National Ideology and Strategic Defense of the Population, from Athens to Star Wars

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On March 23, 1983, President Ronald Reagan gave a televised speech to the American public in which he proposed that the United States begin working to develop a space-based "peace shield"—a system of strategic defenses that would "intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies." The goal of the system would be to "give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete" and "eliminate[e] the threat posed by strategic nuclear missiles."1 Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)—dubbed "Star Wars" by the proposed system's detractors—has since become a major factor in American defense planning and diplomacy. Most SDI planners envision a limited system in which only the most important military targets would be defended.2 The version that has been marketed to the American public, however, both in Reagan's initial speech and by private groups advocating SDI, is a strategic defense of the population: a system which, once fully implemented, would safeguard the residents and the economic infrastructure of the United States from nuclear attack.3 The version of SDI in which the American public has been encouraged to believe is a true grand strategy of preclusive population defense.

The literature on Star Wars is vast, but the psychological impact of preclusive defenses on popular opinion and on decision making by national leaders has not been taken enough into consideration. The problem is best approached historically, since although technologies change, there are apparent continuities in the interaction of public opinion and policy within democratic polities. A consideration of the impact on classical Athens of the development and deployment of preclusive population
defense systems points out the complex interplay between defensive strategy and national ideology. The history of Athenian defense strategy in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. suggests that a national military policy based on a grand strategy of preclusive defense can lead to both ideological and technological problems and helps to explain why these problems may not be fully recognized by the system's designers or by its supposed beneficiaries. Furthermore, the Athenian example suggests that preclusive defense systems can destabilize power regimes regardless of whether the system was built for genuinely defensive purposes (as SDI proponents claim) or to mask aggressive plans (as some critics of SDI claim). The Athenian example helps to explain the role of offensive and defensive innovation in destabilizing international power regimes and in expanding and intensifying hot conflicts. Ultimately, analysis of how Athenian public opinion conditioned foreign policy options may offer a challenge to the classical Realist school of international relations theory.4

Some may object at the outset that the unique strategic function of nuclear weapons renders all pre-nuclear age history irrelevant to discussions of international relations.5 But, while admitting that the modern situation indeed presents some unparalleled features, I believe that there is a very real danger in abandoning history when thinking about international relations. Those who fail to take the past into consideration tend to regard their own attitudes, biases, and modes of thought—in short, their ideology—as objective and as capable of arriving at objective truth. Consequently, they may fail to recognize the limits that their own ideological presuppositions impose upon the range of options to which they are able to give serious attention. Ideology, as I have defined it here, is inescapable and dangerous because it tends to be invisible: Michel Foucault has emphasized that ideology is not simply prejudice that can be shed through exercise of the rational will, but is structured into the discourse and power structure of every society.6 If Foucault is correct, strategists and planners are wrong to assume that their conclusions can be completely rational or free from extraneous influences, because the very form of their thought is predetermined by the ideology of the society in which they live. Studying the past may offer a partial corrective. The ideology of past societies tends, over time, to become more opaque and so is subject to analysis and interpretation. Historical studies can therefore reveal the ways in which strategic choice molds national ideology and can reveal how that ideology in turn conditions strategic decision making.

THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR (431-404 B.C.)

Thucydides emphasized that the Peloponnesian War pitted Athenian sea power against Spartan land power.7 This situation entailed offensive capability inequality. The Athenians could use their superior navy to raid the Peloponnesian coast and to interfere with overseas trade by members of the Peloponnesian League, but they could not do much direct damage to Sparta's home territory.8 For their part, the Peloponnesians could march upon and occupy the home territory of Athens. The Athenians could not prevent the occupation unless the Athenian land army could defeat the Peloponnesians in open battle. Given the superior numbers of the Peloponnesian infantry and the superior military training of the Spartans, this was not a likely scenario, and both sides knew it. The disparity of means by which offensive military power could be deployed was certainly a primary reason why many Spartans and Peloponnesians believed the war would be short and must inevitably end in Athenian surrender.9

Athenian strategists had to devise a way to deflect the effects of the direct application of offensive land power by the Peloponnesians on Athens. The solution to the problem was found in fortifications. Given the inferiority of fifth-century siegecraft, the massive Athenian long wall fortified complex (the Athens-Piraeus long walls) offered a completely secure bastion behind which the Athenians could defend themselves against Spartan military forces.10 By protecting the population of Attica, the fortification complex could potentially balance the power equation in a protracted war with a superior land power. But we do not actually know whether that was the original intended function of the fortification complex.

