



The two containment buildings (center) and two of the cooling towers (background) of the Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy

responding to the findings of the Kemeny Commission, also stressed that “we cannot shut the door on nuclear power for the United States.” But, he added, nuclear power is an energy source of last resort. Once the Nation had reached its goals “on conservation, on the direct use of coal, on development of solar power and synthetic fuels, and enhanced production of American oil and natural gas,” Carter observed, “then we can minimize our reliance on nuclear power.”⁶⁶ The future envisioned by the Carter Administration for nuclear power was thus somewhat murky, but what was clear in the immediate aftermath of Three Mile Island was that the accident had only further complicated matters for an administration struggling to deal with an emerging energy crisis.

ENERGY CRISIS REDUX

President Carter addressed the Nation concerning the renewed energy crisis on April 5,

1979. Calling on Americans to join “our battle for energy security,” he declared that the energy crisis was real, with American national strength “dangerously dependent on a thin line of oil tankers stretching half-way around the Earth.” The President observed that there was no single answer to the crisis, and, in a highly detailed and complex prescription, he demanded greater national effort in production, conservation, and the use of new energy sources through advanced technology. Nevertheless, the major thrust of the President’s remarks was evident: controls over the price of oil produced in the United States should be reduced gradually until the domestic price equals the international price. This would reduce the consumption and increase the domestic production of oil. To reduce the profits oil companies would realize from price decontrol, Carter proposed a windfall profits tax. Castigating the oil producers, he warned that “as surely as the Sun will rise tomorrow, the oil companies can be expected to fight to