10-19-1989

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U.S. Applies Pressure To Prevent Brazilian Acquisition Of Missile Technology

by John Neagle
Category/Department: General
Published: Thursday, October 19, 1989

The Brazilian government solicited bids this year from McDonnell Douglas and Arianespace, a French company, for the launching of two communication satellites, as well as rocket technology toward developing satellite launch capability. An unidentified Brazilian embassy spokesperson told the New York Times that Arianespace presented a proposal which included transfer of technology for its Viking liquid-fueled rocket-motor, used in Ariane's space launch vehicle. An unidentified McDonnell Douglas spokesperson told the Times that instead of offering Brasilia missile technology, the company offered to give Brazilian engineers a chance to work on the space shuttle, and that the company was willing to pay the cost of educating two Brazilian engineers in the US in propulsion technology. Unidentified Bush administration officials were cited as saying that the proposed French sale would violate a 1987 understanding among western nations which states that international cooperation on space programs is permitted "as long as such programs could not contribute to nuclear weapons delivery systems," such as ballistic missiles. The officials said the missile technology should not be provided to the Brazilian space program because Brazil has a history of deriving military rockets from its civilian space program. They added that it would unlikely that safeguards could be implemented to guarantee the rocket technology is not used by the Brazilian military, and thus disseminated to the Middle East through weapons sales. The Bush administration has protested against the sale to the French government. Last week State Department officials visited Paris to emphasize US concerns. An unidentified French Embassy spokesperson told the Times that the 1987 understanding explicitly permitted technology transfer in some instances. He said that France would provide the technology to Brazil only if adequate safeguards were developed to ensure its use for peaceful purposes. Moreover, said the spokesperson, if a decision is made to provide the technology to Brazil, it would be transferred in stages, thereby permitting France to suspend the transfer if it is being misapplied by Brasilia. (Basic data from New York Times, 10/19/89)