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To Be Continued

With the experts having agreed at Geneva on the feasibility of monitoring a suspension of nuclear test explosions, the problem of suspension now rests in the hands of the people who conduct political negotiations. The West has proposed and the East has accepted a plan to begin talks on 31 October about such matters as where the 180-odd control posts are to be located and who is to man them. On the same date the United States and Britain will begin a one-year suspension of nuclear test explosions which will be renewed on a year-to-year basis, depending upon the success of the talks, upon progress in other phases of arms control, and upon Russia's not resuming her own test explosions. But besides its bearing on the suspension of nuclear tests, the Geneva conference may also have other results. The conference may provide a pattern for reaching agreement on other aspects of international arms control, the pattern being to explore questions of scientific possibility before turning to questions of political reality.

One good candidate for some future application of the Geneva pattern is the problem of safeguarding nations against surprise attacks. With the increasing shift from manned bombers to space-missiles, the danger posed by the possibility of a surprise attack includes not only the possibility of one nation launching an attack upon a second, but of a fatal false alarm in the second nation's defense warning system. Some ghastly compounding of mechanical defect and human mistake may mean that a false alarm is not identified as false in sufficient time to prevent the second nation from launching its counteroffensive. The problem of surprise attacks is a good candidate for negotiations because, like the suspension of nuclear test explosions, an international system to safeguard nations against surprise attack has common advantages for both East and West.

Although in the Geneva pattern scientific talks precede political talks, still the decision to seek scientific talks is itself a political decision, and the success of future talks may well depend upon the kind of priority assigned to them. The question of priority arises because the requirements of a scientific conference may well work against the other requirements of this country's welfare. In the matter of security, for example, getting down to details in considering the feasibility of a detection network may also mean getting down to details that have been classified secret by one department in the Government or another. The problem is how much secret information our representatives at a conference should be permitted to reveal if they deem it necessary. It would be interesting to know in this connection what kind of authority our participants in the Geneva conference had to disclose technical points that had previously been classified.

Most scientists, like most other people in this country, are something less than happy that their efforts for national defense seem necessarily to result in weapons of ever greater destructive power. In seeking to make us ever more secure, scientists find themselves creating the possibility of ever greater catastrophe. Consequently, many scientists wonder if there is not some action that they as scientists can take to neutralize the threat to civilization that their own achievements are posing. Part of the answer may lie in the pattern set by the Geneva conference. Scientists can develop the different instruments of inspection appropriate to the various aspects of arms control. If the art of war has become dependent in good part upon the efforts of scientists, then so has the art of making peace.—J.T.