

## USA

## Security conscious

*The Worldwatch Institute, the private Washington-based research organisation concerned with global problems, published its latest pamphlet last week. Chris Sherwell reports*

"THE present deficiency of assured energy resources is the single surest threat that the future poses to our security and to that of our allies", the US Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, told a gathering of business leaders in the United States last week. For a namesake of his at the Worldwatch Institute, the timing was near-perfect. Lester Brown, Worldwatch's president, was about to release *Redefining National Security*, which considers why energy and other global problems pose a new threat to national security that only a new approach can combat.

These new threats to security, Brown says, "arise less from the relationship of nation to nation and more from the relationship of man to nature". From his discussion of them he concludes that the traditional military concept of national security is no longer adequate for an interdependent world facing global ecological and economic problems. Political leaders have to realise that national security is meaningless without global security; countries must address the problem, he says without amplification, "cooperatively".

### OTA appointment

THE position of Director of the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) has been given to Dr Russell W. Peterson. He is president of a lobbying organisation concerned with global issues called New Directions and formerly chairman of the Council of Environmental Quality and Governor of the State of Delaware.

The choice follows several months of speculation and political infighting sparked off by allegations that Senator Edward Kennedy was trying to take control of the OTA and had engineered the resignation of its founder and first Director, Emilio Daddario. These allegations were strongly contested at the time and will be further diminished in credibility by the fact that Peterson is a Republican with a reputation for independence. In addition, Kennedy has been scrupulous in avoiding any appearance of interference in the selection process.

Other nominees for the job were Russell Train, former head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Daniel Desimone, presently the deputy director of OTA, and John Sawhill, former head of the Federal Energy Administration.

Sandy Grimwade

The discussion itself ties together several well-known threads of argument that have already appeared in other Worldwatch publications. Thus, in respect of energy, Brown says that an oil-dependent world, in a nuclear limbo and facing climate alteration with heavy use of coal, must act in concert to produce a timetable for a transition to renewable resources. The world's biological systems, on which the global economy depends, says Brown, are similarly threatened by excessive human claims: fishery catches exceed the long-term sustainable yield, tree-cutting exceeds the regenerative capacity of forests, grasslands deteriorate as livestock and human populations increase, and erosion damages croplands as population pressures mount.

Brown takes his arguments further. Humans can inadvertently or intentionally alter global climatic patterns, he states, causing agricultural output to shrink and adversely affecting the survival prospects of hundreds of millions of people. And a "basic transformation" in the world food economy in the 1970s means that the global balance between demand and supply remains delicate. This, says Brown, is attributable to agricultural shortcomings in Eastern Europe and the USSR and agricultural mismanagement elsewhere, rapid population growth and "negative ecological trends"—deforestation, overgrazing, desert encroachment, soil erosion and flooding.

Finally he argues that economic threats to security—simultaneous inflation and unemployment on a global scale—aggravate social divisions, not least through a worsening income distribution. Taken with the other factors, which also translate into economic stresses, the military's role in securing a nation's well-being and survival is "relatively less important than it once was". But political leaders "perceive the new threats dimly".

Outside the optimists who through faith in man's ingenuity see no problems ahead, doubts about all these arguments will come from those who believe ecological and environmental problems will resolve themselves at great human cost regardless of political intervention, and from those who believe in political intervention but have little hope for it. Doubts of the first kind may simply be unacceptable to Brown, but the second kind pose a difficulty. After all, is it really the case that if *all* nations don't hang together they will hang separately? □

## BRITAIN

## Help at the margin

*UK Research Councils have received a small windfall. Chris Sherwell reports*

WHEN the UK Advisory Board for the Research Councils (ABRC) holds its regular meeting at the end of next week, it will consider how to advise Shirley Williams, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, on the allocation of an extra £4 million among the country's research councils. The sum was added to the department's 1978-79 Science Budget by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr Healey, in his 'mini-budget' last week. Science administrators who recognise, in the words of one, that "it is the margins which cause us the misery", greeted the news enthusiastically.

It is not yet known whether the extra cash represents a once-and-for-all increase or the beginning of a longer term upturn. No indication of what precisely will be happening in the period after 1978-79 is yet available. This means that research councils must prepare options: greater expenditure on capital projects or special programmes will make different demands from improved research grants, for example, which would be recurrent. Last year's forward look means that a fair amount was already known of what councils might want to do with the extra cash.

Mrs Williams has asked the ABRC for its "urgent" advice. If a decision is not made next week, the next meeting is set for 9 December. □

## NETHERLANDS

## Limited progress

*The position regarding recombinant DNA research in the Netherlands is still not clear. Casper Schuurings reports*

THE old Dutch government, still in office five months after the 25 May elections, has decided to start preparing legal rules for recombinant DNA research in the Netherlands. The minister of Health and Environmental Protection, in a letter to parliament, says that so long as not enough is known of the positive and negative consequences of this research, no concrete judgment can be given about the contents of such legislation. "There is also not enough known about the social relevance of this research and therefore of the priority it must have in research generally". In the meantime,