The city wall of Athens was rebuilt after the Persian Wars (480-79 B.C.), and the long walls to Piraeus were completed in the 450s.11 Neither the strategic views of the architects who planned the walls nor those of the citizens who approved the plans in the Athenian assembly are known. It may be the case that the original motivation behind wall building was aggressive: to create a secure bastion that would allow Athens to launch attacks without fear of effective retaliation. But it is unnecessary to presume a priori that most Athenians in the decades before the Peloponnesian War had rationally thought through the role the walls might play in a major war. Many Athenians may well have regarded building the long walls as part of the normal (for the period) “tactical” military preparations of the city: a factor in fighting the enemy indeed, but not intended to permanently protect the entire population of the state. Pre-Peloponnesian War Greek warfare was highly formalized and emphasized personal bravery and collective fortitude rather than strategic insight.12 It was ordinarily assumed that enemy invaders would be challenged to a fair fight in the open field by the national levy of the invaded state. City and harbor walls ensured that towns could not be captured by surprise; they allowed the national army to prepare in
an unhurried manner to meet the enemy in the field. In the case of defeat in the field, the defenders could retreat to a place of safety, and the negotiations with the victorious enemy could be carried on in an atmosphere of relative tranquility.

Pericles, however, recognized that the urban fortification complex held the potential to serve a comprehensive role in protecting the Athenian population and essential Athenian economic resources against the superior Peloponnesian land army. Pericles argued that if all the Athenians in Attica retreated within the walls, they need not engage the Spartan-Peloponnesian land army in battle. The Spartans could ravage the land outside the walls, but extrurban property was strategically nonessential in light of the ability of Athens' navy to convoy supplies to the port at Piraeus. Imports could be paid for with accumulated surpluses and imperial revenues. Thus, Sparta's military might would be rendered impotent. Since the Spartans could not hope to assault the walls successfully, the Athenians inside the city would be insulated from the deployment of Spartan power, provided they were able to ignore damage done by invaders to property outside the walls. The city wall defense plan required considerable sacrifices on the part of the Athenian rural population—over half, perhaps three quarters, of the total citizen population. Given Athens' democratic constitution, Pericles' strategic plan required the acquiescence and cooperation of the rural population. Thucydides implies that Pericles had some difficulty in persuading some Athenians to accept this view of the fortifications as a retreat for the population and in getting them to stick by his strategic vision during the first Peloponnesian invasion in 431. But in the end Pericles won out. His grand strategy for the Peloponnesian War, based on sea power to control the empire combined with strategic defense of the population within the urban complex, confounded the Spartans for several years.

Pericles' strategy radically altered the use of force in Greek international relations. The physical obstacle represented by stone and brick fortifications effectively stymied the deployment of military force by human agents who lacked the technological means to overcome the obstacle. Thucydides was intensely aware of the role fortifications played in interfering with the deployment of force. In the introductory section of his history, Thucydides emphasizes the part that fixed defenses played in the origins of civilization: before men built defensive walls around their settlements, there could be no civilized life, because wandering tribes and pirates could easily overwhelm undefended settlements. Only after the development of fortifications could a civilization based on overseas transport flourish. The highly positive assessment of Pericles' career in Book 2 implies that Thucydides regarded Pericles' strategy as rational and capable of leading to victory.

But, with the aid of hindsight, Thucydides came to see the role played by fortifications in international relations rather differently than did Pericles. The latter seems to have supposed that his new defensive strategy would simply amputate Spartan power, by denying the Spartans an object they could affect through the deployment of the most important type of offensive military force (infantry trained to fight in open plains in hoplite formation) at their disposal. For Pericles, the walls were an immovable object which would demonstrate that Spartan military power was far from being an unstoppable force. Thucydides ultimately recognized that the interaction between the deployment of offensive force and defenses could have results that were rather more complex than that.

