D-^{3}He Magnetic Fusion Space Propulsion

John F Santarius

Fusion Technology Institute

University of Wisconsin

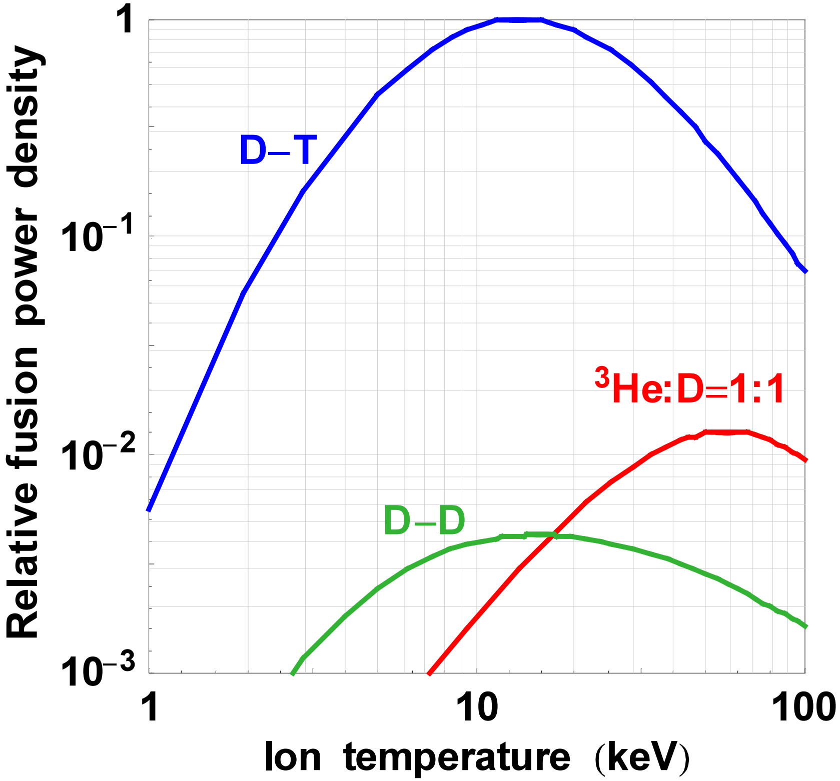
20th International Space Development Conference

Albuquerque, New Mexico

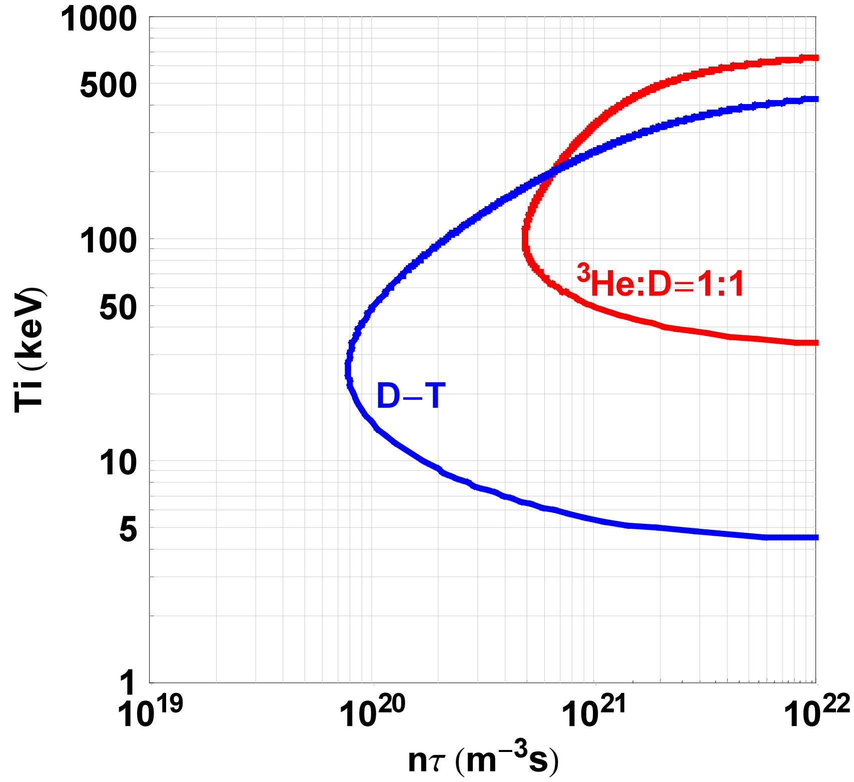
May 24-28, 2001

Physics Viewpoint:
D-^{3}He Fuel Requires High β†, nτ, and T

Power density



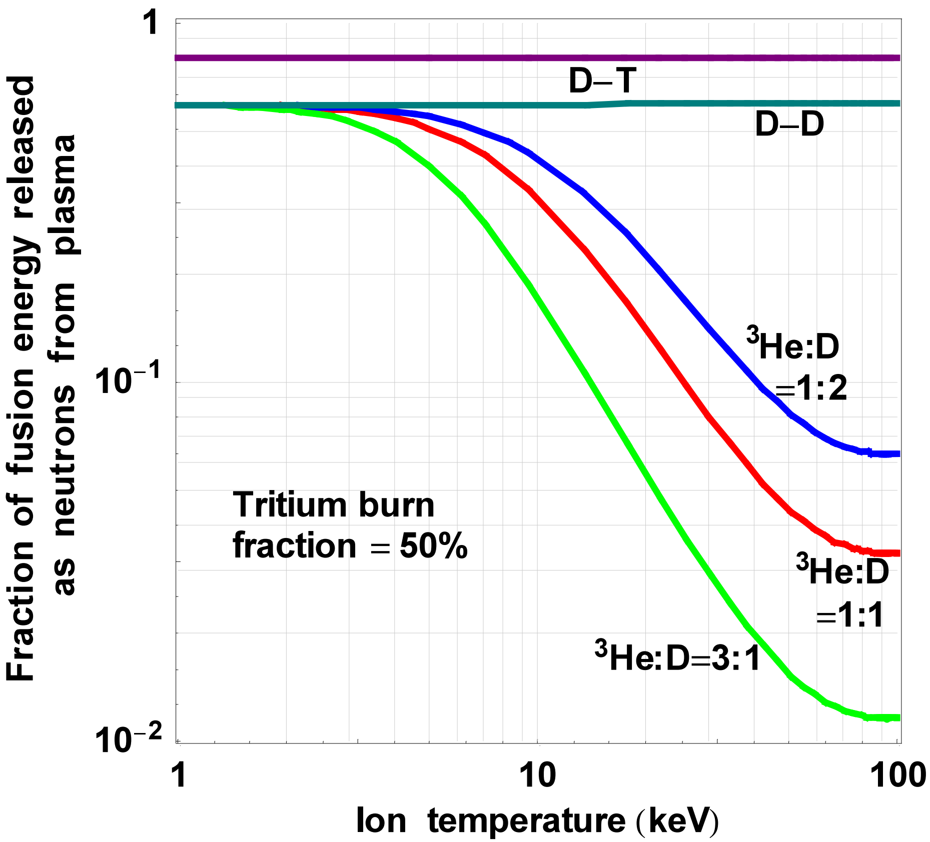
Confinement



† β = plasma pressure/magnetic field pressure.

