Project Sherwood's Progeny: An Intelligence History of the Intellectual Genesis and Technical Maturation of the Field-Reversed Configuration

Executive Summary

This report presents a comprehensive intelligence history of the Field-Reversed Configuration (FRC), tracing its origins from disparate theoretical concepts and sporadic experimental observations through its development into a viable plasma confinement scheme. The FRC was not a planned invention but rather emerged from the confluence of a prescient but technologically premature theory—the Astron E-layer—and a series of puzzling, serendipitous observations of spontaneous magnetic field reversal in early theta-pinch devices. This intellectual genesis was further emboldened by unprecedented data on high-beta plasma behavior from high-altitude nuclear tests conducted during the Cold War, which provided empirical confidence that such states of matter were not inherently unstable.

The formalization of FRC research during the Project Sherwood era at Los Alamos National Laboratory led to the landmark discovery of "anomalous stability," where FRC plasmas were observed to be stable for up to one hundred times longer than predicted by magnetohydrodynamic (MHD) theory. This stable period was, however, terminated by a destructive n=2 rotational instability, which became the primary focus of research for nearly a decade. The solution to this gross instability, achieved through the elegant application of external quadrupole magnetic fields on the FRX-C experiment, represented a critical inflection point. This breakthrough, coupled with the experimental validation of favorable confinement scaling laws and the first demonstration of stable plasma translation, established the FRC as a scientifically credible and scalable fusion concept.

Subsequent research has focused on developing advanced formation and sustainment techniques to meet the demands of next-generation applications like Magnetized Target Fusion (MTF) and steady-state reactors. Innovations such as plasma gun-assisted formation have solved critical flux-trapping challenges, while the development of Rotating Magnetic Field (RMF) and Neutral Beam Injection (NBI) current drive offers a clear path to steady-state operation. The FRC's history is a testament to the interplay between theory, serendipitous discovery, and targeted technological innovation in overcoming fundamental physics challenges, positioning it today as a leading alternative fusion concept.

I. Intellectual Genesis: Precursor Concepts and Foundational Observations (1950s-1960s)

The Field-Reversed Configuration did not emerge from a single, deliberate design effort. Instead, its intellectual foundation was built upon two parallel and initially disconnected streams of research in the nascent field of controlled fusion: a highly ambitious theoretical concept for creating a closed magnetic topology, and a series of unexpected experimental observations in which plasmas appeared to spontaneously organize themselves into such a state.

A. The Astron E-Layer: A Theoretical Blueprint for Field Reversal

The first formal, documented proposal for actively creating a field-reversed magnetic topology for fusion purposes came from the Greek engineer Nicholas C. Christofilos. At a secret Project Sherwood meeting in 1953, he presented his "Astron" concept. The core idea was to inject a high-energy, high-current beam of relativistic electrons into a magnetic mirror machine. Christofilos theorized that these electrons would become trapped and form a cylindrical current sheet, which he termed the "E-layer." If the current in this E-layer could be made sufficiently intense, its self-generated magnetic field would become strong enough to overcome and locally reverse the direction of the externally applied mirror field along the machine's axis. This reversal would create a set of closed magnetic field lines within the open mirror geometry, forming a magnetic "bottle" theoretically capable of excellent plasma confinement.

The Astron program, which operated at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) from 1956 to 1973, was a technologically ambitious endeavor that required the development of novel linear induction accelerators to generate the required electron beams. While the experiment ultimately never achieved full, stable field reversal, its conceptual contribution was paramount. It established the theoretical goal and provided the vocabulary for what would become the FRC. The Astron concept is now widely recognized as the "earliest conception of a compact torus".

B. Spontaneous Reconnection in Theta-Pinches: The First Physical Evidence

While Christofilos was pursuing a top-down, engineered approach to field reversal, a separate line of experimental research was providing bottom-up, emergent evidence of the same phenomenon. In the mid-1950s, the theta-pinch became a leading concept for plasma heating and confinement. In this device, a rapidly rising axial magnetic field induces a powerful azimuthal (theta) current in a pre-ionized cylinder of gas. This current interacts with the axial field to create a strong radial implosion—the "pinch"—that shock-heats the plasma to fusion-relevant temperatures.

