News and Comment

Arms Control and Disarmament: Notes on the Situation at Geneva

Reports from the Geneva conference, as of last Tuesday at any rate, were remarkably uniform: No progress was being made, and everyone was quite relieved at the way things were going. What this meant was that no one had gone to the conference expecting a dramatic breakthrough, or any breakthrough at all in the opening sessions; therefore the opening deadlock was not a great disappointment, while the comparative restraint with which both sides discussed their differences was something of a relief. If there was no progress, there was also no bitterness, leaving open the hope that something useful might eventually come out of the meeting.

For the Russians, the most apparent "something useful" seems to be a summit conference, which Khrushchev appears to want very much, presumably for reasons having to do with politics within the communist bloc. For the West, the "something useful" seems to be primarily a lessening of the tensions on issues peripheral to disarmament, particularly Berlin and Southeast Asia. On disarmament proper, though, there is no sign yet of any progress at all: The Russians have proposed, once again, a grand scheme of virtually absolute disarmament within 4 years; we and the British have proposed a considerably less far-reaching but still extremely ambitious plan beginning with a 30 percent cut in strategic weapons; the French, who are boycotting the conference on the grounds that it is too big (18, now 17, nations) to accomplish anything beyond exchanges of propaganda, have proposed beginning by eliminating strategic delivery systems (long-range bombers and missiles), which is comparatively easy for the French to propose, since they do not have any strategic delivery systems anyway. All of this, though, is merely empty talk without some kind of agreement on controls, and here East and West are miles apart: The Russians are willing to allow inspection only of weapons being destroyed; the West insists we also need to know something about the weapons that are being kept, which the Russians insist they will not accept.

The Russians, of course, insist that we want controls over existing arms for espionage reasons, a position which, if adhered to, makes it virtually impossible to reach agreement if only because the West would have no assurance that the Russians had accurately reported either the size of their armaments or the extent to which weapons being destroyed are merely being replaced by new weapons being manufactured. The danger involved for the West would be comparatively small in the early stages of a disarmament agreement; but the danger would grow increasingly severe as the agreement was carried through and as the possibility of a comparatively small stock of unreported weapons became an increasingly severe source of worry to the West.

Inspection

The most promising way of meeting this problem, one which seems to have won a fair amount of acceptance among the Russian scientists who have attended the Pugwash conferences, is a plan which would combine absolute verification of *dis*armament with gradually increasing control over existing armaments. For the West the idea would be that at any point the range of uncertainty over whether the Russians were fully meeting their commitments would be kept small enough to assure the West that it is not going to suddenly wake up and find itself facing a dangerous imbalance of power. For the Russians, the idea would be that they would not have to accept substantial amounts of internal inspection until a substantial amount of disarmament had actually been achieved. But all of this is not only difficult to work out in detail but may not even meet the most immediate Russian worry about inspection.

There is at least a fair possibility that what is worrying the Russians is not only espionage in the general sense, with the implication that Western inspectors will serve as spies, pinpointing, say, the location of missile launching sites they are only supposed to be counting. The Russians also show signs of worrying that the world will discover, in any kind of verification of existing armaments, that the Russians are not so strong as they have been claiming to be.

The West has been stressing a variation of the idea developed by Louis Sohn of Harvard for a spot-check kind of inspection. Sohn's idea, for example, was for the U.S. and Russia to divide their countries into some 20 zones and report on the armaments in each zone; after this each country could select any zone it wished for detailed inspection. In part, this sort of approach is just an efficient way to handle the thing: given a limited amount of inspection, it is likely to be more effective if it takes the form of a reliable audit of a relatively small area chosen more or less at random by the inspectors, rather than the form of a superficial audit of a large area. The American negotiators, at least for home consumption, have stressed this side, and the idea that this type of inspection is not to be interpreted as a retreat from the American position that there must be reliable controls. For the Russians, of course, the appeal in this type of system is, or ought to be, that it limits the possibilities for espionage since the inspectors will be limited, in any given inspection period, to a small segment of the Soviet Union.

But if the Russians are worried not merely that they will be giving us the ability, for example, to pinpoint their missile sites, but that we will learn that they just don't have as many missile sites as they would like us to believe, then they will be shy of any kind of disarmament plan that will tell us how many missiles they have, and simultaneously, of course, how many they do not have. This concern would not be inconsistent with the grand scheme of disarmament the Russians have proposed since it is most unlikely that anyone on either side believes that any proposal on the scale the Russians have made is going to come out of the conference.

Our chief negotiator, Arthur Dean, has suggested that we hope to counter the Russian concern about espionage by telling them something of how much we already know about their military strength and disposition. His point, presumably, will be that the Russians aren't endangering their security by opening themselves to inspection because even if our inspectors acted as spies they could not, under the kind of scheme we are proposing, tell us anything of vital importance that we have not already been able to learn through such devices as the Midas (spy-in-the-sky) satellites, the long-range radar surviellance of Soviet missile testing, and other conventional and unconventional means of gathering intelligence.

