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Nuclear Spread: 'The Cure Begins at Home'

To the Editor:

In a recent editorial you make a powerful case for halting the reckless proliferation of reprocessing plants that extract plutonium from spent nuclear fuel. You rightly stress that I.A.E.A. safeguards are, and will probably remain, unequal to the task. You don't address widespread concern that national safeguards will be ineffectual or repressive or (probably) both. Yet you do perpetuate the dangerous fallacy that "there is no objection to the sale of giant nuclear power reactors that produce electricity" though they also produce dozens of bombs' worth of plutonium per reactor-year. Any country with a power reactor, or a largish research reactor, can make atomic bombs if it wishes.

The way to stop proliferation of bombs is not to sell more reactors, but to keep everyone from becoming dependent on nuclear technologies; not to continue being a pusher telling other countries they need a nuclear fix, but to offer them wiser counsel, even therapy, instead. The cure begins at home. By improving our own energy efficiency (thus becoming better off with far less total energy than we use today) while we deploy sophisticated transitional fossil-fuel technologies we can buy the fifty years or so that we need to switch to diverse technologies that use energy income, such as sun, wind and organic conversion. New studies in several countries, including some as fuel-poor as Japan and Denmark, are showing that such

a non-nuclear strategy is at least as quick, cheap and socially practicable as the present policy, and probably much more so. If less fortunate countries can do it, we can do it too—with a unique bonus.

All countries, for at least the next five or ten years, will continue to rely on the U.S. for the technical, the economic and especially the political support they need to justify their own nuclear programs. The domestic political base (public and private) to support nuclear power in France, Germany, England, Japan, even the U.S.S.R. has simply not metastasized yet: witness the *de facto* nuclear moratoria in several European countries. A principled decision by the U.S. (1) to phase out its nascent nuclear program and divert those resources to conservation and "soft" technologies; (2) to help others to do the same, and (3) to start to consider nonproliferation, control of civilian nuclear technology and strategic arms reduction as interrelated parts of the same problem would, I believe, be irresistible and offers our best chance of transcending the hypocrisy that has stalled arms control.

The U.S. can still turn off nuclear power virtually everywhere, and thus turn on energy and foreign policies that our grandchildren can live with; but we must stop passing the buck before our clients start passing the bombs.

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