

(Mr. Clarke, Sri Lanka)

Which leads inevitably to the subject of laser and particle beam weapons. Now that the long-imagined "death ray" is technically possible, it has been seized upon as a solution to the problem of defence against nuclear missiles. A vigorous debate is in progress over the practicability of such systems and the consensus appears to be that although they are theoretically possible, it will be decades rather than years before they can become operational, except for relatively close-range purposes.

However, I am always suspicious of negative judgements, because I remember vividly the debate in the United States over the possibilities of long-range rockets in the late 1940s. Let me quote again the notorious pronouncement made by the chief American defence scientist, Dr. Vannevar Bush, in 1945:

"There has been a great deal said about a 3,000 mile high-angle rocket ... I don't think anyone in the world knows how to do such a thing, and I feel confident that it will not be done for a long period of time to come ... I think we can leave that out of our thinking. I wish the American public would leave that out of their thinking."

The American public did; but the Russians didn't.

If something is theoretically possible, and someone needs it badly enough, it will be achieved eventually, whatever the cost. And when one side develops a new system, the other will try to outdo it. The two Superpowers are both led by intelligent and responsible men, yet they sometimes appear like small boys standing in a pool of gasoline -- each trying to acquire more matches than the other, when a single one is more than sufficient.

It is no longer true that wars begin in the minds of men; they can now start in the circuits of computers. Yet the technologies which could destroy us can also be used for our salvation. From their very nature, space systems are uniquely adapted to provide global facilities, equally beneficial to all nations.

As you are well aware, in 1978 the French Government proposed the establishment of an international satellite monitoring agency to help enforce peace treaties and to monitor military activities. This has been the subject of a detailed study by a United Nations Committee (see United Nations document A/AC.206/14 of 16 August 1981) conducted by Hubert Bortzmeier. The conclusion is that such a system could well play a major role in the preservation of peace.

The operational and political difficulties are obviously very great, yet they are trivial when compared with the possible advantages. The expense -- one or two billion dollars -- is also hardly a valid objection. It has been estimated that its reconnaissance satellites saved the United States the best part of a trillion dollars. A global system might be an even better investment; and who can set a cash value on the price of peace?

However, the United States and the Soviet Union, anxious to preserve their joint monopoly of reconnaissance satellites, are strongly opposed to such a scheme. The British Government is also lukewarm, to say the least.

Nevertheless, we have seen that in matters of great, though lesser, importance, such as international communications, it is possible to have extremely effective co-operation between a hundred or more countries, even with violently opposing