

## Where next after Geneva break?

*The Geneva arms control talks have adjourned without breaking down, which is something to be grateful for. The negotiators should spend their break deciding where to go from here.*

THE prospect that something will come out of the bilateral arms control negotiations at Geneva, far from being dimmed by last week's adjournment, is enhanced because they have not long since broken down. That the negotiations would be difficult has been clear from the start even though those that broke down at the end of 1983 covered some of the same ground. This time, the problems at Geneva have been complicated by its announcement of the US plan to build a defence against strategic missiles, an issue that seems not unduly to have alarmed the Soviet Union during the earlier abortive talks. The best hope now is that the two sides will use the summer to work out the skeleton of an agreement that might be put to Mr Reagan and Mr Gorbachev when they meet, as they intend next November. But even that is a lot to hope for.

The present position is both complicated and delicate. The United States, which spent the years preceding the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972 in trying (successfully, in the end) to convince the Soviet Union that ballistic missile defences would be dangerous, is now faced with the task of demonstrating that the opposite is the truth, that a workable shield against hostile missiles would be a boon. Inevitably, the logic must sound thin. Yet the United States is within its rights to insist that research programmes cannot be the subject of international treaties (because verification is impossible), while the Soviet Union can rightly say that some of the testing planned by the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) would violate the ABM treaty, as would the emplacement in an Earth orbit of a radar system for detecting hostile missiles, whether or not it was accompanied by a device for shooting down unwanted objects.

### Understanding

The signs are that the Soviet Union is now willing to accept that research cannot be prevented by bilateral agreements. What the United States should in return be willing to accept is that successful research cannot be followed by development without violating the 1972 treaty so the need is for some general understanding (not at this stage a treaty) on mechanisms for modifying the ABM treaty by agreement. That, in any case, is about the only way in which the United States could hope to win support in Western Europe for its plans, and also the best way to avoid the increasingly bruising squabbles in Congress about money for SDI.

But how is it possible to agree in advance on procedures for modifying a treaty without knowing what changes will be required? The difficulties are fewer than they appear. The ABM treaty itself is, by its symmetry, a useful guide. In the original version, each side was allowed to protect only two regional targets, one city and one missile field. Each was allowed to build phased array radars, but only on its periphery, and directed outwards. There were restrictions (whose observance is not

easily verified) on the uses that might be made of anti-aircraft missiles. The general principle was that each side was allowed to follow, if it chose, prescribed courses of action. (In the event, the United States decided not to take up the right to deploy anti-missile missiles, the Soviet Union exercised only one of its two options.) So it might sensibly be agreed that any later modifications of the ABM treaty would follow the same principles. The first practical component to emerge from SDI is almost certain to be a recipe for an orbiting early-warning system which, if not accompanied by defences, could do no harm. So why not agree now to agree later on how such a system should be specified, and agree that each side should be entitled to one of them? And so on with the other planned components of SDI, as and if they become practical realities?

The rest of the Geneva agenda similarly cries out for re-examination. The serious flaw in the abortive negotiations of 1983 was that strategic and intermediate-range missiles were rigidly kept separate. The separation is now less complete, which is just as well when it is reckoned that missiles such as the Soviet SS20 and heavy bombers based in Europe have a similar strategic function in a European context. One obvious difficulty now is that so much time has passed since the Salt II agreement (1978) that each side probably needs, for good military reasons, a more modern strategic missile. The US need of something more credible than the MX missile stands out a mile. So here again is an opportunity for reciprocal modification of the existing agreements — permitted modernization coupled, say, with a target number for total warheads reducing steadily over some specific period ahead, something like a decade. There would be opportunities in such an arrangement to use the "build-down" principle in fashion two years ago — one new missile for each two old missiles destroyed. An arrangement like this would let ordinary people sleep more easily in their beds, but also keep the generals happy. But why bother about them? Because an agreement that lets one side feel permanently at a disadvantage will not stick. □

## Reaganomics found out

*The US economy is heading for stagnation and the need to cut the deficit is more urgent.*

BUDGET directors, wherever they work, are not often popular, so that there are rarely floods of tears when they quit their jobs. The departure last week of Mr David Stockman, director of the US Office of Management and Budget since 1981, should be differently regarded. His continued presence at the White House has been for the past three years the best chance that something would be done to reduce the federal government's budget deficit, expected to exceed \$200 million in the year beginning on 1 October. The chance, recently only an off-chance, has no doubt been further diminished by President Ronald Reagan's abdominal operation, while the past week has seen such a confusion of signals about the condition of the US economy from the stock markets and the foreign exchanges that the most resolute members of the US Congress are likely to be given pause. However, this is not the time for masterly inaction.

## Biological manuscripts

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