The critical discovery was that when a theta-pinch was operated with a "reversed bias" magnetic field—an initial, quasi-static axial field pointing in the opposite direction to the main compression field—a spontaneous, self-organized plasma structure with closed field lines would often form. This phenomenon was first observed in the late 1950s and was studied throughout the 1960s at multiple laboratories, providing the first physical evidence of the FRC topology.

The formation mechanism involved the principle of "flux trapping." The initial reversed-bias flux was "frozen in" to the highly conductive pre-ionized plasma. When the main external field was rapidly applied in the opposite direction, the oppositely directed field lines would be forced together at the ends of the cylindrical plasma column. This led to magnetic reconnection, a process where the field lines break and re-form into a new, lower-energy topology consisting of a closed set of magnetic surfaces inside the plasma and a reconnected set of open field lines outside. This spontaneous self-organization was a remarkable result, suggesting that the field-reversed state was a naturally preferred, low-energy configuration for a high-beta plasma.

Key early observations of this phenomenon were made at several leading fusion laboratories:

- **Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory (LASL):** The Scylla I experiment, which in 1958 became the first device to demonstrate controlled thermonuclear reactions, was a theta-pinch. Early reports from the Scylla program noted that the production of neutrons during the first half-cycle of the discharge was only possible when a reversed-bias field was applied. This indicated that the process of trapping and reversing the magnetic flux was essential for achieving the necessary heating and confinement, even if the resulting plasma structure was not fully understood or long-lived at the time.

- **Naval Research Laboratory (NRL):** The NRL conducted extensive theta-pinch research throughout the 1960s. Experiments such as the Pharos device contributed significantly to the growing body of evidence on the formation and properties of these spontaneously formed reversed-field configurations.
- **Culham Laboratory:** In the United Kingdom, experiments on the "Thetatron" device also observed these phenomena, confirming their reproducibility across different machines. A seminal 1963 paper by H.A.B. Bodin in *Nuclear Fusion* provided some of the clearest early documentation, explicitly describing observations of "reversed field loops which close within" the plasma column, a definitive description of the FRC topology.

Precursor Concept/Observation	**Date**	**Institution(s)**	**Key Contribution**
Astron E-Layer Concept	1953	N/A (Christofilos) / LLNL	First theoretical proposal of creating a closed-field topology by reversing an external magnetic field with a relativistic particle layer.
Spontaneous Field Reversal	Late 1950s	LANL (Scylla I)	First experimental observations of transient, self-organized FRC-like structures when using a reversed-bias magnetic field.
High-Altitude Nuclear Tests	1958-1962	LANL/LLNL/DoD	Large-scale observation of stable, high-beta plasma structures (diamagnetic cavities) interacting with the Earth's magnetic field.
Documented Closed Magnetic Loops	1963	Culham Laboratory	Publication by H.A.B. Bodin explicitly describing "reversed field loops which close within the plasma" in a theta pinch.

II. Crossover from High-Energy-Density Physics: The Weapons Program Connection

While the theoretical and experimental foundations for the FRC were being laid within the controlled fusion community, a parallel and largely separate stream of research within the U.S. nuclear weapons program provided critical, unprecedented data on high-beta plasma behavior. The large-scale plasma phenomena observed during high-altitude nuclear tests in the late 1950s and early 1960s offered an empirical validation that such states of matter could exist stably, informing and emboldening the nascent FRC research effort.

A. Anomalous Plasma Phenomena in High-Altitude Nuclear Tests

During the Cold War, the United States conducted a series of high-altitude nuclear tests to study weapons effects, including the generation of electromagnetic pulse (EMP) and impacts on communications. Two key test series, Operation Hardtack I in 1958 and Operation Fishbowl in 1962, were, in effect, the largest plasma physics experiments ever conducted.

The most scientifically significant of these was the **Starfish Prime** event on July 9, 1962. A 1.4-megaton device was detonated at an altitude of 400 km, creating spectacular and scientifically invaluable plasma effects. The explosion's X-rays rapidly ionized the surrounding thin atmosphere, creating a massive, high-temperature, high-beta plasma. This plasma fireball expanded violently against the Earth's geomagnetic field, pushing the field lines aside and creating a vast "diamagnetic cavity" tens of kilometers in diameter. The explosion also generated a "debris fireball stretching along Earth's magnetic field". Charged particles from the detonation—beta particles (electrons) and heavier debris ions—were trapped by the geomagnetic field, spiraling along the field lines to create artificial radiation belts and widespread auroral displays that were visible for thousands of kilometers.