But, again, this would apply primarily to such matters as pinpointing the sites of potential targets. It would be of little use if the Russians simply did not feel comfortable about the idea of making available to the world data that would show an unfavorable balance of strategic power between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Pentagon here believes that this unfavorable balance of strategic power exists, but there is not only a considerable range of uncertainty about the extent of the U.S. advantage, but the very important fact that, as a number of public opinion surveys have shown, a large part of the world believes the advantage lies in the other direction. The Russians have made great efforts to convince the world that they are overtaking the capitalist giant; they have succeeded in convincing a great part of the world that they have actually outdone the giant in military power; and therefore they can hardly be anxious to demonstrate that their pretentions are ill-founded.

The problems for the Russians on this point go beyond a concern with a general effort to cultivate the view that Communism is the wave of the future. For the estimates of Soviet strength have an effect not only on the American willingness to take a firm stand on a matter like Berlin, but more importantly on the willingness of the American allies and even its own public to support a firm position.

For reasons such as this, the Soviet stand on controls over existing armaments is not so unreasonable as it is sometimes presented, if by reasonable we mean only that we could credit the Russians with the best of motives and still find something of an understandable basis for their position. Any nation in the Soviet position would have similar misgivings about the kinds of controls we are asking for. But that we can find understandable reasons for the Russian attitude, of course, hardly makes the Russian position acceptable: It is perfectly reasonable for the Russians to want to do something about Berlin, a western island in the midst of the most unsuccessful of the East European satellites; but that the Russians really have reason to be unhappy about Berlin, that they are not just trying to be nasty in pressing us there, hardly argues that we should give up Berlin. The Russians have serious reasons, beyond their vague charges of possible espionage, for shying away from controls over existing armaments; recognizing this does not solve anything: that it may be "reasonable" for the Russians to oppose controls does not make unreasonable our insistence on these controls. But it is useful to bear such considerations in mind in trying to understand why, despite the convincing professions of sincerity on both sides about the importance of avoiding nuclear war, it is so difficult to make even a little progress on formal agreements to lessen the chance of war.

We will apparently have a good deal of time to dwell on these problems. Again, as of the middle of this week, all signs pointed to a lengthy conference. Ambassador Dean and his counterparts were spending some of their spare time last weekend looking for houses to rent for the long stay.—H.M.

East-West Exchange: Signing of Pact Renews Program for Another 2 Years

That biennial testimonial to East-West distrust, the Soviet-American exchange program, was renewed earlier this month, after 5 weeks of negotiations.

The new agreement, which is the third since 1959, runs for 2 years and governs scientific, technical, educational, cultural, and athletic exchanges. Under the agreements, a once near-absence of traffic between the two countries has been replaced by a carefully regulated, tit-for-tat exchange. The flow has never become heavy—the State Department estimates that the total number of persons involved, outside of tourists, has never exceeded 7000 annually—and the program has often been attended by charges of bad faith from both sides. Unquestionably, the exchange program provides, or results from, a better state of affairs than that which prevailed in pre-exchange days, but its very existence reflects the tensions and distrusts of the Cold War. Except for a minor agreement with Romania, the United States government has no exchange agreement with any other nation; nevertheless the traffic between the U.S. and many minor countries easily exceeds that between the U.S. and Soviet goliaths.

The new agreement, as was the case with its predecessors, is not to be regarded as an understanding that specified exchanges will actually take place, but rather that there is an interest in such exchanges and there is therefore a good chance that they will come about. In the previous agreement, for example, it was stated that "both parties shall provide for an exchange of one delegation of specialists for studying problems of radio broadcasting and television, consisting of three or four persons, for a period of up to three weeks."

The State Department reports that, without explanation, the Soviet delegation called off its visit 6 days before it was to arrive; the exchange never took place. Other exchanges never come within even 6 days of fulfillment; they simply do not get beyond the talking stage and, sometimes, they do not get that far.

The differences between the old and new exchange agreements are not very substantial, but they follow the pattern of differing national interests that have prevailed since the first exchange program went into operation. The Soviets have shown a keen interest in getting a look at American science and technology, though, at the same time, they have displayed no enthusiasm for giving American visitors access to their laboratories, industrial plants, and scientific meetings. Over the years this has been a source of friction, with the State Department charging that the Soviets are wrangling invitations from private parties in this country, while American specialists interested in going to the Soviet are at the mercy of a central authority in seeking invitations. The State Department, with its visa authority, can, of course, control the flow of Soviet visitors, but it has had little success, no matter what the leverage, in moving the Soviets on this issue.

"The Soviet interpretation of the