

Few of the 79 goods got export licenses. But the study includes no estimate of what items the Soviet bloc got from the U.S. through espionage. Nor is there any estimate of what got past COCOM, the West's leaky strategic export-control group based in Paris.

Defense says that during '83 and '84, the Kremlin wanted U.S. technology to update 14 "key technology clusters." These include automated production for machine tools, computer technology for linking military communications, particle beam and high energy laser energy for their Star

12 who "worked" for UNESCO, six for the Soviet trade mission, four for the scientific and technical section of the Soviet Embassy and two for Tass. If 47 industrial spies were at work in France, how many must there be in San Jose, Calif.?

There's no way to stop every leak of technology, but that's no reason to pull the plug. In light of the Soviets' own priorities, the question is not whether the Export Administration Act is too tough on exports to the Soviet bloc, but whether it's tough enough.

## In Praise of Tip O'Neill

House Speaker Tip O'Neill makes an inviting rhetorical target, embodying as he does the reactionary element of the Democratic Party. But watching his fellow Democrats squirm on Nicaragua since getting the policy they said they wanted, we are starting to think better of the speaker.

We have our problems with Mr. O'Neill's taste in Nicaraguan experts; he has acknowledged a heavy influence from the Maryknoll missionaries. The Maryknolls are active in his constituency, his aunt was a founder of the order. While our tastes run to a foreign policy based on national interests, we can understand and respect a desire to base foreign policy on morality and helping the poor. At the very least, it commands the respect always due to consistency.

Even now that Danny Ortega has packed off to Moscow and feedback on the abandonment of the contras has started to penetrate the Capital Beltway, Speaker O'Neill is staying true to his lights. His policy is no aid to the contras, whom in the past he has branded "butchers and maimers." Speaker O'Neill understands the issue: Do you want the contras to win, yes or no? If you don't, don't give them aid—lethal or nonlethal, through the CIA or the U.N., this fiscal year or next.

If you follow that policy, which is the one Congress in its collective wisdom has now reached, you have to be prepared for the eventuality that Danny Ortega will go to Moscow, that the Sandinistas will consolidate their totalitarian state, that they will export subversion to their neighbors. Speaker O'Neill apparently can contemplate this as the lesser of two evils, but at

this point most of his party is trying to get off the ship.

So we now have proposals for "compromise." Yes, we will aid the contras, but no we will not let them win. It will only be "humanitarian assistance." We will let them get their own bullets, but will give them food enough to stay alive long enough to provide ample targets when the Sandinistas learn how to fly the helicopter gunships the Soviets have supplied. The purpose of the aid has nothing to do with humanitarianism, nothing to do with national interests, and nothing to do with foreign policy. The purpose of the "compromise" is to provide a \$14 million fig leaf for Congress.

With the House Democrats squirming to avoid responsibility for their actions on Nicaragua, the administration ought to step back and draw a few lessons about political tactics. Before the vote it was also willing to sign on for about the kind of "compromise" now being bandied about by the Democrats, and indeed was seemingly surprised when conservative Republicans joined Democrats in voting against the final pile of mush. But each compromise brought further flightiness from the Democrats; signs of reasonableness started to appear only when it seemed they might actually get saddled with blame or credit for the outcome in Nicaragua.

The system works best if an administration offers a policy it thinks will work. Rather than compromise to the extent of getting blamed for an unworkable policy, it should let the opposition accept or reject and bear the consequences. The way you make an opposition responsible is to make it responsible. You should offer no fig leaves, and salutes to those in the opposition, like Speaker O'Neill, who are willing to stand without one.

meeting the TV report was talking about. He said it was absurd to say that scribbles on a note pad during a meeting were necessarily a direct reflection of the scribbler's own views. But trying to stop a scandal story with an appeal to logic is like trying to reason a three-year-old out of wanting a piece of candy. Just as discouraging, Mr. Buchanan thought that someone inside the White House was chief peddler of the accusation, and that the long knives had been unsheathed for him.

Here the story becomes atypical. The charge against Mr. Buchanan was so sleazy, especially in light of his overall pro-Israeli politics, that a number of participants and observers around the affair got mad. As they talked to one another, they found they could piece together which meeting Mr. Buchanan's accusers were talking about and who at the meeting could have seen what he was writing.

The fateful meeting, it turned out, had been a discussion of Bitburg in the White House between presidential staffers and Jewish leaders. The phrase Mr. Buchanan had written, "succumbing to the pressure of the Jews," had been uttered by a Jewish representative arguing that it would be hurtful to everyone for the president to appear to act in response to the power of an organized interest group.

At least one of the outside leaders was among NBC's two sources for its story.

Soon enough Mr. Buchanan knew these things had happened. Almost as soon, the organization leaders who had attended that meeting knew that he knew. Some of them were smart enough to see that if they allowed themselves to be used to get Mr. Buchanan fired, the result could be disastrous for them and their concerns.

Two attendees at the crucial meeting—Max Fisher, honorary chairman of the Republican Jewish Coalition, and Kenneth Bialkin, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations—issued essentially the same message: The Suspicious Scribble had been a combination of note and doodle rather than a revelation of ugliness in Mr. Buchanan's soul.

The dire doodle should of course never have made it into the news in the first place, anymore than a journalist should take to the airwaves with the fact that while talking in my sleep I resolved to set fire to the installations office of my local telephone company. Moreover, the organization leaders involved in this little smear cooperated all too readily with the current anti-conservative campaign to drive Mr. Buchanan from the White House.

But it is hard for decent journalists to stay judicious once a scandal theme lands on the shoulders of a public figure, and hard for citizens with a grievance not to air their complaints about an official they think is thwarting them. More fundamentally at fault are the White House whisperers of this administration and the way they have tried to cut down figures from Haig to Kirkpatrick to Meese to Buchanan.

Journalists are suckers for the conspirators' offers of secrets and exclusives. The newsmen succumb with special ease because the targets of attack are conservatives, whom many reporters readily think