Arms Control

Nigel Hawkes (20 Oct. 1972, p. 286) articulates how hard it is to sustain a high level of morale in working for international conciliation and disarmament. He also gives due credit to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) for its indispensable reportorial work in documenting the world’s preoccupation with armaments.

It is, however, a mistake to judge SALT (Strategic Arms Limitations Talks) and other diplomatic efforts solely by their failure to reduce the global expenditure on arms. Many elements of the arms account, for example, the rapidly changing strategic power of China and its geopolitical impact, were simply beyond the reach of SALT. Dramatic political reorientations in other spheres have now transformed the context of efforts at arms control.

If strategic disarmament were an end in itself, the scene today would be the most discouraging in history. Expenditures on arms remain a vicious drain on resources needed for economic development. However, the overriding peril of strategic weapons is not that they will be stockpiled, but that they may be used. Most of us would agree that we are safer today in that respect than we were 10 or 15 years ago. SALT has contributed a measure of stability through its formal arrangements of mutual limitation. Perhaps more impor-