

Star Wars defense plan fails to solve 'political' questions

In her book *The Guns of August*, Barbara Tuchman says that before World War I, the French believed in something called *elan* — a spirit, a dash, a boldness that was supposed to be uniquely theirs. *Elan* is what led the army to contemptuously reject khaki and retain red pants. "Eliminate the red trousers?" cried a former war minister. "Never!" And so soldiers died because they looked like bull's-eyes.



Richard Cohen

Most nations have their delusions and America is no exception. Ours is called "can do" — the belief that enough money, energy and desire can accomplish anything. The pantheon of "can-do" triumphs include the building of the atomic bomb the invasion of Normandy and, even, victory in World War II itself. Give GI Joe and Rosie the Riveter the goods and they'll deliver.

Now we are embarking on the grandest of all "can-do" projects — the Strategic Defense Initiative, better known as Star Wars. President Reagan says it promises much — nothing less than eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. The President believes this so fervently that he is willing to bet trillions of dollars on it and, among other things, your life. There is, after all, only one thing Star Wars will destroy for certain and that is the nervous understanding known as deterrence. Instead of a doctrine based on retaliation we would substitute one based on defense.

You can understand why the President is enamored of Star Wars. It promises we will make atomic war no more, that we can throw a net into space so that no missiles will get through and, as result, there will be no need for missiles at all. Star Wars will do to atomic weapons what shining armor did to the bow and arrow. Hold a room in the museum for the MX.

Star Wars is not the conceptual breakthrough that the president thinks it is. Instead, it is a mis-application of the old can-do ethic. The President is of the World War II generation, and it's not surprising that maybe his most moving speech was delivered on the beach at Normandy.

Here is a man shaped by his times, nurtured on Edison and Bell and, probably, that nearly mythical moment when Franklin Roosevelt opened a letter from Albert Einstein and concluded, in the manner of Andy Hardy, let's build an atomic bomb.

Star Wars is neither an attempt to build a bomb nor a massive invasion of France. The Normandy invasion was so vast it smothered its mistakes. As for the A-bomb, nothing much would have happened if, in fact, nothing much had happened. We could have tried again.

But that's not the case with Star Wars. It shreds the doctrine of deterrence and promises to replace it with a system that requires something it can not deliver — perfection. After all, a system that's 90 percent effective is not effective at all. If only ten percent of Soviet missiles penetrate our defense, it's still, as they used to say in the old films, curtains. Just one missile can carry ten warheads. As with pregnancy, there's no such thing as a little nuclear war.

We've had this sort of expectation before. We made war on poverty, and there's still poverty. We made war on drugs, and there's still drugs. The problem was neither drugs or poverty alone, but the way people complicate things — the way they just won't keep still.

That's the trouble with Star Wars. Even if it were feasible, an enemy would still be facing us — an enemy capable of coming up with its own Star Wars system and, with a little can-do of its own, ways to evade the system we have. Of course, we would do the same — and that's just the point.

Nothing will have been solved. The competition will just have been moved upstairs to space. Neither we nor the Soviets would give up nuclear weapons, anymore than a homeowner would give up a gun because he's put bars on the windows. There's always the thief with the hacksaw.

Before World War I, the doctrine of *elan* deluded the French into thinking they were stronger than they were. Now a doctrine that there is a technical answer to a political question is deluding us and, worse, complicating the chances for disarmament. Like *elan* before it, Star Wars is a chimera. Can-do can not do what needs to be done.

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Letter

Student thanks America for Vietnam sacrifice

I am a Vietnamese student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

I want to thank all the American and Vietnamese soldiers who have fought for the Vietnam War.

Through my life, I have been more fortunate than other children of war. I lived in a warring nation, but never saw active battle nor experienced any suffering. I only saw these on the television, just as most Americans did. Because of you, I didn't have to see all the bad sights of war. Because of you, I got to taste what real freedom is like, what Levi's are, who Michael Jackson is . . . Because of you, I now enjoy the freedom for which you fought.

I wish there hadn't been a Vietnam War so you would not have had to fight and kill and die. I know you didn't want to do these. I just want you to know that what you fought for wasn't for nothing. I am grateful for what you have done for me and other Vietnamese who love freedom. You have done so much. What did I do to deserve the sacrifice of your life, your freedom? Ten years ago I was too young to understand what was going on in Vietnam. Now I am older and still trying to understand the Vietnam War itself.

I have a new life now. I am doing well in the United States. People here have treated me with kindness and generosity. My life goes on. I hope someday I can do big things for others as you have done for me.

For soldiers who have died, I hope you sleep well. For soldiers who are alive, I hope your deep wounds will soon heal. I understand what you have gone through — we haven't forgotten you.

Nuc Mam
arts and sciences

Resident says church loses UNL participation

Regarding Jim Rasmussen's story, "Students change religious attitudes," (DN, March 8), I

find the remarks of Father Michael Jackels rather sad. He admits, "It's tough for the church to get students involved in social causes unless those causes affect students' personal success in some way. It's frustrating because you can't make people see that a concern, whether it's remote or not, is still a concern of theirs."

Almost three years ago, your newspaper ran a story about the departure of the Oblate priests, Fathers Dale Harde and Tom Kozeny, from Sacred Heart Parish in Lincoln. In that same story, the new pastor at Sacred Heart was quoted as saying, "Everything's back to normal now at Sacred Heart."

Back to normal, in the Catholic community of Lincoln, must mean what Father Jackels is bemoaning — "more conservative attitudes . . . more emphasis on personal success . . . personal gain and personal convenience." The Oblates had awakened consciences in this community and had personally involved themselves and others in "social causes like civil rights, relief to the poor and personal freedom around the world." For this reason, many university students had begun to attend Mass at Sacred Heart. Also for this reason, the diocesan leadership recommended the departure of these two activist priests.

Where is the leadership for the 4,500 Catholic students on this campus? Where was the leadership last weekend when the seminar on the Catholic bishops' first draft of the economy pastoral was held on UNL campus? Why were there only a dozen or so Catholic laity present to hear Bishop McNamara from Grand Island, a member of the committee which will draft the agricultural section of the pastoral, as he spoke so knowledgeably about the letter and asked for specific input from those present? Were the students, those 800 who attend the Newman Center for Mass, encouraged to attend this seminar?

It is a consolation, though small, that Father Jackels has admitted that there is a problem.

Elizabeth A. Peterson
Sacred Heart Parish
Lincoln

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