EDITORIAL

IT is back in the early days of the 19th century. There is Thomas Jefferson, the President, with some of his advisers. They all stand around a desk, looking down at a bit of paper. Jefferson shakes his head sadly. "Well, I thought it was a good idea," he says, "but the tape says no. Therefore tell the French minister that we will not purchase the Louisiana Territory, after all."

This little scene came unbidden into my mind recently when I read a news story to the effect that the Department of Defense appropriated $100,000 with which to kick around the possibilities of building a computer that could lay down guidelines for national and international policy. A team of scientists—after reading up on strategy, world politics, international finance, and—I quote the team's leader—"that sort of thing," programmed a computer with 30,000 bits of information to enable it to simulate relations among the major power blocs under any given set of circumstances. Eventual object: to tell nation's leaders possible consequences of particular policies.

No doubt the scientists involved are well aware that this is all experimental, that the machine will never be a predictor or purveyor of foreign policy, but rather a quick and handy second-guesser of alternative approaches. Nevertheless, it is difficult to overestimate the yearning of some men to relieve themselves of the responsibilities for decisions, to be able to fob off onto other people—or things—the decision-making function. And, though it may be heresy to say so in these pages, I, for one, grow increasingly dubious of the "theory of probability" approach to the life and death of our civilization. The strategy of games reads nicely, and it may be fun to apply it to poker, or to theoretical war. But when the lives of billions are at stake, I'd rather put my trust in the mind of man, rather than the mind of a probability machine.

The mind of man may not be as quick, nor as knowledgeable, nor as objective.

But it is powered by a heart.

N. L.

5