

The world must no

Arms & Weapons



By Prof. Praful Bidwai

The world must put an end to these fancy - and dangerous - programmes before they get the better of it

AMONG the many dubious ideas that former United States president Ronald Reagan embraced, two were particularly dangerous. The first was that "a limited nuclear war" with the Soviet Union could be fought and won. The second held that the US could reliably secure itself against nuclear weapons by building Star Wars-style ballistic missile defence (BMD).

BMD would detect launches of nuclear-tipped missiles using satellites and radars, and intercept and destroy them. This would render the enemy's nuclear deterrent ineffectual. If the US

took the lead in BMD, it would acquire supreme, unmatched power.

Peace-minded scientists sharply criticised these ideas. They showed that a "limited nuclear war", deploying only 100 of the world's then-existing arsenal of 70,000-plus nuclear weapons, would create a cloud of soot and smoke which would block sunlight for years.

This would cause a prolonged "nuclear winter". Global food

with a 500-5,500 km range, and their nuclear warheads. However, Reagan never gave up on BMD. Spending some \$120 billion, the US developed rudimentary capabilities to engage ballistic missiles in all phases of their flight.

However, Reagan's successors desisted for long from actual BMD deployment, deferring to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (1972) with the USSR, which prohibits deployment.

Globally, BMD will trigger off a qualitatively new arms race and militarise space. Ethically, the human race has no business to militarise space. Strategically, militarisation will prove utterly disastrous

production and forestry would be devastated, creating climate havoc and large-scale hunger. This critique was fused into the great global peace movement of the 1980s.

Reagan eventually abandoned "limited nuclear war" and negotiated with the former USSR the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1987, the world's only agreement to dismantle a whole class of weapons - 2,700 missiles,

Things changed with George W Bush's election as President. In 2001, he announced plans to deploy a BMD shield against about 100-120 missiles. In 2002, the US withdrew from the ABM Treaty, and gave its Missile Defence Agency a free hand to develop BMD and space-based weapons, including lasers, kinetic-energy weapons, etc.

The world was horrified. But BJP-ruled India welcomed the announcement

- ahead of America's own allies. India had for decades opposed Star Wars and the militarisation of space.

The US's BMD is setting off new rivalries. The MDA has built two bases in Alaska and California for missile interceptors, costing \$26 billion. It's planned to spend \$250 billion on BMD.

The US has just announced a BMD programme in central Europe, with radars in the Czech Republic and an interceptor base in Poland. Washington claims this will guard against strikes from "rogue" nations like Iran.

The ABM Treaty recognised that BMD deployment would introduce uncertainty about the workability of nuclear deterrence, on which all nuclear weapons-states (NWSs) ostensibly base their security. Deterrence assumes that NWSs won't attack each other because they know their adversary can retaliate and inflict "unacceptable damage" upon them. This creates "balance-of-terror"-based security. Nuclear deterrence is flawed because it makes unrealistic assumptions about transparency, rules out accidents or miscalculations, and demands rational, cool-headed conduct from fallible, panic-prone decision-makers.

The search for ultimate supremacy

must not go ballistic

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through BMD, including the "freedom to attack" an adversary with nuclear weapons, and "freedom from attack" by his weapons, makes nonsense even of this limited stability, and creates new insecurities and dangers.

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fake targets.

Similarly, real warheads can be enclosed in radar-reflecting balloons. Besides, infrared jamming measures can be used. These can be mastered by the 30-odd countries with missile programmes. Finally, an adversary can "overwhelm" BMD with a large number of missiles. Yet, Russia, China, Japan and India have also entered the BMD game besides the US.

India must not waste scarce resources on BMD. Nor should Pakistan get lured into this sordid business. We already spend too much on the military in relation to health, education and social security

utterly disastrous.

With today's technology, BMD cannot provide remotely reliable defence against missiles. It's near-impossible to hit a bullet travelling at 24,000 kmph with another bullet travelling at the same speed with certainty.

Further, any number of inexpensive countermeasures can neutralise BMD, including cheap decoys like balloons. It cannot discriminate between real and

On December 6, India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) fired an interceptor to destroy a Prithvi missile launched five minutes earlier. In November 2006, the DRDO had used a modified Prithvi to intercept another Prithvi. It boasts that it can develop a fully indigenous BMD shield in three years.

These claims must be taken with a pinch of salt - and not just because Israeli

radars were used in the latest test. The DRDO's record inspires no confidence. All its major projects, including the Main Battle Tank, Light Combat Aircraft, and Advanced Technology Vessel (nuclear-powered submarine) have failed in some measure or other - sinking thousands of crores. Its missile programme too has run into serious difficulties.

However, it's even more important to recognise that BMD is strategically dubious, destabilising and harmful to regional security. Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee admitted as much in October when he ruled out joining the US-led BMD programme. The DRDO is working at odds with this.

India must not waste scarce resources on BMD. Nor should Pakistan get lured into this sordid business. We already spend too much on the military in relation to health, education and social security. The result is our falling Human Development Index ranks. BMD will further distort South Asian priorities - without producing security. The world must put an end to these fancy - and dangerous - programmes before they get the better of it. COURTESY KHALEJ TIMES

The writer is a veteran Indian journalist and commentator