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(April 1940), but it was of little help to them. And the Allies won the Battle of the Bulge (December 1944) without preliminary warnings from Ultra, which had been frustrated by Hitler's decision to maintain tight radio silence prior to the German surprise attack.

Laser, Laser in the Sky

"Strategic and Arms Control Implications of Laser Weapons" by Barry J. Smernoff, in *Air University Review* (Jan./Feb. 1978), Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

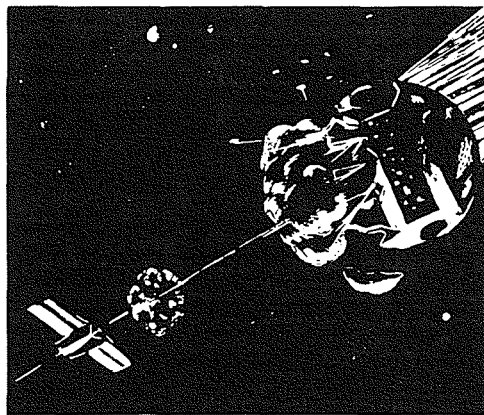
The United States and Russia are both spending heavily to develop laser weapons capable of destroying military targets by means of a high energy beam of electromagnetic radiation. The reason is obvious, says Smernoff, a researcher at the Hudson Institute: "Laser weapon technology has the potential to revolutionize the art of warfare during the next quarter-century."

The ultimate laser weapon system could fire a beam of energy from the ground thousands of miles into space with enough power to destroy enemy satellites and ballistic missiles, as well as bombers and cruise missiles. An intermediate weapon might be an airborne laser designed to shoot down enemy planes, satellites, and ballistic missiles launched from submarines (which are most vulnerable during the early minutes of flight).

Should Russia and the United States both develop laser antisatellite weapons, there would be a temptation for each to strike first, knowing that both sides depend on reconnaissance satellites for early warning of impending missile attack.

Experts believe that U.S. development of a high energy laser weapon able to protect our own satellites while capable of eliminating both enemy satellites and incoming ballistic missiles would represent a

*Future conflicts
may find laser-armed
killer satellites
roaming outer space.*



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Sputnik-like event—a technical achievement that could establish the United States as undisputed leader in defense-related technology.

Smernoff doubts that either Russia or the United States would tolerate the open deployment of such a weapon by the other. But he warns that there are broad gray areas between high energy laser systems designed only to *track* satellites and the lethal laser weapon systems. This blurring is likely to increase as high energy laser technology advances, producing severe problems for arms control negotiators. On the other hand, Smernoff suggests, perhaps the primary task of long-term arms control should be to seek a smooth transition from the instability of nuclear deterrence based on offensive weapons to reliance on non-nuclear (laser) defensive weapons.

Reassessing War Crimes

“Vietnam: New Light on the Question of American Guilt” by Guenter Lewy, in *Commentary* (Feb. 1978), 165 E. 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

Critics of American involvement in the Vietnam War, notably participants in the 1967 Stockholm International War Crimes Tribunal organized by the late Bertrand Russell, condemned as criminal such U.S. actions as relocation of civilians and the use of napalm and herbicides, and broadly indicted the U.S. military for atrocities.

However, Lewy, a political scientist at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, after combing through classified Pentagon archives, concludes that charges of officially condoned crimes and grossly immoral U.S. conduct in Vietnam are without substance.

Those charges, Lewy argues, were based on a distorted picture of battlefield conditions, ignorance of the U.S. and international rules of military engagement, and a tendency to construe every lapse of discipline and mistake of judgment as a wanton breach of the laws of war. Evacuation of civilians from combat areas to create “free-fire” zones, for example, not only enhanced civilian safety but could be seen as *required* by the 1949 Geneva convention on the treatment of civilians in wartime. Combat in populated areas stemmed from a Viet Cong tactic of converting hamlets into fortified strongholds (itself a violation of the Geneva accords). American bombing of North Vietnam from 1965 to 1968 was hedged about by so many precautions against damage to civilian life and property that the effectiveness of the missions was jeopardized.

Furthermore, says Lewy, a faulty impression of American conduct emerged from the news media and the willingness of many Western intellectuals to accept almost any allegations of U.S. wrongdoing at face value. A widely-published photograph of a young girl burned by napalm near Saigon in 1972 helped create the false notion that thousands of children suffered napalm burns; a photograph of a “prisoner” being thrown from a U.S. helicopter turned out to have been staged using a corpse; and accounts of the “tiger cages” at the Con Son island