Power and lust for power, for Thucydides, were inevitable products of human nature and of inequalities in strength. Once the artificial constraints of conventional morality and ethics had been stripped away, power, exercised through the threat or the application of force, flowed from the stronger and swept away the objections of the weaker, rather like the action of a river which naturally flows downhill and carries before it lesser obstacles. Drawing out the river metaphor, a Thucydidean view of power might visualize fixed defenses as large, irregularly shaped boulders that fall into the stream of power: impediments that distort and redirect the stream. Thucydides emphasizes the turbulence by drawing the reader's attention to several incidents when superior Peloponnesian forces were unable to storm fortified positions, notably at the sieges of Oinoe, Plateae, and Pylos. In these cases and others, the fortifications were ultimately unable to stop the flow of power, but the turbulence resulting from the long and futile sieges led to significant consequences: notably the reinforcement of an Athenian conviction that the Spartans were militarily impotent. This conviction in turn helped to short-circuit efforts to end hostilities and encouraged the Athenians to expand the war. The consequences arising from the strategic use of fortifications were among those elements of chance which Thucydides claimed were the natural products of war, elements beyond the ability of anyone—even the far-sighted Pericles—to foresee or understand.

Pericles could create an apparently rational grand strategy, but he could not control the results of the impact of that strategy on Athenian public opinion, on Spartan decision-making, or on natural processes (e.g., the spread of the plague within the city). As a result of the uncontrollable physical and ideological effects of Pericles' defensive grand strategy, the Peloponnesian War took a series of surprising turns and expanded to involve the entire eastern Mediterranean world.

A developing appreciation on the part of both the Athenians and the Spartans for the strategic potential of fortifications was a major factor.
in the war, and Thucydides gives this factor a significant role in his narrative. The defense of Athenian Oinoe and of the pro-Athenian town of Plataea by small garrisons against much larger besieging forces were case studies in the strength of fixed defenses against traditional Greek offensive siege tactics. The Athenian construction of a fortified position at Pylos on the coast of Spartan-held Messenia in 425, combined with the Spartan infantrymen's inability to carry out a successful frontal assault on even a makeshift fortification, led directly to the Athenian capture of Spartan soldiers on Sphakteria Island. Athenian possession of Spartan hostages forced a temporary halt in Spartan military incursions into Attica, but Spartan power continued to flow northward to spread to different theaters. The Spartan general Brasidas succeeded in capturing fortified coastal cities of the Athenian empire in northern Greece; his indirect strategy for putting pressure on Athens and his use of economic coercion to force the northern cities into submission foreshadowed Spartan operations during the Ionian War. In 424 a defeated Athenian army in Boeotia fell back on makeshift fortifications at the sacred site of Delium. The Boeotian besiegers drove off the defenders by developing a sort of flame-thrower: an early example of defenses stimulating new technologies of offense. The negotiations which led to the Peace of Nicias were endangered by a drawn-out dispute over who would be left in control of the fortress of Panactum on the Athenian-Boeotian border.

The Periclean strategy left the Athenians secure behind their walls, and they maintained an offensive potential in their navy. This combination of security from assault and offensive capability seems to have contributed to Athenian belligerence, which some scholars have seen as a key factor in the origins of the war. Once war had broken out, Athenian security and offensive capability were important factors in broadening the conflict. Athenian naval raids on the Peloponnesian in the early years of the war may have begun as reasoned responses to Spartan invasions of Attica. But the naval raids did not have much effect, and the Athenians were soon led to attempt more ambitious offensive endeavors. Between 429 and 426, besides keeping up pressure on Megara and engaging in defensive operations in various theaters, the Athenians went on the offensive in Aetolia, Thrace, Boeotia, Crete, Melos, and Sicily. The garrisoning of Pylos in 425 was a significant amplification of the naval raid strategy and, as we have seen, led to an expansion of the war. In 415, during an interval of peace with Sparta, the Athenians voted to attack Syracuse in Sicily. It was surely obvious to many Athenians that this action would lead to a renewal of war with the Peloponnesians. But the majority of Athenian voters seem not to have been particularly concerned about this. The success of the Periclean defensive strategy in preventing the Spartans from exerting direct force upon the citizenry of Athens was surely an important factor in the Athenians' decision to invade Sicily. The advocates of the Sicilian strategy were able to play upon the imperialistic ambitions of a population that imagined itself immune from enemy military might.

