to the entire team, including our sailors, industry partners, and allies who helped achieve this milestone.”

According to the release from MDA News, the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense is the naval component of the U.S. Ballistic Missile Defense System. The management of the Aegis BMD program is a joint effort of the MDA and Navy. “The Missile Defense Agency’s mission is to develop and deploy a layered Ballistic Missile Defense System to defend the U.S., its deployed forces, allies and friends from ballistic missile attacks of all ranges in all phases of flight.”

After Reagan announced his desire to deploy such a system, mainly as a defense against ICBMs from the Soviet Union, that country’s communist leaders tried very hard to make sure the United States never actually succeeded. It was obvious that while liberal critics ridiculed even the possibility that such a system could ever be successfully deployed, it was just as obvious that the Soviets were worried that the United States would be able to construct a space-based missile defense.

Reagan did not originate the idea of a space-based missile defense. That was a private organization known as High Frontier (HP), led then by founder Lt. General Daniel Graham. In 1982, HP published a



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report entitled “High Frontier: A New National Strategy.” After the development of ICBMs in the 1950s, some sort of anti-ballistic missile technology was discussed, but dismissed during the administrations of John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. Their secretary of defense, Robert S. McNamara, is credited (or blamed) for the creation of the nuclear strategy known as mutual assured destruction (MAD). The idea behind MAD was that if both sides simply left their major cities undefended against nuclear attack, then nuclear war would then be so unthinkable that it would never be fought.

But others, such as Graham, argued that that strategy was what was “mad.” Graham and other supporters of developing a space-based defense system said that a miscalculation could lead to a nuclear war, killing millions of Americans.

After Reagan left office, and the apparent collapse of the Soviet Union, interest in SDI waned. President Bill Clinton sharply curtailed the project’s budget. But after President George W. Bush withdrew from the ABM Treaty, actual development, testing, and deployment of SDI became a reality. Despite this, neither the administration of Bush or President Barack Obama expressed much interest in putting much money into developing the technology needed to fully develop a space-based defense.

Of some note is the “Iron Dome,” a system used by Israel to intercept and destroy short-range rockets fired from distances up to almost 50 miles away. While relatively little money has been dedicated to developing our own shield against incoming nuclear missiles, the development costs of the Iron Dome were largely paid for by U.S. taxpayers. It was declared operational in 2011, and has been successful in shooting down hundreds of rockets that would otherwise have hit heavily populated areas inside Israel.

The High Frontier organization, from which Reagan first received his idea for SDI, is still in existence as a 501 [c] 3 non-profit organization. It still advocates a space-based missile defense system, arguing that America needs to “revive a space-based defense program to provide a global defense, effective against ballistic missiles in all their phases of flight.”

Photo of TOPOL-M ballistic missile: [Vitaly V. Kuzmin](#)



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