

Nonproliferation Policy Challenged

A major retreat in one of the distinctive foreign policy initiatives of the Carter Administration seems to be in the making. The President's special ambassador for nuclear nonproliferation is recommending significant modification in the Carter policy of trying to halt the spread of nuclear weapons by restraining international trade in nuclear technology. In light of several recent policy setbacks, Gerard C. Smith proposes that the United States soften or withdraw altogether its opposition to aspects of the nuclear energy policies of America's major allies and trading partners, particularly their widespread interest in construction of pilot breeder reactors which use weapons-grade material as fuel.

The recommendation is contained in a still classified memorandum to the President, intended as a working draft, that is currently under discussion by a nine-member presidential review committee coordinated by the National Security Council. Included are representatives of every major executive agency concerned with nuclear weapons.

Smith proposes that the United States give up its case-by-case review of foreign requests for transfer or reprocessing of nuclear fuel, in favor of a blanket assurance that such requests will be granted when the fuel is needed for reasonable overseas breeder reactor research and development. Under present agreements, U.S. jurisdiction over the transfer of fuel is expensive, giving the United States veto power over the disposition of between 60 and 70 percent of the world's present uranium supply.

Smith also proposes that the United States grant contracts to supply uranium to reactor operators in foreign countries for the duration of a reactor's lifetime—about 30 to 40 years. Contracts would be granted in return for various concessions for government officials of the countries involved. At present, sales contracts are approved only for a few years at a time.

Finally, Smith proposes that the United States actively support the start-up of an international plutonium storage and management regime, altering the present approach to the controversial suggestion.

Each of these ideas is vigorously desired by American allies and opposed by a large segment of the nonproliferation community in Washington. State Department officials say they decided to support a new policy after becoming convinced that a rigid U.S. policy of denial and confrontation was leading nowhere. They point to three recent diplomatic setbacks, the most noteworthy being the final report of the U.S.-sponsored International Nuclear Fuel Cycle Evaluation (INFCE) in February (*Science*, 28 March). Against the wishes of the United States, the conference generally endorsed the breeder concept.

A second setback was the recent announcement that Switzerland and West Germany had reached agreement with Argentina for the sale of nuclear energy equipment that substantially enhances Argentina's capability to develop a nuclear bomb. A number of American officials, up to and including President Carter, had unsuccessfully attempted to intervene in the case. Finally, the long-stalled U.S. negotiations with India over nuclear safeguards recently missed an important deadline without any further progress.

These and earlier disappointments produced a sense of frustration at the State Department that led to the latest proposal. "We just need more flexibility to negotiate," says one diplomat. "We go over there [to Europe] and recite for them, *ad nauseum*, the American [nonproliferation] law, and all they do is smile at us." The hope is that by granting concessions on breeder R & D, plutonium storage, and uranium supply, the United States might gain acceptance of some of its more difficult objectives, such as complete nuclear energy proliferation safeguards and pledges not to engage in enrichment or reprocessing for conventional reactor systems.

Backers of the proposal hope to have a final version on Carter's desk within 2 to 3 weeks. But interviews with many of the officials involved at different agencies reveal considerable disagreement about what the final draft should say. Furthermore, the President's domestic policy staff is concerned about the impact of a major policy shift during an election year.

—R. JEFFREY SMITH

merely confirmed into law changes which had their genesis in sweeping value changes outside the political system. Politicians have seldom been leaders."

Sociologist Robert C. Mitchell of Resources for the Future had encouraging news for the conferees in that public opinion polls have consistently shown strong public support for environmental quality objectives, even when it has been made clear to respondents that attainment of these objectives may involve economic trade-offs. But, on the whole, the assessments as to where the environmental movement stands indicated a need for new solutions and new strategies. Those that were offered vary widely and some appear clearly contradictory.

Speth called in particular for political mobilization at the grass roots and for building coalitions with "natural allies"—among them the urban poor, farmers, industrial workers exposed to hazardous chemicals, and "concerned and enlightened businessmen."

William K. Reilly, president of the Conservation Foundation, emphasized consensus building "in quiet cooperation with other sectors of society, including business and labor leaders." He also emphasized more reliance on state, local, and private initiatives rather than on federal initiatives.

Peter Harnik of Environmental Action urged that environmentalists get behind the campaign being led by Ralph Nader and others for "corporate democracy." This is a revival of an effort that goes back to 1970 to shift corporate control from company managers to shareholders and independently elected directors who would include consumerists, environmentalists, labor representatives, and other outsiders.

Lester Brown, president of the World Watch Institute, saw a need for sharpening the environmental movement's semantics and rhetoric. "We have allowed our opponents to define the movement in terms of environmental quality versus jobs," he said. "We ought to stress the protection of natural systems that underpin the social and economic systems. In defining the problem that way, we can occupy the high ground."

Brown stressed that present economic circumstances are encouraging some environmentally benign innovation: "We are on the edge of a fundamental transformation in the U.S. social and economic system," he said. "As we move toward \$40 a barrel oil and full price decontrol, solar collectors may sprout on roof tops in the 1980's like TV antennas did in the 1950's."—LUTHER J. CARTER