

Effort to Halt Spread of A-Arms Said to Falter

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WASHINGTON, June 20 — United States officials and nuclear policy specialists fear that they may be losing a 35-year-old battle to curb the spread of nuclear weapons.

Critics of the Reagan Administration say the White House has placed insufficient emphasis on stopping nuclear proliferation. A policy put forth in a paper approved last month by President Reagan, they argue, will lead to increased distribution of plutonium, a material

used in nuclear weapons, which will undermine efforts to slow the spread of atomic arms.

Administration officials deny that this will be the effect of the policy. But officials and private analysts agree that efforts to discourage the spread of nuclear arms have been severely complicated by growing international and regional tensions that put pressure on nations such as Israel and Argentina to develop and test atomic devices.

Robert H. Kupperman, a nuclear specialist at Georgetown University's Cen-

ter for Strategic and International Studies, said with reference to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the British-Argentine fighting in the Falklands:

"We had better start thinking not just about how to stop nations from getting nuclear weapons, but how to stop them from using the weapons they will inevitably get."

"The emergence of some new nuclear powers is unavoidable," concluded Lewis A. Dunn in a book published soon after he joined the Administration as special assistant to Under Secretary of State Richard T. Kennedy, a central figure

in nuclear policy matters.

Many nuclear specialists have increasingly begun to focus on "managing" a world in which many nations have nuclear weapons, rather than on preventing the spread of the weapons.

But the Reagan Administration remains officially committed to preventing the spread. In Senate testimony last month, Mr. Kennedy called this a "fundamental commitment."

Toward that goal, the Administration has emphasized measures to allay political and military security concerns of countries and to enhance regional stability.

U.N. Aide Backs U.S. Stand

This approach has been criticized by several Congressional nuclear policy specialists. But it has been warmly endorsed by, among others, Hans Blix, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations organization in Vienna that promotes atomic energy and monitors nuclear facilities to verify that they are not being used for military purposes.

Mr. Blix has repeatedly voiced concern that India, Israel, Pakistan and South Africa refused to sign the 1970 treaty that became the cornerstone of efforts to halt the spread of nuclear weapons.

"The alarm bells are ringing loud and clear with respect to these four," Mr. Blix said early this year.

Under the treaty, 116 nations have forsworn nuclear weapons; 45 have not.

Causes for Nuclear Worry

Nuclear policy specialists say these other alarms are sounding, if somewhat more softly:

¶No country capable of developing atomic weapons has acceded to the treaty in the last five years. Switzerland was the most recent.

¶The International Atomic Energy Agency has become increasingly polarized and politicized, as have many other United Nations organizations. Some Government analysts fear that growing political confrontations between Western industrialized countries and developing nations could eventually undermine the agency's system of international safeguards, such as inspections.

¶Israel's attack on an Iraqi research reactor a year ago weakened the International Atomic Energy Agency's ability to safeguard nuclear facilities ostensibly designed for peaceful purposes. The air strike touched off a debate on whether the agency was capable of quickly detecting a diversion of nuclear material from a facility. The dispute has further shaken international confidence in the agency.

¶A sagging demand for energy has triggered a slump in sales of nuclear reactors and a decline in the growth of nuclear power. This, in turn, has increased strains on the international system of export controls aimed at slowing the spread of sensitive technology to countries that might be trying to develop nuclear weapons.