These tests, particularly Starfish Prime, demonstrated on a geophysical scale that a high-beta plasma could violently expand against a background magnetic field, exclude that field from a large volume, and form structures that were stable on human timescales (minutes to days). This was a powerful, large-scale demonstration of the fundamental physics underlying the FRC: the ability of a plasma's internal pressure and currents to overpower and reshape an external magnetic field into a stable, confined state.

B. Intellectual Synergy at the National Laboratories

The intellectual connection between the weapons tests and the controlled fusion program is a high-confidence inference based on the deep institutional and personal overlaps between the two efforts. The same national laboratories—primarily Los Alamos and Livermore—were the epicenters for both programs. Key figures who went on to lead the fusion efforts, such as James L. Tuck at Los Alamos and Richard F. Post at Livermore, were veterans of the Manhattan Project and were deeply involved in the subsequent weapons program.

Physicists at these laboratories were responsible for designing the diagnostic packages and interpreting the data from the high-altitude tests. They were observing, for the first time, macroscopic, long-lived, high-beta plasma structures interacting with a magnetic field. This provided a powerful empirical counterpoint to the simple MHD theories of the day, which often predicted that such configurations should be violently unstable. The data from these tests provided an invaluable, albeit indirect, validation that the small, transient, self-organized reversed-field structures seen in laboratory theta-pinches were not mere curiosities, but manifestations of a fundamental and potentially stable plasma state.

Furthermore, the nuclear testing program provided the fusion community with its first and only data on the behavior of a truly "collisionless," reactor-scale, high-beta plasma. The extremely hot and diffuse plasma debris from a high-altitude explosion is effectively collisionless on relevant timescales, and its size is enormous compared to the ion gyroradius. The observation that these large, collisionless plasma structures could persist against a magnetic field provided crucial, qualitative evidence that the pessimistic predictions of MHD theory were incomplete. This was a direct parallel to the FRC, which was later found to be stable precisely because of kinetic effects not captured in fluid models. The nuclear test observations thus provided the first large-scale hint that kinetic physics could dominate and stabilize high-beta plasmas, a foundational principle of the FRC that likely emboldened researchers to pursue the "anomalously stable" configurations they were seeing in the lab.

III. The Project Sherwood Era: Formalization, Anomalous Stability, and the Rotational Instability

Following the sporadic observations of the 1960s, the 1970s saw the beginning of a formal, systematic research program into field-reversed theta-pinches. This effort, centered at Los Alamos as part of the broader Project Sherwood, quickly led to a landmark discovery that established the FRC as a uniquely promising fusion concept, while simultaneously identifying the primary instability that would define the research landscape for the next decade.

Experiment	**Operational Period**	**Coil Dimensions (L x D)**	**Peak B-Field**	**Max Confined Lifetime**	**Primary Stability Finding**	**Key Confinement Finding**
FRX-A	c. 1979	1.0 m x 0.25 m	0.6 T	~50 μs	Anomalous Stability vs. MHD	N/A
FRX-B	c. 1981	1.0 m x 0.25 m	1.3 T	~60 μs	n=2 Rotational Mode Identified	N/A
FRX-C	c. 1983-1988	2.0 m x 0.50 m	0.8 T	>300 μs (w/ quadrupoles)	n=2 Mode Suppressed	$\tau N \sim R^2$ Scaling Verified
FRX-C/T	c. 1983	2.0 m x 0.50 m	0.8 T	>300 μs	Stable Translation Demonstrated	Translation Feasibility

A. The FRX Program at Los Alamos (FRX-A & FRX-B): A Systematic Campaign

The formal FRC program at Los Alamos began around 1975, with the goal of moving beyond anecdotal evidence to systematically study the formation, equilibrium, and stability of these configurations. The first dedicated devices, the Field-Reversed eXperiment (FRX) series, were designed for this purpose. FRX-A (operational c. 1979) and FRX-B (operational c. 1981) were theta-pinches based on 1-meter-long, 0.25-meter-diameter coils, forming FRCs using the standard reversed-bias technique. FRX-B was an upgrade with a more energetic capacitor bank, allowing for experiments at higher magnetic fields and plasma densities.
The most transformative finding from these initial experiments was the discovery of **anomalous**

