

Norway's 'No' to Star Wars



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The American "Star Wars" programme has created one of the deepest conflicts in Norwegian politics since the climax of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) issue in 1982-83. Norwegian politicians across the whole political spectrum have opposed the Special Defence Initiative (SDI) plans.

The Standing Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Constitution in its unanimous Proposal No.225 (1983-84), adopted by the Norwegian Parliament in May 1984, warned against the militarisation of space:

"There is considerable danger that the arms race will also move to outer space through the introduction of new weapons, e.g. laser weapons. This is an area where it is still possible to prevent arms build-up. The Committee therefore wishes to stress the importance of resumed negotiations in order to prohibit deployment of weapons in space. Prohibition must also apply to all anti-satellite weapons" (p.23).

However, faced with increasing US pressure for support for the "Star Wars" plans, the Norwegian Government's position became less clear. The Norwegian Defence Minister supported the Final Communiqué of Nato's Nuclear Planning Group (26-27 March 1985) which stated: "We support the United States research programme into these technologies, the aim of which is to enhance stability and deterrence at reduced levels of offensive nuclear forces". The Defence Minister's support for the Communiqué provoked strong reactions, and the Norwegian Government had to modify this position in its letter to Parliament of 15 April (see below).

From the very beginning the Labour Party, Norway's largest party, has opposed the SDI plans.

The National Board of the Christian People's Party (one of the three coalition parties) on 14-15 February adopted the following resolution: "The National Board opposes the extension of the arms race into space, e.g. through the American 'Star

Wars' programme". At the party's General Conference in April the following resolution was adopted: "Norway must unambiguously oppose all plans for military escalation in space, including research programmes".

The Centre Party (also a Government coalition party) at its General Conference in March passed the following resolution: "Norway must also declare that research for development of space weapons should not take place, neither in the East nor in the West".

The Norwegian Trades Union Congress on May 10th adopted the following paragraph for its programme of action: "The Norwegian TUC will actively oppose research and development for space weapons, and will oppose the militarisation of space".

"No to Nuclear Weapons", the Norwegian movement for nuclear disarmament, in a letter to Members of Parliament on March 20th argued that Norway must take an unambiguous stand against the Star Wars programme (including research and development), and oppose all militarisation of space by the East or the West (including anti-satellite weapons). (See below.)

Among the critics of the SDI plans are Johan Jorgen Holst (former Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and formerly a very active apologist for Nato's 'dual track' decision, at present Director of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs) and Knut Frydenlund (former Labour Minister of Foreign Affairs, at present Chairman of the Standing Parliamentary Committee on Defence). In his criticism of the communiqué from Nato's Nuclear Planning Group, Mr Frydenlund said in the Norwegian Parliament on March 28th:

"In the discussion about 'Star Wars' we have seen sceptical statements by both a Conservative British Foreign Minister and the Foreign Minister in a Conservative German Government. Similar scepticism and opposition to these plans have been voiced by a majority in this hall. The Norwegian Government therefore ought to have used the occasion of the Ministerial Session of the Nato Nuclear Planning Group to warn against these plans in such a way that it would have influenced the formulation of the communiqué. (. . .) I fear that the question of the 'Star Wars' programme may release the greatest crisis within the Alliance in the relationship between Western Europe and the USA, and may give the USSR a European card which they have never before possessed".

Because of the strong opposition to SDI and other space weapons the Norwegian Government in its letter to Parliament on April 15th formulated its position. The letter may be summarised as follows.

An arms race in space must be avoided. One should also be cautious about R & D programmes which may lead to such an arms race. Norway fears that development of new strategic defence systems may lead to an arms race for new offensive systems intended to neutralise the defensive system. The Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty must be observed in order to avoid development, testing or deployment of space-based defence systems. Up to now research has not been subject to arms control agreements. Research cannot be controlled through agreements. Norway has expressed her concern and fear that the American and Soviet research may lead to an arms race in space. In consultations in Nato, Norway has

expressed her concern about the possible effects of the American SDI programme, particularly with regard to political and strategic consequences in a longer perspective. Even if Norway has not wanted to advise the USA to abandon research on space weapons technology, considering the Soviet activity, Norway has presupposed that this research will not have dimensions and directions which may justify the idea that the USA is striving for strategic supremacy. Norway will not participate in the USA's military programme for space weapons research. Norway will contribute actively to the discussions which are now taking place in the permanent Disarmament Conference in Geneva in order to prevent an arms race in space.

It is still, in mid-May, an open question whether the Norwegian Parliament will accept the Government's present position. The Standing Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Constitution is at present discussing its position. A proposal has been tabled that Norway should voice its opposition to the American SDI programme. A parliamentary debate is expected by May or June.

