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# Director's Staff Group Memorandum



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*Rep. Sec. 1.4*  
**To: THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**

**Subject: Chemical Warfare Attacks in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan**

This morning you read an article prepared by CIA on the use of chemical warfare agents being confirmed. It is understood that Secretary Haig is planning to issue a press release on this new reporting - which is based on test results and analysis reported by the Medical Information and Intelligence Agency, US Army Surgeon General.

The following is offered as background data for your information.

Since 1973, the Intelligence Community has received reports on the use of chemical warfare agents in Southeast Asia. During 1979, we also began receiving reports on the use of chemical warfare agents in Afghanistan just prior to and following the Soviet invasion. Alleged use of chemical warfare agents in SEA and Afghanistan continues to be reported. Although the reports are highly compelling and no fabrications have been uncovered that would detract from the credibility of the reporting, we were not able to obtain confirmatory evidence that chemical warfare agents were being used. What we had accumulated was rebel force and refugee reporting on the attacks, usually the release of a yellow colored material from various kinds of aircraft with resultant casualties and fatalities. A DoD medical team examined and questioned refugees, primarily H'Mong tribesman in camps in Thailand, during the Summer of '79. Based on the medical symptoms described to the team, they concluded that CW agents, lethal and non-lethal, and perhaps a mixture of agents had been employed. However, the actual agent could not be identified. Collection of samples of agents during or immediately following the attacks were extremely difficult because of the remoteness of the attack areas, coordination of collection with foreign governments involved, and the lack of a fully coordinated test and assay effort in the United States. Despite the political, technical and inherent collection problems in this kind of activity the pursuit of confirmatory evidence continued.

The State Department, because of the compelling reporting, in 1980 pursued a UN resolution to set up an independent investigatory commission to look into the alleged chemical warfare attacks. This effort was successful and the commission recently was established and will begin working in the near future. Additionally, the State Department made public press releases on the alleged CW attacks.

It also became clear to the intelligence community that the Soviets probably were involved in a supply and technical advisory role to surrogate forces and, in the case of Afghanistan, a direct involvement in the use of the CW agents. There is no capability to produce CW agents in the countries where the attacks have occurred.

Most recently, sample collection and analysis have improved and the results of the latest assay point to a high probability that a toxin has been used. This fact, coupled with information derived from recent medical questioning and examination of survivors, [REDACTED] confirms the use of a lethal CW agent and also gives us strong circumstantial evidence for the illicit use of toxins in Southeast Asia. The production of a toxin weapon is prohibited by the Biological Weapons Convention of 1975.

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Vegetation samples of the alleged CW agent recently acquired were prepared as "blind" samples - that is Sample A, B and C with one sample being a control and another containing a known quantity of fungal toxin. These were sent, through a third party, to a mycotoxin expert for analysis. The one unknown sample was found to contain levels of trichothecene toxins that exceeded the "normal" indicating an non-natural occurrence. Trichothecene toxins are toxins extracted from a fungus source. They can be easily extracted and can be produced in large quantities. Some can be chemically synthesized, but biological synthesis is the most effective way to produce large quantities. Scientific and technical intelligence analysis over the years has established that the Soviets have had important and significant experience in combating the diseases caused by this group of toxins; that they have excellent capabilities and facilities to produce this toxin in large quantities; that some of these facilities are under military control. In 1978, the Chief of Polish chemical troops called toxins the third generation of chemical weapons. He called the mustard agents the first and nerve gases the second. Ideally, additional samples collected as the result of attacks and showing toxins present will strengthen the case immeasurably. However, the evidence, albeit fragmentary, when taken as a whole does make a very strong circumstantial case for confirming the use of lethal chemical agents in SEA and a high probability that toxins are being employed.

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