stability. The FRC plasmas remained in a stable, quiescent equilibrium for up to 60 μs, a duration that was as much as one hundred times longer than the characteristic growth times predicted by ideal MHD theory for instabilities like the n=1 tilt mode. This was a landmark result. It provided the first definitive evidence that the simple conducting fluid model of MHD was fundamentally incomplete for describing the FRC. The observed stability strongly indicated that other physics, likely related to the large, non-fluid-like orbits of the ions (kinetic effects), were playing a dominant stabilizing role. This discovery established the FRC as a uniquely promising configuration for magnetic confinement and motivated its continued study.

B. Identification of the n=2 Rotational Mode: The Achilles' Heel

While the FRCs in FRX-A and FRX-B were surprisingly stable against the fast-growing instabilities predicted by theory, their lifetimes were not infinite. The stable period was consistently and destructively terminated by a slower-growing, n=2 (elliptical) rotational instability. As the FRC evolved, it would begin to spin up about its axis of symmetry, causing its cross-section to deform from a circle into a rotating ellipse. This instability would grow in amplitude until the plasma was driven into the wall of the quartz discharge tube, catastrophically destroying the configuration.

By the late 1970s, this rotational mode was clearly identified as the primary physics obstacle that had to be overcome to extend FRC lifetimes. The 1979 Sherwood Meeting on theoretical fusion research featured multiple papers dedicated to this problem. L.C. Steinhauer of Mathematical Sciences Northwest presented theoretical work on "Field Reversed Plasma Rotation and Transport," proposing a spin-up mechanism driven by viscous friction from the plasma on the open field lines just outside the FRC's separatrix. Simultaneously, simulations by D.C. Barnes and C.E. Seyler at Los Alamos were being used to examine these rotationally driven n=2 and n=3 modes. This concentrated effort demonstrates that the community had successfully identified, experimentally characterized, and begun to develop a theoretical understanding of the n=2 rotational mode as the FRC's principal vulnerability. The entire history of FRC research can thus be seen through the lens of a conflict between two different physical regimes: its foundational stability against the most dangerous predicted instability (the tilt) is a product of kinetic physics, while its practical lifetime limit for many years was dictated by a more mundane, fluid-like MHD instability (the rotation).

IV. The Golden Age of Stability: Taming the Tilt and Scaling Confinement

The 1980s marked a period of critical breakthroughs, primarily on the FRX-C device at Los Alamos, that solved the primary stability challenges and established the FRC as a scientifically credible and scalable fusion concept. The research followed a clear pattern: a major, potentially fatal flaw was identified, followed by the development of an elegant "external" solution that fixed the problem without fundamentally altering the core FRC plasma itself, demonstrating the remarkable robustness of the underlying configuration.

Identified Challenge/Instability	Physical Mechanism	Evolved Solution/Mitigation	Key Experiment
n=1 Tilt Mode (MHD Theory)	Gross fluid-like tilting of the plasma column.	High plasma elongation and kinetic effects from	FRX-C

Identified Challenge/Instability	Physical Mechanism	Evolved Solution/Mitigation	Key Experiment
		large ion orbits.	
n=2 Rotational Instability	Plasma spin-up leading to elliptical deformation and wall contact.	Application of external, static multipole (quadrupole) magnetic fields.	FRX-C
Inefficient Flux Trapping (High-Density Formation)	Suppression of ionization cascade by strong bias field; convective flux loss.	Plasma gun-assisted formation to catalyze ionization and enable resistive flux diffusion.	MSX
Resistive Current Decay (Lack of Sustainment)	Finite plasma resistivity leads to decay of toroidal current and loss of configuration.	External current drive via Rotating Magnetic Fields (RMF) or Neutral Beam Injection (NBI).	TCS (RMF), FIX (NBI)

A. The Multipole Solution: Complete Suppression of the Rotational Instability

Motivated by the promising results from FRX-A and FRX-B, Los Alamos constructed FRX-C (operational c. 1983-1988), a device with twice the linear dimensions of its predecessors. Its primary missions were to test confinement scaling and, most urgently, to solve the rotational instability problem. Building on initial successes in Japan, the FRX-C team demonstrated that the application of a weak, steady-state external quadrupole magnetic field could completely suppress the n=2 rotational mode. This was a transformative achievement. The quadrupole field provided a non-axisymmetric magnetic pressure that acted as a restoring force against the elliptical deformation, effectively "stiffening" the plasma against the instability. By solving the primary stability problem that had plagued all previous experiments, the team achieved an order-of-magnitude improvement in FRC lifetimes, extending them to over 300 μs. This breakthrough unlocked the FRC's true confinement potential, allowing experiments for the first time to be limited by slower transport processes rather than gross, violent stability.