Engineering Viewpoint: D-^{3}He Fuel and High β Relax Constraints

- Many configurations can increase fusion core B fields, gaining power density due to the $\beta^2 B^4$ scaling.
- Reduced neutron flux allows
  - Smaller radiation shields
  - Smaller magnets
- Increased charged-particle flux allows direct energy conversion to thrust or electricity



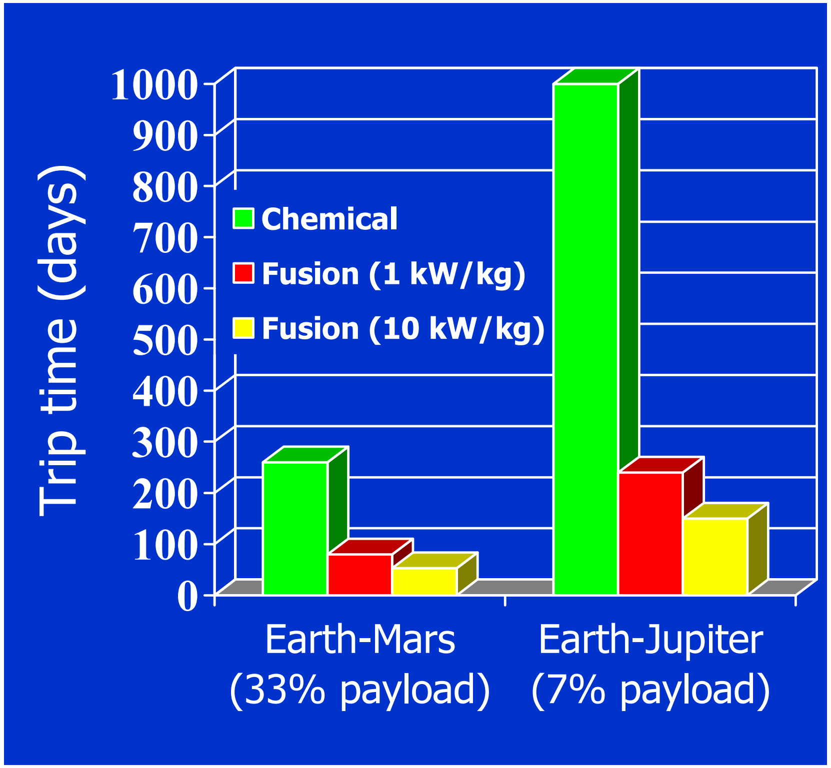
Predicted Specific Power of D-^{3}He Magnetic Fusion Rockets is 1-10 kW/kg

- Prediction based on reasonably detailed magnetic fusion rocket studies performed during the past fifteen years.
- Rationale for this performance supported by J.F. Santarius and B.G. Logan, “Generic Magnetic Fusion Rocket,” *Journal of Propulsion and Power* **14**, 519 (1998).
- Development of high-temperature superconductors should reduce the power-plant mass.
  - Reduced refrigerator mass for magnet coolant.
  - Reduced shielding, because more magnet heating can potentially be tolerated before quenching.

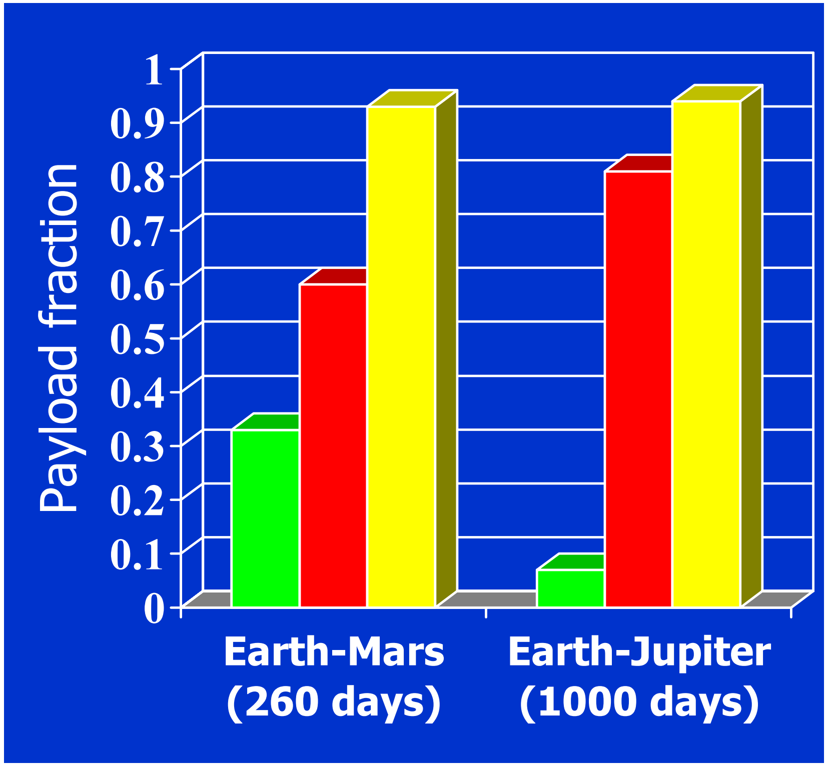
At the Predicted α=1-10 kW/kg, Fusion Propulsion Would Enable Attractive Solar-System Travel

- **Comparison of trip times and payload fractions for chemical and fusion rockets**

