NUCLEAR ENGINEERING
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Experimental Characterization of Pu Separation by PUREX Process on a Low-Burnup, Pseudo-Fast-Neutron Irradiated DUO_2 for Product Decontamination Factors and Nuclear Forensics

A PhD. Prelims Defense by: Paul Mendoza

Chair: Dr. Sunil Chirayath

Committee Members: Dr. Sean McDeavitt
Dr. Craig Marianno
Dr. Cody Folden III.

Monday, February 27, 2017, 10:00 am
AIEN 304

TEES | TEXAS A&M ENGINEERING EXPERIMENT STATION

NUCLEAR SECURITY SCIENCE & POLICY INSTITUTE

Outline

Motivation

- Current Events
  - Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
  - Non-safeguarded reactors
  - Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
- Past Events
  - Septemer 11, 2001
- Limited scope of IAEA safeguards
- "the awful arithmetic of the atomic bomb" [1]
- Need for improved forensic capabilities [2, 3, 4]

Definitions

- Special Nuclear Material (SNM)
  - Plutonium, ^{233}U, or ^{235}U
- Nuclear Forensics
  - The investiative activity that surrounds the search for attributes of undetermined radioactive specimens for the purpose of attribution.
- SNM origin attributes/indicators
  - Indicators or clues for SNM origin attribution. Examples include burnup, fluence rate, initial fuel enrichment, fuel age, and fast-to-thermal irradiation ratios
- Decontamination Factors (DF)
  - A measure of the effectiveness with which a product is decontaminated from a contaminant

$$DF_j = \frac{\frac{c_j}{c_{Pu}}\Big|_{\text{initial}}}{\frac{c_j}{c_{Pu}}\Big|_{\text{final}}}$$

National Context

"The United States has developed a nuclear forensics capability that has been demonstrated in real-world incidents of **interdicted materials** and in exercises of actions required after a nuclear detonation. The committee, however, has concerns about the program and finds that without strong leadership, careful planning, and additional funds, these capabilities will decline" [2]

Major areas of concern include:

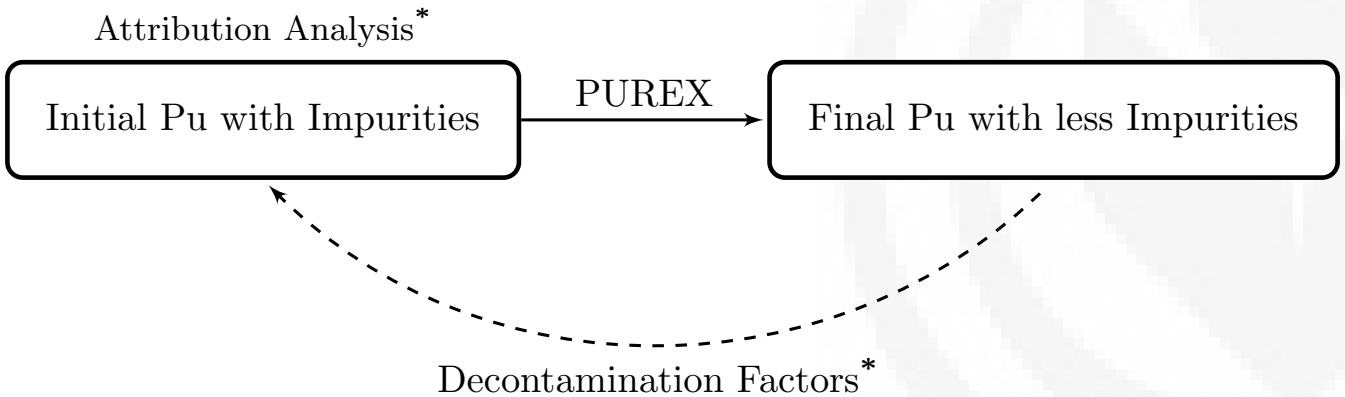
- Organization
- Sustainability
- **Workforce and Infrastructure**
- **Procedures and Tools**

Forensic Context

- Nature of inverse problems
- Plutonium purification necessary for weapons production

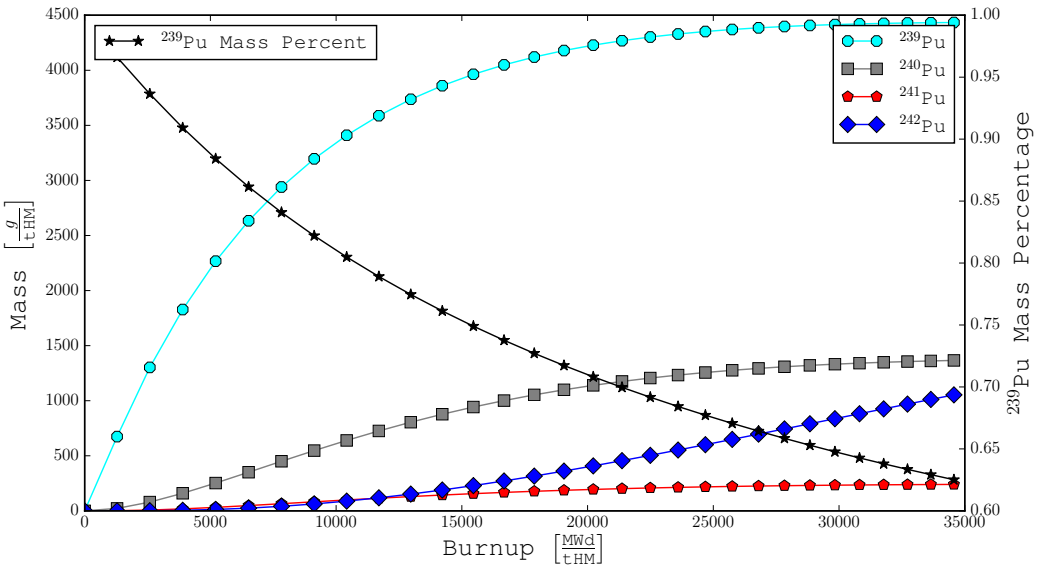
$$^{238}U + n \rightarrow ^{239}U \xrightarrow[T_{1/2}=23\text{ min}]{\beta^-} ^{239}Np \xrightarrow[T_{1/2}=2\text{ d}]{\beta^-} ^{239}Pu$$

