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Dear Matt,

On the matters outstanding after our mammoth telephone conversations on 25-26 Jan: a check-list of things you are going to do or consider:

p.14: Date of obsoleting of BZ. Note: I imagine that the process of declaring a standardized item obsolete requires much paper- and committee-work, so that by the time an item is formally obsolete it may in practice long since have become nonoperational. For example, according to the Brophy, Miles & Cochrane (1959, pp68-69) volume of the official US Army in WWII history of the CWS, lewisite was not obsoleted until 1955 even though the decision to close down the lewisite plants had been taken in 1943. It could be, then, that BZ has not yet been declared obsolete (though Bob M implied to me, back in 1976, that it had been) even though all stocks may have been identified for disposal.

p.19: Are we to go on suggesting, as we now do in the last line, that the GSRS MRL system will not have CW warheads available? (You had had the impression that the whole GSRS project, a collaborative US-NATO one, was on the skids, not just the binary GSRS warhead).

p.20: Whether to retain lines 4-8 or to delete them (i.e. is binary Lance-warhead R & D still alive?) The reason why I am quite keen on retention is that these lines are about the only place in the article where we indicate that the USA has a programme of CW weapons R & D. There is quite a lot of press comment that seems predicated on a belief that weapons R&D stopped when production stopped, back in 1969. As it happens, development of the E-27 CW warhead for Lance, which had begun around 1962, was indeed curtailed in 1969 (according to congressional testimony); but my understanding is that, at that time, a decision was taken to abandon all non-binary munition R & D. The reference in the last ACIS to flight testing of a binary Lance warhead suggests that the E-27 project was simply revamped as one of dozens of binary projects.

p.43: Has Canada, like Britain, renounced CW weapons only for the time being? If so, has she also renounced the option of seeking access to US (or French) supplies?

p.47 & 50-51: Do the anti arguments need expanding? The pro arguments (pp44-7) concern "NATO maintaining/having a chemical retaliatory capability". But the anti arguments (pp47-50) address only "the deterrent value and the de-escalating/escalation-damping potential claimed for NATO's chemical weapons". Only in the sentence beginning three lines from the bottom of page 47 do we comment on the war-fighting value to NATO of having CW weapons, and then all we say is that they "might or might not" have value.

For the reason outlined in para 35 of my letter to you of 27 Nov 79, I don't think we can usefully add to the anti arguments at this part of the article. But we could, as you suggested, towards the bottom of page 50: by inserting a sentence or two which alludes back to page 49 and forwards to page 53 (lines 4-6), making explicit the two main European worries about CW--decoupling and imposition of WWI-meatgrinding--previously left implicit.

On the assumption that we do indeed replace "sign of a diminished resolve to use nuclear weapons" (bottom of page 49) by "sign that even in the event of massive Soviet conventional and chemical attack, NATO might refrain from using its nuclear weapons", the following could go in after "military capabilities." at the end of the first para on page 51:

'At a more fundamental level there is fear that, if an expanded chemical retaliatory capability were ever used, the consequence would be immobilization of battlefields and reversion to the meatgrinding tactics of World War I: a horror that is deeply embedded in European consciousness, the recurrence of which nuclear deterrence is relied upon to avert. US pressure for expansion of NATO chemical forces on grounds of preserving the nuclear threshold stands to be misinterpreted as a weakening of the foundation of that deterrence, namely commitment of US nuclear forces.'

The words "and concern for the hazard to civilian populations" could then be deleted from page 50, lines 6-5 from bottom.

Actually, rereading this, I'm not sure it's much of an improvement. Maybe you can tighten it up.

In haste to catch the post,

As ever,



J P Perry Robinson