

August 24, 1967

Dr. Martin Kaplan
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Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Martin:

I am about to go off to Australia and the South Pacific for one month and will miss seeing you in Sweden. Under separate cover I have sent you some material on the use of gas in Yemen. My impression of the chronology of events is as follows:

In July, 1963 the first reports of gas attack in Yemen appeared in the Western press. It has been claimed that tear gas and mustard were used. This may have the very first time that a civilian population was bombed with poison gas, unless it happened in Ethiopia before the Second World War.

Egypt denied any use of gas in 1963 and an investigation by the United Nations Observation Group in Yemen at the time found no evidence for the use of gas.

Renewed reports of the use of gas appeared in the press in 1965. The UAR again denied any use of gas.

It was reported that Phosgene gas had been used in Yemen in 1966, and on January 5, 1967 it was subsequently claimed in the newspapers that nerve gas had been used for the first time in combat. The site of the alleged first use of nerve gas was Kitaf, North Yemen near the Saudi border. It may not generally be known that Kitaf was at that time also the site of the headquarters of the Yemeni royalist command. Newspaper stories have said that a Red Cross team on the scene fled to Saudi Arabia. Soon afterwards the Red Cross appealed to all sides to cease the use of "illegal weapons". The report was not released to the press.

In February, 1967 a UAR minister denied the use of gas and called for UN investigation.

During May, June, and July there were many reports of the use of gas in Yemen. On June 2 the Red Cross in Geneva

released the only public statement regarding the use of gas in Yemen of which I am aware. It referred to "strong indications" that gas had been used, and called upon all sides not to use such weapons.

There were also stories that Israel had found shells loaded with gas ready for use in Sini. There are also stories claiming that this was not the case, but that only small amounts of gas of an unreported nature were found in a laboratory in Sini.

In July, 1967 US News and World Report published the text of what it claimed to be an official Red Cross report. The New York Times has also published a different statement which appears to be an official Red Cross statement. Nevertheless, to my knowledge the International Red Cross has acknowledged nothing regarding the use of gas in Yemen aside from its own press release of June 2, 1967.

Martin, do you know anything more about the position of the International Red Cross or can you find out anything? Although it is possible they have good reasons for not releasing additional information, one cannot help but think that a detailed report from the Red Cross would mobilize world action to put a stop to the use of gas in Yemen. The International situation as you know is rather difficult. The Saudi Arabians do not wish to bring the matter to the Security Council at this time. The Western powers are unlikely to take the lead, both because of the reluctance of the Saudi Arabians and because of the political consequences of the Arab-Israeli War. In addition the continued use of anti-crop chemicals and tear gas by the United States in Viet Nam cannot help but inhibit us. The great risk is that the International legal and customary restraints on gas warfare that have grown up since World War I may begin to collapse as a result of the use of gas in Yemen. This could have terrible consequences for Israel and the Arab States - and for the rest of the world as well.

In addition to encouraging the Red Cross to issue a report on the basis of which other actions might be taken, a number of other practical measures might be considered.

- 1) Private discussions should be held with various parties including the Russians at Ronneby to reach an understanding regarding the danger of the continued use of gas in Yemen.

- 2) Since Egypt has denied any use of gas and declared that it would accept United Nations inspection a move should be

made to get such an inspection. One thing that scientists might do is to write a letter to U Thant urging him to take action. This should not be done unless it can be determined in advance that there is a reasonable course of action open to the Secretary General. If there is not, a letter might still be written to him expressing concern but it would be invidious to ask him to act when he cannot. If a letter is to be sent to him it would be most effective if it could be signed by Nobel Prize winners from a variety of countries including France.

3) There might be some public action taken at Ronneby but this would obviously be rather delicate.

I hope you will have time to send me a letter telling what happened at Ronneby and if any interesting documents about CB are produced I would appreciate seeing them. This is the last letter I am writing before I leave, my plane leaves in a few minutes, my secretary is applauding.

Love to Lena and the boys and to you.

As ever,

Matthew Meselson