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The following statement represents Nei til atomvapen's position on "Star Wars". The statement was presented to the Norwegian Parliament and the political parties in Norway in March 1985.

"No to Nuclear Weapons" demands that Norway oppose research for development of weapons for waging war in space

In his address to the nation on March 23rd 1983, President Reagan introduced the plans for a "Strategic Defense Initiative" (SDI). The plans involve large-scale deployment of high technology weapons for waging war in space. In case of a nuclear attack on the USA, these weapons would track and destroy all the enemy's strategic missiles before they reach their targets. In this way the new weapons are supposed to render the USA invulnerable to nuclear assault.

With current technology this is not feasible. However, a gigantic research programme is being prepared. Most attention has been given to optical lasers, i.e. devices which generate concentrated light beams. It is also theoretically possible to develop X-ray lasers, which by means of nuclear explosions generate more powerful light beams. Also discussed are particle beams and more "ordinary" weapons such as homing projectiles released from battle stations in space. At present, all this is a distant dream — or nightmare.

The programme will take several decades and the total costs could amount to one billion dollars. Thus, it will be the largest military research and development programme in history. It will even dwarf the Manhattan project which led to the production of the first atomic bombs in World War II.

In spite of the huge efforts, the outcome is uncertain. The task is almost hopeless. Within a few minutes, one would have to detect, determine the position of, and destroy tens of thousands of nuclear warheads in their trajectories towards their targets. And destruction would have to be total. If only a few per cent of the USSR's strategic missiles penetrate, the USA would be devastated.

In addition to the technical problems which a ballistic defence in space represents, there are a number of other problems as well. What about cruise missiles in their low flight paths which the proposed space weapons cannot stop? What about the security of the USA's European allies? What about the vulnerability of the space-based weapons?

Alternative or supplement to deterrence

In spite of the difficulties, Reagan proposes a "waterproof" ballistic defence system which is to make all nuclear missiles "impotent" and "obsolete". In his Star Wars address in March 1983, the new programme was presented as an alternative to the balance of terror. Reagan asked the rhetorical question: "What if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant US retaliation to deter a Soviet attack, that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies?"

In competent circles in the USA, the credibility of this alternative is being questioned. Even the President's own advisers are reserved when it comes to promising an early removal of nuclear deterrence. They emphasise that the USA for a long period will still have to retain and further develop its own retaliatory weapons. Indeed, they go further; they state that the new system's first task is to protect missile silos, not cities.

Less stability, greater insecurity

The USSR will not perceive deployment of US space weapons as a purely defensive initiative. The USSR will view the SDI as a system which may decisively support the USA in a possible attack on the Soviet Union. The system may acquire this function before it fulfils Reagan's dream — if that dream will ever come true. Even an imperfect defence system may reduce to a great extent the effect of a retaliatory strike launched by those missiles which have survived a first strike.

The construction of the proposed ballistic defence system in space will have a destabilising effect because it may support an attack before it becomes effective as defence. The nuclear power which possesses such a system may be tempted to strike first in an emergency. Fearing this, the other side may be tempted to launch a pre-emptive strike. The result is less security for both sides.

In the longer run, it is also possible that the technology of space-based weapons may be used for direct attacks on ground targets. Even if this is not the purpose of the current plans, this is a possibility which the other side will

have to take into account.

Counter-measures and a new arms race

A gigantic American weapons programme in space will in any case be met with Soviet counter-measures. So far the Soviets have not started a space-based ballistic defence system comparable to Reagan's project. But it seems likely that also in this case they will follow according to the principle: "Everything they have, we will have as well".

According to Pentagon reports the USSR has come almost as far as the USA in basic research on lasers and particle beams. But the USSR lags behind with regard to other technology necessary for applying the research in effective ballistic defence weapons, particularly in such areas as micro-electronics and data processors.

Like the Americans, the Soviets have for a considerable period been working on anti-satellite weapons. They have developed a ground-based system which is already operational, but has limited range and effectiveness. The Americans are working on an air-based system which is not yet fully developed, but which will become considerably more flexible and accurate, and which will also be able to hit high-orbit satellites. Anti-satellite weapons have a different purpose from space-based ballistic defence systems, but the technology is to some extent related. The USSR therefore has a favourable point of departure for development of ballistic defence weapons. In a longer perspective, there is little doubt that the USSR will be able to follow the USA in the area of "Star Wars".

