Cambridge, U.K.—A $10 billion effort to harness energy from nuclear fusion was teetering on a knife edge earlier this week after another deadlocked meeting of its six international partners. Since last December, the six—China, the European Union, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and the United States—have been split over whether to build the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) at Rokkasho in Japan or Cadarache in France. A meeting on 18 June threatened to turn into a bidding war as both Japan and the E.U. offered to up their contribution if they were to host the ITER tokamak. But European sources fear that Japan and the United States are on the verge of turning their backs on the partnership to build the tokamak themselves at Rokkasho.

After 2 decades of preparation for the grand experiment, which aims to reproduce the sun’s furnace here on Earth, a decision on whether to build ITER to turn for the tokamak. In Vienna last week, both raised their bids to 50% and offered to pay up to half the cost—$540 million—of a broadened program. “We still have mirror-