

“Lack of Reciprocity” Prompts IIASA Cutoff

The Reagan Administration has turned thumbs down on continued government funding of American membership in the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) outside Vienna. The decision is being conveyed in a response by President Reagan to a letter from Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky who urged that the United States maintain its official support for IIASA.

A major factor in the decision is the belief within the Administration that the benefits of IIASA membership to the United States are much less than those to the Soviet Union and also that U.S. security interests could be compromised. To a large extent, the cold shoulder given IIASA seems to be the result of deteriorating relations between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Administration criticisms are vigorously disputed by American advocates of a continued U.S. role in IIASA. Such participation has had strong support in the scientific community and Congress. An effort will apparently be made through an informal organization styling itself the Friends of IIASA to find alternative sources of funding to permit continued involvement of American scientists in IIASA programs.

IIASA was chartered in 1972 as a nongovernmental organization; the U.S. National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is designated as U.S. national member. The United States and the Soviet Union have each paid about a quarter of IIASA's budget with the 15 other member countries splitting the remainder of the \$10 million annual operating costs. Funds for the U.S. contribution—amounting to about \$2.3 million a year—were provided through the National Science Foundation (NSF) budget.

Since late last year NAS officials have been negotiating for government support of an IIASA proposal (*Science*, 11 December 1981, p. 1222) under which the institute would be restructured and the U.S. contribution reduced to \$1 million. NAS president Frank Press said through a spokesman that if President Reagan called an end to the federal payment the Academy would take no further action.

White House sources said that the Kreisky and Reagan letters were a private exchange between heads of state and the contents would not be made public. The decision and the reasons for it, however, were expected to be communicated by White House officials to Press and others.

Continued federal support for U.S. participation in IIASA was stiffly opposed by White House staff even before the Kreisky letter arrived. Federal funding difficulties had been given originally as the reason for withdrawal of government funding, but charges last spring that a Soviet official occupying an administrative post at IIASA was involved in intelligence activities and the Administration reaction to the declaration of martial law in Poland in December further chilled official U.S. attitudes to the institute.

Staff work on the IIASA issue was done principally within the National Security Council. NSC official Richard E. Pipes' comments on the decision were crisp and categorical. The overall assessment of U.S. membership in IIASA, according to Pipes, was that “We don't seem to be getting anything out of it.” Ticking off negative points, Pipes noted “security implications,” the “money in-

volved,” and the fact that government support would be “contrary to the spirit of the new sanctions.” When IIASA was started, said Pipes, “the spirit of détente prevailed.” As for the views of decision-makers in the Administration, “I don't know anybody who's in favor of it.”

Another official said that the Administration has been concerned that Soviet and Eastern European scientists had access to Western data bases through IIASA computers and also that Soviet scientists working at the institute might not be “bona fide” scientists. He acknowledged that IIASA had proposed taking measures to deal with these concerns, but said that U.S. officials were not persuaded that such measures could be effective. However, no particular issue caused the decision, he said. A general “lack of reciprocity” was what determined the action, he said, “we saw all negatives.”

Sharp issue with these views is taken by Roger Levien, who returned recently after 6 years as director of IIASA and is now director of strategic systems analysis for the Xerox Corporation. Levien says “the information on which the decision [for U.S. withdrawal] was made is incorrect and based on supposition rather than analysis.”

An incident last spring in which IIASA administrator Arkady Belozarov was identified by a Norwegian double agent as his Soviet “control,” Levien says was an “outrageous abuse of IIASA” by the Soviets. He notes, however, that Belozarov's intelligence activities “had not involved anything happening at IIASA.” Levien went on to say that among international organizations, “IIASA is one of the few places where such abuses are controlled.”

Levien and others deny the allegation that IIASA computer practices give East bloc scientists special access to Western data banks. The same access is available from “any telephone line,” says Levien. The charge that IIASA does not ensure that all staff are scientifically qualified is also rejected by scientists familiar with IIASA.

Levien says the important thing missed in criticism of IIASA is its difference from other international organizations. An atmosphere has been created that makes genuine cooperation possible, he says. A serious misunderstanding about the institute concerns the nature of the problems with which IIASA deals. These are “problems for which there are no solutions,” says Levien. The focus is on long-term problems with global applications on subjects such as energy, food, and water resources. “If you can get the Soviets to work with us on those, everyone benefits.”

Advocates of the IIASA link say the “crisis” over U.S. sponsorship rose abruptly, in part because of a mix-up that delayed delivery of the Kreisky letter. Sympathy for the IIASA connection was thought to be substantial in Congress and the NAS compromise proposal was viewed as having good prospects. The Administration's action, however, with its emphasis on security considerations, may have a preemptive effect.

If the government pulls out of the 10-year-old IIASA experiment, as now seems likely, the real cause is probably less the criticisms of IIASA, which might have been made at almost any time during its history, than the post-détente criteria now being applied by the Reagan Administration.

—JOHN WALSH