

# (EFFECTS) Dark sky over disarmament

1 framework and the environment of the disarmament negotiations have changed with a dramatic suddenness, the failures of the negotiators merging with the nightmares that summarise widening public awareness of what is happening.

Let me first of all deal with the framework. After five years virtually bereft of achievement, one leg of the structure, the intermediate range missile talks (Cruise etc, known as INF), has collapsed following the Soviet pull-out and another, the talks dealing with intercontinental missiles (START), sways uncertainly while the Soviet Union makes up its mind whether to continue. These are the major negotiations, part of a process begun more than a decade ago, where the United States and the Soviet Union confront the ultimate realities of their powers of destruction.

There are other negotiations in the framework. The Soviet Union will return to the Vienna talks on troops reductions in Central Europe on March 16, but since its bored delegations have done little more in 10 years than design a club tie that may be of mainly cosmetic significance. The UN Committee on Disarmament struggles with such issues as a comprehensive nuclear test ban and an international treaty on chemical weapons. And there is the European security conference which began in Stockholm last week and of which more later.

Surrounding this depressing scene is an environment which comprises public and scientific opinion as well as the political antagonisms of East and West. Public opinion at a serious level (and one can assess it only in the West) seems to me to be changing in a way that will have a formative influence on future disarmament policies. Cruise deployment in Europe and films such as "The Day After" have had their impact, of course, but largely on already well-exercised fears for the survival of individuals and their families. It is the findings presented at a conference of 100 leading scientists in Cambridge, Massachusetts, last November which will have a deeper and more profound effect.

## Odds against survivors

They are summarised in the current issue of *Foreign Affairs* magazine by Prof. Carl Sagan, of Cornell University, under the title: Nuclear War and Climatic Catastrophe: Some Policy Implications. The conclusion is graphic and simple enough to grip the popular imagination. Between 500 and 2,000 nuclear explosions (the threshold figure is dependent on where the warheads burst) would be enough to ensure there were no survivors in the northern hemisphere and probably few in the southern. The smoke and dust alone would ensure a 30degC drop in temperature for months. That can be compared with the 10degC average decline caused by an ice

age of the ice age drop caused by a volcanic eruption, which brought about "the year without a summer" in 1816.

Even allowing for the fact that scientists can get things wrong, or exaggerate for political purposes, there is no margin for optimism. Even a first strike which overwhelmed the enemy so completely he was unable to fire a shot in reply would have the potential to destroy not only the "victor" but everyone else.

There is always the chance of a madman starting a war, of human error unleashing a missile, or a peripheral conventional war escalating into a nuclear war. And, in any case, why should humanity have to co-exist with

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**New scientific findings  
add further gravity to  
the Stockholm talks, says  
DAVID ADAMSON,  
Diplomatic Correspondent**

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such an appalling prospect? To accept it as part of the world's condition would be like arguing that mediaeval plagues were necessary because they kept men on Godly paths.

One implication is that the proliferation of new and improved missiles—the "vertical proliferation" which rightly perturbs States barred by international treaty from possessing nuclear weapons—is pointless. Another is that the refusal of nuclear-weapon States such as Britain and France to allow their weapons to be counted in East-West negotiation has declining validity.

There is another implication, too, which may affect the attitudes of the Super-Powers, particularly the Soviet Union. If war is so clearly not an option why negotiate at a disadvantage? Neither side is run by madmen. The risks are not going to increase.

The Soviet Union is aware that it has lost the first round in the battle over intermediate-range missiles. Its position is based on a desire to get the Americans out of Europe, not primarily on concern over having new weapons deployed on its doorstep. The long-term objective is to bring about the day when it can deal with a divided Western Europe instead of an alliance led by the United States. In any case, the position it has taken in the INF talks would make an agreement based on even limited Cruise deployment look like weakness and that is something it cannot afford to display at the moment.

Since the 'sixties the disarmament negotiations have been dominated by nuclear missiles. It has been accepted that only an agreement on their limitation could provide the breakthrough that would lead to a general reduction in forces at all levels.

But supposing that breakthrough is unobtainable in present circumstances? Is it possible to turn the whole disarmament scene topsy-turvy and begin at the bottom, at the humblest level of men and tanks, and work upwards from there? The Stockholm conference does offer that chance.

The Conference on Confidence—and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe may well turn out to be as laborious as its title, but it has the virtue that it can, theoretically, deal with a wide range of disarmament issues, including nuclear ones. But in its first stage it will, if Nato has its way, confine itself to questions of military "transparency." That means, as the word suggests, being able to see what the other side is up to.

Under the Helsinki accords there exists what is essentially an obligation on Nato and the Warsaw Pact to notify each other of manoeuvres involving more than 25,000 men within 150 miles of the East-West divide. There is agreement that notification should be extended to the whole of Europe and its adjacent sea and air space. There is also acceptance of the need to increase the notification period, improve communications between the nations concerned and extend notification to military movements in addition to manoeuvres.

## Soviet non-co-operation

It is when the question of "transparency" is reached that the going will get really hard. The Warsaw Pact has not invited Nato observers to its exercises since 1979. On the evidence of last week's speech to the conference by Mr Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, it is not going to throw open the gates to inspections to ensure compliance with agreements.

A 35-nation conference which includes eccentric neutrals like Malta in addition to the members of the rival alliances does not lend itself to speed. The first phase of the conference could well continue until the next Helsinki review conference meets in Vienna at the end of 1986, hopefully to be followed by further stages. In addition to differences over "transparency," it could get itself endlessly bogged down in arguments over what Nato regards as pointless: "declaratory" agreements, such as the no-first-use of nuclear weapons treaty proposed by the Warsaw Pact.

The road to confidence promises to be a long one without any guarantees at the end of it, but the slow step-by-step approach does seem the most promising one at the moment. It does not mean that there should be any relaxation of the pressure on the Soviet Union to return to the START talks in Geneva. What Stockholm can do if it works even reasonably well is reduce the tensions and fears which at the moment provide the reasons, real or invented, for not negotiating massive reductions in nuclear armories.