- Attribution for unpurified Pu has been previously studied [5, 6, 7]



Nuclear Context

- Weapons-grade Pu can be extracted from reactor discharged fuel with a burnup of about 1 (GWD/tU)
- Pu isotopes produced in irradiated fuel can vary
- Two examples of reactors which can intentionally discharge low burned fuel for extracting weapon-grade Pu are:
  - Fast Breeder Reactor, CANDU Reactor



Chemical Context

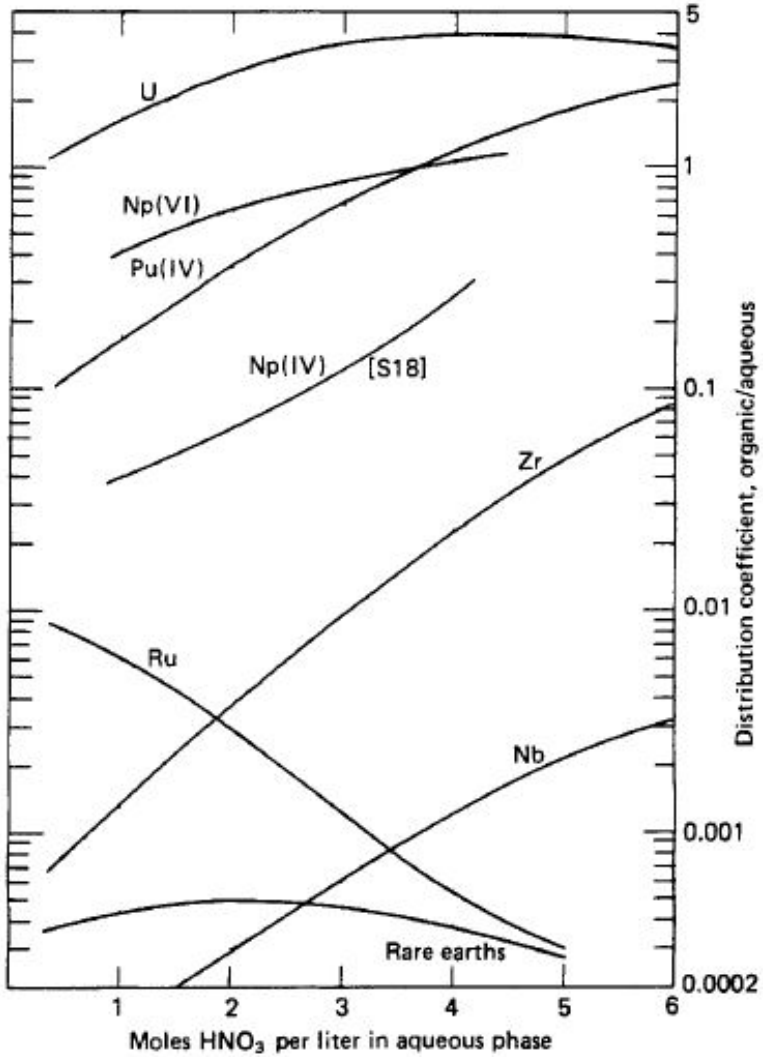
- Plutonium Uranium Redox EXtraction
  - Liquid-liquid solvent extraction
  - Many stages:
- Distribution Coefficient (D): The ratio between the organic and aqueous phases (aka: D-values)

$$D = \frac{c_o}{c_{aq}}$$

- Specific element to element
- Vary widely with:[8]
  - Composition of phases
  - Solution saturation
  - Temperature of the solvent
- The fraction of mass, f_o deposited in the organic phase, assuming a volume ratio between the aqueous and organic

Chemical Context

- Attribution for unpurified Pu has been previously studied [5, 6, 7]
- Interdicted Pu would likely have been processed
- Lack of literature on decontamination factors and distribution coefficients for useful forensic elements (Cs, Sb, Eu, Rb, Sr, Nd, Pm, and Sm)

