

Nuclear Power Policy

Statement on Decisions Reached Following a Review. April 7, 1977

There is no dilemma today more difficult to resolve than that connected with the use of nuclear power. Many countries see nuclear power as the only real opportunity, at least in this century, to reduce the dependence of their economic well-being on foreign oil—an energy source of uncertain availability, growing price, and ultimate exhaustion. The U.S., by contrast, has a major domestic energy source—coal—but its use is not without penalties, and our plans also call for the use of nuclear power as a share in our energy production.

The benefits of nuclear power are thus very real and practical. But a serious risk accompanies worldwide use of nuclear power—the risk that components of the nuclear power process will be turned to providing atomic weapons.

We took an important step in reducing the risk of expanding possession of atomic weapons through the nonproliferation treaty, whereby more than 100 nations have agreed not to develop such explosives. But we must go further. The U.S.

is deeply concerned about the consequences for all nations of a further spread of nuclear weapons or explosive capabilities. We believe that these risks would be vastly increased by the further spread of sensitive technologies which entail direct access to plutonium, highly enriched uranium, or other weapons usable material. The question I have had under review from my first day in office is how can that be accomplished without forgoing the tangible benefits of nuclear power.

We are now completing an extremely thorough review of all the issues that bear on the use of nuclear power. We have concluded that the serious consequences of proliferation and direct implications for peace and security—as well as strong scientific and economic evidence—require:

- a major change in U.S. domestic nuclear energy policies and programs; and
- a concerted effort among all nations to find better answers to the problems and risks accompanying the increased use of nuclear power.

I am announcing today some of my decisions resulting from that review.

First, we will defer indefinitely the commercial reprocessing and recycling of the plutonium produced in the U.S. nuclear power programs. From our own experience, we have concluded that a viable and economic nuclear power program can be sustained without such reprocessing and recycling. The plant at Barnwell, South Carolina, will receive neither Federal encouragement nor funding for its completion as a reprocessing facility.

Second, we will restructure the U.S. breeder reactor program to give greater priority to alternative designs of the breeder and to defer the date when breeder reactors would be put into commercial use.

Third, we will redirect funding of U.S. nuclear research and development programs to accelerate our research into alternative nuclear fuel cycles which do not involve direct access to materials usable in nuclear weapons.

Fourth, we will increase U.S. production capacity for enriched uranium to provide adequate and timely supply of nuclear fuels for domestic and foreign needs.

Fifth, we will propose the necessary legislative steps to permit the U.S. to offer nuclear fuel supply contracts and guarantee delivery of such nuclear fuel to other countries.

Sixth, we will continue to embargo the export of equipment or technology that would permit uranium enrichment and chemical reprocessing.

Seventh, we will continue discussions with supplying and recipient countries alike, of a wide range of international approaches and frameworks that will permit all nations to achieve their energy objectives while reducing the spread of nuclear explosive capability. Among other things, we will explore the establishment of an international nuclear fuel cycle evaluation program aimed at developing alternative fuel cycles and a variety of international and U.S. measures to assure access to nuclear fuel supplies and spent fuel storage for nations sharing common nonproliferation objectives.

We will continue to consult very closely with a number of governments regarding the most desirable multilateral and bilateral arrangements for assuring that nuclear energy is creatively harnessed for peaceful economic purposes. Our intent is to develop wider international cooperation in regard to this vital issue through systematic and thorough international consultations.

Nuclear Power Policy

*Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session
With Reporters on Decisions Following a
Review of U.S. Policy. April 7, 1977*

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The second point I'd like to make before I answer questions is concerning our Nation's efforts to control the spread of nuclear explosive capability. As far back as 30 years ago, our Government made a proposal to the United Nations that there be tight international controls over nuclear fuels and particularly those that might be made into explosives.

Last year during the Presidential campaign, both I and President Ford called for strict controls over fuels to prevent the proliferation—further proliferation of nuclear explosive capability.

There is no dilemma today more difficult to address than that connected with the use of atomic power. Many countries see atomic power as their only real opportunity to deal with the dwindling supplies of oil, the increasing price of oil, and the ultimate exhaustion of both oil and natural gas.

