Abrahamson delivers his own view of SDI

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"They modernize and we feel we have to modernize."

Reagan's announcement of the SDI plan in March, 1983, included a proposal that the United States would share the "Star Wars" technology with the Soviet Union. After it is designed, the technology may actually be shared with the Soviets as a bargaining measure at the negotiation table, Abrahamson said. In the meantime, "a very large amount of this effort is already available for the public," Abrahamson said.

Abrahamson said an umbrella defense is impossible, but the SDI system "doesn't have to be perfect." He discussed the concept of "layer defense," which will theoretically make the "Star Wars" technology effective.

The first layer of defense will destroy missiles shortly after they are launched. The second layer will destroy missiles which have gone far above the ground, but which are still rested (not separated). The third and fourth layers will pick off separated warheads and stragglers respectively. Abrahamson said each layer would be 60 to 70 percent effective, making the entire system approximately 99 percent effective.

Abrahamson responded to questions about the inability to test the system before it is put into use. Again he made an analogy with the Space Shuttle. Components of the Shuttle were tested separately in simulators, although no complete test of the Shuttle was made prior to its launch.

The five million lines of code in the Space Shuttle software was error tolerant, allowing small errors in the program to go by, he said. The SDI system will be fault tolerant in both hardware and software.

"We don't test our offensive systems today," Abrahamson added.

Abrahamson said that the economic tradeoff of developing such a system would be a Congressional decision. It's a lot of money, but it is a good investment if it works out, he said.

MIT promoters present

Approximately 20 promoters from the MIT Students Against the Strategic Defense Initiative Demonstrated in front of Farnsworth Hall before the discussion. Ron Newsman '79 expressed concern that certain projects at MIT will become classified.

A pamphlet distributed by the demonstrators stated, "As MIT students and alumni, we are embarrassed that the head of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization ... is a fellow alumna.

The pamphlet also stated that 37.6 percent of all research dollars going to MIT research come from the Department of Defense.

Abrahamson expressed his pleasure at the debate process going on in the United States. He addressed the students directly during his talk saying, "I am not ashamed of you."

Abrahamson's talk was sponsored by the Ford Hall Forum and was requested by Ken Curved, Special Education editor for The Beacon Globe.

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