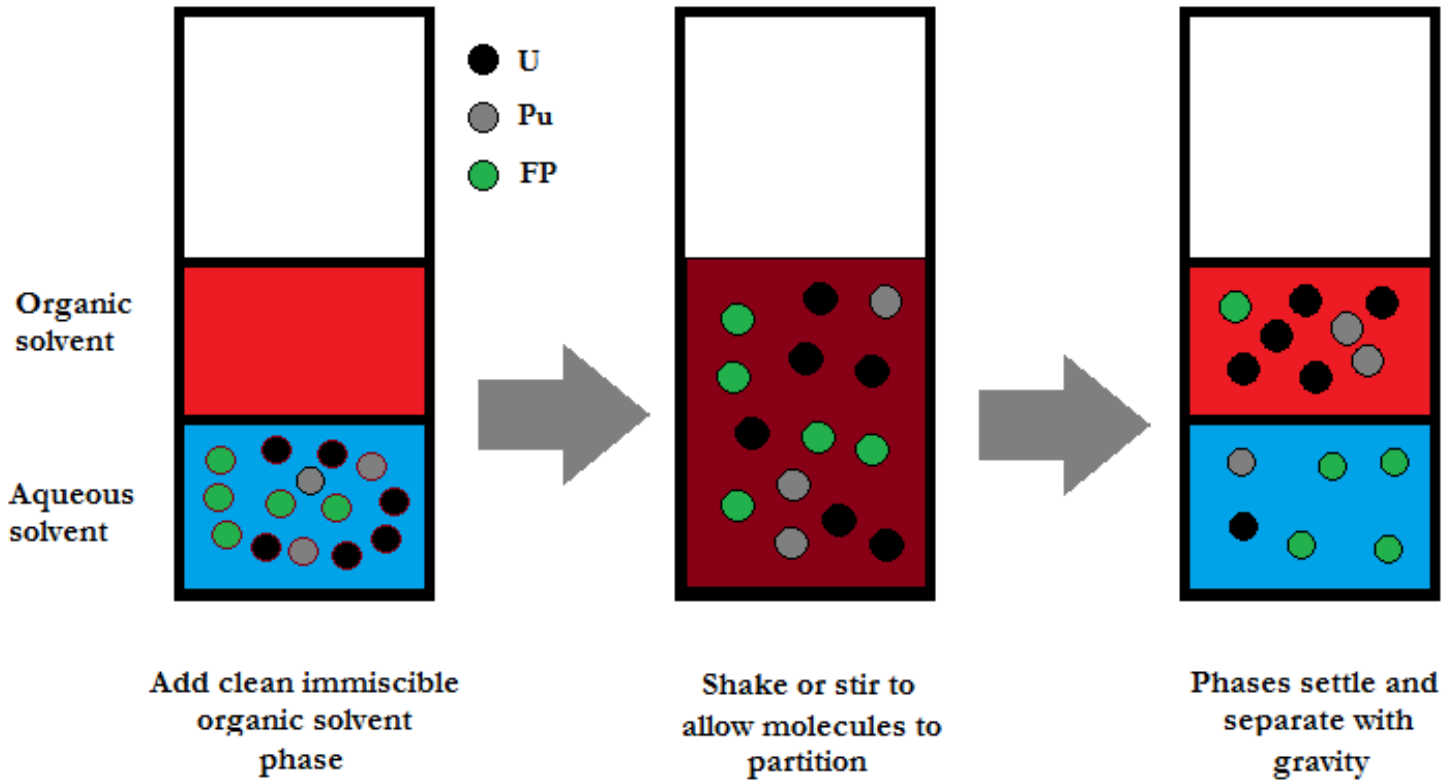


Adapted from Stoller[8]

