

Kucewicz

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MAR 20 1993

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March 15, 1993

Prof. Matthew Meselson
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Dear Matt:

Congratulations! I read with great satisfaction in today's newspapers that you finally got to the bottom of the Sverdlovsk incident. Well done!

I realize it's now up to the Russians themselves to supply further information. But, certainly, the fact that you were part of the U.S. team gives the report particular credence, especially among skeptics in the American media and the foreign-policy establishment,

Recent news reports (the BBC, London's *The Spectator*, "The Cold War's Deadliest Secret," Jan. 23, and *Newsweek*, "Planning a Plague?" Feb. 1) have said that the former Soviet Union was using genetic engineering to produce new biological weapons of mass destruction -- "Biopreparat." Was Sverdlovsk part of that program?

The BBC, *The Spectator*, *Newsweek* and your study seem to vindicate what I first reported in 1984 in my *Wall Street Journal* series, "Beyond 'Yellow Rain': The Threat of Soviet Genetic Engineering," which covered Sverdlovsk and the Soviet bio-warfare program.

It's too bad so many doubted my reporting then. Who knows how much dangerous research, and perhaps production, could have been forestalled if the West -- i.e., government, academia and the media -- had been more ardent in the effort to get the Kremlin to conform with international treaties?

Given the new data on Sverdlovsk and Biopreparat, are you going to revisit "yellow rain"? I have been told that a "veil of secrecy" continues to shroud whatever it was that happened in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan. Do you think the Russians are willing to comment further on "yellow rain" now?

You might find it interesting to know I finally found an arms-control treaty I liked. See attached.

Be well and best regards,

Bill

P.S. Would you be so kind as to send me a copy of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences report? Thanks so much.

An Arms Treaty That Just Might Work

By WILLIAM P. KUCEWICZ

Disarmament accords are much like marriage vows: ideal at the ceremony but later subject to breaches. A large majority of the world's governments are about to embark on a utopian disarmament venture — no less than ridding the globe of chemical weapons of mass destruction. Surprisingly, the treaty has a fair chance of success, for it views peace as a process, not just a principle.

Representatives are gathered in Paris today to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention. The United Nations General Assembly approved the measure by consensus on Nov. 30. Even before the signing ceremony, it is the mostly widely supported disarmament accord in history, with 145 sponsoring countries.

Within 10 years after going into force, the aim is to eliminate all chemical weapons and production facilities from the arsenals of signatory countries. That could come as soon as 2005. The ultimate goal, the treaty states, is, "for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons."

This ambitious undertaking may appear unrealistic given the poor record of its predecessor, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention of 1972. That convention, signed by more than 110 nations, has not averted charges of hostile use of such weapons in recent years or prevented their laboratory development.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin, for instance, admitted publicly last year that the former Soviet Union had not fully complied with the biological warfare treaty and that subsequent steps were being taken to correct matters. Russia has released new data confirming that an anthrax outbreak in Sverdlovsk in 1979, which took many civilian and military lives, was the direct result of an accident at a biological weapons facility.

"The Biological Weapons Convention suffered from the very beginning — and continues to suffer — from the lack of a verification regime built into it," Ambassador Adolf Ritter von Wagner of Germany, chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons of the U.N. Conference on Disarmament, said. By contrast, the new convention places primary emphasis on verification and compliance.

The mechanism in the chemical weapons treaty to help ensure compliance is the "challenge inspection." This provision, first advanced by the Reagan administration in 1984, permits international inspection at any time, anywhere, without the right of refusal. Teams of international inspectors will be selected by the treaty's supervisory organization, which will be a U.N. affiliate. They would be given almost free rein to pursue suspicious activities and ascertain compliance.

Challenge inspections would be prompted by an alert from one or more parties to the treaty. These would be in

addition to routine oversight and spot-checks. Inspectors must be allowed into any site suspected of containing prohibited materials or operations. Some safeguards would be permitted in order to maintain national security in areas where no chemical weapons activities would be feasible; say in the Pentagon's electronic war room.

The accord is not perfect. It can't guarantee that not a single chemical munition will be left or that a fertilizer plant can't quickly be converted to weapons manufacture. While the chemical-weapons threat continues in the Mideast, notably from Iraq, no Arab state has joined Iran and Israel in agreeing to sign the treaty.

The intrusive inspection regime, which even encroaches upon national sovereignty, was the focus of much acclaim, and no little controversy, in recent interviews with ambassadors to the Geneva-based, 39-member Conference on Disarmament.

Russian Ambassador Sergei Batsanov called the challenge inspection concept "revolutionary" and "unprecedented" and termed the result "reasonable and well-balanced." The Russians, however, have reservations about bearing the full costs of inspections and about limits on transferring dual-use equipment to peaceful purposes. Another question involves whether Russia would be able to meet the deadline on the destruction of its existing stockpiles, estimated at 40,000 metric tons.

"The Russians inherited an enormous problem from the Soviets," said U.S. Ambassador Stephen Ledogar. "The Russians turned out to have not only political difficulties, not only economic difficulties, but also these environmental difficulties in trying to organize a destruction program."

Ambassador Li Daoyu of China, which joined the U.N. consensus and claims not to possess chemical weapons, said that the accord doesn't adequately reflect the "just demands and reasonable propositions" of developing countries. "Its scope of verification of the chemical industry is too broad," Ambassador Li told the U.N. in a November speech. "As a result, an extremely large number of chemical facilities not relevant to chemical weapons are subject, where [there] is no necessity at all, to declaration and verification." Moreover, he said that the convention "places undue emphasis on making challenge inspections extremely intrusive and short-noticed but ignores the danger of abuse" by countries requesting that others be scrutinized.

"There are two concerns," Japan's Ambassador Yoshitomo Tanaka said. Inspection "must be as intrusive as possible," but "must not be abusive." He cautioned: "Whether, in practice, this idea can be realized depends very much on the various details which are still to be worked out." He cited such items as inspection manuals, technical definitions and organi-

zation of the supervising secretariat.

The key to the ultimate success, or failure, of the Chemical Weapons Convention will be adherence to the process of verification and compliance. In the past, signing disarmament treaties carried few, if any, enforceable obligations. This new accord demands that signatories put their pledges of disarmament into action in demonstrable and verifiable ways.

The final determinant will be the openness of the signatory countries. Secretive societies and malevolent regimes cannot long be party to this convention, even if they were to sign it initially. Any attempt at being closed to world scrutiny is in vain. And staying outside the treaty is tantamount to an admission of peace-threatening activities. The suspicion that someone is hiding something is broadcast.

Shall the wolf live with the lamb? Shall the leopard lie down with the kid? Perhaps not. But one thing is certain from the Chemical Weapons Convention: It will be infinitely more difficult for a wolf to disguise itself in sheep's clothing.

Mr. Kucewicz has written on chemical and biological warfare for more than a decade.