East-West relations

SIR — Your editorial "How to order an East-West thaw" (28 June, p.735) shoots at the wrong targets. Its "sorry tale" of how East-West relations came to deteriorate to their present state is "familiar and depressing" only in its servile acceptance of every nuance of the official Reaganite version of events.

Having swallowed these myths it is perhaps not surprising that you are able to say that Washington is "about to try again for better scientific relations with the Soviet Union", as if throughout this administration nothing had been closer to President Reagan's heart (other than the odd anti-communist crusade) than better scientific relations. As the scientific community must be aware, nothing can be further from the truth.

It is the United States that has impeded scientific contact with the Soviet Union. It is the United States that has brought back cold war ploys to cut down the exchange of scientific information and created an atmosphere in which Soviet academics have been represented as red spies and some scientists have actually been mistreated by the US authorities.

The Soviet Union has always been against discrimination in the field of science and technology, and has more than 60 inter-governmental agreements with Western countries, covering the main areas and forms of cooperation in science and technology. As a result of these agreements, the countries concerned have 22 long-term programmes, some of them scheduled to last for decades.

The USSR Academy of Sciences has agreements on cooperation with scientific establishments in more than 100 countries. Some 500 Soviet scientists have been elected to membership of more than 200 national scientific organizations of other countries. Many of them are in the leadership of various international research centres. The USSR Academy of Sciences has over 80 foreign members from among the outstanding scientists of other countries.

This year marks 25 years since the signing of an agreement on the exchange of personnel for research purposes between the USSR Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences of the United States.

Despite the hindrances created by the last two US administrations, these contacts continue. Last year saw the end of a third Soviet-US Arctic expedition which collected important data on the study of whales and the fin-footed animals.

Encouraging results were received by the M.M. Shemyakin Institute of Bio-Organic Chemistry of the USSR Academy of Sciences, which cooperated with the Buffalo Medical Center in the United States, in the study of antibiotics and proteins effective against tumours.

In 1983 these establishments concluded a further five-year agreement on cooperation. Of world-wide interest is the exchange of research results between the Soviet Union and the United States in, for example, the fields of cosmonautics, thermonuclear energy and cardiovascular diseases.

Soviet science has achievements in many fields which it can share with other nations; it has more research personnel than any other country, about 1.5 million or 25 per cent of the world figure.

The mutual advantage of contacts in science and technology is endorsed by scientists and public figures of many Western countries, many of whom do not admire the Soviet Union's socio-political system.

Their opinion coincides with the Soviet Union's immutable stand on this question not because of political considerations, but because the growth of scientific and technological links promotes world progress, particularly international understanding and trust.

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● Mr Sapsai does not comment on one of the principal items raised by the article to which he refers — East-West misunderstanding (to say the least) over the treatment of Andrei Sakharov in the past two years — Editor, *Nature*.

Nuclear power

SIR — The British nuclear power programme was recently discussed extensively by Sir Alan Cottrell ("No Power of Persuasion", *Nature* 7 June, p.545). A review of an exhaustive three-volume survey of nuclear power technology edited by Walter Marshall, his article accords high praise to a work that is "an honest tale, plainly told", free of rhetoric, advocacy, passion or prejudice, in contrast to the propaganda world of the "Pied Piper" anti-nuclear lobby. The terms "military" and "weapons" appear nowhere in the review, neither in the description of contents, nor in the reviewer's own list of neglected topics.

Yet the military connections of the programme are indubitable. In the United States, the Calder Hall reactor is commonly known as a gas-cooled weapons reactor that made some electricity on the side. The continuing commitment of the United States to maintain its treaty rights to use British plutonium for nuclear weapons is a current issue.

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AIDS priority

SIR — Some comments of Tim Beardsley ("Dispute over AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] patent priority" *Nature* 19 July, p.174) may leave your readers with the impression that human T-cell leukaemia virus III (HTLV-III) reagents were supplied to our group by Dr R.C. Gallo in our early investigations on lymphadenopathy virus (LAV). On the contrary, we supplied Dr Gallo with LAV first isolate on 17 July and 23 September 1983. According to Dr Gallo, the first sample failed to grow in his laboratory, but the second did.

HTLV-III was brought to our laboratory by a co-worker of Dr Gallo, Dr Sarngadharan, on 15 May 1984 for comparison with our own isolates. In our earlier investigations, we received from Dr Gallo only HTLV-I reagents, which were useful to show that LAV was not related to HTLV-I.

Our virus was deposited at the French National Collection of Cultures of Micro-organisms on 15 July 1983. It has since been freely available to any qualified laboratory and has indeed been sent to more than a dozen laboratories throughout the world.

Moreover, I disagree with the statement that "antibodies to core proteins are less well correlated with disease symptoms" than the p41 putative glycoprotein of HTLV-III.

Data published from our laboratory^{1,2} as well as from other laboratories³ indicate a high degree of correlation between antibody against the major core proteins of LAV and AIDS and pre-AIDS (lymphadenopathy syndrome). The lack of antibody to the p25 protein in the sera of some AIDS patients may be due to a profound impairment of their humoral response. Indeed we have observed a decrease or even a disappearance of antibody titre in some patients during evolution of the disease^{2,4}.

This phenomenon may be of prognostic value. Furthermore, the presence of antibodies to any of the LAV/HTLV-III antigens cannot be considered *per se* as a sign of AIDS or pre-AIDS, since a number of healthy homosexuals or haemophiliacs, as well as some asymptomatic carriers, have such antibodies. Although the incubation period of the disease may be very long, it is fair to assume that as in other viral diseases, the AIDS agent will not induce in all infected individuals a severe pathological disorder. The significance of antibodies to the various antigens of LAV/HTLV-III remains therefore to be determined, and is one of the real objectives of current research on AIDS.

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2. Vilmer E. et al. *Lancet* i, 753-57 (1984).
3. Kalyanaraman V.S. et al. *Science* 225, 321-325 (1984).
4. Brun-Vezinet F. et al. *Lancet* ii, 1253-56 (1984).