Fast human transport



Efficient cargo transport

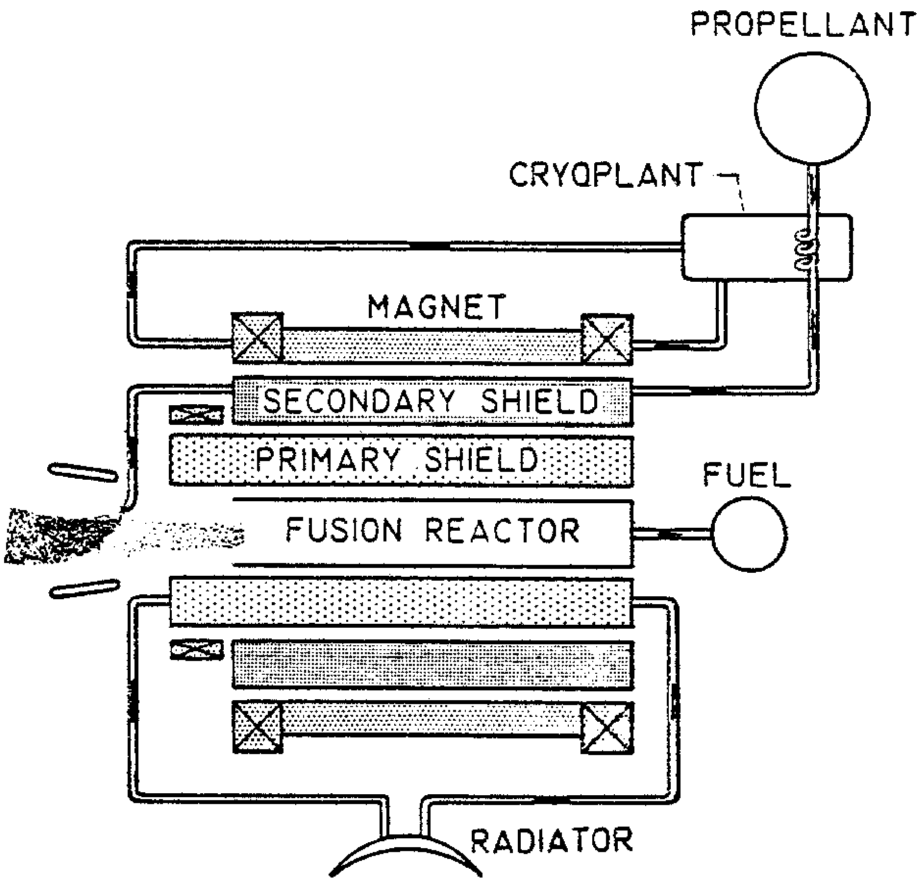


Earliest D-^{3}He Reactor Design Was a Fusion Rocket

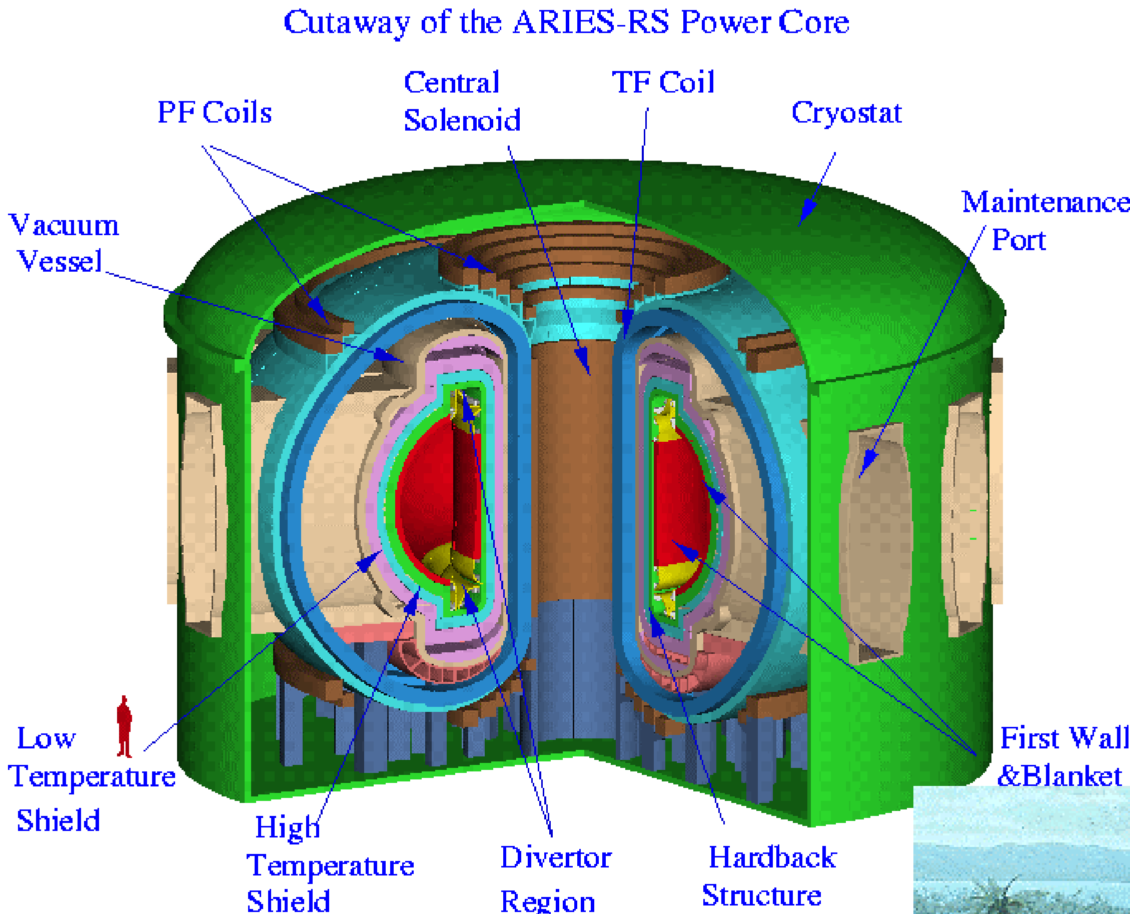
G.W. Englert,
NASA Glenn Research Center
New Scientist (1962)

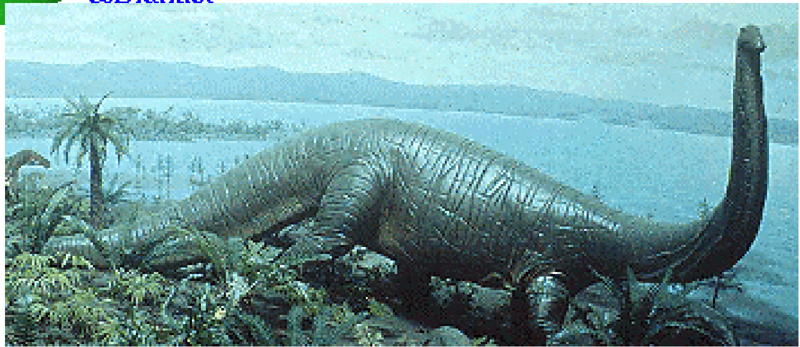
"If controlled thermonuclear fusion can be used to power spacecraft for interplanetary flight it will give important advantages over chemical or nuclear fission rockets.

The application of superconducting magnets and a mixture of deuterium and helium-3 as fuel appears to be the most promising arrangement."