Thucydides' detailed narrative of the Sicilian expedition pointedly underscores how the Athenians themselves learned the hard lesson they had taught the Spartans: how difficult it was to storm a large, well-fortified city. The Athenian operations against Syracuse centered on an attempt to close off the Syracusans from their home territory, by constructing a wall of circumvallation. Meanwhile, the Syracusans were safe behind their own massive city fortifications, and they constructed a counter wall, which cut off the Athenian attempt to besiege the city. The Athenian army went largely on the defensive once the circumvallation strategy failed. The ironic circle was closed when the Athenian besiegers found themselves besieged, due to their inability to defend their own field fortifications from Syracusan counterattacks.

Meanwhile, in mainland Greece, the Spartans went on the offensive. In 413, taking a lesson from the Athenian occupation of Pylos, they fortified and permanently garrisoned the Attic village of Decelea, 21 kilometers north of the city of Athens. Most Athenians were now forced to remain in the city year-round. For the first time, Athenians suffered the psychological miseries of an extended siege, even though food supplies remained ample thanks to the secure port of Piraeus and the continued superiority of Athenian sea power. The Spartan strategy of epiteichismos (constructing a garrison fort in enemy territory) was a logical response to Athens' policy of urban defenses. The Decelea garrison allowed the Spartans to use their superior land army to control enemy territory, to destroy enemy extrarural resources in an organized manner, and thereby to step up the economic and psychological pressure on the Athenians trapped inside the city.

A similar, indirect approach—deployment of military pressure against enemy resources rather than enemy armies in order to circumvent a strategic defense for which no direct technological ‘solution’ could be devised—is evident in Sparta's use of naval forces during the Ionian phase of the Peloponnesian War. Like Brasidas in the late Archidamian phase of the war, Lysander and other Spartan commanders concentrated on undermining the strength of Athens' empire. The Spartan commanders recognized that Athenian economic dependence on imperial revenues and on the grain route from Egypt and the Black Sea was, in Clausewitzian terms, Athens' center of gravity. After Lysander's defeat of Athens' fleet at Aegospotamai in 405, the Athenians were deprived of vital grain supplies. Bracketed by Lysander's fleet and the Decelea garrison, the
city was starved into submission in 404. The Athenian city wall complex was never overcome, indeed was never assaulted, but Pericles' strategic defense system had been defeated by the simultaneous application of indirect pressure by land and sea forces. The Spartan victory was sealed when, to the sound of flutes, the Athenian long walls were demilitarized.

For Thucydides, the fall of Athens was, at least in part, the fault of the "radical" democracy—the inability of the citizen population to devise effective policy after the death of wise and authoritarian Pericles. The authorization of the Sicilian expedition is his case in point. But Thucydides' description of the war and his analysis of the relationship between defense policy and the play of power allow a different explanation: that the ideological effects of a strategy based on defense of the population carried the seeds of the system's own destruction. The effectiveness with which the fortified urban complex buffered the effects of Spartan military might upon the Athenian population led the Athenians to overestimate their own power vis-à-vis the power of their enemies and so to use their offensive naval capability to expand the conflict. Because the defensive strategy initially stymied traditional Spartan tactics, the Athenians failed to consider that their enemies could develop strategies for deploying offensive military force indirectly. Feeling secure behind their mighty walls, the Athenians were persuaded to engage in imperialistic expansionism that overtaxed their resources. Pericles' grand strategy of defense was brilliant and original but overrationalistic in its assumptions. He reckoned neither with the ideological effect of guaranteed security combined with offensive capability on the citizens of a democratic polity nor with the inventiveness of offensive strategists who are faced with an unvarying challenge. Even the Spartans, slow as they may have been to change their ways, could and did figure out means to defeat a strategy of defense based on a fixed obstacle.

