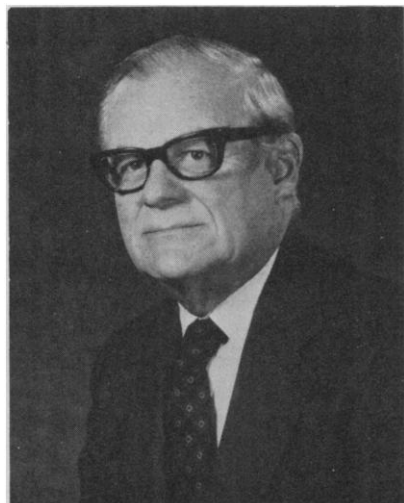


mental policy for the AFL-CIO, said Robbins has "the unusual ability to identify areas of potential agreement and he works very hard at realizing that potential. He builds a consensus



Frederick C. Robbins

in a direction that does not represent the lowest common denominator, and he knows when to stop pushing for agreement when a moral decision is required." In short, Robbins has "very acute political skills."

DOD Says "Weteyes" Will Stay in Denver

As it has done several times since 1969, the Department of Defense (DOD) announced on 26 February a new policy for managing its stockpile of nerve gas bombs stored at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal in Denver, Colorado. It will do nothing.

Colorado's politicians have repeatedly extracted promises from Defense officials to have the 888 "Weteye" bombs moved out of the state or dismantled. And, after appropriate review and consideration, Defense officials have repeatedly concluded that it is best to leave the weapons where they are. The latest round in this minuet began last June, when the Army—which has inherited these deadly antiques—proposed to ship the bombs to the Tooele Army base in Utah. There, it was said, they would seem less threatening to the public, for they

would be far from any population center. (They are now stored near Denver's international airport.) The alternative to shipping them out was to neutralize them, a choice which the DOD rejected for strategic reasons. As officials explained when they reversed an earlier promise to do away with the weapons, the United States must have a chemical arsenal in reserve as a "deterrent" against the Soviets.

Having made this decision, DOD now finds that it must break its second promise to Colorado, for the bombs are too hazardous to ship. Several were found to be leaking internally, and all have now been sealed in airtight containers. A single drop of the toxin is enough to kill. The Pentagon does not wish to risk an accident. Nor has it found the people of Utah eager to relieve Colorado of this cargo. In upbeat prose, the department explained: "Retention of the Weteye bombs at Rocky Mountain Arsenal precludes even the minimal risks that might have been involved in the movement of the stockpile to Tooele Army Depot."

How effective is this leaky threat in preventing the Soviets from striking first with chemical weapons. Not terribly, if refugees from Afghanistan and Laos are to be believed. According to reports from these witnesses, Soviet and Soviet-supplied troops have used chemical agents in combat in the last year.

White House Brushes Off Report of Israeli A-Blast

Ever since an American satellite spotted a bright flash of light in the Southern Hemisphere last fall (*Science*, 1 February), rumor pointed to the Israelis, or the South Africans, or both, for having conducted a secret nuclear test. CBS News went further on 21 February and raised the allegation from the status of rumor to fact. "Informed sources," CBS said, "confirmed this was an Israeli nuclear test, conducted with the help and cooperation of the South African government." The sources, it appears, were a couple of Israeli journalists who re-

cently finished a book on the history of Israel's nuclear weapons program (Eli Teicher and Amy Dor-On). Their book is now in the hands of Israeli military censors, awaiting clearance for publication.

Like the event itself, CBS' report is tantalizing in its elusiveness. No official of any government has been willing to lend it authority. American officials, who presumably have the best intelligence and the least personal stake in the matter, refuse to budge from the stance of ignorance taken early this January. Although they speak blandly of "the event in the South Atlantic," suggesting that they know where the nonblast occurred, they still insist that the satellite may have sighted nothing more threatening than a meteoroid reflecting a glint of sunlight.

This explanation ran into trouble last winter when scientists at the Arecibo, Puerto Rico, radio observatory described a ripple in the ionosphere which suggested that there was, in fact, a nuclear blast on the night of 22 September. A panel of experts convened by the White House could not agree on the correct interpretation of the Arecibo data. Because of these conflicts, a technical report scheduled to be released by the White House in January is being held up for further review. According to a staff assistant of the President's science adviser, the experts will reconvene this month, possibly to render a final judgment by 1 April. This official personally thought the meteoroid explanation would hold up.

Carter Administration officials discourage speculation about the flash in the South Atlantic, stressing the possibility that there may have been no bomb blast at all. One reason for this, a State Department policy aide explained, is that it becomes more difficult to negotiate and enforce nuclear nonproliferation pacts if some countries are believed to be making weapons in secret. South Africa and Israel are seen already as villains in much of the Third World. Now they are suspected of having built a hidden nuclear arsenal. If this suspicion becomes accepted as fact, the State Department fears that it may be impossible to fashion any policy of self-restraint in the nuclear arms race.

Elliot Marshall