US defence policy

Anti-satellite weapon still under fire

Washington

THE Reagan Administration is coming under mounting congressional pressure to postpone tests planned for this summer on the United States' first air-launched anti-satellite weapon. Four resolutions have been submitted in the House of Representatives and the Senate calling for the United States and the Soviet Union to resume talks on banning all weapons from space. Their sponsors claim that deployment of the new weapon, a miniature homing vehicle launched from under the wing of an F-15 aircraft, would make verification of such a treaty virtually impossible.

Talks on the banning of anti-satellite weapons were broken off by the Carter Administration in 1979 after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. In 1981, the Soviet Union submitted to the United Nations a draft treaty banning the stationing of weapons in space, but the United States has not yet decided whether to resume negotiations. The administration's interim policy is to support the principle of banning space weapons while drawing attention to the fact that the Soviet Union is believed to possess the world's only operational anti-satellite system.

Department of Defense sources claim that the Soviet system, based on launching an explosive satellite interceptor from the ground, has been tested on 20 occasions. The department believes the Soviet Union might be capable of placing a laser weapon in space within a few years. The Soviet Union's apparent advantage in anti-satellite weaponry is cited by the administration as the principal justification for its development of the air-launched system.

At a press conference last week, however, Representative Joseph Moakley (Democrat, Massachusetts) said that deployment of the US weapon would leapfrog Soviet technology and represent an "irreversible step" towards a space arms race. Moakley, who has the support of some 120 congressmen for a resolution banning space weapons, said the small size of the American weapon and its ability to be launched without warning from an ordinary fighter aircraft would pose a verification "nightmare". Once it was operational, he said, the Soviet Union was unlikely to enter any kind of agreement banning space weapons.

Two live firings of the new weapon are planned this summer and the President's 1984 budget request for the programme includes \$19 million for procurement — the first time procurement funds have been requested for the anti-satellite programme. Current estimates are that the system could be operational in 1987.

Representative Moakley's resolution is receiving powerful backing from many of the US scientists who played a big part in the development of ballistic missiles. Dr Richard Garwin, a long-serving Defense Department consultant who helped design multiple independent re-entry vehicles for

missiles (MIRVs), said that the deployment of anti-satellite weapons could lead to a pre-emptive war in space during times of peace.

Earlier this year, Dr Garwin and Professor Carl Sagan organized a petition calling on all "spacefaring" nations to outlaw weapons from space. Signatories included two former presidential science advisers and a large number of former Pentagon officials. The scientists received a reply last month from Yuri Andropov reaffirming the Soviet desire to resume talks on a space ban treaty.

Peter David

Unclassified secrets

Stanford protests at data freeze

Washington

THE Department of Energy (DoE) is proposing to clamp down on unclassified information relating to nuclear weapons, a move that universities say would have a chilling effect on fundamental research supported by DoE.

The proposal — which stems from a 1982 law allowing the department to "protect" information that could help terrorists to make nuclear weapons, steal nuclear material or sabotage nuclear facilities — would establish a new category of "unclassified controlled nuclear information" that could be released only to government officials or government contractors having a "need to know". Under the rule, government contractors — presumably including universities — would have to establish procedures that would "at a minimum" treat such information with the level of secrecy "customarily accorded proprietary business information".

The rule describes in general terms the sorts of data that are to be considered "controlled". Information on the design and manufacture of nuclear weapons is the most important; the rule specifically notes that this is information that was at one time classified but was "subsequently declassified at a time when . . . [terrorism] was a relatively infrequent occurrence and when nuclear proliferation was not a serious threat". Information concerning naval nuclear propulsion, security around nuclear defence facilities, and nuclear material production and processing would also be covered, if its release could be "inimical" to the "common defense and security" of the country.

But the proposal is vague when it comes to how someone in possession of such unclassified material is to know that it is considered "controlled". This problem in particular prompted Stanford University's dean for graduate studies and research, Gerald Lieberman, to lodge a strong protest in a letter to DoE. He argues that the rule has an "unlimited potential to chill research, teaching, and the general interchange of information . . . It seems to apply to any information, no matter when pro-

duced or by whom, so long as it was 'ever developed by or for' the United States Government". Lieberman wrote that Stanford would be unable and unwilling to search all of its documents for material that might fit the rule's definition.

He also asserted that the new rule could end up preventing Stanford and other institutions that forbid classified research on campus from taking on any DoE contracts. Stanford's policy is not to accept any research from sponsors who place restrictions on publication. "The DoE rule provides no assurance that results will be distributable", he wrote; a researcher may not even be able to know until he has done the research that its results would be considered "controlled".

Lieberman added in an interview: "In a way, we argue — please classify it, so we'll know where we stand. We're troubled by being in this never-never land of not knowing."

Trisha Chico of DoE's Office of Defense Programs said the agency has no intention of requiring a "wholesale review of documents" already published and on library shelves. Only documents reviewed by a designated DoE official and found to meet the rule's criteria would have to be secured and stamped with a warning.

But she did suggest that the intention of the rule was that if a DoE contractor develops new information in the course of a DoE project, or receives a request for information from a non-authorized person, and that information is a "likely candidate" for being controlled, the contractor would be expected to send it to DoE for review before releasing it. She added that the rule was unlikely to have much effect on an institution such as Stanford, since places that are not defence-related "are not going to have much of that information".

Several institutions that could be affected by the rule learned of it only in the past two weeks, and DoE has agreed to extend the comment period for 30 days, until 3 June. The original proposal appeared in the *Federal Register* on 1 April (p. 13988).

Stephen Budiansky