**FORTRESS ATTICA (403-338 B.C.)**

After regaining their independence in the mid-390s, the Athenians were once again faced with the question of how to defend themselves against superior land forces. The situation was very different from what it had been in 431. With Persian support and a reviving economy, Athens might hope to regain naval ascendency in the Aegean, but—although many Athenians dreamed of a second empire—the empire and its revenues were gone for good. With the loss of the empire, Athens became economically dependent upon the production of her home territory. The protection of extrarural resources, especially the farms, quarries, and silver mines of Attica, became a primary policy consideration. Pericles' strategy of abandoning Attica was no longer economically feasible.

Furthermore, international relations in the fourth century B.C. were complex and fluid. Lacking overwhelming military superiority, Athens necessarily designed its foreign policy in the context of a highly volatile diplomatic matrix, one in which last year's allies might well be this year's enemies and vice versa. The shifting system of alliances was no doubt bewildering to many Athenian citizens, who were urged by their political leaders to vote for treaties with recent enemies or to prepare to attack recent friends. The volatility and uncertainty of the diplomatic situation contributed to the preference of many Athenians for a new strategy of preclusive defense, one that would ensure Athens' security and would provide a constant on which other more ephemeral and high-risk diplomatic and military initiatives could be grounded.

Post-Peloponnesian War Greek military operations were quite sophisticated and posed serious threats to local—and now vital—Attic resources. The Periclean defense strategy had made the Peloponnesian War a testing ground for new offensive as well as defensive strategies and tactics. The strength of fortified positions against direct assault had been demonstrated time and again in the war. The primary offensive counterstrategy devised by the Spartans was an indirect attack on the resources upon which the enemy depended. In the late fifth century, that had meant Athens' imperial holdings. Now, in the fourth century, Athens' enemies could use the strategy of making war upon economic assets, rather than upon armies, against the agricultural and mineral resources of Attica. The defensive lesson of the war—that well-fortified positions could hold out indefinitely against superior forces—could be implemented only if ways could be found to limit the effects of indirect attacks on economic assets.

The fluidity of the international situation, along with the need to protect the resources of Attica, required a new approach to national defense. The Athenians were unwilling to return to Pericles' city/navy strategy. But they maintained their conviction that a strategy of defending the population from attack by land, combined with offensive/defensive naval capability, should be at the center of state military policy. The implicit lesson of the Peloponnesian War—that new defensive strategies would lead inevitably to new enemy offensive innovations—was ignored. The Athenians consequently expanded their land defense system to include all of Attica. The strategy of preclusively defending the city was inflated to a strategy of preclusively defending the entirety of the home territory. It was not feasible to build a wall around the northern and western land frontiers of Attica, but these frontiers were mountainous and there were only a limited number of land routes into Athenian territory available to enemy invaders. The Athenians reasoned that blocking these routes by the construction of a line of fortresses should
offer the same level of security for Attica as the circuit walls offered for the city. Blocking routes into Attica would protect not only the population but also the economic resources of the countryside.  

Of course, defending a system of border fortifications required a more complex military infrastructure than did defending the walled urban complex, in light of the much greater distances involved. The border fortresses controlling the land routes must be able to communicate with each other and with the city; a recruitment system must be devised to ensure adequate and dependable garrison troops to guard the forts; a system for collecting and rapidly deploying reinforcements had to be initiated; good roads from the center to the periphery were needed to allow reinforcements to move quickly between the city and the borders. In the decades after the end of the Peloponnesian War, each of these considerations was addressed by the Athenians.