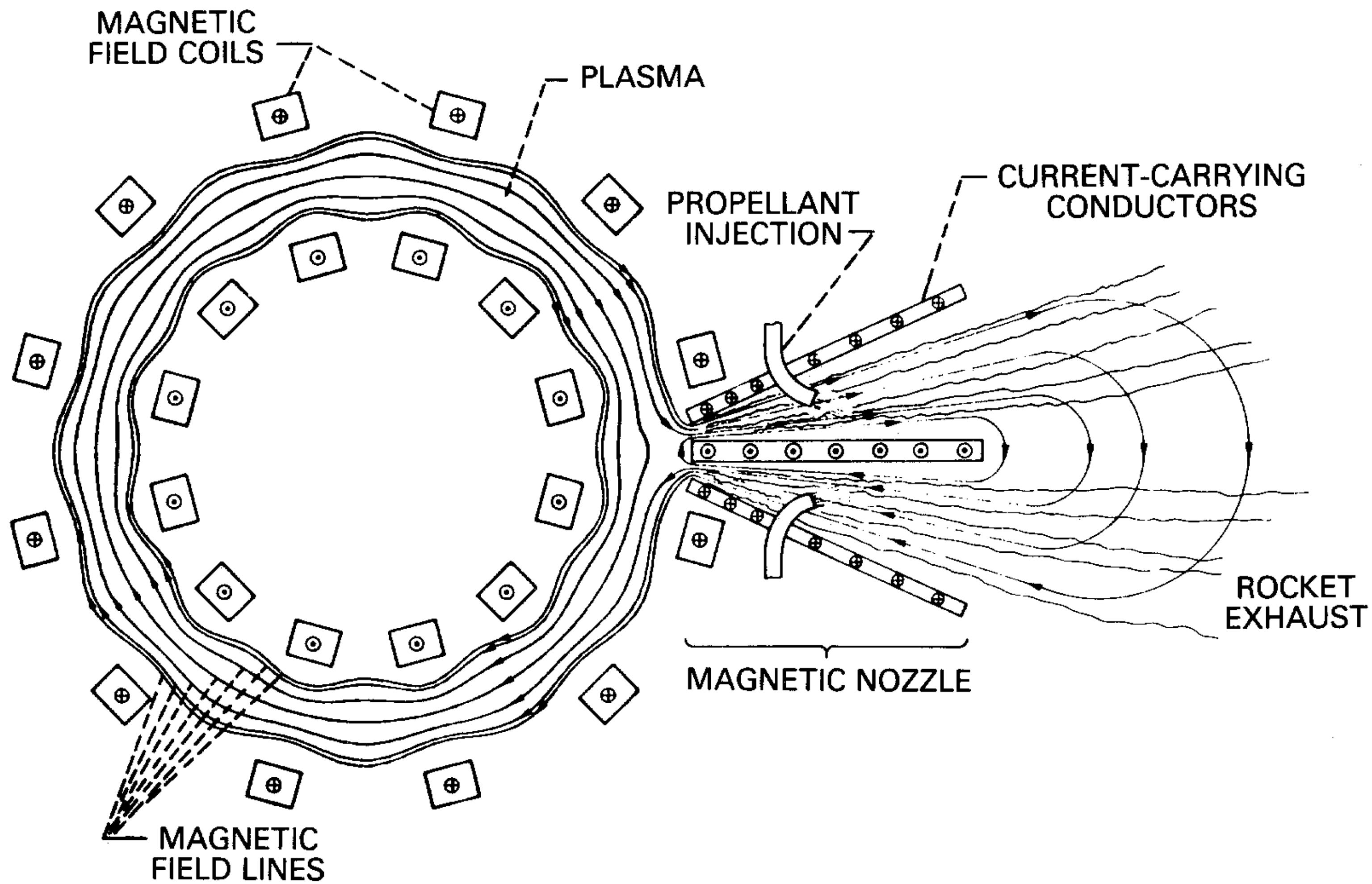


Conventional Tokamaks Have High Mass





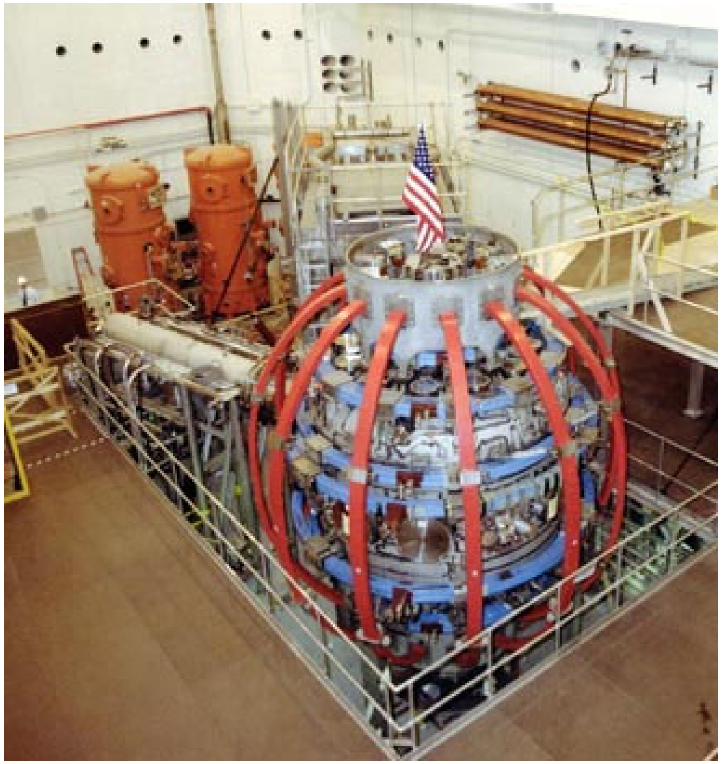
EFBT Toroidal Fusion Rocket
J. Reece Roth, NASA Lewis, 1972



Spherical Torus Space Propulsion

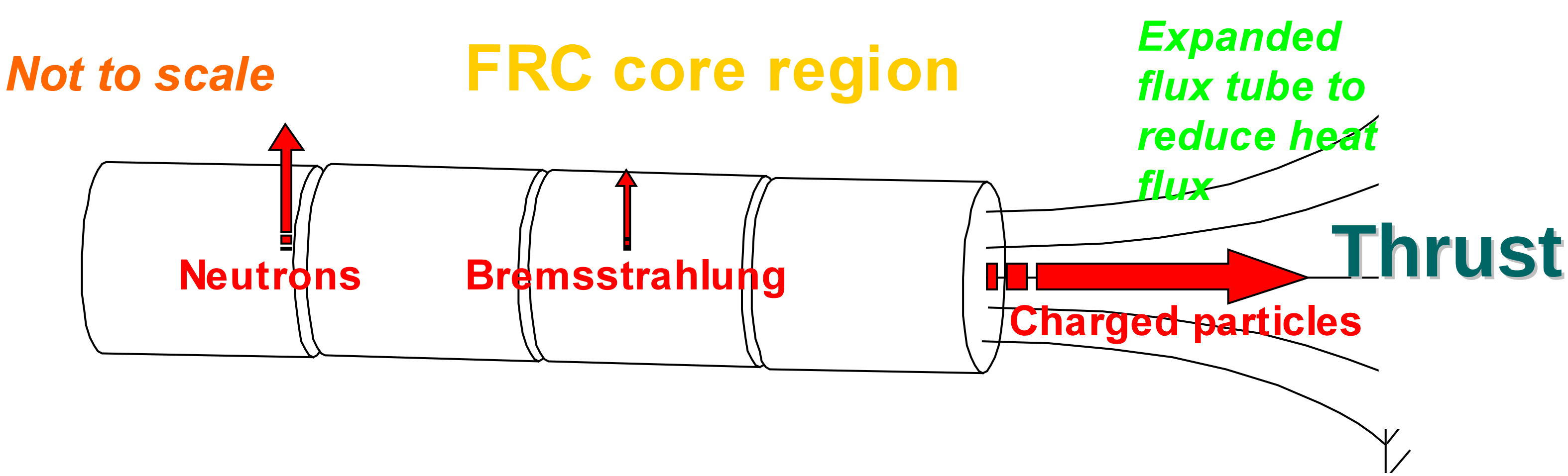
- ST's give high β, implying high power density.
- Crucial problems are recirculating power and providing thrust.
- Martin Peng has suggested helicity *ejection*, and the concept will be tried on NSTX.

Princeton Plasma Physics Lab NSTX experiment



Plasma Power Flows in Linear Devices Differ Significantly from Flows in Toroidal Devices

- Power density can be very high due to $\beta^2 B^4$ scaling, but first-wall heat fluxes would remain manageable.
  - Charged-particle power transports from internal plasmoid to edge region and then out ends of fusion core.
  - Magnetic flux tube would be expanded in end chamber to reduce heat and particle fluxes, so charged-particle transport power only slightly impacts the first wall.

