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## **Keep Star Wars in the Movie House**

By Jack Shanahan

It's ironic that just as the latest episode of Star Wars sweeps the country, the *New York Times* reports that the Pentagon is pursuing a program to put weapons in space.

Why? Because it's the Star Wars concept, first proposed by President Ronald Reagan, that has led to the Pentagon's decision to pursue space weapons.

Now wait a minute, you're thinking. Star Wars is long gone. Well, not exactly.

It's true that President Reagan's original idea to base "defensive" weapons on satellites in the cosmos has been off the official books ever since President Bill Clinton decided to scale it back.

Clinton proposed a limited "Star Wars" plan. It was referred to as "National Missile Defense," and the interceptor missiles were designed to be placed on land, not in space.

Democrats supported Clinton's plan for political—not military—reasons: Democrats hoped to take another issue away from the Republicans. We support missile defense, too, they wanted to tell voters—just like the Republicans.

This strategy failed, because Republicans then proposed a bigger missile defense system, leaving Democrats where they started: on the defensive.

After 9/11—which was irrefutable evidence of the limited benefit of Star Wars—Democrats threw in the towel completely and voiced little or no opposition to the missile defense program.

And so the program has gone ever since. Silos are now under construction in Alaska, even though the ability of the system to shoot down incoming missiles has never been proven.

This, despite federal expenditures on missile defense of about \$10 billion per year—enough to provide health insurance for every uninsured kid in America. Over \$80 billion has been spent on missile defense over the years, about the same amount as America spent on finding a cure to cancer.

And despite the expenditures, missile defense tests continue to fail as often as succeed—not a great track record when you consider that it takes only one nuclear missile to slip through the system to cause unspeakable death and destruction.

We've arrived at a point where reasonable politicians, Pentagon officials, and scientists should conclude that missile defense, as currently conceived, will not work.

And that's just what the Bush Administration has apparently concluded. But rather than give up on the program, Pentagon officials are planning to return to the grand Star Wars plan, as envisioned by President Bush, with weapons on satellites circling around the planet waiting to shoot down enemy missiles as they're launched.

They see this as the only plan that has a prayer of working—not matter what the ultimate cost.

And how would our enemies respond to a new Star Wars program? They'd start building nuclear bombs to counter it? The easiest way to combat a Star Wars “defensive” system, which our enemies would surely see as a threat, is overwhelm it with nuclear missiles, insuring that some get through. And if some bombs get through, our enemies would reason, then an offensive attack by the U.S. is unlikely.

We can find a better way to protect our national security than loading space with weapons.

But nothing will change if our political leaders are too scared about being labeled “weak on defense” to challenge even the most egregiously wasteful Pentagon projects.

We need leaders who have the guts to stand up and say that throwing money at the Defense Department will not make us more secure.

We need smart defense spending. And cutting “missile defense” funds and transferring the savings to our kids is a great way to show just how smart our country can be.

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