Extraction

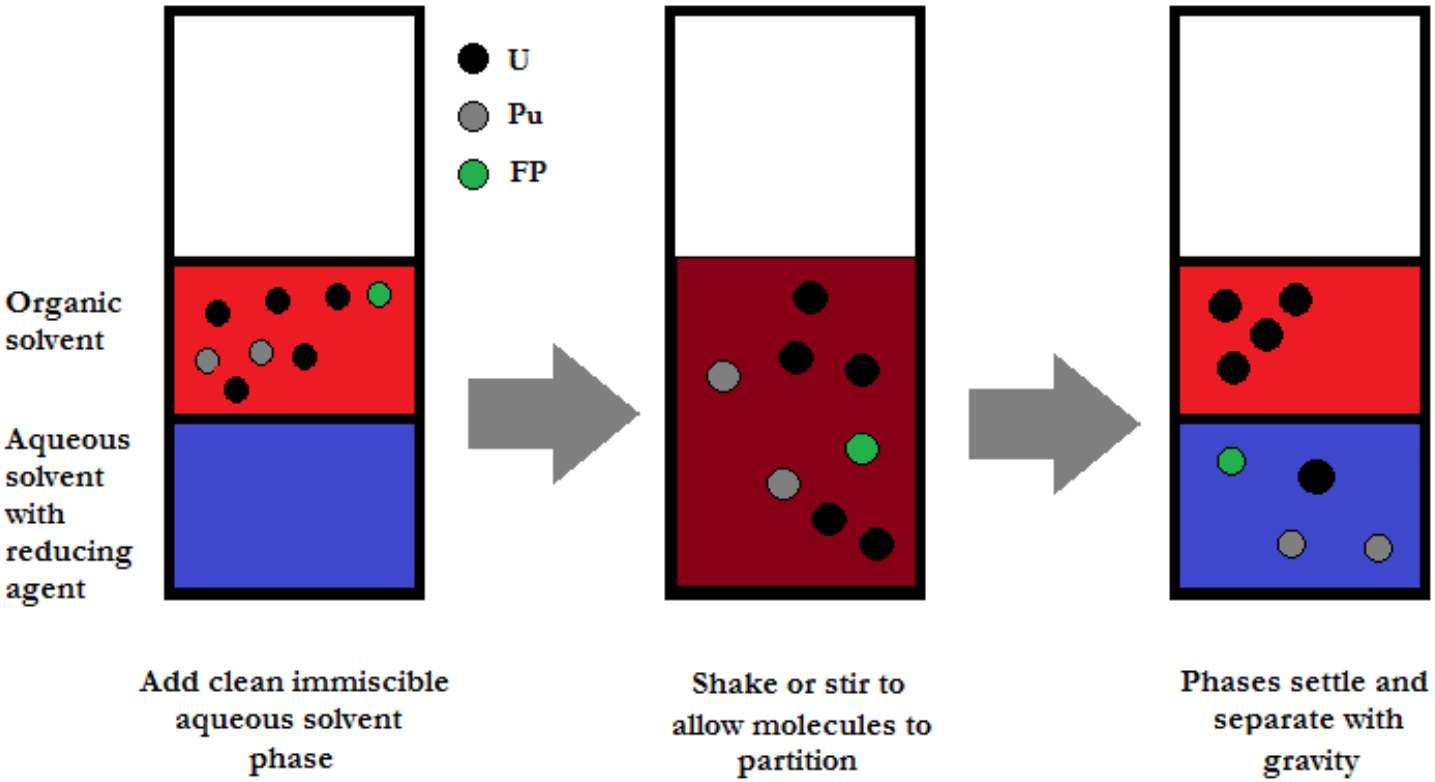
$$UO_{2(aq)}^{2+} + 2NO_{3(aq)}^{-} + 2TBP_{(o)} \leftrightarrow UO_2(NO_3)_2 \cdot 2TBP_{(o)}$$ [9]

$$Pu_{(aq)}^{4+} + 4NO_{3(aq)}^{-} + 2TBP_{(o)} \leftrightarrow Pu(NO_3)_4 \cdot 2TBP_{(o)}$$



Back-Extraction

$$Pu(NO_3)_4(TBP)_{2(o)} + Fe^{2+}_{(aq)} \leftrightarrow Pu^{3+}_{(aq)} + 4NO^{-}_{3(aq)} + 2TBP_{(o)}$$ [10]



Distribution Coefficients - The Missing link

Decontamination Factors - The Pot of gold

- After several cycles of Pu extraction/scrubbing/back-extraction are completed, the effectiveness of a PUREX cycle is described by the decontamination factor (DF):

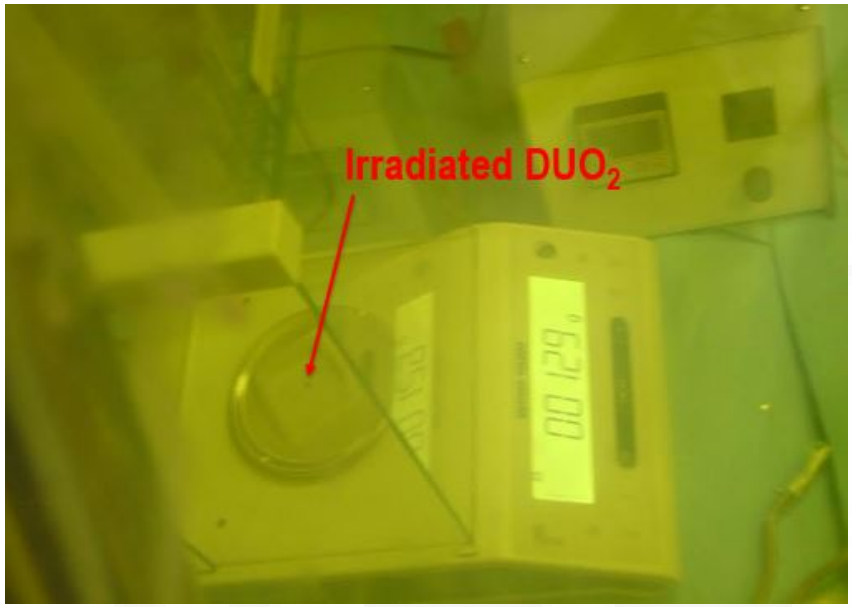
$$DF_j = \frac{\left|\frac{c_j}{c_{Pu}}\right|_{initial}}{\left|\frac{c_j}{c_{Pu}}\right|_{final}}$$

- DFs are characteristic of different process cycles
- Larger values (10^7) for industrial scale PUREX (compared to benchtop)[8, 9]