B. The Tilt Mode and the Importance of Elongation

While the n=2 mode was solved experimentally, the n=1 tilt mode remained a major theoretical concern, as MHD simulations consistently predicted it should be violently unstable. Yet, despite these predictions, the highly elongated FRCs produced in experiments like FRX-C were observed to be robustly stable against the tilt. This persistent discrepancy between theory and experiment reinforced the conclusion that kinetic effects—which are more pronounced in elongated configurations where ions can execute large orbits across the entire plasma radius—were providing a powerful stabilizing influence not captured in fluid models. High elongation thus became an essential design principle for ensuring FRC stability.

C. Validation of Confinement Scaling and Adiabatic Compression

With extended lifetimes and a stable configuration, FRX-C was able to provide the first definitive evidence of a favorable particle confinement scaling law. By comparing results with the smaller FRX-B, the Los Alamos team demonstrated that the particle confinement time (τ_N) scaled

approximately with the square of the plasma's major radius (R^2) and inversely with the ion gyroradius in the external field (ρ_{i0}). This diffusive-like scaling, $\tau_N \propto R^2/\rho_{i0}$, was a critical result for the fusion prospects of the FRC, as it implied that confinement could be dramatically improved simply by building larger devices.
Concurrently, a foundational 1983 theoretical paper by Spencer, Tuszewski, and Linford established the scaling laws for the adiabatic compression of an elongated FRC. This work provided the theoretical framework showing that applying a slowly rising external magnetic field was a highly efficient method for heating an FRC to fusion temperatures while simultaneously maintaining its stable, elongated shape.

D. The Dawn of Translation: The FRX-C/T Experiment

In a final, crucial demonstration, the FRX-C device was modified into FRX-C/T by adding a long translation chamber and a DC magnetic guide field system. This experiment successfully demonstrated, for the first time at Los Alamos, that a stable FRC could be formed in a theta-pinch and then moved (translated) over long distances into a separate chamber. This was an essential engineering proof-of-concept, validating the entire architectural paradigm of future reactor concepts—including Magnetized Target Fusion (MTF)—which rely on separating the plasma formation region from the compression and burn region.

V. The Modern Era: Advanced Formation and Sustainment Techniques

The foundational breakthroughs of the 1980s established the FRC as a stable, scalable plasma configuration. The subsequent decades have been defined by the development of advanced techniques to meet the dual needs of higher performance for next-generation experiments and steady-state operation for future reactors. This evolution represents a deliberate progression away from violent, brute-force dynamics toward more controlled, quasi-steady-state processes, all driven by the need to maximize trapped magnetic flux—the ultimate figure of merit for FRC performance.

A. The Shift to High-Density MTF and the Trapped Flux Challenge

The pursuit of Magnetized Target Fusion (MTF) in the 2000s, exemplified by the joint Los Alamos-Air Force Research Laboratory collaboration on the FRX-L and FRCHX experiments, imposed new and far more demanding requirements on the FRC target plasma. These experiments required higher densities ($n > 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$) and longer trapped-flux lifetimes (approximately 20 μs) to match the relatively slow implosion timescale of a solid metal liner. This created a significant formation bottleneck. Traditional ringing-theta-pinch pre-ionization, which relies on the axial magnetic field crossing zero to ionize the gas, proved highly inefficient at the strong bias fields and high fill pressures needed for MTF. A strong bias field suppresses the ionization cascade, leading to poor pre-ionization, low trapped flux, and consequently short FRC lifetimes—the very problem that critically stalled the flagship FRCHX program.

