

its path to the Moon, saw the need for NASA to recapture its role as leader of a global enterprise; but he, too, felt this enterprise should stress international terrestrial applications "...in education, communication and transportation, looking toward more viable political, social and economic systems for nations willing to work with us in the years ahead."¹⁷

In the RTG program in the last years of the decade, attention centered on remaining commitments to support NASA's unmanned planetary missions and military orbital missions. New initiatives to establish relationships with DOD resulted in the creation of a Space Nuclear Systems Applications Steering Group. RTG program directors recognized that regardless of the nuclear-power and space-program climate, the RTGs faced stiff competition from solar power systems—which were cheaper and avoided the complexities of the RTG safety procedures. A selling point with military users was the reduced vulnerability of RTGs to enemy countermeasures, as compared to solar-cell arrays. Remaining commitments to NASA, however, were for planetary missions that could not use solar cells because the missions went too far from the sun. Missions logged by the program during the last half of the decade were:

	Launch Date
Viking 1 (SNAP-19)	20 August 1975
Viking 2 (SNAP-19)	9 September 1975
LES 8 (MHW)	14 March 1976
LES 9 (MHW)	14 March 1976
Voyager 2 (MHW)	20 August 1977
Voyager 1 (MHW)	5 September 1977

A summary of American space launches in the last half of the decade reveals how selective were the uses of RTGs. According to NASA figures from 1975 to 1980, the United States launched: 77 applications satellites; 23 scientific payloads; and 11 space probes. Of this total, only six carried RTGs. Two RTG launches (the earth-orbital LES military communications satellite launches) are included in the total applications satellites. The other four all flew on space probes—and thus RTGs supplied power for over half of the missions.¹⁸ Clearly, as in earlier applications, the RTGs were reserved for special uses.

Amid the uncertainties of organizational change and public controversy, those heavily involved in space missions persisted in addressing primary tech-