By the mid-fourth century Athens was defended by a series of border fortresses and advance watchposts, so that the approach of enemy armies could be detected well before their arrival at the border. Another series of watch stations provided communication (by means of fire signals) between fortresses and from the borders to the city. The younger census classes of Athenian citizens (ephebes) were trained in the special skills required for fighting in the mountainous borderlands and for defending fortified positions. After training, ephebes were stationed at fortresses and watchposts as garrison troops. The system of calling up the main Athenian army was streamlined so as to facilitate rapid mobilization and deployment of reinforcements. Roads from the city to the frontier were built or refurbished. A special “generalship of the countryside” was created so that there would be a competent official in charge of the new system, and the topic of “protection of the home territory” was added to the mandatory agenda of the ten annual principal meetings of the citizen assembly. The construction of the system of land defenses corresponded to the growth of the navy. The Athenians viewed the fortification system as defensive; the navy was also regarded in primarily defensive terms, but retained an offensive potential.  

The strategy of preclusive territorial defense was predicated upon the assumption that a fortress with a relatively small garrison could hold out against superior enemy forces for at least as long as it took to get reinforcements to the frontier. In practical terms this meant at least 24–48 hours, maybe longer. The forts on the most vulnerable routes were massively constructed, but the garrisons were not solely dependent upon the innate strength of the walls. By the mid-fourth century the most important of the Athenian border forts were defended by catapult artillery. The nontorsion (crossbow-style) catapult had been invented in 399 B.C. in Syracuse, as an offensive siege weapon. But non-torsion catapults were essentially antipersonnel weapons; they were not powerful enough to do significant damage to well-built fortifications. Furthermore, catapults were delicate machines and their range was much increased by elevating them above ground level. Chambered towers on fortification walls could provide protection from the elements and elevation. Consequently, the nontorsion catapult was very well suited as a defensive weapon. Athenian forts built in the mid-fourth century incorporated towers specially designed as emplacements for catapults. The superior firepower that the catapults afforded against enemy troops helped to guarantee the security of fortress garrisons.

By the mid-fourth century the Athenians probably felt relatively secure behind their fortified line. The need to import grain and her naval tradition ensured that Athens never became an isolationist state, but the fortification system offered the Athenians the luxury of deciding when and under what conditions they would deploy Athenian military forces outside of Attica. Often the assembly decided that risking Athenian lives and spending Athenian cash resources in overseas or overland expeditions were unnecessary. Some Athenian politicians warned the citizens not to waste too many of their resources outside Attica. Eubulus and the general Phocion were, I believe, at the center of those Athenians who saw the military interests of Athens in “Attica first” terms and urged the assembly to turn down proposals that would require a commitment of Athenian military power far from Athens’ homeland. Not all Athenian politicians were convinced of the long-term efficacy of the territorial defense strategy. Demosthenes protested long and hard in the 340s against Athenian unwillingness to challenge Philip of Macedon militarily in northern Greece. Demosthenes argued that ignoring Philip would result in the very thing the Athenians most feared: a war in Attica. Even if the enemy could be kept outside of Athens’ borders, Demosthenes argued, an extended period of vigilance would exhaust Athens’ resources more surely than would a surgical strike against Philip in his own homeland. Meanwhile, Philip’s engineers were busy developing new artillery technology. In circa 350–340 B.C. they devised the torsion catapult, a potentially vastly more powerful machine which propelled stone shot or bolts by the spring action of twisted sinew or hair. By 332 Philip’s son, Alexander, was using powerful catapults with deadly effect against the very well-constructed defenses of Tyre. Furthermore, Philip’s army was much more skilled at siegecraft than was any previous Greek army. The combination of Philip’s trained army and the new technology quite clearly would put Athens’ border fortresses at risk if it came to all-out war with Macedon. Athens’ policy of defending Attica was undermined by Philip’s tactical and technological advances.
How soon should the Athenians have recognized the risk and devised a different strategy of defense? This question cannot be answered definitively, as the answer depends on factors that are unknown and probably unknowable: Philip's actual long-term intentions vis-à-vis the states of central Greece; how powerful his torsion machines were in the late 340s and early 330s; how soon the Athenians knew about those machines. But it seems a likely hypothesis that the defensive strategy based on the border fortification system blunted the fourth-century Athenians' interest in thinking through the implications of recent military developments. Having made the financial and emotional commitment to a defensive strategy that seemed to have "solved" the problem of offensive land warfare, the Athenians concentrated their attention on other matters. Despite Demosthenes' eloquence, therefore, they did little in the 340s to counter Philip's growing power in northern Greece.

