

CBW

Curry

13 November 1980

Mr. Bill Curry  
The Los Angeles Times  
Denver Bureau  
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Denver, Colorado 80202

Dear Mr. Curry,

Thank you very much for the clippings and the copy of your original article. In responding to your request for comment, please excuse the following hasty summary which is all I can do at present. For reference, I have assigned page numbers to consecutive sheets on the print-out that you sent me:

Page 2, paragraph 4: In public, DOD officials still pay lip service to a US ~~treaty goal~~; in private, however, I find that the treaty possibility is no longer taken seriously, as it once was.

Page 2, paragraph 6: The reason the "Army official" is right to say we do not have the capability to conduct sustained chemical weapons operations is that we have only a limited supply of chemical weapons in Europe. If the Europeans would let us deploy our present stockpiles to Europe, we would definitely have the capability to conduct chemical weapons operations for the full 30-90 day planning period envisaged for conventional war.

Page 3, paragraph 2: You are right to say that the 1973 war seems to have had a catalytic effect on US military interest in chemical weapons. I am not sure, however, why it had such an effect. Essentially similar filters and blowers were found on Soviet personnel captured by the Israelis six years earlier in the 1967 war. It is true that the antidote was new. If major conclusions were based on finding the antidote, however, I would consider it to be an overreaction. Enclosed for your

reference is an article from Defense Week. I suspect that causes for renewed ~~interest~~ in chemical weapons were more institutional and internal than in response to any new information regarding Soviet activities. On the defensive side, the Soviets have continued their impressive efforts more or less steadily for many years. On the offensive side, we know almost nothing of their preparations and apparently do not know in particular whether they have manufactured any poison gas weapons.

Page 3, paragraph 3: It is not correct to say that the Soviets have acquired the spray decontamination device "meanwhile". Actually, this device -- a truck-mounted turbot jet engine -- was first seen as early as 1965. It appears to be intended for chemical decontamination, insecticide spraying, and melting ice on roads and runways.

Page 3, paragraph 5: So far as I know, there is absolutely no evidence to support the alarming view stated by Senator Armstrong.

Page 6: The decision to keep the Weteyes appears to me to have been an attempt on the part of the Secretary of Defense to avoid possible criticism for being soft. At a somewhat lower level on his staff, I suspect the motive was different. Keeping the Weteyes keeps alive an irritant which can be used to obtain Congressional approval to spend money on binary weapons. There are, incidentally, many thousands of MC-1 GB bombs for which current fighter aircraft, such as the Phantom, are qualified.

Page 8, paragraph 4: It actually becomes GB, not merely "like" GB.

Page 10, paragraph 6: It is true that the army is withdrawing 105 millimeter howitzers from Europe. They are being kept, however, for possible contingencies. More important in the European context, our NATO allies do have and are keeping 105 millimeter howitzers in which our 105 chemical shells are fully serviceable.

Sincerely Yours,

Matthew Meselson