

HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
THE BIOLOGICAL LABORATORIES  
16 DIVINITY AVENUE  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

3 May 1976

Mr. John Voss  
American Academy of Arts and Sciences  
165 Allandale Street  
Jamaica Plain Station  
Boston, MA 02130

Dear John,

Enclosed is a short memorandum proposing a meeting to consider the current military role of chemical weapons, especially in the European context, and its implications for possible chemical disarmament.

Sincerely yours,

*Matt*

Matthew Meselson

enc.

cc: Dr. Paul Doty  
Dr. Bernard Feld

4 May 1976

MEMORANDUM

TO: John Voss  
FROM: Matthew Meselson

Although the development, manufacture, possession, and transfer of biological weapons is now prohibited by international treaty (The Biological Weapons Convention of 1972), there is no similar agreement for chemical weapons. The United States, and probably the Soviet Union, have large stockpiles of lethal chemical weapons.

High level interest in achieving chemical disarmament was indicated in communiques by U.S. and Soviet heads of state issued at Moscow in July, 1974 and at Vladivostok in November, 1974. Nevertheless, progress in chemical disarmament appears to be stalemated. In the U.S. the issue has insufficient priority at the highest levels of government to overcome objections from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, there is no published analysis clearly demonstrating an important major power need for lethal chemical weapons and U.S. military views on the subject are by no means unanimous.

A small one or two day meeting attended by military experts and others could significantly clarify some of the most important issues and might thereby help to overcome the current stalemate in U.S. policy discussions. Two questions of particular importance are:

- (1) Of what importance is U.S. possession of a lethal chemical capability to the defense of Europe?
- (2) What would be the costs and benefits of U.S. adoption of a "defense only" posture for chemical weapons?

If the academy wishes to organize such a meeting, I suppose you would want to set up a small planning committee to select the participants and the time.

For your interest, I enclose the "Report from the Third Pugwash Chemical Warfare (CW) Workshop," London, 12-14 April 1976, and also an article of mine entitled, "What Policy for Nerve Gas?" It is of interest to note the section on pages 4-5 of the Pugwash report stating the view that there is little military rationale for the possession of lethal chemical weapons by major powers.