The first Soviet counter-measure, however, will probably be to increase greatly the number of nuclear missiles and warheads which may penetrate the American ballistic defence system (BDS). An especially likely alternative is to speed up the deployment of weapons which a BDS is unable to stop, particularly long-range cruise missiles. Thus the scene is set for further nuclear build-up, especially of weaponry which even today is a source of great concern, not least in our country.

The USSR will presumably also concentrate on development of weapons systems which may destroy the American space stations. In principle this is much easier and less expensive than establishing an effective space-based BDS.

On the other hand, the Americans will make every possible effort to protect their space weapons. The current plans for fiscal years 1985-90 will cost 26,000 million dollars. 74 million have been earmarked for development of protective measures against Soviet counter-weapons.

This means that we are on the threshold of a new arms race which will overshadow everything the world has seen so far. Where this will lead us nobody knows. But we know that there is only one acceptable exit; things must be brought under control. We have no time to lose.

In this context it may seem less essential to mention the expenditures involved. But when the costs amount to about one billion dollars, they cannot be disregarded. This money could have been used for relieving to a great extent hunger and impoverishment in our world.

Undermining arms control agreements

The fact that defence systems against strategic missiles may have a destabilising effect is not a new problem. The wish to avoid destabilisation played an important part in the work leading up to the ABM Treaty of 1972. This agreement, signed by the USA and the USSR, prohibits testing and deployment of anti-missile systems, with the exception of one ground-based ABM system on either side.

There is no doubt that carrying out the Star Wars programme will blatantly violate the ABM Treaty. If one side succeeds in developing X-ray lasers, where energy is generated by nuclear explosions, and places these devices in space, this will also be a breach of the Outer Space Treaty of 1967. This agreement, signed by the USA and the USSR, prohibits the placing in space of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. If the development of such weapons in space includes nuclear test explosions, this will also be a violation of the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963. This agreement, also signed by the USA and the USSR, prohibits all nuclear test explosions in the atmosphere and beyond its limits, including outer space.

Some will claim that what is on the current agenda is only research, and that this consequently does not violate any agreements. However, it should be realised that what is here referred to as "research" is not a purely academic activity, but research and development for the production of weapons systems prohibited by the ABM Treaty. We are faced with preparations for the violation of one or several treaties.

It is hardly necessary to stress further how important it is for the international community that concluded agreements are observed. In the case of the ABM Treaty of 1972, this is particularly important, because violating the treaty may mean the end of all arms control.

Rearming for disarming once more

It is being claimed that it is important to embark on the plans for Star Wars in order to have a bargaining position in negotiations with the USSR. Once again, we hear the argument of "rearming for disarming". The hollowness of this argument has been sufficiently documented by earlier experience.

In the present situation, the argument is even more unreasonable, since President Reagan at an early date stressed the view that the proposed space-based defence is not a bargaining chip. Recently he has made it clear that he will not limit research on this programme even if Moscow were to comply with his demand for reductions of offensive missiles. For Reagan this seems the only logical position. His dream is a system which is able to provide the USA with total protection against nuclear assault. This is not to be bargained away, wholly or partly.

Clear positions are needed now

Up to now, Norwegian politicians across the whole political spectrum have

opposed the Star Wars plans. The Standing Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Constitution in its unanimous proposal (No.225, 1983-84) warned against the militarisation of space. A number of Norwegian politicians belonging to different parties have argued that the plans for a space-based BDS should be abandoned.

This is in line with the "freeze" idea as a confidence-building measure for negotiations about arms control and disarmament — which is another idea in Parliamentary Proposal No.225. In view of the recently started Geneva talks, it is important that both sides show restraint in initiating further rearmament and that they strictly observe existing agreements. This will pave the way for *real* negotiations, which should also contribute to the further development of the ABM Treaty in order to prohibit all militarisation of space, anti-satellite weapons (ASAT) included.

Faced with increasing pressure to support the Star Wars plans, the Norwegian Government's position has become less clear. The "bargaining chips" argument and the alleged necessity of doing research are views being voiced with increasing frequency.

Amongst the Norwegian people, however, resistance is as strong as ever, and there is little doubt that a majority in the Norwegian Parliament oppose the plans. The situation is similar in a number of other countries. Even in the USA there is very strong opposition to the programme. Everywhere people are condemning plans which may lead to a continued and uncontrolled arms race, and which may bring the world another step closer to catastrophe and destruction.

The Reagan Administration's campaign for Star Wars is a campaign for winning world opinion. In this situation, the political positions voiced by the USA's allies may carry the greatest weight. It is therefore of paramount importance that Norway strongly confirms an unambiguous stand against Star Wars, including research and development.