In the end, the Athenians did recognize the threat and, spurred by Demosthenes, allied with the Thebans against Macedon. In 338, the Athenians sent out their full infantry levy to Chaeronea in Boeotia, well in advance of the fortified line. But by the early 330s, Philip's army was large enough and well enough trained to defeat the combined armies of Thebes and Athens in open battle. Athens lost her independence of foreign policy at Chaeronea. And that loss cannot be uncoupled from the defensive doctrine that had dominated Athenian military thought through most of the fourth century. The territorial defense system solved the main military security problems that had arisen as a result of the offensive strategies developed during the Peloponnesian War. But as a consequence, Athenian policymakers were slow to appreciate the significance of newer technological and strategic developments. Athenian slowness must be attributed in part to the psychological effects of the defensive doctrine that the citizenry had embraced.

CONCLUSIONS: POWER AND IDEOLOGY

Thucydides saw power as a force that flows from inequalities in national strength and recognized that when defenses distort the flow of power, the consequences are unpredictable. Michel Foucault argued that knowledge is ideological, that no one can think without employing the assumptions of the community in which he lives. Foucault saw power as a product of ideological knowledge: all social and political relations are conditioned by the ways in which the people of a certain time and place view reality. These insights can, I believe, be of key significance to international relations theory, even if we do not completely accept either Thucydides' or Foucault's views of power. Combining Thucydides and Foucault, I would suggest that the national ideology of a major state is likely to embrace that nation's right and duty to display its power: the self-definition of citizens is likely to entail the perception that they (or their proxies in the government) must retain the ability to manifest national superiority by actual or potential deployment of force.

Any obstacle erected by another state which threatens to limit the potential ability of a major state to deploy its power may threaten that state's internal political stability by introducing a new variable into the knowledge-power equation. The domestic regime of the USSR has traditionally based its legitimacy in part on an ideology of national military superiority. Thus, the internal regime is clearly at risk if the citizenry comes to perceive its leadership as impotent in the face of defensive deployments by the United States. Because Soviet leaders will recognize this threat to their position, and because they themselves view international relations through an ideological filter invisible to themselves, they are likely to respond to an SDI deployment by putting pressure upon Soviet scientists, engineers, and military strategists to come up with a quick "solution" to the SDI "blockage." The solution must offer a means to balance, circumvent, or destroy the "shield" and so restore Soviet potential to deploy power. This government pressure will lead to a concentration of the USSR's intellectual and material resources upon breaking the SDI. Since the obstacle facing Soviet scientists will be a "fixed target"—as all strategic population defenses must be—a way to circumvent SDI will probably be devised, although only after the commitment of considerable resources. The ideological effects of confronting the SDI blockage and expending resources to eliminate it, along with a general fear that the United States may soon find a way to redesign its defenses against the new offensive strategy, may encourage the Soviet leadership to be ruthless in using that offensive strategy as soon as it has been perfected. The strategic innovations devised by the ordinarly conservative Spartans in the Peloponnesian War and the increasingly savage treatment of combatants and civilians in that war can be explained in these terms.

A grand strategy of defending the population will also affect the national ideology of the state which has adopted the defensive strategy. No sane military planner has ever believed that a comprehensive and self-sustaining defensive shield can be constructed that will totally and permanently protect the population of the home state against any and all levels of security threat. Even the most optimistic proponents of, for example, the French Maginot Line knew that the defensive system could not afford perfect safety. But, given the huge expense of implementing a strategic defense system, it is typically politically necessary to "oversell" the system to the population that will be asked to foot the bill. The successful campaign by French military experts and politicians to market...
the idea of the Maginot Line to the French public in the late 1920s and 1930s is a case in point. In order to be accepted by the voting public, the defensive system must be touted as more effective, more permanent, and more self-sustaining than it could possibly be designed to be.

