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U.S. Study of Atom Sale To Reds Puzzles London

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LONDON, May 29—Reports that Washington is considering a Rumanian request to buy two atomic power reactors to Rumania have caused surprise and puzzlement in Britain.

Early this year, the Rumanians approached British atomic firms with inquiries about buying a British reactor. The British government took the line that there was nothing to discuss because atomic supplies are on the Allied strategic embargo list. The commercial companies turned the Rumanians down.

Broached in Talks

The British have been surprised at what appears to be a rather more interested U.S. attitude to a similar Rumanian request made in Washington. The idea of purchasing an atomic reactor from the U.S. was first broached by the Rumanians in September and was brought up again by a Rumanian trade mission in talks last week at the State Department.

So far as is known, there have been no official consultations between London and Washington on the subject. But if Washington decides to consider a sale, it is clear that the British will take it as a policy reversal permitting them to reconsider items on the embargo list.

No Reason Seen

Experts here are extremely puzzled at the Rumanian request in any case. The country is rich in oil and has hydroelectric power. It is hard to see why it would want an atomic reactor.

[In Washington, a State Department spokesman confirmed that atomic power re-

actors are on the Allied list of strategic goods embargoed for sale to Communist nations. He said such a sale would require "special treatment." He added that the Administration "has made no decision whatsoever yet on the question."]

There is some temptation to consider that it might be useful for the West to promote the independence of Communist countries from Moscow by moving into the atomic field, where the Russians have held an extremely tight rein in their bloc. And, normally, Britain is eager to expand trade.

But serious dangers of providing even somewhat dissident Communist countries with atomic know-how and material are also appreciated here. London is watching for Washington's decision with close interest.