

PHASING OUT THE MILITARY USE OF HERBICIDES

Under current U.S. policy herbicides are not authorized for use in combat zones except for the defoliation of perimeters immediately adjacent to fire bases and similar installations. Herbicides are no longer authorized for use against crops or for defoliation except on perimeters. In other words, the U.S. is almost entirely out of the military herbicide business. The use of herbicides on perimeters may be considered as a housekeeping activity and, it is to be hoped, can be successfully distinguished from the use of herbicides as weapons of war.

Although there are arguments both for and against the use of herbicides as weapons, the U.S. has decided that the benefits of stopping outweigh the advantages of continued use. It would be a pity if divergent practices by our allies, in particular the Republic of Vietnam, were to prevent us from obtaining the advantages of our newly adopted policy. With this in mind, we should consider the possible consequences of the current use of herbicides by the RVNAF.

The following quantities of military herbicides are presently stocked in the Republic of Vietnam:

<u>NAME</u>	<u>QUANTITY (Gallons)</u>
Agent Orange	1,500,000
Agent White	200,000 (approx.)
Agent Blue	100,000 (approx.)

These materials are formally in the possession of the GVN under the Military Assistance Program. However, the Department of Defense is arranging for the return to the U.S. of the stock of Agent Orange on grounds that it may be dangerously contaminated with a toxic impurity.

There are currently no plans to return Agents White or Blue to the United States.

The RVNAF has recently begun spraying herbicides from helicopters on forested areas, canals and other targets at a rate of approximately 4,000 acres per month. At this rate RVNAF herbicide operations could continue for at least two years, using Agents White and Blue currently stocked in the RVN.

Thus, if present RVNAF practices continue, there will be a substantial period during which the practices of the U.S. and those of the GVN regarding herbicides are strongly divergent. This could cause some substantial problems for us:

1. If the Administration should renew its request to the Senate to approve the 1925 Geneva Protocol, Senators who have blocked action on the Protocol because of their opposition to military use of herbicides would probably react by feeling that the Administration is trying "to have its cake and eat it too." If so, our change of policy regarding herbicides may prove insufficient to obtain Senate approval of the treaty. It is unlikely that the problem would go unnoticed, especially in view of the White House statement of 26 December 1970 and Secretary

Rogers' repeated assurances to the Senate on 5 March 1971 that the Administration is instituting "... an orderly, yet rapid phase out of the herbicide operations..." in Vietnam.

2. Herbicide warfare could become a persistent feature of conflicts in Southeast Asia, Africa and other third world areas. For example, if the RVNAF becomes habituated to spraying herbicides, the Cambodians may, at some point, do the same. It is not at all inconceivable that in some future quarrel one of these nations will use herbicides against the crops or plantations of the other. For such uses, the necessary application rate of herbicide can be much less than the three gallons per acre used for forest defoliation, thus allowing even a small nation to destroy food or economic crops over large areas. Although presently no direct threat to the United States, this kind of warfare certainly can intensify nasty situations elsewhere.

3. We should not ignore the possibility that today's herbicide warfare may lead on to types of chemical or biological anti-plant warfare that would be a serious threat even to large, wealthy nations. With the Administration going to considerable trouble to control chemical and biological weapons, we should go the last mile and get rid of herbicide warfare, too, in order to minimize future military interest in this entire category of weapons.

These considerations lead to the conclusion that we should attempt to convince the GVN to bring their policy regarding the military use of herbicides into agreement with our own. One or more of the following approaches might be successful:

1. Frankly explain to the GVN the strong concern of this Administration with preventing chemical and biological warfare and the problems connected with securing Senate approval of the Geneva Protocol.

2. Emphasize that the military use of herbicides by the RVNAF is of marginal utility at best and has its counterproductive aspects.

3. Terminate all aerial spraying of herbicides by U.S. forces in Southeast Asia, using only ground delivered herbicide and non-herbicide alternatives for use on fire base perimeters.

4. Request return of all, or nearly all, herbicide stocks to the U.S. The return of Agent White could be facilitated by pointing to evidence for its undesirably long persistence in soil and the danger of contaminating the water table with picloram, a component of White to which many common crops are extraordinarily sensitive. (It appears, however, that there is no similar technical reason for terminating the use of Agent Blue.)