

Supercomputer access question unresolved

The State Dept., Defense Dept., and National Science Foundation remain deadlocked on supercomputer restrictions. Such computers are on the restricted export list, but concern that US allies would not vigorously prevent supercomputers sold to them from falling into Soviet hands led the Defense Dept. 18 months ago to propose restrictions on access to supercomputers in this country by foreigners.

The proposed restrictions included limiting what was taught in classrooms about supercomputers and monitoring by university personnel what foreigners were doing when on-line a supercomputer. When made public in summer 1985, the proposals created an uproar in the computing community. The Senior Interagency Group on Technology Transfer, asked to resolve the differences, began meetings to create acceptable policies.

The supercomputer access issue remains unresolved, said Jerry Leach, the State Dept.'s deputy office director for political/military affairs. The National Science Foundation has proposed that the issue be resolved by imposing visa limits on those foreigners the Defense Dept. fears may pass supercomputer technology to the Soviets, who have no supercomputers, said Art Kusinski, the foundation's assistant counsel. The Defense Dept. believes that is insufficient, said George Menas, one of the department's representatives to the interagency group.

But while the question of what to do domestically remains unresolved, the government tentatively has convinced India to accept restrictions on who may use supercomputers sought by India for weather prediction.

India had resisted US licensing procedures that require India to follow certain security procedures so no supercomputer technology would reach the Soviets (the USSR is a major weapons supplier to India), claiming such restrictions violated its national sovereignty.

However, negotiations by State Dept. trade technology representative Robert Dean resulted in a tentative agreement between the two nations that now must be approved by both governments. While the details are classified, the US has accepted that "India has an impeccable record of protecting such technology," said Shiv Mukherjee, spokesman for the Indian Embassy in Washington, DC.

— Galen Gruman, Assistant Editor