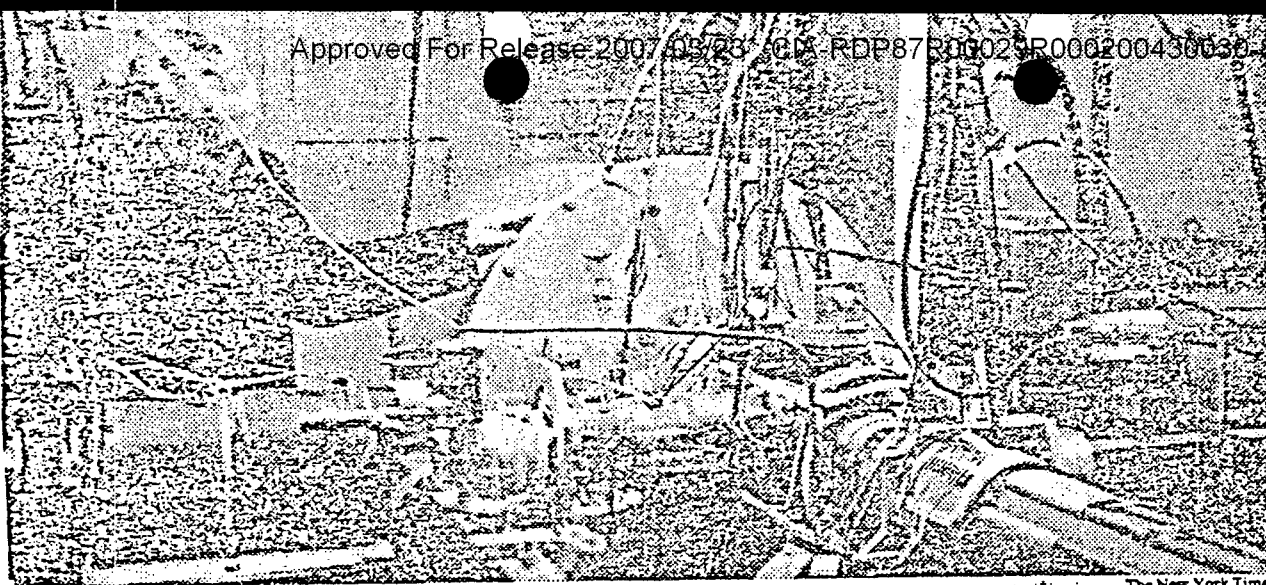
¶Growing sophistication of terrorist groups and a spread of "mininukes" has increased the threat of nuclear terrorism, Administration officials say. The Central Intelligence Agency has concluded, for example, that in Europe there is a "moderate likelihood" that there could be an attempt to damage a nuclear weapons storage facility, to attack a weapon in transit, to raid a nuclear power plant or to carry out blackmail by threatening to use a nuclear weapon or by pretending to have one.

¶Lack of progress on arms control agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union has led to a surge in nuclear weapons arsenals and destructive ability. This, in turn, encourages nonnuclear nations to develop a nuclear ability, Mr. Blix and other specialists contend.

U.S. Concerned by Argentina

The conflict over the Falkland Islands focused Administration concern on Argentina. While there have been no startlingly new developments in Argentina's nuclear program, now in its 31st year, some Administration officials fear that the conflict with Britain may prompt Argentina to build a nuclear bomb, especially since the Falkland surrender caused a loss of face for Buenos Aires.

The Central Intelligence Agency has estimated that Argentina could build an atomic bomb in three to five years if it chose to do so. A new report prepared by the Congressional Research Service



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Dr. Abraham J. Kastelman, head of nuclear research for Argentina, at the atomic energy plant in Bariloche. U.S. Intelligence estimates that Argentina could build an atomic bomb in three to five years.

concludes that Argentina would be able to test a nuclear explosive by the mid-1980's, "if it is willing to run the risks of getting caught at diverting safeguarded materials or of abrogating its safeguards agreements." But the report also states that Argentina could not produce an arsenal of weapons until the 1990's at the earliest.

Argentina poses a special problem not only because it has declined to sign the nonproliferation treaty or to submit all of its nuclear facilities to inspection, but also because it is building what is known as an "independent fuel cycle" — the ability to produce everything required for nuclear power. This would give Argentina the ability to make nuclear weapons quickly, without violating any safeguards agreements.

Bomb Helps Weak Feel Strong

"Nuclear tests are political statements, a country's way of showing that it has hair on its chest," said Warren H. Donnelly, a senior specialist at the Library of Congress and author of the report on Argentina. "So naturally there is concern about the growth of pressures that could lead a country like Argentina to prove that it is tough."

Mr. Donnelly and other specialists are also concerned about Argentina's proclaimed intention to export plutonium, which arms control officials assert would immeasurably complicate efforts to stop the spread of atomic weapons and would increase the threat of nuclear terrorism. The atomic weapons material is a man-made substance that is extremely toxic.

