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CW Aaron

November 26, 1981

Dear Professor Meselson,

This note has several purposes.

First, I thought you might be interested in an update of goings-on at ABC. Second, I just wanted to say how valuable your role as catalyst and skeptic seems to me to be. Third, I wanted to propose a meeting to discuss the aims, and political and financial feasibility, of some collective, standing body whose creation would expand upon, and solidify, the isolated, largely defensive efforts of individuals to respond to government campaigns like "yellow rain."

Telephone conversations with people at ABC confirm our sense that the original trajectory of the program remains largely unadjusted. Your caveats were taken seriously, but the preponderance of evidence, according to ABC, is sufficient to justify an indictment against the Soviets. The title of the show indicates the tenor: "Rain of Terror."

Airtime will not be until the 3rd week in December, the worst possible date for ratings. Beyond the fact that people will be out at parties instead of at home, those that are watching television are not likely to stay tuned for scenes of bloody vomit. The Christmas season is supposed to be a time to celebrate peace on earth.

The producers of the show are also concerned that Haig has refused to appear on the program; there are suspicions that because of START, the crew that pushed the issue of "yellow rain" in the beginning is now being muzzled.

Pam Hill is intimately involved in the production. She is extremely wary about ABC being set up, and caution, rather than prosecutorial zeal, has been the official mandate.

I'm going down to the screening the 2nd week in December. I wrote a brief piece and showed it to the Globe, and intend to do a longer article on the politics of "Rain of Terror."

You've been a one man band in this entire affair. I know, from my reference to Freeman Dyson's book, that you feel uncomfortable being cast as the lonely hero. I appreciate your impatience for melodramatic depictions. But based on an admittedly brief exposure to your work around "yellow rain," your energy and your political skills are impressive.

As you're the first to recognize, however, those talents would be infinitely more productive if they were embedded in, or attached to, some collective structure of analysis and action. You recall saying how frustrated you felt that there weren't twenty colleagues helping you to set the record straight on "yellow rain."

The point is, of course, that there are going to be continuous official campaigns, similar to this one, which assert "factoids," or plain lies. Even if the charges are ultimately refuted, such disinformation can do tremendous damage. Tactics intended to gain the ideological whip-hand do not depend upon reliable evidence for their effectiveness; government allegations, no matter how spurious, are going to befuddle and disorient, as long as domestic opposition groups are unprepared to pose immediate and authoritative counter-arguments.

Randy Forsberg, whom I've worked with, began her career as a disarmament specialist at SIPRI; she moved on to MIT, and two years ago, founded the Institute For Defense and Disarmament Studies. Her goal is to produce a set of data on weapons and strategy so lucid, and so thoroughly researched, that her political perspective will gain credibility among journalists, citizens groups, etc. Other organizations are also attempting to establish themselves as sources of alternative, non-government expertise.

Beyond an absence of any centralized co-ordination, or even information sharing, much of this activist scholarship and analysis is without what the strategic gnostics like to call "time-urgent capability." Response to State Department "White Papers," for example, must be swift and accurate.

The critical issue goes beyond how to de-contaminate public opinion after it has been exposed to some toxic miasma. To mix my metaphors, people have to anticipate the ideological windows of opportunity the government is likely to test. And analysts and prognosticators have to have pre-existing organizational and media ties so that the "intelligence" which is generated can be broadcast quickly.

I'm sure you've thought about these problems long and hard. Some of my friends and I have been mulling all this over, too. Jack Womack, who teaches Latin American history at Harvard, is politically imaginative; he also knows some people who might have some money. Dick Bell, who used to edit the Real Paper, and recently wrote a history of the "nuclear mind-set (Nuke-Speak), is likewise shrewd and energetic.

I'd like to invite you to sit down with a few people and discuss, in very preliminary terms, how a watch-dog group/early warning system might be put together.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul Aaron". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed word "Yours,".

Paul Aaron