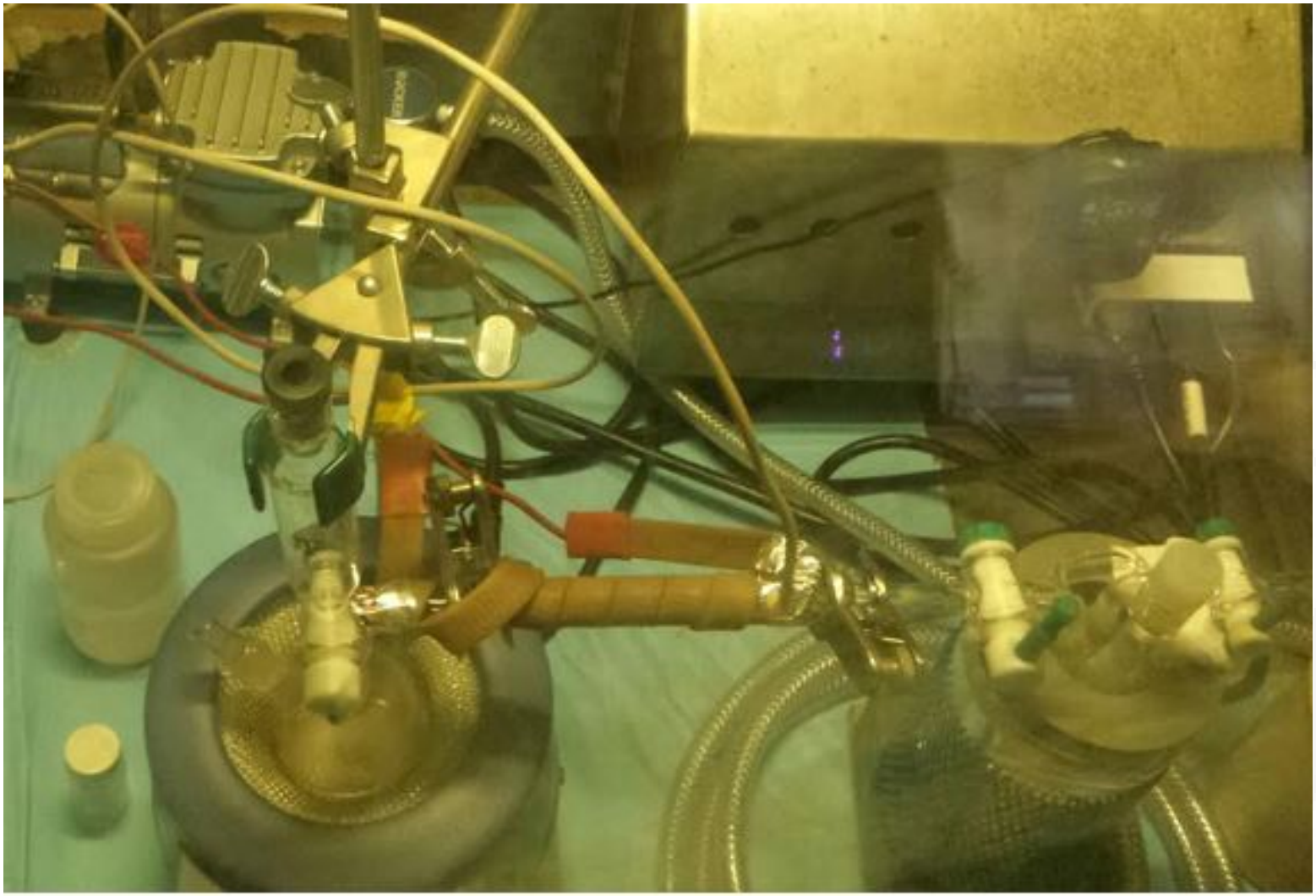
Previous Work

Irradiation

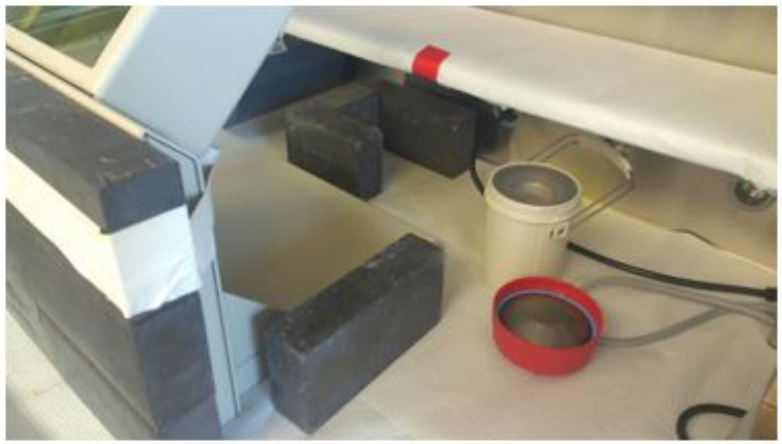
- 12.9 $\pm$ 0.1 mg of DUO_2 was irradiated
  - High Flux Isotope Reactor at Oak Ridge National Laboratory
- Burnup was 4.43 $\pm$ 0.31 GWd/tHM[11]
- 0.196 $\pm$ mg of total Pu was produced as measured by ICP-MS

