

dent speculated that the dispute may have grown out of a trivial quarrel between factions in the social sciences community, CNRS officials are treating the matter as a serious challenge to scientific independence. One of the council members who resigned, history professor Gilbert Dagron, wrote in *Le Monde* that the issue is "whether a minister may use his authority alone to put people of his choice in responsible scientific posts, making an institution like the CNRS a simple annex of his ministry." He concluded: "An abuse of power is still an abuse of power, whether it takes the form of a prince's action or assumes the mask of ideology."

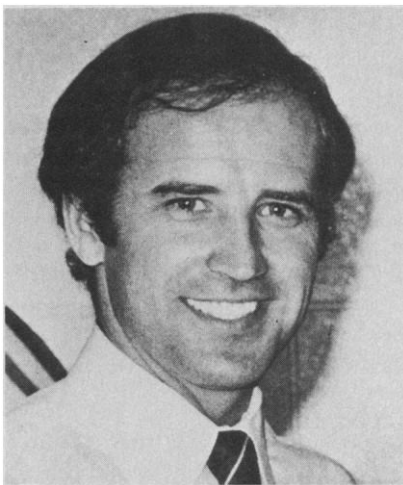
—Elliot Marshall

## Satellite for Arabs Causes a Stir in Senate

An aftershock of resentment over the sale of AWACS planes to Saudi Arabia caught the Administration by surprise on 3 November. Several senators challenged the government's decision to let an American company sell an advanced communications satellite to a consortium of Arab groups which includes the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Congress received notice on 30 October that the State Department was preparing to give the Ford Aerospace Company an export license that would allow Ford to transfer satellite parts to the French company Aerospatiale. Aerospatiale has been hired to assemble the system for a group known as Arabsat. Based in Saudi Arabia, Arabsat is composed of 22 governments, among them Libya, Syria, South Yemen, and the PLO. Libya is an avowed enemy of the United States. Although Arabsat members already lease channels from the global communications system known as Intelsat, the Arab nations would like to have their own regional system.

Under the terms of the Arms Export Control Act, the State Department must grant licenses for the export of all high technology items, even for those that have no direct military application. Congress must be notified before licenses are granted, and a license may be blocked if both houses vote within 30 days to disapprove it.



**Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.**

Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (D-Del.) rattled Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger on 3 November when he questioned the Secretary about Arabsat during hearings before the Foreign Affairs Committee. With some awkwardness, Weinberger confessed that he knew nothing about the deal. The following day, Secretary of State Alexander Haig told the Foreign Affairs Committee that he was just as ignorant about the Arabsat license. Haig announced that the State Department had decided to withdraw the proposal to permit further study and consultation with the Senate. The 30-

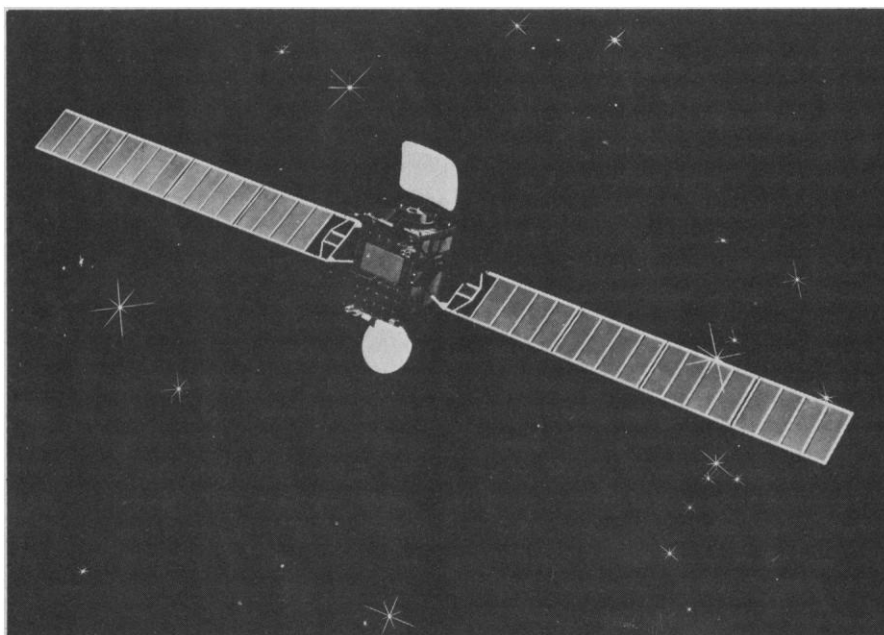
day grace period for congressional review has been extended indefinitely.

Susan Frutkin, a spokeswoman for Ford Aerospace, says the company expects the license to be approved once the State Department has had a chance to educate Congress about the benign nature of the project. She adds that Aerospatiale is the prime contractor and that the communications satellites are intended for non-military purposes.

The value of the Arabsat contract, which calls for the construction of three satellites, is around \$135 million. The design is similar to but less sophisticated than that of the latest satellite being built by Ford and Aerospatiale for Intelsat, the global cooperative that dominates the field. Arabsat will have the capacity to carry 8000 simultaneous two-way telephone conversations and one television transmission.

Although the same services are available from Intelsat at a lower cost, the members of Arabsat apparently prefer to own and operate a system. Satellites similar to the one Arabsat wants to purchase have been launched or are being planned for the United States, Western Europe, Japan, Canada, Indonesia, India, Australia, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico.

—Elliot Marshall



**Arabsat**

Aerospatiale

Ford Aerospace and Aerospatiale of France plan to build three satellites of this design to provide television and telephone links among 22 Arab organizations.