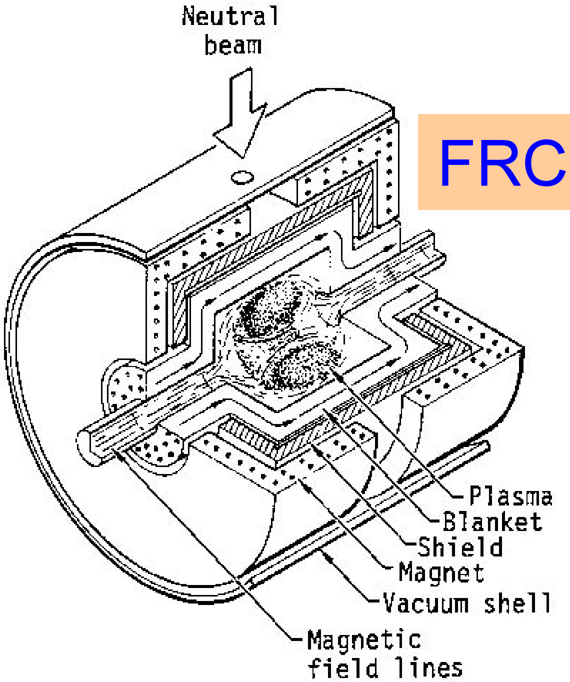


Linear Geometry Greatly Facilitates Engineering

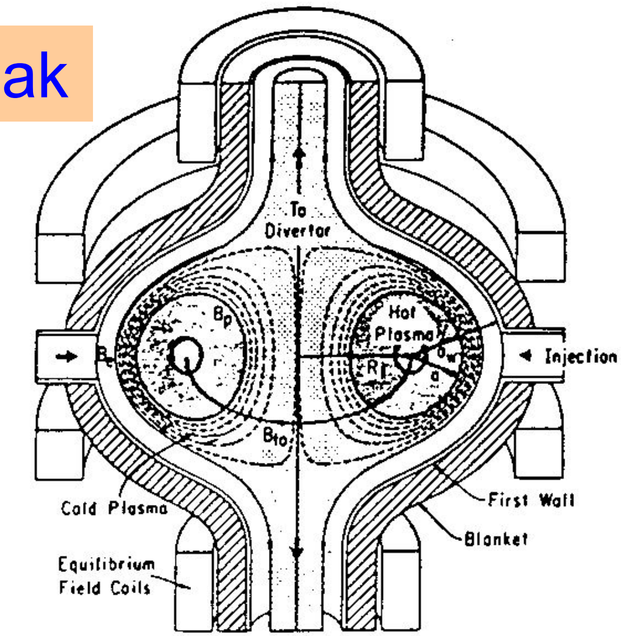
- Steady-state heat flux is broadly spread and due almost exclusively to bremsstrahlung radiation power.
- Relatively small peaking factor along axis for bremsstrahlung and neutrons.
- Maintenance of single-unit modules containing blanket, shield, and magnet should be relatively easy, improving reliability and availability.
- Considerable flexibility and space exist for placement of pipes, manifolds, etc.
- Direct conversion of transport power to thrust by a magnetic nozzle would increase efficiency.

Several Concepts with Linear External Magnetic Fields Have Been Investigated for Space Propulsion