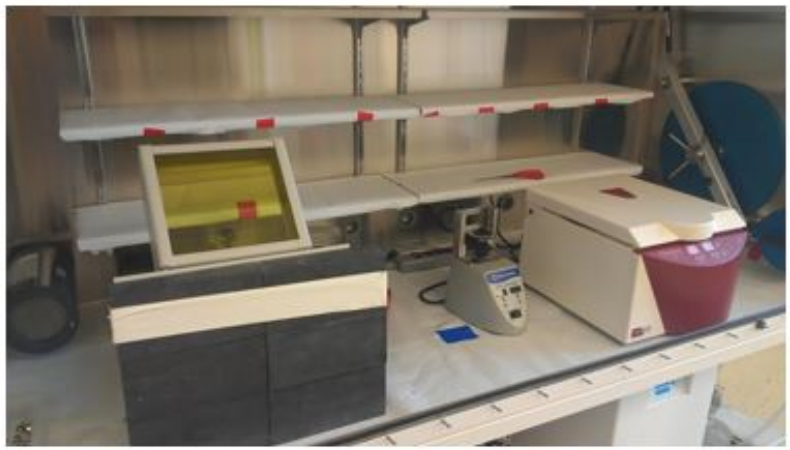


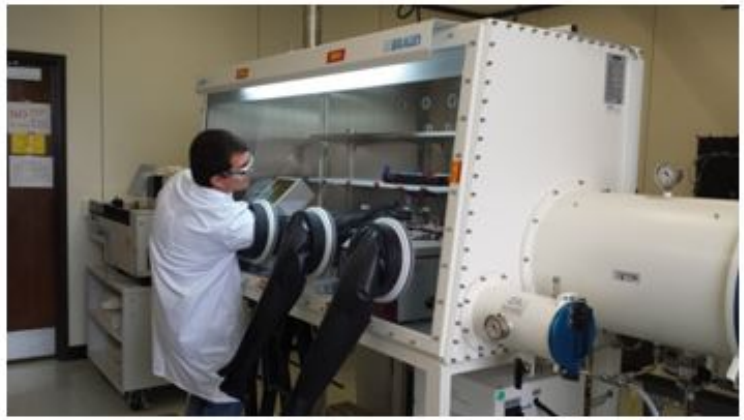
Dissolution of the spent fuel pellet



Glovebox







Experiments

- Single stage extraction and back-extraction
  - Purpose: quantify product recovery, D-values and DF values for single stage extraction and back extraction
  - Conditions:

Starting Solution	Extraction Solution	Back extraction solution
4 M nitric acid	30% vol.% TBP, 70 vol.% kerosene	0.024 M ferrous sulfamate in 0.75 M nitric acid

- Multi-contact extraction and back-extraction
  - Purpose: Maximize recovery of Pu with 4 extractions, 3 back extractions
  - Conditions:

Starting Solution	Extraction Solution	Back extraction solution
4 M nitric acid	30% vol.% TBP, 70 vol.% kerosene	0.024 M ferrous sulfamate in 4 M nitric acid

Previous Experiment Results

Recoveries of U and Pu

	Pu Recovery	U Recovery
Single stage	(83.4±9.5)%	(11.2±1.3)%
Multi-contact Cycle 1	(99.7±4.2)%	(6.8±0.3)%
Multi-contact Cycle 2	(93.0±4.6)%	(6.6±0.3)%
Overall Experiment 2	(92.7±6.0)%	(0.45±0.03)%

Previous Experiment Results

Decontamination Factors

Element (Z)	SS	Error	MC Cycle 1	Error	Isotopes Used
Rb(37)	39.0	5.9	11.8	0.8	^{85}Rb
Sr(38)	283	43	84.6	5.9	^{90}Sr
Mo(42)	5.7	0.8	1.9	0.2	^{97,98,100}Mo
Ru(44)	59.2	6.4	16.6	2.5	^{101,102,104}Ru
Pd(46)	65	14	8.9	1.2	^{110}Pd
Cd(48)	74	17	22.1	2.5	^{112}Cd
Cs(55)	177	28	52.9	3.9	^{133}Cs
Ce(58)	43	16	11.5	4.9	^{140,142}Ce
Nd(60)	19.2	2.1	5.9	0.4	^{143}Nd
Pm(61)	12.8	1.9	3.9	0.3	^{147}Pm
Sm(62)	11.5	1.5	3.6	0.3	^{151}Sm
Eu(63)	10.0	1.4	3.6	0.3	^{154}Eu
U(92)	7.4	1.2	14.7	0.9	^{238}U

Conclusions

- Two PUREX experiments were conducted
  - Single stage: Determined DC values for Pu, U and several FP
  - Multi-contact: Utilized Experiment 1 to recover over 92% of Pu while leaving less than 1% of the U
- DF values were measured for 12 FP elements
- DF values were lower than those typically found in industrial scale PUREX plants due to multiple extraction and back-extraction steps without an intermittent scrubbing step.
- This work provide DF data that will be built upon for nuclear forensic investigations of interdicted Pu.