B. The Plasma Gun-Assisted Formation Breakthrough

The solution to this critical formation problem was developed on the Magnetized Shock Experiment (MSX), a flexible testbed constructed from the hardware of the earlier FRX-L device. The innovation, pioneered by T.E. Weber and T.P. Intrator, was to inject a "seed plasma" into the formation chamber using an annular array of coaxial plasma guns *before* the main field reversal pulse. This seed plasma provided an initial population of free electrons that effectively catalyzed a Townsend ionization cascade in the bulk gas fill, even in the presence of a strong axial magnetic field that did not cross zero.
This technique fundamentally changed the physics of flux loss during the reversal phase. Instead of a rapid, convective loss of flux as the un-ionized gas was swept away, the pre-seeded plasma enabled a much slower, resistive diffusion process. The result was a landmark ~350% increase in the amount of trapped magnetic flux, which in turn enabled the formation of hotter, denser, and significantly longer-lived FRCs that met the stringent requirements for the FRCHX integrated liner compression experiments.

C. Pathways to Steady State: RMF and NBI

While theta-pinch formation is inherently pulsed, a viable fusion reactor requires a method to sustain the FRC's internal currents against resistive decay. Two primary methods have emerged as leading candidates for steady-state operation.

- **Rotating Magnetic Fields (RMF):** This technique uses external antennas to create a transverse magnetic field that rotates around the plasma's axis of symmetry. If the rotation frequency is chosen to be between the ion and electron gyro-frequencies, the lighter electrons are "dragged" along by the field, creating a continuous toroidal current that sustains the FRC's magnetic structure. Early work on this concept was performed in cold plasmas (in devices known as "Rotamaks"), with the first application to hot, theta-pinch-formed FRCs occurring on the Translation, Confinement, and Sustainment (TCS) experiment.
- **Neutral Beam Injection (NBI):** NBI involves injecting a beam of high-energy neutral atoms (e.g., hydrogen or deuterium) into the FRC. These neutrals cross the external magnetic field unimpeded. Once inside the plasma, they are ionized by collisions. The resulting energetic ions are trapped on large, betatron-like orbits that encircle the FRC's magnetic null, forming a powerful current ring. This ion current both sustains the field reversal and provides a significant source of plasma heating. While proposed conceptually for reactor designs like ARTEMIS, the first experimental demonstrations of NBI on an FRC were performed on the FRC Injection Experiment (FIX) device in Japan. These experiments showed a dramatic improvement in performance, with NBI leading to a more than 200% increase in the FRC's configuration lifetime. More recent experiments have even demonstrated the ability to form an FRC from a seed plasma using NBI alone, representing a true steady-state formation method.

VI. Assessment and Outlook

The evolutionary arc of the Field-Reversed Configuration is a compelling narrative of scientific discovery and technical innovation. The concept did not spring fully formed from a single design but was instead synthesized from three distinct intellectual streams: the prescient but technologically challenging theoretical goal of field reversal laid out by the Astron program; the serendipitous and repeated observation of spontaneous self-organization in early theta-pinch experiments; and the crucial, large-scale empirical evidence from high-altitude nuclear tests that demonstrated the potential stability of high-beta plasma structures.

This foundation gave rise to the first generation of dedicated FRC experiments during the Project Sherwood era. These experiments yielded the paradoxical discovery of "anomalous stability," where the FRC plasma proved far more robust than MHD theory predicted, while simultaneously revealing its vulnerability to a slower, fluid-like rotational instability. The subsequent history of the FRC can be viewed as a systematic campaign to overcome a series of such existential challenges. The n=2 rotational mode was elegantly suppressed by external quadrupole fields. The theoretical threat of the n=1 tilt mode was mitigated by embracing high plasma elongation, which enhances the stabilizing kinetic effects inherent to the configuration. With gross stability achieved, the focus shifted to performance and sustainment. The validation of favorable confinement scaling on FRX-C provided a clear path toward reactor-relevant conditions, while the successful demonstration of translation opened the door to advanced architectures separating plasma formation from compression and burn. In the modern era, the demanding requirements of high-density applications like MTF drove the development of advanced formation techniques, culminating in the plasma gun-assisted method that dramatically increased trapped magnetic flux. Finally, the demonstrated success of both Rotating Magnetic Field and Neutral Beam Injection current drive has provided credible pathways to true steady-state operation. The FRC's history is a testament to the resilience of a fundamentally sound plasma configuration and the ingenuity of the community that has systematically identified and solved each challenge, maturing the concept from a laboratory curiosity into a leading candidate for practical fusion energy.

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