
White House Issues Secrecy Guideline

In a reaffirmation of existing policy, the White House has officially stated that the results of fundamental scientific research shall, "to the maximum extent possible," remain unclassified, and thus exempt from constraints on publication or dissemination. In so doing, it appears to have settled a protracted dispute within the Administration over the handling of military research.

"No restrictions may be placed upon the conduct or reporting of federally funded fundamental research that has not received national security classification, except as provided in applicable U.S. statutes," reads a statement released by press secretary Larry Speakes on 27 September. "Our goal is to maintain the free and open exchange of unclassified research so necessary to a free society and an expanding economy."

This policy, which has been observed by the Defense Department for the last year and a half, essentially finesses a bitter argument between those within the Administration who are interested in blocking the flow of even unclassified technology to the Eastern Bloc through tight restraints on scientific publication and public discussion, and those who believe that U.S. technological superiority depends on as wide an exchange of data as possible within the scientific community.

The statement does not rule out, for example, the possibility that the fruits of unclassified research conducted by colleges or universities might eventually be classified. But Colonel Donald Carter, the acting deputy under secretary of defense for research and advanced technology, says that it makes this "a very, very remote possibility." In short, it sets the tone, but leaves a loophole for circumstances where free discussion would reveal secret characteristics of weapons systems or military research facilities.

It also does not rule out constraints on the presentation of unclassified yet highly sensitive data at scientific symposia, authorized by a provision in the 1984 defense bill (an "applicable U.S. statute"). In April, the Pentagon cited this law to block the presentation of

several dozen papers at a meeting of the Society of Photo-Optical Instrumentation Engineers open to foreigners. Under the new policy, Carter says, "we plan to limit the papers that we withhold for this reason to the very fewest that we can."

An additional statement, outlining exactly which papers will be subject to these export constraints, is presently under negotiation with various scientific societies, Carter adds. In a letter dated 17 September, however, the presidents of 12 of these groups* bluntly told Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger that they "will not be responsible for, nor will they sponsor" any closed or restricted technical sessions, no matter what the guidelines are. Carter says that this leaves the Pentagon with little choice but to sponsor separate sessions, at the same time and in the same spot as a general scientific conference, for those scientists willing to respect the Defense Department's wishes. "We will do it as an adjunct to the principal meeting, for U.S. citizens to participate at their discretion," he says.

The debate will continue.

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*The AAAS, the American Association of Engineering Societies, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the National Society of Professional Engineers, the American Physical Society, the Society of Photo-Optical Instrumentation Engineers, the Society of Manufacturing Engineers, the Optical Society of America, the American Chemical Society, the American Society of Civil Engineers, the Institute of Industrial Engineers, and the System Safety Society.

Star Wars Boycott Gains Strength

An academic boycott of "Star Wars" research, which began only a few months ago, has now enlisted more than 350 full-time faculty members and 700 graduate students or postdoctoral fellows. Citing a mixture of political and technical concerns, each of the participants has pledged not to solicit or accept any funds from the controversial ballistic missile defense program.

The principal explanation given in a petition, now being circulated on more than 60 campuses, is that the program, officially known as the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), is "ill-conceived and dangerous." But the peti-

tion also complains that "the likelihood that SDI funding will restrict academic freedom and blur the distinction between classified and unclassified research is greater than for other sources of funding." As a result, it states, "participation in SDI by individual researchers would lend their institution's name to a program of dubious scientific validity, and give legitimacy to this program at a time when the involvement of prestigious research institutions is being sought to increase congressional support."

At the University of Illinois, more than 200 faculty members and graduate students or post-docs have signed the pledge, including a majority of the school's physics department. Similarly, most of the physicists at the University of Pennsylvania, Princeton, Cornell, Carnegie-Mellon, and SUNY at Stony Brook have signed. Smaller but substantial numbers of engineers and computer scientists at these and other schools have signed, including a sprinkling of Nobel laureates, according to David Wright, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania who helped organize the drive.

These totals may be contrasted with 150 or so university faculty members who have already accepted some "Star Wars" funding, according to James Lonson, who directs the program's Innovative Science and Technology Office. Lonson claims that the academic community is still enthusiastic about SDI, and that he will have to turn applicants away during the 1986 fiscal year. But he is concerned that as a result of the campaign, some post-docs and graduate students who want to work on the program will be pressured not to do so.

Lisbeth Gronlund, a graduate student at Cornell who also helped organize the effort, explains that its purpose is not to block research, but to make a political statement that "this is a bad idea. Since only a small percentage of SDI funds are going to universities anyway, it is unrealistic to think that we can prevent it from going forward." The petition was drafted with the assistance of several prominent SDI critics at Cornell, including Hans Bethe, Kurt Gottfried, Roald Hoffman, and Robert Wilson, she says. At present, it is coordinated by a group known as United Campuses to Prevent Nuclear War.

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