

tives guiding current RTG operations: (1) "To provide the U.S. with a viable nuclear isotope option for space power by continuing development of technology and qualification of static and dynamic isotope power systems"; and (2) "To develop and deliver qualified isotopic energy systems for use on approved U.S. space missions." The plans cited two missions, Galileo and Solar-Polar, both scheduled for launch in May/June 1986. Budget projections in this plan showed marked increases in proposed funding.¹⁰

Rock was optimistic about the future: "Our forecasts are for growth. A NASA planetary series is pretty well defined. The military are showing increased interests. Beyond Galileo and Solar-Polar, NASA is set to start work in 1987 for launches in the 1990s. The military are looking at missions in the early 1990s. We are in a period of planning and development for these missions." Rock indicated that the latest developments in static RTGs for such missions were concentrating on a new device beyond the General Purpose Heat Source (GPHS) RTG to be used on Galileo and Solar-Polar. The latest generation RTG was called "Modular Isotope Thermoelectric Generator" (MTG), and the modules for this device—which facilitated fine tuning on lower-power modules—were 20 to 25 watt units.¹¹

The supportive thrust of an overall long-range national endeavor was missing from the larger picture of space programs. Space advocates recognized that demonstrations of a quick, dollar and cents, return on investment were not feasible in space explorations and felt the need for visionary leadership willing to take political risks for potential long-term payoffs.¹²

Few in the lay public, or in the technical inner circles, expected or wanted another race in space. Those with an abiding interest in the space-RTG program hoped that past experiences would lead to a better appreciation of the value of space exploration. In *Distant Encounters*, Mark Washburn quoted one project scientist as saying that Voyager had made us "human beings [that] now measure a billion kilometers in dimension." Washburn concluded:

Voyager gave us a glimpse of all that lies beyond us, and the experience of Voyager gave us a new appreciation of what is within us . . .¹³

As RTG technical developments went forward, the program was prepared to make new space achievements possible.