

SALT II treaty. To that extent, the United States is right in asking that missiles should be considered alongside ASATs.

Whether such a broad agenda can ever be agreed is anybody's guess. A quick start on negotiation, which would be of symbolic value, is less important than the need that the ground should be prepared thoroughly in advance. And there is much to be said for postponing negotiations until after the US elections in November. President Reagan makes no secret of his eagerness to be seen to be talking to the Soviet Union during the pre-election period, but no doubt has also calculated that it would be an electoral handicap if talks began and then broke down in a flurry of recrimination.

Either way, it is unthinkable that negotiations conducted in parallel with an election campaign could yield the best result. But it should also serve the interests of the Soviet Union to wait until after November, if only in case there is a change of administration in the United States. Then, at least the negotiators should know with and for whom they are negotiating. □

Secret science

Governmental efforts to impose spurious secrecy on the scientific enterprise can be dangerous.

It is a safe bet that many official secrets are neither official nor secret. Government secrecy, however well justified when first imposed, has a way of becoming an end in itself. At no time has this been more apparent than during the Reagan Administration, ironically elected on the pledge to curtail government usurpation of individual freedom. Thus the Reagan Administration has imposed unprecedented restrictions on contacts with the press by government officials, has sought to impose lifelong censorship on government employees with access to classified materials and has even tried to vitiate the Freedom of Information Act.

Tales of high government silliness about secrecy are, of course, nothing new. Generals' laundry lists have become top secret. But it is more than just silliness when secrecy becomes a veil behind which travesties of public policy are committed. One such is the way in which US intelligence officials have arrogated to themselves responsibilities they could never claim in the open by seeking to bridge a supposed strategic gap between the United States and the Soviet Union — in parapsychology. Last February, presidential science adviser George Keyworth all but acknowledged the existence of a parapsychology development programme. In response to a question on the subject, he paused and then said, "Let me say this only, and that is that in our pursuit of research in the really critical areas of military technology, we do our very best to let our imaginations and our creativity be as effective as possible. We pay attention to Soviet programs, and no areas are going to be clearly rejected on parochial grounds."

Nobody knows exactly what the Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of Defense may be up to, which is why attention has been concentrated on the supposedly investigative reporting of one Don McRae, who has just published an account of the US Government's interest in parapsychology (*Mind Wars: The true story of secret government research into the military potential of psychic weapons*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1984). McRae's story in any case makes entertaining reading. We learn, for example, that the US Navy hired 34 psychics to keep track of Soviet submarines, that the National Security Agency is applying clairvoyance to code-breaking and that worries over Soviet psychics peering into concrete silos led to the abandonment of the "race-track" basing mode for the MX missile. Only the untested arrogance that secrecy affords could permit such thinking to go on inside the government. Even a little dose of peer review (or scientific expertise) would do wonders to cure it.

The same untested pseudo-science seems to be behind the administration's plans to expand the use of the polygraph or "lie detector", which seems to flourish in the climate of national security and darkness of secrecy.

The one Department of Defense official who tried to shed the light of science on the plans is said to have been given a dressing-down from General Richard Stilwell, Deputy Under-Secretary of

Defense and a retired four-star general who is not used to being told he is wrong. The official finally gave up, left the department and now says he should have known better than to try to talk science to people who wear copper bracelets to cure their arthritis. It will be interesting to see whether those hoping to keep polygraphs out of the British Government's Communications Headquarters in Cheltenham will be any more successful. □

Consistency in France

The new French Government may be even more zealous in the application of science.

NOT all of France would agree with the opinion that President François Mitterrand is the epitome of consistency, but there is a good deal of support for that proposition. Outwardly, the evidence is stacked the other way. Since his election in 1981, the President has blown hot and cold on the principal issues raised during his election. To begin with, he was faithful to the promise that France would be run on socialist lines, and embarked on a programme of nationalization as remarkable for its diversity as for its scale. At the outset, the government of France clearly believed that it would be possible to banish many social problems, unemployment for example, by deficit financing contained within the bounds of plausibility only by draconian taxes. By the spring of 1983, however, it was clear that the recipe would lead to economic disaster, so the President and the government changed economic course, settling instead for the period of retrenchment that has produced the past year's economic privations in Lorraine and other regions of France best-known for their dependence on ageing industries. Left-wing radicals such as M. Jean-Pierre Chevènement left the government at this point, although the two members of the Communist Party in the government soldiered on. Now the communists have departed, but M. Chevènement is back, as minister of education. What can be consistent about that?

It is important to remember the fine print. A year after his election, President Mitterrand startled the Western economic summit with his plea that the industrialized nations of the world should band together to use technology for the transformation of their economic prospects. By then M. Chevènement, originally minister of science and technology, had added industry to his portfolio and was attempting to carry through in France the policies that his president was urging on the West in general. There was never a chance that industrial innovation could prosper so quickly that France would hardly notice the disappearance of older uncompetitive industries, but Chevènement did his best. His successor, M. Laurent Fabius, has unfortunately been almost exclusively preoccupied with the downside of the last year's upheaval. But then and now, as Mitterrand's Prime Minister, Fabius has repeated the familiar doctrine that France will survive economically only by energetic application of technology through French industry. Can they succeed?

There is more than a slim chance. Even when the going has been roughest in the past three years, the government has sustained the scale of its support for basic science and for industrial development. The texture of research has been strengthened both in the universities and the research organizations, while there have been heartening technical successes such as the administration of the Ariane rocket programme and the operation of the huge French nuclear industry. The trouble of course, is that these are not yet (and may never be) economic miracles, while French ambitions to make a mark in the international market for telecommunications and computers remain as insubstantial as, say, the British. But plainly the new French Government does not intend to back away from this radical element of its economic policy. M. Fabius's post for science and technology is now filled by Professor Hubert Curien, one of the architects of the French space programme with his roots firmly in the academic side of the research enterprise — and with a high reputation elsewhere in Europe for his concern for international collaboration. Business as usual is the motto. □