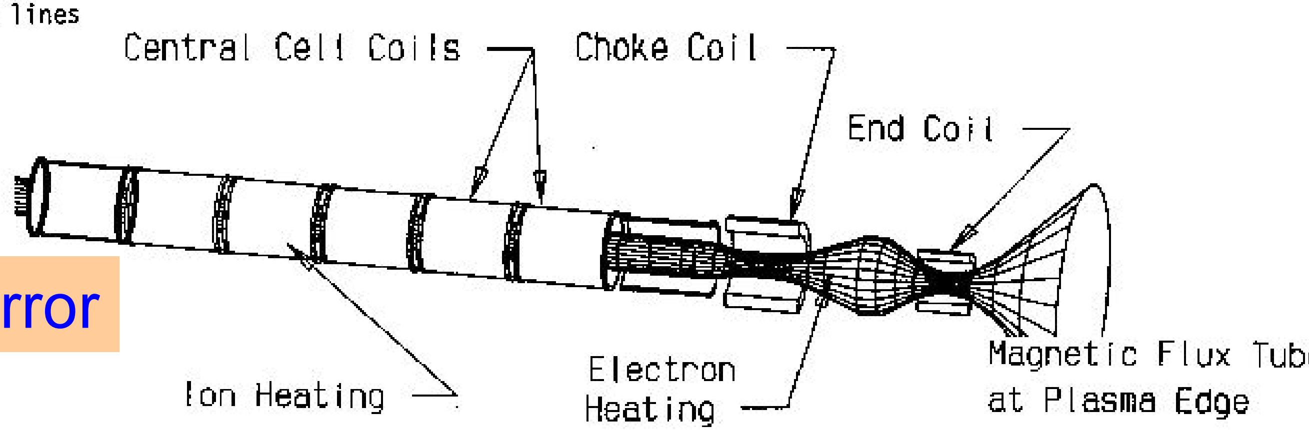
FRC



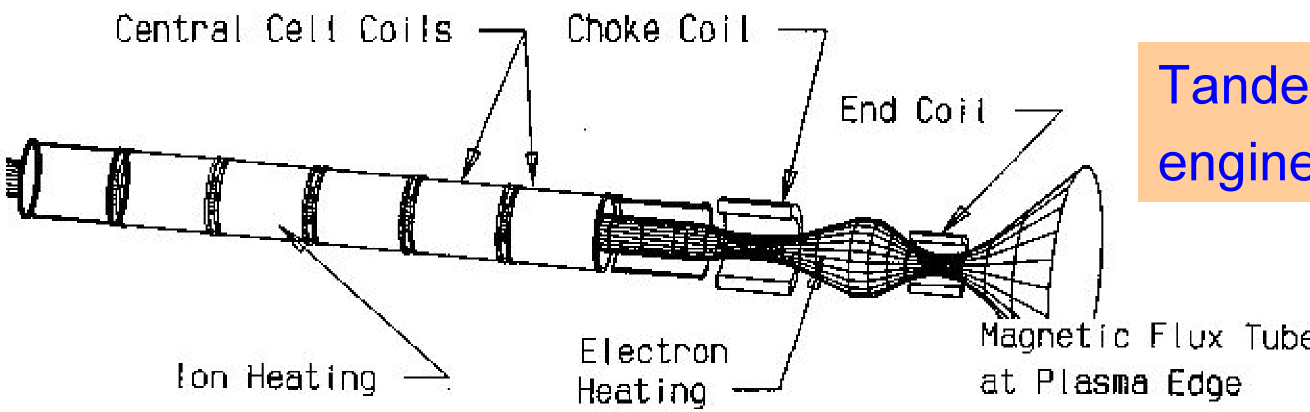
Spheromak



Tandem mirror



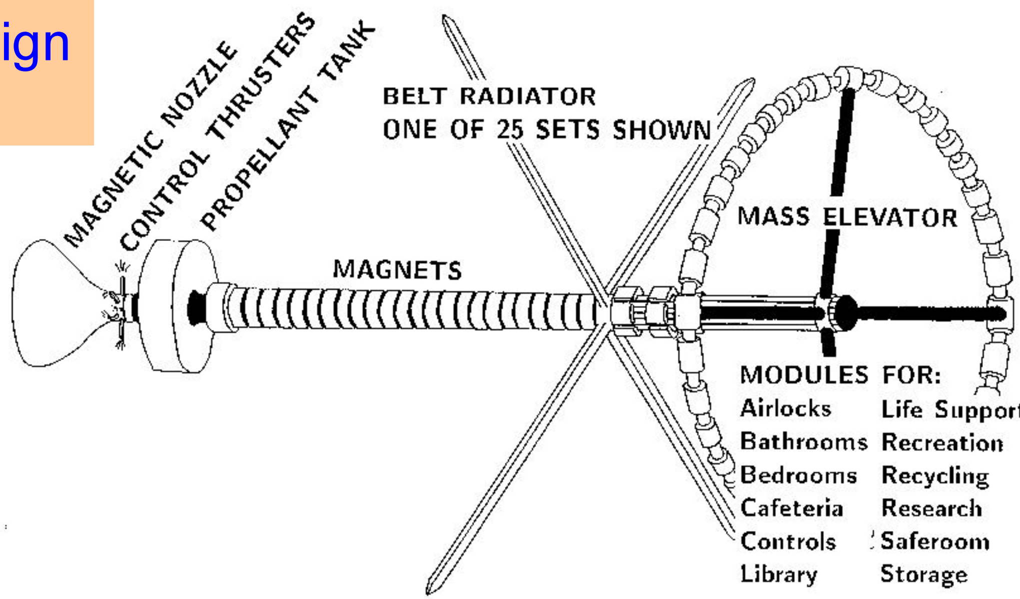
D-^{3}He Space-Propulsion Tandem Mirror



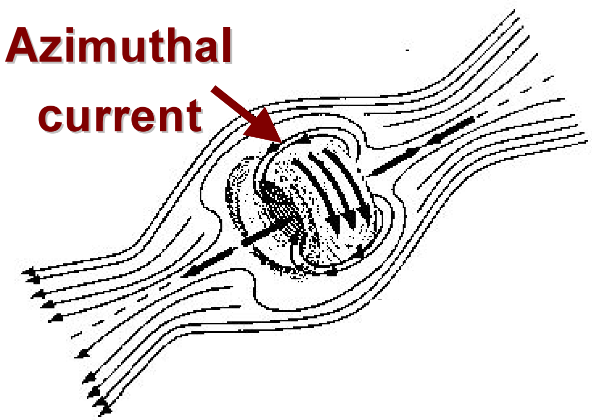
Tandem mirror engine

Tandem mirror rocket design by UW EMA 569 students

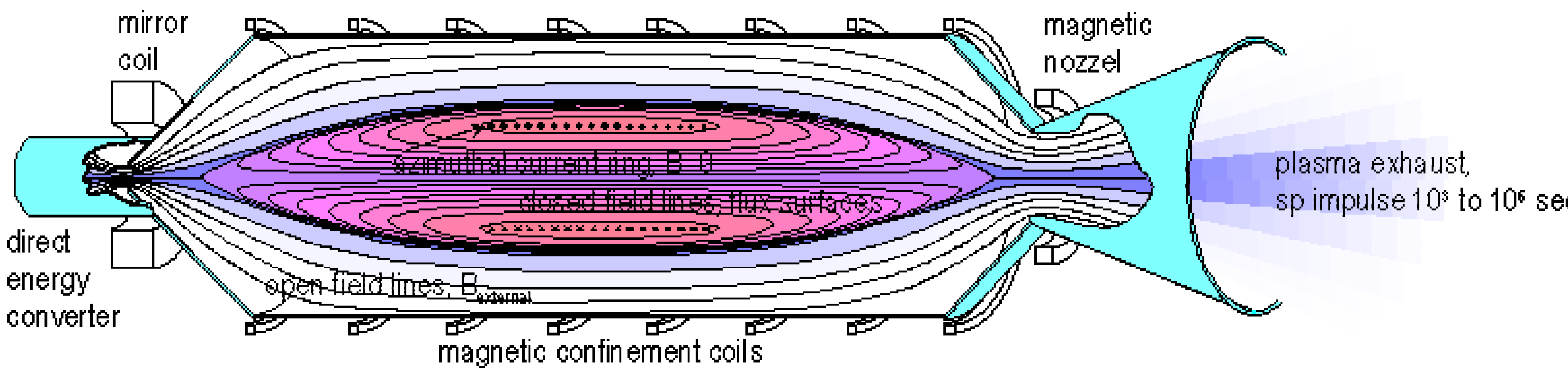
Specific power	1.2 kW/kg
Thrust power	1500 MW
Length	113 m
Ave. outer radius	1 m
Core B field	6.4 T



Field-Reversed Configurations (FRC) Would Be Attractive for Space Applications



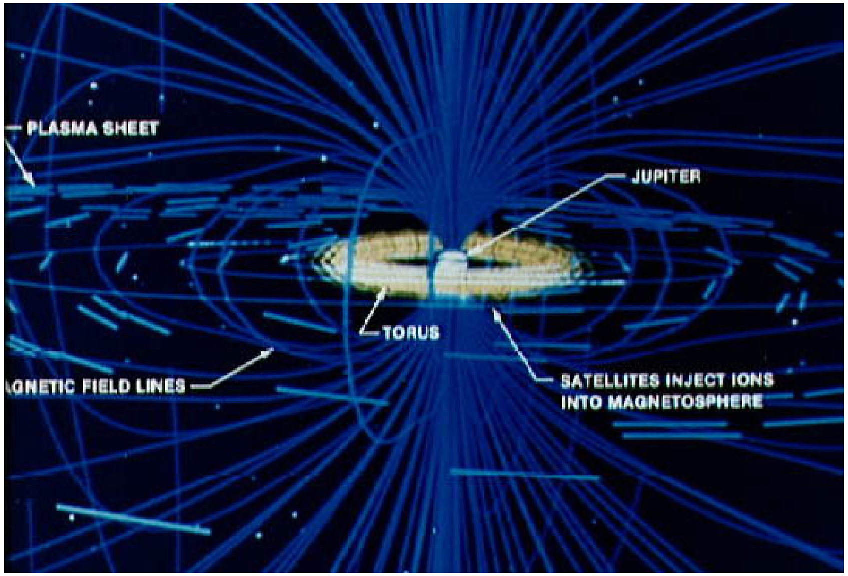
- High $\beta \equiv P_{plasma}/P_{B\text{-field}}$
- Linear external B field
- Cylindrical geometry
- RMF current drive



FRC as Power Source and Ion Engine for High Energy Space Missions

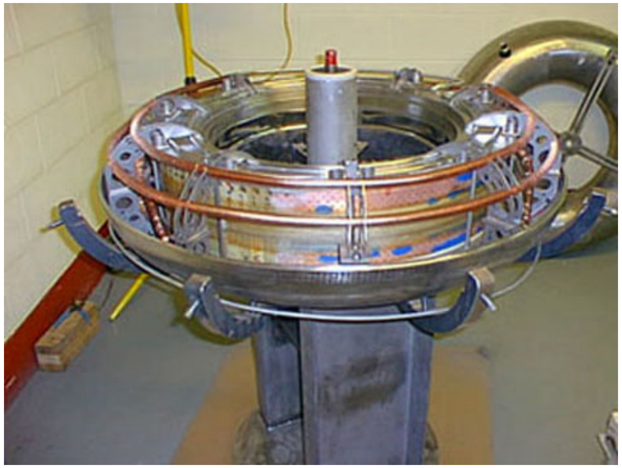
From Univ. of Washington web page for the Star Thrust Experiment (STX):
www.aa.washington.edu/AERP/RPPL/STX.html

