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Dear Member of the National Academy of Sciences:

It seems to me and many of my physicist colleagues that the President's SDI (Star Wars) program is doomed to failure.

If most of the members of the National Academy of Sciences likewise regard it as doomed, the President, Congress, and the public should be so informed. No other advisory group is more broadly competent or more impartial than the NAS.

I am now making a personal effort to sound out the NAS membership on its views on Star Wars by means of the following questionnaire. I intend to compile the results promptly and to publicize them appropriately. (Seventeen years ago, when the threat of the sonic boom of the proposed supersonic transport (SST) plane was at issue, I wrote -- as Director of the Citizens League Against the Sonic Boom -- to all of the NAS members, received strong confirmation that the sonic boom would do much damage to buildings, and was able to bring additional pressure to bear on Congress to halt the program. It soon did so.)

I hope you will indicate your views on the following questions and will return the sheet to me in the enclosed stamped envelope.

* * *

Is it likely that the proposed Star Wars program would succeed in providing an effective shield against a surprise attack by a flight of several thousand rocket-launched, high-altitude atomic-bomb-carrying warheads? Yes _____ No _____

(The attack could, I suppose, be launched on a stormy night and could be accompanied by tens of thousands of decoys of new and sophisticated type.)

Would the Star Wars program, even if capable of defeating a high-altitude attack, prevent atomic-bomb delivery by various other methods? Yes _____ No _____

(My impression is that an enemy could introduce dozens of city-destroying atomic bombs by cruder methods such as smuggling them ashore in innocent-looking lobster boats and yachts, then transporting the bombs by truck to our biggest cities, ready for detonation by clockwork. Or they could be smuggled in across the Mexican or Canadian borders with the aid of a bribed customs officer. Or the bombs could be delivered by short-range low-altitude rockets launched from close-offshore freighters and submarines.)

Would the Star Wars program prevent ten-minute short-range delivery of atomic bombs to England, France, and West Germany? Yes _____ No _____

What is your overall attitude toward the Star Wars program?
Strongly for __, For __, Neutral __, Against __, Strongly against __.

Your signature _____

Sincerely,

(Comments welcomed.
Use reverse side?)

William A. Shurcliff

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Senior Editor of "Smyth Report" ("Atomic Energy for Military Purposes: The Official Report on the Development of the Atomic Bomb, 1940 - 1945")
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