Our country is in a little better position. We have oil supplies of our own, and we have very large reserves of coal. But even coal has its limitations. So, we will ourselves continue to use atomic power as a share of our total energy production.

The benefits of nuclear power, particularly to some foreign countries that don't have oil and coal of their own, are very practical and critical. But a serious risk is involved in the handling of nuclear fuels—the risk that component parts of this power process will be turned to providing explosives or atomic weapons.

We took an important step in reducing this risk a number of years ago by the implementation of the nonproliferation treaty which has now been signed by approximately a hundred nations. But we must go further.

We have seen recently India evolve an explosive device derived from a peaceful nuclear powerplant, and we now feel that several other nations are on the verge of becoming nuclear explosive powers.

The United States is deeply concerned about the consequences of the uncontrolled spread of this nuclear weapon capability. We can't arrest it immediately and unilaterally. We have no authority over other countries. But we believe that these risks would be vastly increased by the further spread of reprocessing capabilities of the spent nuclear fuel from which explosives can be derived.

Plutonium is especially poisonous, and, of course, enriched uranium, thorium, and other chemicals or metals can be used as well.

We are now completing an extremely thorough review of our own nuclear power program. We have concluded that serious consequences can be derived from our own laxity in the handling of these materials and the spread of their use by other countries. And we believe that there is strong scientific and economic evidence that a time for a change has come.

Therefore, we will make a major change in the United States domestic nuclear energy policies and programs which I am announcing today.

We will make a concerted effort among all other countries to find better answers to the problems and risks of nuclear proliferation. And I would like to outline a few things now that we will do specifically.

First of all, we will defer indefinitely the commercial reprocessing and recycling of the plutonium produced in U.S. nuclear power programs.

From my own experience, we have concluded that a viable and adequate economic nuclear program can be maintained without such reprocessing and recycling of plutonium. The plant at Barnwell, South Carolina, for instance, will receive

neither Federal encouragement nor funding from us for its completion as a reprocessing facility.

Second, we will restructure our own U.S. breeder program to give greater priority to alternative designs of the breeder other than plutonium, and to defer the date when breeder reactors would be put into commercial use.

We will continue research and development, try to shift away from plutonium, defer dependence on the breeder reactor for commercial use.

Third, we will direct funding of U.S. nuclear research and development programs to accelerate our research into alternative nuclear fuel cycles which do not involve direct access to materials that can be used for nuclear weapons.

Fourth, we will increase the U.S. capacity to produce nuclear fuels, enriched uranium in particular, to provide adequate and timely supplies of nuclear fuels to countries that need them so that they will not be required or encouraged to reprocess their own materials.

Fifth, we will propose to the Congress the necessary legislative steps to permit us to sign these supply contracts and remove the pressure for the reprocessing of nuclear fuels by other countries that do not now have this capability.

Sixth, we will continue to embargo the export of either equipment or technology that could permit uranium enrichment and chemical reprocessing.

And seventh, we will continue discussions with supplying countries and recipient countries, as well, of a wide range of international approaches and frameworks that will permit all countries to achieve their own energy needs while at the same time reducing the spread of the capability for nuclear explosive development.

Among other things—and we have discussed this with 15 or 20 national leaders already—we will explore the establish-

ment of an international nuclear fuel cycle evaluation program so that we can share with countries that have to reprocess nuclear fuel the responsibility for curtailing the ability for the development of explosives.

One other point that ought to be made in the international negotiation field is that we have to help provide some means for the storage of spent nuclear fuel materials which are highly explosive, highly radioactive in nature.

I have been working very closely with and personally with some of the foreign leaders who are quite deeply involved in the decisions that we make. We are not trying to impose our will on those nations like Japan and France and Britain and Germany which already have reprocessing plants in operation. They have a special need that we don't have in that their supplies of petroleum products are not available.

But we hope that they will join with us—and I believe that they will—in trying to have some worldwide understanding of the extreme threat of the further proliferation of nuclear explosive capability.

I'd be glad to answer a few questions.