The Dipole Configuration Offers a Relatively Simple Design That an MIT/Columbia Team Is Testing

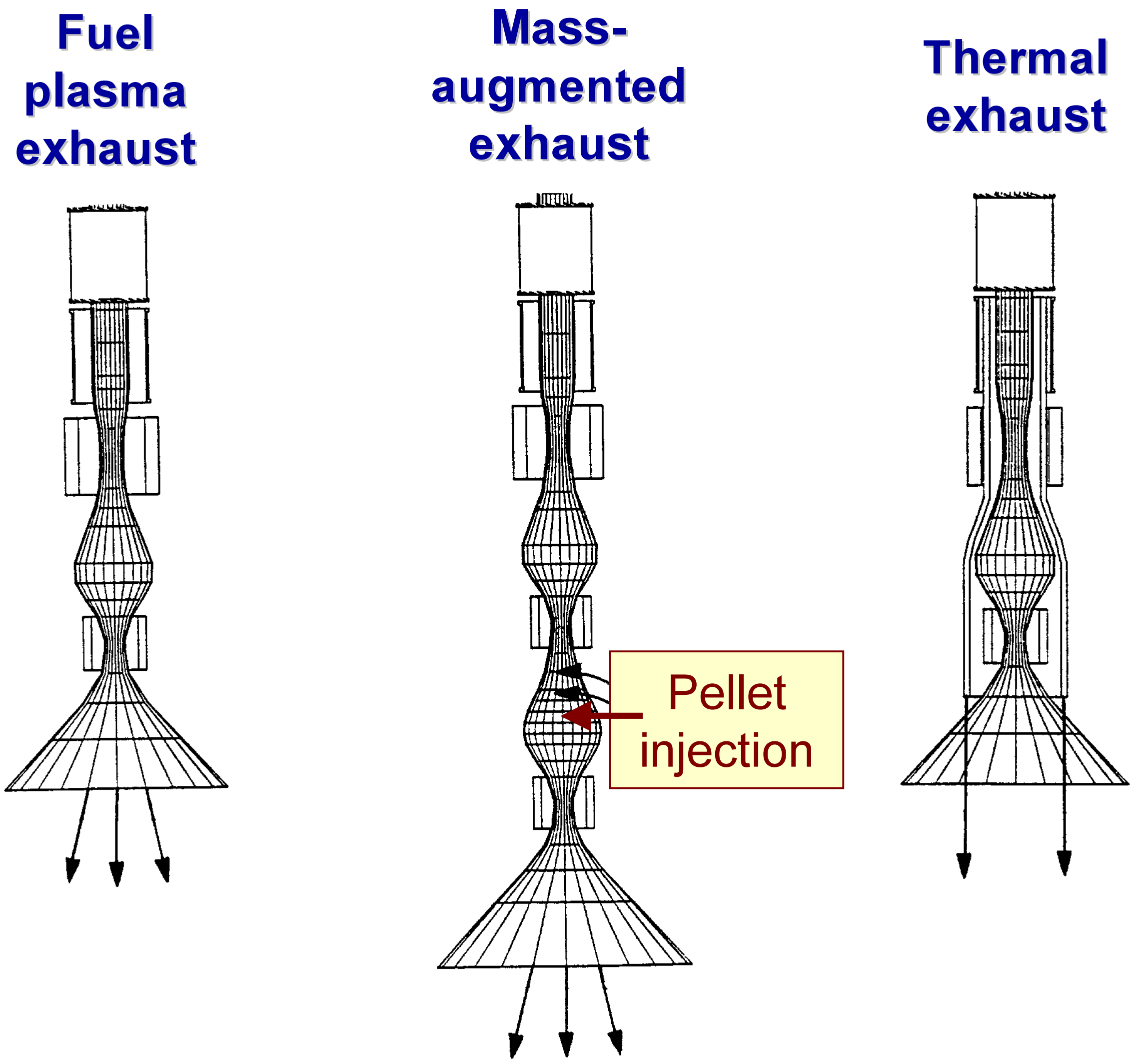


Io plasma torus around Jupiter

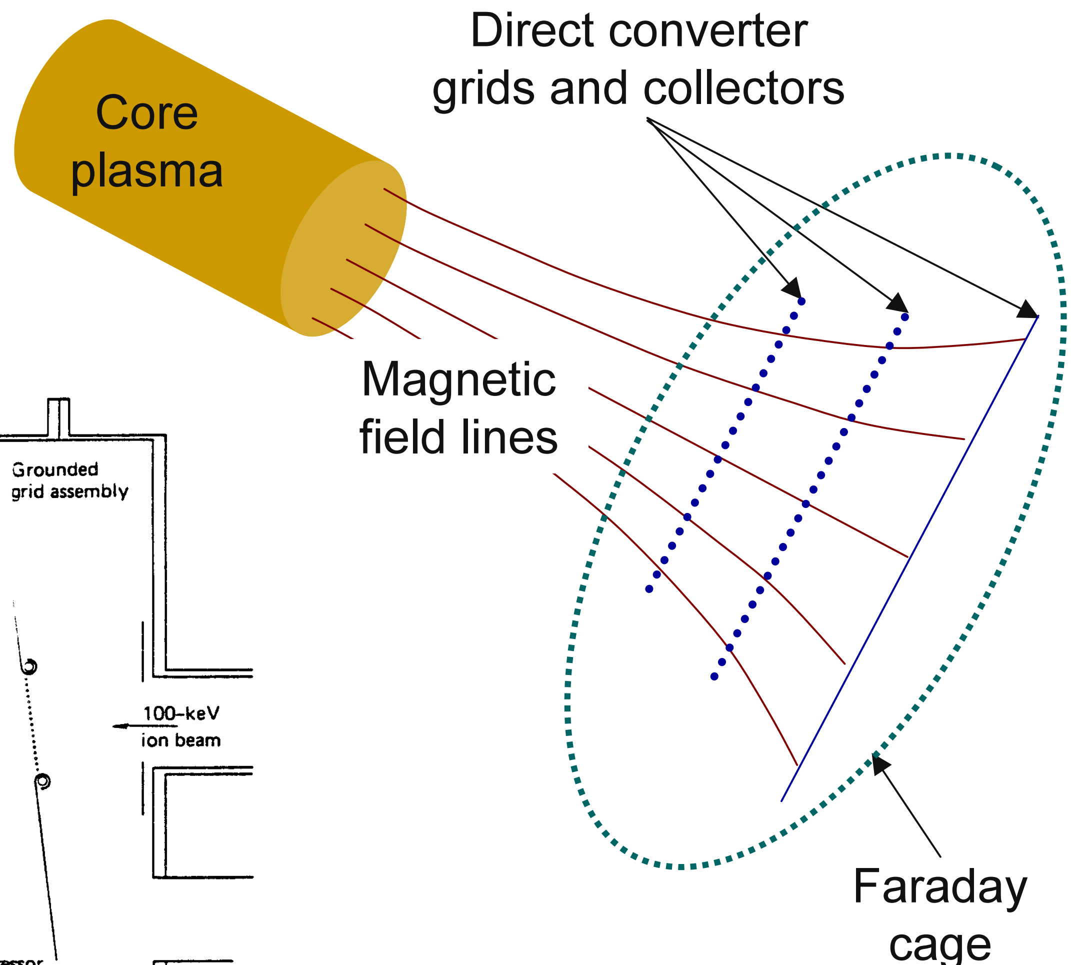
LDX experiment
(under construction at MIT)



