

tions on that topic; and a study on "The Soviet strategy of terror" was issued the day after Secretary of State Alexander Haig announced that international terrorism would be a top priority of the State Department.

The Heritage people never send out a press release that is not accompanied by



Edwin J. Faelner, Jr.

Constance Holden

the publication to which it refers; every new report is delivered by hand to every member of Congress as well as key aides and government officials. Money is no problem: in addition to corporate and foundation support, Heritage has received 120,000 individual contributions over the past 18 months.

Science policy is one of the few areas to which the foundation has not accorded much attention. It is not particularly interested in the nature of the President's science advisory apparatus. Recommendations so far are in accord with the conservative line: most applied research should be left to the private sector; regulatory and fiscal roadblocks to research investments should be lifted; and government should reduce participation in areas that promise no immediate benefits, such as space, astronomy, and high energy physics. In line with faith in the power of economic incentives, the foundation recommends establishment of a new federal prize for private innovators. Says Faelner, "we would defend scientists making decisions instead of them being made by bureaucrats or the courts." Any more specific than that he is not prepared to get. He says, "broadly speaking, as believers in the growing economic pie, we are supportive of advances in science and technology. . . the best way government can serve science is by restoring a healthy economy."

—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

"Flash" Near South Africa, Again

The press has recently given attention to a report of a second mysterious "flash" over the ocean near South Africa, detected 15 December by a U.S. surveillance satellite. The sighting has been described as a sequel to the flash spotted near South Africa on 22 September 1979.

Many intelligence analysts thought the 1979 event might have been produced by a small, surreptitious atom bomb test. After a year-long review of the physical data collected that night, an independent panel of scientists brought together by the Carter White House concluded that there was no evidence that a blast had occurred. However, the scientists never came up with a persuasive explanation of what had happened (*Science*, 1 August 1980). They guessed that a meteoroid might have reflected sunlight into the satellite's "eye."

Some of those who were skeptical of this theory thought the Carter Administration was trying to paper over an unpleasant fact: that a nuclear test could be concealed and that a test ban treaty would be unenforceable. The skeptics appear ready to cite the second event as conclusive evidence that someone is testing nuclear weapons in secret and getting away with it. As one agitated Washington newspaper columnist put it, "President Reagan is confronted with one of the gravest, most perplexing mysteries of the nuclear age. . . Is the nuclear club expanding another notch, or has a card carrying member taken advantage of the remote waters where the South Atlantic joins the Indian Ocean to test weapons without the risk that the world will ever discover who he is?"

Although the report from 15 December remains somewhat puzzling, government officials and scientists who have studied it say that in one respect it is not mysterious at all. The intelligence agencies agreed this time that it was not an atomic blast. In the earlier case, the federal technicians were divided because the satellite's record looked like the unique signal given off by an atom bomb explosion. In this case there is no difference of opinion in the technical community.

The 15 December event was in fact a heat signal picked up by an infrared monitor designed to spot missile launches. Because nuclear blasts do not give off a unique infrared signal, there is no way for the people who interpret the satellite's messages to judge whether the machine spotted a natural or man-made event. However, nuclear blasts do produce a unique visible light signal, not thought to have any counterpart in nature (except for meteoroids reflecting sunlight). The technicians are confident that the 15 December event could not have been caused by a bomb because an optical sensor—just like the one that picked up the earlier South African flash, and much more sensitive than the infrared sensor—was watching the same area of the globe that night. It saw no flash. According to one highly placed government official, the most likely explanation is that the satellite picked up solar infrared radiation being reflected off the condensation trail of a meteor. The intelligence agencies have combed through the geophysical and other information collected last December and found nothing to suggest that a blast occurred.

One intriguing aspect of this and the previous sighting is that they have given rise to the expression of diverse varieties of international paranoia. Although there is insufficient evidence to prove that any bomb actually went off, authoritative articles have already named villains. The candidates include South Africa, Israel, the Soviet Union, Pakistan, and France.

—ELIOT MARSHALL

Texas Court Rules That Hughes Left No Will

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute has lost an attempt in Texas to take control of the estate of the late Howard R. Hughes, Jr., an empire valued at more than \$2 billion. A victory for the Institute would have immediately made it one of the world's largest private organizations devoted to the support of biomedical research (*Science*, 20 February). On 27 February, a judge in Houston ruled that the Institute could not attempt to probate a so-called lost will. Last year, similar rulings were handed down in Nevada