Bush Nuclear Program: Technology Apartheid

by Marjorie Mazel Hecht

The Bush Administration's Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, or GNEP, is a program of technological apartheid dressed up as nuclear development. It is the civilian side of the British geopolitical strategy, first enunciated by Bertrand Russell and H.G. Wells in the first half of the 20th Century, to consolidate power in a single or small group of states, and deny technological development to most of the world. Like the global warming hoax, behind it lies a Malthusian program for checking population growth, especially of non-white populations.

Under GNEP, the United States would provide selected nations with all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle—in a "black box." The recipient countries must agree not to develop those technologies on their own, thus denying those nations knowledge of uranium enrichment, fuel fabrication, and reprocessing, as well as nuclear applications like desalination or medical isotopes. The program aims to control the nuclear fuel cycle "from cradle to grave," as U.S. Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman said. Recipient nations will have only a leased black box—as long as they stay on the good side of the supplier.

GNEP is thus an attack on the national sovereignty of recipient nations, which must give up control over their energy resources and over the training of nuclear scientists and engineers.

From the beginning of the civilian nuclear age, just after World War II, there were two views of the nuclear future. One faction saw nuclear energy as a boon for all mankind, providing virtually unlimited energy to develop industry and raise living standards. The other were the proponents of the Bertrand Russell/H.G. Wells policy, who aimed to prevent Third World development and population growth, by keeping the nuclear genie bottled up. Their program was conveyed in the 1946 Baruch Plan, an earlier version of GNEP, which intended to put a United Nations agency in control of all nuclear fuel. The policy was carried forward from the 1950s by a school of truly mad strategic analysts centered for a time in the Rand Corporation. The leading figure was Albert Wohlstetter, the real model for Stanley Kubrick's fictional "Dr. Strangelove," whose students included the prominent neocon strategists, Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz.

Selling Points vs. Reality

GNEP was sold to the U.S. nuclear community on the basis that it will fund research and construction of three new fa-

cilities: 1) a nuclear reprocessing facility using new methods that will make it harder to divert nuclear fuel for bomb making; 2) a nuclear fast reactor, which would be geared not to breed new fuel, but instead just to burn up the long-lived radioisotopes (actinides) in spent fuel; and 3) an advanced fuel cycle research facility, to look into new methods of reprocessing and new fuel cycles.

Eleven sponsors for potential sites for the first two facilities have been selected to receive grants to prepare "detailed siting studies." One is the Hanford Site in Washington State, where, in 2005, the Bush Administration shut down the Fast Flux Test Facility, a working research fast reactor that was perfectly suited to perform the R&D proposed by GNEP, and to burn up actinides.

There is no question that the United States needs an advanced nuclear program, which will include recycling, enrichment, fuel cycle research, and development of the fast reactor and other advanced reactors. But GNEP is a go-slow program, which may (or may not) produce a new reactor or new technologies in the next 10-15 years. It is not a crash development program to build the research facilities and the advanced reactors the nation—and the world—need. GNEP's focus is nonproliferation enforcement, at home and abroad.

The Department of Energy's funding for GNEP is up to $60 million in the next two years, for conceptual studies, scheduling, and design. It has managed to hook in the nuclear community, as well as all the national laboratories, because it is the *only* Federal nuclear program going. As for the foreign countries participating, most of them—Russia, China, and Japan, for example—already reprocess their spent fuel, and have ambitious programs for research and construction, including fast breeder reactors. They have nothing to lose by participating in GNEP—unless they get so tangled in the web of bureaucracy that they stop forging ahead with their own programs.

U.S. No Longer a Nuclear Leader

Although the United States now has nearly one-fourth of all the world's nuclear reactors (104 out of 435), more than any other country, it has taken a back seat to other nuclear nations in the development of nuclear technology. The U.S. shut down its commercial reprocessing (recycling) capability in the 1970s, although its PUREX reprocessing facility was working well. Since then, the U.S. has had a once-through nuclear fuel cycle, instead of recovering the 97% of the spent nuclear fuel that could be turned into new fuel.[1] The reason for the shutdown was ostensibly to prevent "proliferation," because reprocessing spent fuel separates out plutonium (about 1% of the spent fuel), which might be stolen and used for bomb-making.

The real reason is that by allowing reprocessing, nuclear energy becomes fully "renewable" and therefore fully able to supply increasing amounts of energy for a growing world. This is what the Russellites wanted to prevent, using the banner of nonproliferation to do it. Meanwhile, spent fuel rods—containing a valuable resource—are sitting in storage.[2]

In addition to the shutdown of reprocessing, there was a virtual shutdown of enrichment technology. Enrichment involves increasing the ratio of fissionable uranium (U-235) to unfissionable uranium (U-238) from the 0.7% found in natural uranium to 3-4% required for fission reactors. The U.S., which had pioneered uranium enrichment methods for nuclear fuel, now must import more than 80% of the enriched uranium for its 104 nuclear plants. The nation also shut down its fast breeder program, although fast reactors are essential to the future of nuclear.

GNEP has captured the allegiance not only of the nuclear community, but of the national laboratories, which historically have been leaders of U.S. nuclear research, both civilian and military. When this writer posed the question of GNEP and its coercive nonproliferation function to Dr. Robert Rosner, the director of the Argonne National Laboratory, he replied "I'll give you the reason why it's a good thing. It's not so much proliferation, it's economic." In Rosner's view, countries that want to develop nuclear power plants will choose the GNEP way because it's cheaper. As for the political control, Rosner said that countries could choose a supplier from among the seven or so advanced nuclear nations—including Russia and China.

As for proliferation, Rosner said: "The key point here is that what GNEP does, if you really put this regime in place—then if someone refuses to be part of it, it's perfectly clear why. It could only be one reason. So at least there's this wonderful element of clarity. With GNEP, if you don't participate, then you basically are interested in proliferation."

And so, we do have clarity: GNEP is about policing nonproliferation, removing national sovereignty, and ensuring technological apartheid, not about advancing nuclear technologies for the benefit of mankind. Much of the U.S. nuclear community has bought into it, along with the fraud of global warming, thus crippling their capability to fight for the kind of nuclear development program that will build the 6,000 nuclear power plants the world needs by the year 2050.[3] Instead of siding with Prometheus, the giver of fire (the atom) to mankind, these supporters of GNEP are working with Zeus to keep Promethus bound.

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1. See "The Beauty of the Nuclear Fuel Cycle," www.21stcenturyscience tech.com/2006_articles/ NuclearFuel.W05.pdf

2. The spent fuel from one 1,000 mw nuclear plant, operated over 40 years, is roughly equivalent to 130 million barrels of oil, or 37 million tons of coal.

3. See "How To Build 6,000 Nuclear Plants by 2050," by James Muckerheide, State Nuclear Engineer of Massachusetts, www.21stcenturyscience tech.com/ Articles%202005/6000NuclearPlants.pdf