

Hall

280 Riverside Drive
Apartment 5J
New York, N.Y. 10025
May 18, 1980

Dr. Matthew Meselson
The Biology Laboratory
16 Divinity Ave.
Cambridge, Mass. 02138

Dear Dr. Meselson:

Thank you for the help you gave me in my research regarding the U.S. claims about CBW in Asia and the USSR. I have just submitted a 2,600 word story on those claims -- and the U.S. & British CW pressures -- to The Progressive; it is to be published for a June 5th release.

At this time, I'm still unclear as to exactly what is going on with the pilot plant and the 1981 appropriations. As I most recently understood it, ACDA had killed it in OMB, but there are rumors that the effort will be revived in committee. As it stands, I expect to write more about this, and hope to visit Denver in order to develop more on the libertarian end of this complex and misunderstood issue.

Meanwhile, I'm belatedly enclosing a copy of the Manchester Guardian story I mentioned to you. It nicely complements Prof. Robinson's early work. I hope to reach you again as things unfold. For now, I wish you success in your project and thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

PETER HALL

Encl.

Peter Nieswand in Peshawar, Pakistan, looks at allegations of Soviet chemical warfare attacks on rebels

G - 4/27/80

Poisoned gas or poisoned propaganda?

THERE IS so far no evidence to prove that the Soviet army has been using poison gas in Afghanistan, in contravention of the Geneva protocol. Although Afghan rebel groups based here continue to make such claims, they are not borne out by eye-witness accounts, by the evidence of injuries, nor by the reports of senior doctors in the main government hospitals here, where the worst cases are supposed to have been treated.

American officials are not able to provide proof to back up recent statements from Washington either, and officials of some other Western nations say flatly that they do not believe there is any truth in the allegations.

There is no doubt that the Soviets are using crowd-control gas of some kind, rather as the United States did in Vietnam with CS nausea gas. From personal accounts, the Russian tactic appears to be to fire gas canisters from low-flying helicopters into villages or rebel encampments, and then send in waves of troops when many of the people are disabled or unconscious.

In a rebel hospital here, run by the fundamentalist Islamic group, the Hezbi-Islami, lies Mohammed Sharif, one of the gas victims. However, he is in bed because his leg has been smashed in two places and the knee joint destroyed, and not because of the gassing. Mr Sharif is from Jalalabad, and he is in his mid-twenties. He was hit 25 days ago in a rebel camp at the village of Sukhrod, five miles

from his home.

"The Afghan Communists and Russian Communists came with about 20 helicopters at one time," he said. "They used different kinds of weapons and also chemical materials which were of many colours. Some were red, some yellow, some grey. The gas had a very bad, bitter taste, like pepper. My eyes began streaming. I began sneezing and coughing and then I vomited. I was carrying my gun, an Enfield 303, and I dropped it. After a few minutes, I fell unconscious."

The attack raged around Mr Sharif, and when he awoke two hours later — his eyes and nose still streaming — he found that he had been wounded, and that his Mujaheddin colleagues had put a "gas mask" over his face.

These masks are home-made affairs consisting of nothing more than a few pieces of gauze. A doctor in charge of the rebel hospital, who gave his name as Dr Matiollha, added: "Sometimes they just use a handkerchief over their mouth and nose" — in fact, the sort of protection which is helpful against crowd-control gas. American experts agree that only a highly sophisticated mask would be of any use against a poison chemical weapon, or a nerve gas.

Mr Sharif's account is similar to those given by others. Although he continued to shake, and his eyes streamed for a few hours afterwards, the gas had no lasting effects. His vision has not been affected

and his voice and breathing are normal.

He said that 20 people were killed in the attack — 13 of them by poison gas. Experts say this sounds unlikely. If Mr Sharif had been gassed into unconsciousness, and survived without ill effects, it seems doubtful that 13 others would have died from it. Even the Americans are not regarding the claim with much hope.

At the 700-bed Khyber Hospital, one of the biggest in Peshawar, a senior official commented: "We have not received any cases here that would indicate the use of poison gases. And we only give dialysis in cases of kidney failure."

He said that most of the Afghans brought in were "simple burn cases, or bomb blast cases."

The Americans suspect that the Red Army may have used poison gas in Badakshan Province for a short period in January and February. Reports which reached them at that stage indicated that some people had died and others were suffering serious and long-term effects.

However, subsequent reports of gassing do not tally with the information received from Badakshan, and the Americans who have already committed themselves publicly, are in the invidious position of being totally unable to prove their allegations.

One Western diplomat said: "The Americans have been forced to review every shred of evidence in their possession, and they've found that what they've got is minimal."