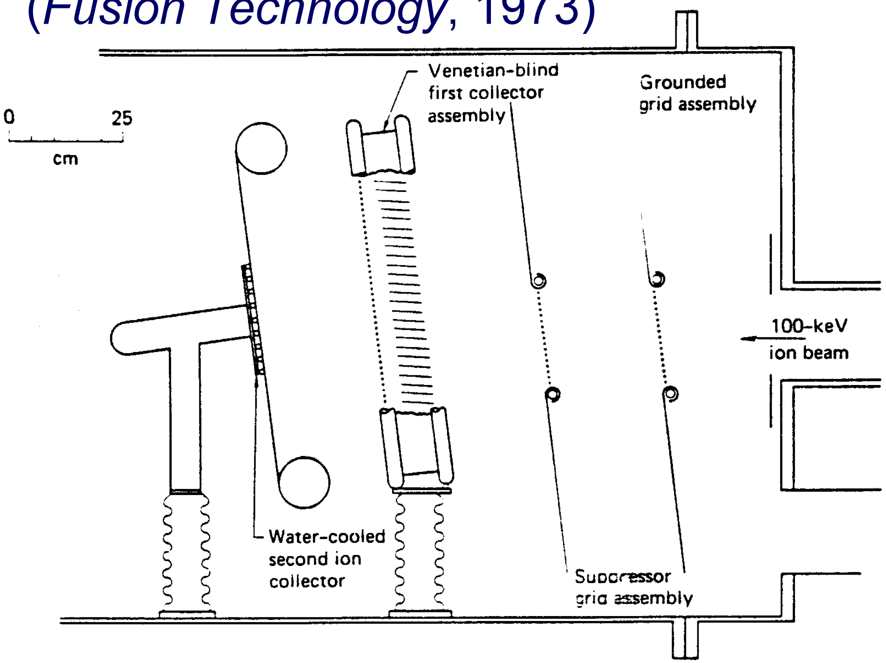
D-^{3}He Fusion Propulsion Could Provide Flexible Thrust Modes



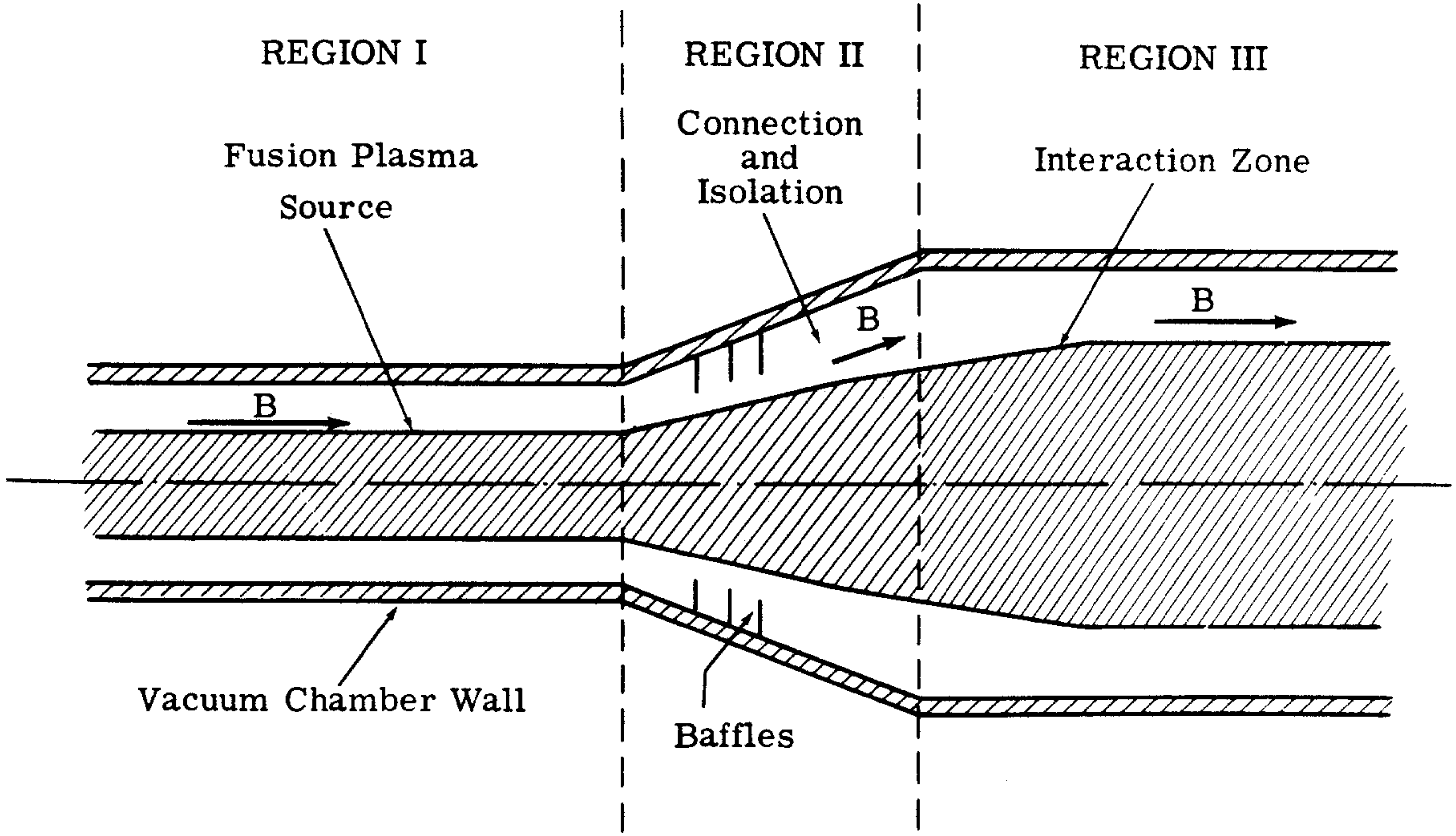
Direct Conversion to Electricity Could Take Advantage of the Natural Vacuum in Space



Barr-Moir experiment, LLNL
(*Fusion Technology*, 1973)



Plasmas Provide Many Materials Processing Capabilities



- B.J. Eastlund and W.C. Gough, "The Fusion Torch--Closing the Cycle from Use to Reuse," WASH-1132 (US AEC, 1969).

Summary

- Sufficient terrestrial ^3He exists for R&D, while lunar ^3He could fuel fusion applications for millennia.
- D-^3He physics requires continued physics progress.
- D-^3He engineering appears manageable.
- Successful development of D-^3He fusion would provide attractive propulsion, power, and materials processing capabilities.