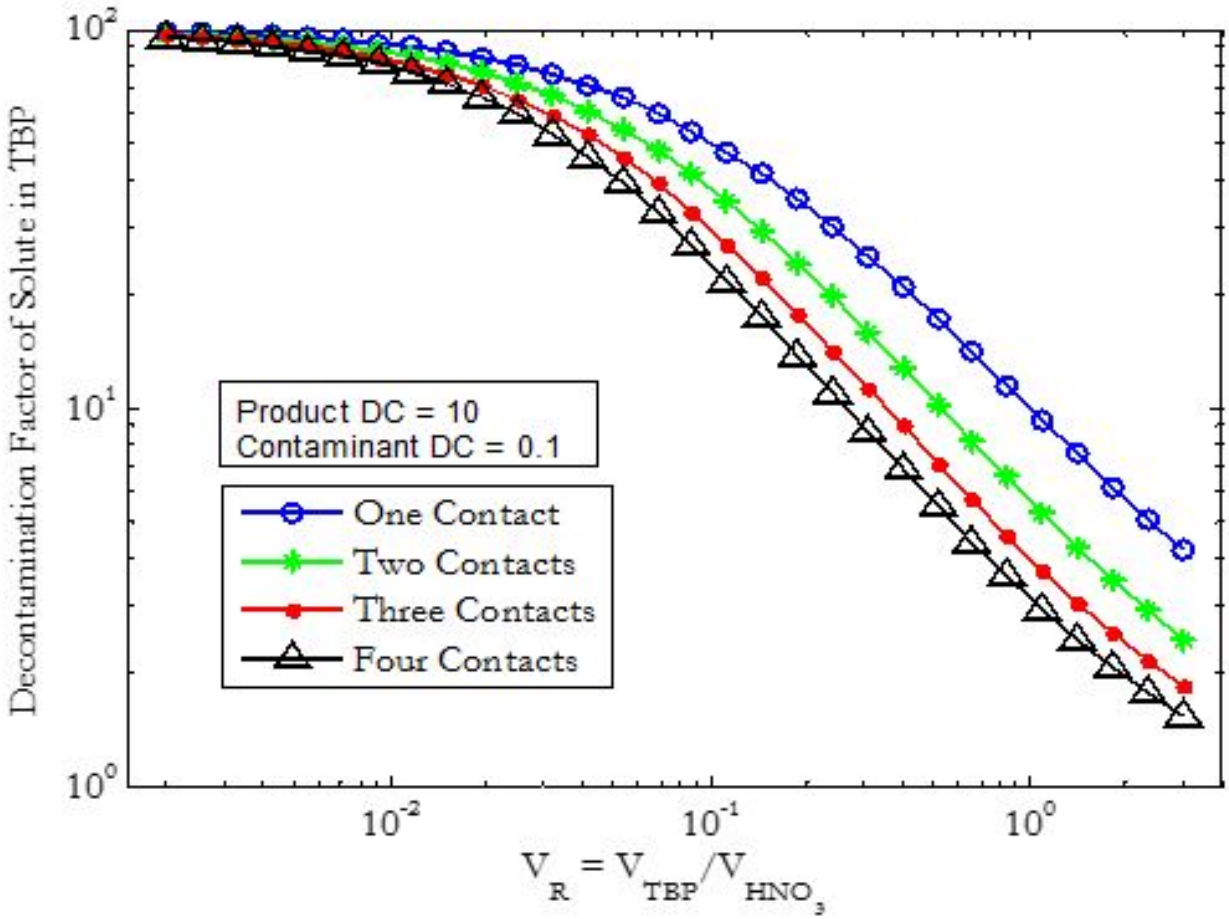
Future Work

Future Work

- Modify Multi-contact extraction, to recover a larger fraction of Pu
- Investigation of how D-values for (Cs, Sb, Eu, Rb, Sr, Nd, Pm, and Sm) change as a function of nitric acid concentration
- Determine statistical uncertainty of D and DF values.
  - Repeat above experiments 3-5 times
- Connect D-values with process information to DF values

Questions?

Previous Experiment Results



Decontamination Factors for multi-contact extraction.

References I

[1] Dwight D Eisenhower. Atoms for peace speech. *Voices of Democracy*, 1953.

[2] *Nuclear Forensics: A Capability at Risk (Abbreviated Version)*. The National Academies Press, Washington, DC, 2010.

[3] AAAS/APS. Nuclear forensics: Role, state of the art and program needs. Report, AAAS/APS, 2008.

[4] Kenton J Moody, Ian D Hutcheon, and Patrick M Grant. *Nuclear forensic analysis*. CRC Press, 2014.

[5] Sunil S Chirayath, Jeremy M Osborn, and Taylor M Coles. Trace fission product ratios for nuclear forensics attribution of weapons-grade plutonium from fast and thermal reactors. *Science & Global Security*, 23(1):48–67, 2015.

[6] Mark Robert Scott. *Nuclear forensics: attributing the source of spent fuel used in an RDD event*. PhD thesis, Texas A&M University, 2005.

[7] Alexander Glaser. Isotopic signatures of weapon-grade plutonium from dedicated natural uranium-fueled production reactors and their relevance for nuclear forensic analysis. *Nuclear Science and Engineering*, 163(1):26–33, 2009.

References II

[8] Sidney M Stoller, Walter Henry Zinn, Stuart MacLain, and Atomic Energy Commission USA. *Reactor handbook. 2. Fuel reprocessing*. Interscience Publ., 1961.

[9] M Benedict, H Levi, and T Pigford. Nuclear chemical engineering. *Nucl. Sci. Eng.;(United States)*, 82(4), 1982.