In certain circumstances (as in the case of Athens after the Peloponnesian War and France after World War I), the citizenry of a democratic state will be predisposed to believe that preclusive defense of the home territory is desirable and so will be inclined to accept the "total" version of the defensive system as feasible. But, having voted for it (or its proponents) and having paid for it, the citizenry will naturally expect to enjoy the promised benefits. Citizens who have been assured that the problem of offensive warfare has been solved are not likely to take kindly to subsequent revisions in the original estimate of the defensive system's effectiveness. And, once the expensive system has been completed, they may feel that they are entitled to a corresponding reduction in other sorts of military expenditure. Canny politicians will not be eager to puncture the balloon; braver ones will be ignored. The result, as in the case of the Athenians in the fourth century B.C., is likely to be a national reluctance to acknowledge the reality of technological or strategic advances which undermine the reliability of the defensive system. Alternatively, since they believe themselves fully protected from the threat of enemy retaliation, the citizenry of the defended state that maintains an offensive capability may be more willing to listen to politicians who advocate escalating overt deployment of military force against other states. Such was the situation in Athens in the Peloponnesian War and perhaps also in the mid-fifth century when the long walls were built to Piraeus. Such could also be the case in the United States, even if we take SDI proponents at their word and assume that the system does not mask an offensive strategic policy.

The ideological impacts of a grand strategy of defending the citizenry are, in sum, likely to be powerful—both on the defending state and upon its opponents. Those ideological impacts are destabilizing to international power regimes. Given that SDI will be extremely expensive, that the United States is likely to maintain an offensive potential even after putting SDI into place, and that the ability to deploy power is surely a significant element in the national ideology of the Soviet Union, the deployment of SDI holds the potential to undermine the existing international regime. Significantly, in the proposed model, destabilization need not necessarily be the product of an actual desire on either side to upset the balance of power. Planners who ignore ideological factors in their own, their nation's, and their opponents' thinking may make serious miscalculations in the erroneous belief that their own goals are completely rational and that their assessment of their opponents' intentions are objectively realistic. The history of democratic Athens' experimentation with two versions of strategic population defense suggests that the long-term ideological effects of building and deploying an SDI system, on American and Soviet citizens and policymakers alike, will have consequences that cannot and will not be accurately assessed by either side. Ironically, the better the system is perceived to be working (in terms of defending the U.S. populace), the greater the ideological impact on both sides will be—and the greater becomes the threat of destabilization.

NOTES


3. This "total" version of SDI was epitomized by a television advertisement in an animated cartoon form (sponsored by a private pro-SI group) which aired in the mid-1980s: A kindly father demonstrates to his anxious children that the defense network is an impenetrable "rainbow umbrella." Atomic weapons are shown exploding harmlessly against the umbrella as the family watches the display with reverent fascination. Cf. discussion by S.J. Hadley, "The Nature of SDI," in H. Brown (ed.), The Strategic Defense Initiative: Shield or Snare? (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), p. 21. For a fantasy scenario of how a perfect "peace shield" would work, see, for example, Ben Bova, Assured Survival: Putting the Star Wars Defense in Perspective (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), pp. 271-274.

4. For further discussion of the realist position and its critics see the chapters by Michael W. Doyle and Matthew Evangelista in this book.

5. On the uniqueness of nuclear-era strategic challenges, see Robert Jarvis, The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), who argues against "conventionalization" defined as "the attempt to understand our world by employing the intellectual tools of the prenuclear era" (p. 14).

Defeat of Athens, demilitarization of the walls: Xenophon, Hellenica 2.1.15–2.2.23.


34. Ibid., pp. 111–180.

35. Ibid., pp. 87–100, 191–207.


40. See, for example, Demosthenes’ three speeches on Olynthus (nos. 1–3) and his four Philippics (nos. 4. 6, 9, 10) with comments of Ober, Fortress Attica, pp. 58–59, 65, 73–74.


42. Diodorus Siculus 17.43.7, 17.45.2; with the comments of Marsden, Greek and Roman Artillery, vol. 1, pp. 61–62, 102–103.


44. Ober, Fortress Attica, p. 222.