1983: the vision

'I call upon the scientific community who gave us nuclear weapons to turn their great talents to the cause of mankind and world peace: to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.'

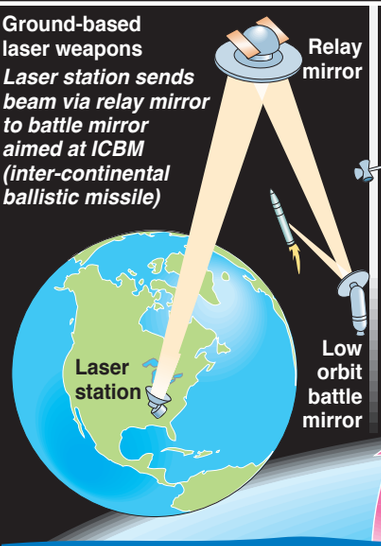
President Ronald Reagan

Congress approves $1.1bn for research

1984-1987: the grand design

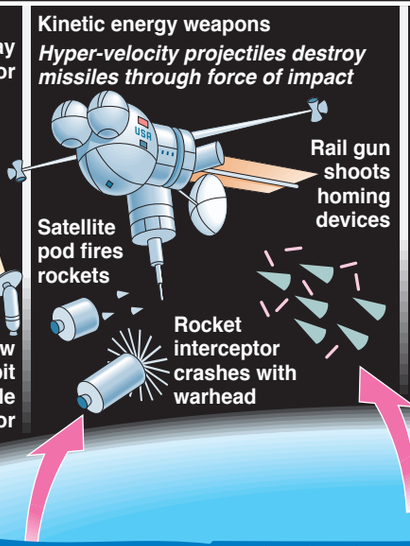
Ground-based laser weapons

Laser station sends beam via relay mirror to battle mirror aimed at ICBM (inter-continental ballistic missile)



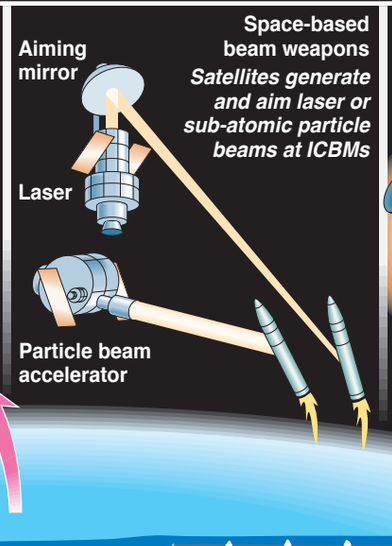
Kinetic energy weapons

Hyper-velocity projectiles destroy missiles through force of impact



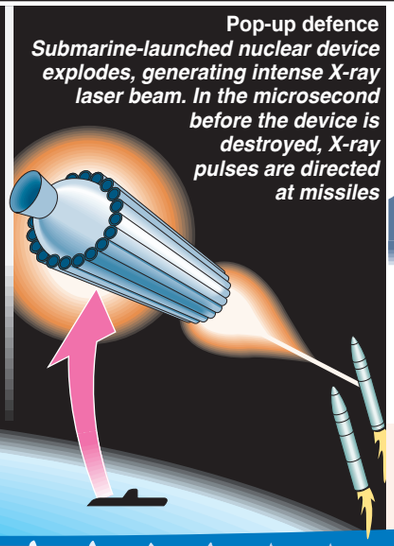
Space-based beam weapons

Satellites generate and aim laser or sub-atomic particle beams at ICBMs

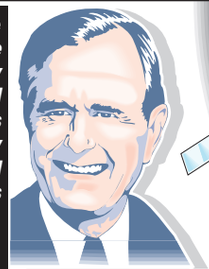


Pop-up defence

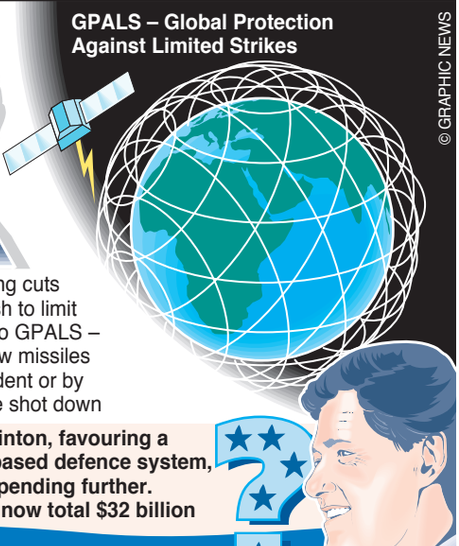
Submarine-launched nuclear device explodes, generating intense X-ray laser beam. In the microsecond before the device is destroyed, X-ray pulses are directed at missiles



1988-1993: the reality



GPALS – Global Protection Against Limited Strikes



Congress spending cuts force George Bush to limit Star Wars plans to GPALS – in which only a few missiles launched by accident or by terrorists could be shot down

President Bill Clinton, favouring a limited ground-based defence system, pledges to cut spending further. Star Wars costs now total $32 billion

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