

The hitherto completely fruitless Vienna talks following three decades of feverish war preparations can thus fulfil only two functions. One is to enable the rulers of the participating countries to assure each other that they are not as yet ready for mass suicide. The other is to convince their own peoples that the blame for the prevailing prewar tension should be cast on the "wrong" side of the Curtain.

Bad faith

But it should be clear that the conference, ostensibly intended to reduce arms and tension, has been held in bad faith. Both sides have known for some years that the armaments at present at a high state of readiness would soon become obsolete and be withdrawn even without an agreement — hence the promise of Leonid Brezhnev at a recent Communist Party conference in Moscow to make new initiatives at the Vienna bargaining table, which apparently means that Russia will soon be ready to re-equip the Western frontier.

For the new weapons have outdated generations of military thinking as well as such traditional and reliable instruments of slaughter as the tank (in which both sides have invested huge amounts of their public wealth). In the 16 days of the 1973 Middle East War, Israel lost more tanks to mobile, Soviet-made, precision-guided weapons than the entire United States land armour stationed in West Germany. A new generation of remotely-piloted air vehicles — armed by precision-guided munitions and operated from a safe distance by computer technicians watching television screens — have already demonstrated their capacity both in the Middle East and in Southeast Asia.

Even if the new weapons are never employed in another European war, they are certain to shatter the public calculations of Western generals intended to frighten tax-payers into tolerating constantly-increasing military expenditure. These calculations are likely to reflect accurately the contingency planning of the Soviet generals; but they tend to distort the violent fantasies of professional killers by transforming them into the realm of universal probability.

Thus in a discussion of the military capability of the Warsaw Pact countries, General Sir Walter Walker, former Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces Northern Europe, recently assured readers of *The Times* of London that, "with their 'meat-grinder' tactics, they will crunch their way forward, regardless of casualties, at a speed of 70 miles a day, supported in depth by airborne troops, armed helicopters, air

attack, amphibious attack on the land, and chemical attack. Their doctrine regards the tactical use of chemical weapons as a normal form of conventional warfare and in this field they are better equipped and psychologically prepared than any other country in the world". The General goes on to predict that the speed, devastating power and velocity of the Soviet onslaught "will" be such that the West "will" not be able to resort to the use of its nuclear weapons because the missiles "will" already have been overthrown the time the political decisions are made. The grave implication is not that the West must rid itself of paranoia but that its might, in the event, depend on American intercontinental missiles for destruction.

But the General will be wrong if catastrophe is postponed for just a while. Studies emerging from the military establishments of the Western world suggest that the new generation of precision-guided weapons necessitates a tactical departure from traditional strategic planning. The high accuracy of the missiles has rendered both the tanks and the aircraft vulnerable to small and nimble teams of technicians and tilted the European military balance in favour of defence.

It would be comforting to conclude from this that the advance of military technology has thus solved mankind's dilemma of survival in the shadow of nuclear clear capability, and that more than a few years after the end of the war there will now be peace. The Vienna talks on reductions in Europe will in all probability produce spectacular results within the next two years as the obsolete weapons are in fact removed. But, judging from previous experience, it is equally probable that the new weapons about to replace them are soon to lose their advantage if further military innovations without one save the military planners on both sides of the Curtain deliberately prepare for corporate destruction.

Europe alone is armed by about 10,000 American and 3,500 Soviet tactical nuclear weapons with a combined destructive capacity 50,000 times as great as that of the atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima. For added "security", the continent is also the target of thousands of strategic nuclear missiles. The United States is capable of delivering about 8,000 of these and the Soviet Union about 2,500. The recent strategic arms "limitation" agreement reached in principle at Vladivostok permits each of them to deploy intercontinental missiles armed with multiple warheads, enabling them to

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