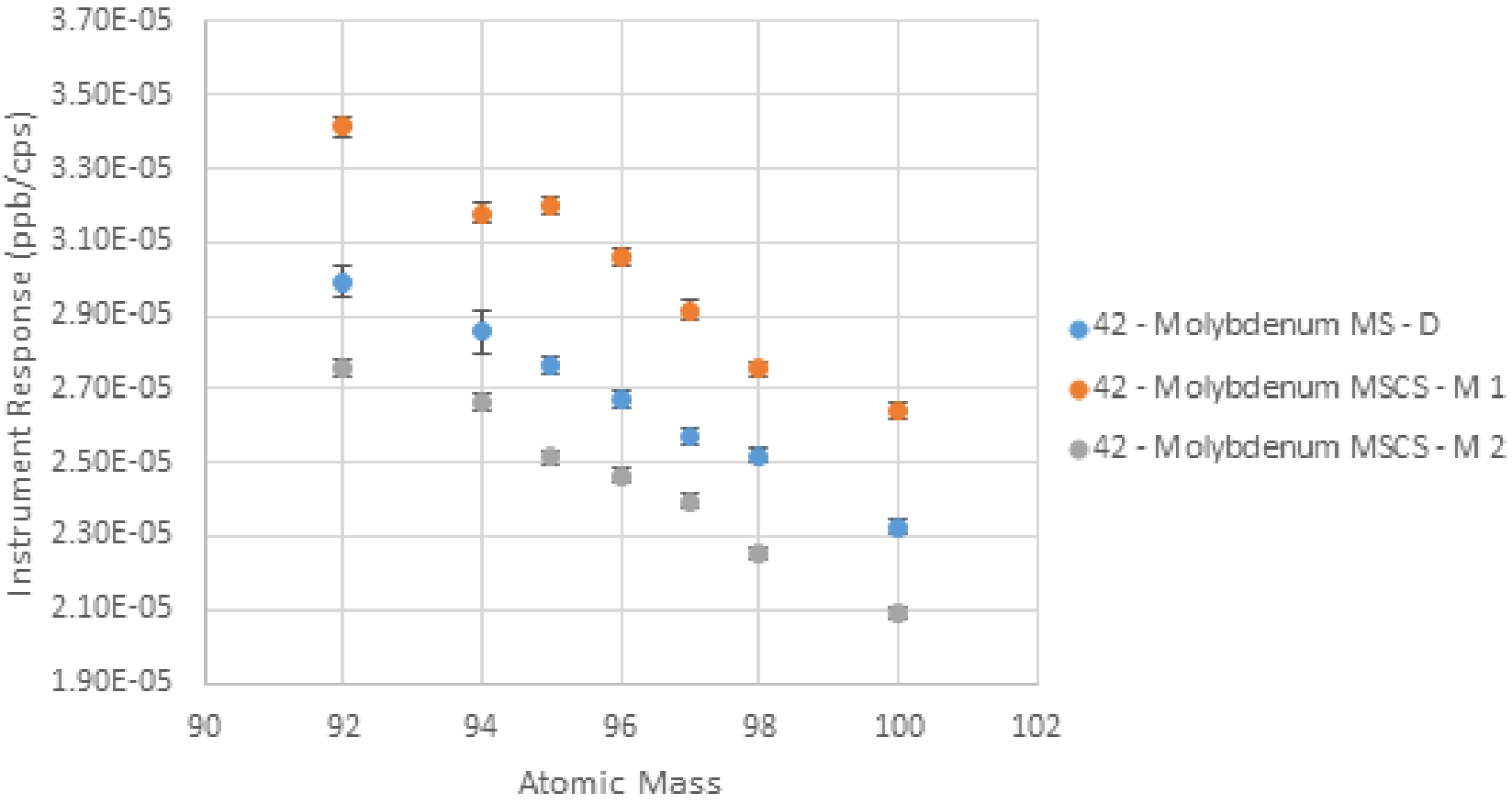
[10] RJM Konings, LR Morss, J Fuger, LR Morss, NM Edelstein, and J Fuger. The chemistry of the actinide and transactinide elements. *Springer, Dordrecht*, 4:2113–224, 2006.

[11] Mathew Wayne Swinney. *Experimental and Computational Assessment of Trace Nuclide Ratios in Weapons Grade Plutonium for Nuclear Forensics Analysis*. PhD thesis, 2015.

[12] Kenneth D Kok. *Nuclear engineering handbook*, volume 60. CRC Press, 2009.

[13] Sunil S. Chirayath, Jeremy M. Osborn, and Taylor M. Coles. Trace fission product ratios for nuclear forensics attribution of weapons-grade plutonium from fast and thermal reactors. *Science and Global Security*, 23(1):48–67, 2015.

Mass Spec


3.70E-05
3.50E-05
3.30E-05
3.10E-05
2.90E-05
2.70E-05
2.50E-05
2.30E-05
2.10E-05
1.90E-05
Instrument Response (ppb/cps)
90
92
94
96
98
100
102
Atomic Mass
42 - Molybdenum MS - D
42 - Molybdenum MSCS - M 1
42 - Molybdenum MSCS - M 2