The Reagan Administration is also concerned about China's nuclear export policies. Intelligence reports indicate that China — a nuclear power that has not signed the treaty or joined the International Atomic Energy Agency — has attempted to sell through third parties heavy water to Argentina, and even to India despite the two countries' border conflicts.

Officials said that China's unwillingness to demand inspection of its nuclear exports is a major obstacle to concluding a nuclear cooperation agreement with the United States, which has been the subject of low-level diplomatic discussions between the two Governments.

Pakistan Resists Inspection

Another source of Administration concern is Pakistan, which has been resisting for more than six months the International Atomic Energy Agency's requests for improvements in inspection arrangements. The agency has said it can no longer assure that Pakistan is not diverting nuclear material for military purposes until it agrees to the changes.

The C.I.A. concluded recently that while Pakistan would be able to test an atomic device within three years, it was not likely to do so. Intelligence officials concluded in the estimate last December that the Reagan Administration's six-year, \$3.2 billion military and economic aid program had made Pakistan reluctant to test an atomic device.

Several Administration officials consider Pakistan a key test of President Reagan's approach to stemming the spread of nuclear weapons. Other analysts, however, say the Administration's emphasis on thwarting the detonation of nuclear devices is misplaced.

Israeli Tests Called Unneeded

"Israel, which is only a screwdriver away from a bomb, is so sophisticated and has access to such good information that it doesn't need to test," asserted one Administration official.

India, which tested a device in 1974, has also aroused concern. The Administration has been trying to terminate a 1963 agreement to supply fuel for India's Tarapur nuclear power plant, while persuading the Indians to adhere to international inspection of the reactor and fuel already shipped.

But Robert F. Goheen, Ambassador to India until 1980, said recently that Indian and American diplomats had told him that India was preparing to transfer the spent, or used, fuel to a nearby plant for reprocessing, in apparent violation of its agreement.

South Africa a Problem

South Africa is also viewed as a major problem, but last month the Administration adopted a more flexible policy that would allow the United States to increase sales of nuclear materials to Pretoria.

Senator Charles H. Percy, Republican of Illinois and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said last month that nuclear nonproliferation was "slipping among our foreign policy priorities" and that the world appeared on the verge of returning to "nuclear laissez-faire" by major suppliers.

Some members of Congress have strongly criticized the Administration for issuing a new policy paper that permits advanced countries to have more control over the reprocessing of American-supplied fuel.

They have also chided the Administration for considering the sale of centrifuge enrichment technology to Australia and for a vague offer to Mexico of assistance with research relating to reprocessing — the separation of uranium and plutonium from spent nuclear fuel.

The Carter Administration tried to discourage both those technologies, arguing that they produce materials that can easily be used in weapons, thereby complicating efforts to curb the spread of weapons.

By contrast, the Reagan Administration has said the United States would not inhibit reprocessing, enrichment or development of the breeder reactor, which produces more plutonium than it consumes, in countries with advanced nuclear programs that do not pose a weapons risk.

Last month Under Secretary Kennedy said this policy was more selective and a "realistic recognition" that Japan and other European countries believed that these activities were required for energy security. But he stressed that the Administration was not "encouraging" a spread of the

sensitive technology.

These explanations have not persuaded the strongest Congressional skeptics. Three Democrats — Senator Gary Hart of Colorado, Representative Jonathan B. Bingham of the Bronx and Representative Richard L. Ottinger of Westchester — have introduced legislation to tighten several major loopholes in nuclear export laws.

Quiet Diplomacy Stressed

Mr. Kennedy predicted last month that the Administration's "quiet, diplomatic steps and measured technical approach" had the best chance of achieving nonproliferation objectives.

In some respects, the debate over nonproliferation reflects a longstanding disagreement about the role of atomic energy.

Some critics maintain that because all nuclear power plants are potential atom-bomb factories, the only effective solution to the spread of such weapons is to phase out all nuclear development, both at home and for export.

Proponents of nuclear power respond that it is the only viable source of power for many countries and that proliferation can be controlled through diplomacy, international safeguards and tight export controls focused on a few nations.