

radioactive material in space. On 16 May 1961, the *New York Times* pointed out that “cautious officials” had split with scientists on use of nuclear devices and that the “problem confronting the Administration...is not so much a technical decision as one of diplomatic, political and psychological considerations.”⁴⁵ On May 19 the *Times* was more specific about the misgivings in certain U.S. government agencies—one article indicated that concern was evident at high levels. While officials believed the vehicle to be safe, concern had arisen, particularly in the State Department, “that in event of an unsuccessful launching, the satellite, with its radioactive parcel, could fall on Cuba or some other Latin-American country” provoking an international incident. Even a successful launch could lead Latin-American countries to “take offense about having radioactive materials flown over their territory.”⁴⁶

In early June hopes of the RTG proponents were high again; and throughout the month, right up to the June launch of Transit-4-A, hopes rose and fell. On June 8, Seaborg reported that he hoped for a reversal of the Space Council's decision but that he was not optimistic that a reversal could be achieved.⁴⁷ By June 23, however, hopes were high as Gilpatric of DOD told the AEC that the Defense Department was making a last attempt to get the State Department to go along with using the SNAP-3 device on Transit-4-A, scheduled for launch on June 27. Finally on the 23d, word came from Gilpatric that approval had been received.⁴⁸

At the working level, perceptions of how it all came about varied. Robert T. Carpenter of the AEC thought that Seaborg asked the JCAE to intercede with the Space Council. Dassoulas believed that the go-ahead came about because Seaborg had dinner with President Kennedy one evening in June and persuaded him to approve the mission. All agreed that lead time was short and the situation hectic as the small RTG team found ways to get their device on the vehicle at Canaveral on time for the scheduled launch.⁴⁹

According to Dassoulas, a fueled SNAP-3A device had already been shipped to the Cape sometime in June when, because of fears it might be launched without approval, an order came: “Return that thing to Washington and store it at the Martin Company.” When the last-second go-ahead was received, the little team scurried to meet the deadline. “One of our people was a Marine Corps pilot, and he checked out a small plane so that he and Carpenter could fly that