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MEMORANDUM TO: The Secretary

FROM: PM - Richard Burt ^{PB}

SUBJECT: Handling of New Intelligence on Reported
Use of Chemical Weapons in Afghanistan
and Southeast Asia

August 31, 1981
Reviewed by: Judith Kelly Jc
Date 9/1/81

SUMMARY

After over a year of unsuccessful attempts to identify traces of chemical agents in the more than 30 human and other physical samples resulting from reported use of chemical weapons obtained from Laos, Kampuchea and Afghanistan, we believe we have uncovered some significant new information which could eventually substantiate our claim that the Soviets, Vietnamese and Lao have been using lethal agents in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia. Specifically, we believe the Intelligence Community has obtained good evidence that, rather than a lethal chemical agent, the Soviets and others have been using a highly lethal toxin (i.e., a poisonous substance typically produced in nature by living organisms) of the trichothecene or T-II variety. (Additional background and technical data on intelligence efforts is contained in INK's Information Memorandum dated 31 August 81.) In light of this new information (which CIA published in their NID dated 31 August) and the fact that a book about the reports (by Mr. Sterling Seagrave, entitled Yellow Rain) is being released later this month in which the author presents his hypothesis that the Soviets are using T-II, we need to be prepared to move quickly to ensure that the Administration is recognized as being on top of this important turn in events.

DISCUSSION

The US has been aggressively pursuing this issue for quite some time. We have been responsible for increasing international awareness of this problem and for exposing the Soviets and others to international pressure and criticism for their reported activities in the CW area in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia. Additionally, with the strong and active support of our Allies, the US succeeded in stimulating sufficient international concern over reports to have a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly last year mandating an impartial international group of medical and technical experts to investigate the reports "to ascertain the facts."

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The UK investigation has been proceeding slowly. While we understand the experts are planning on-site visits to the regions concerned (as provided for in the terms of the resolution), to date, no on-sites have been made. At this point the experts appear to be of the view that the available information (which has been supplied almost exclusively by the US) is not sufficient to substantiate a definitive conclusion one way or the other about CW use. Our most recent information about toxins, however, opens up a whole new avenue for investigation -- and one which could well move the investigation in a more productive direction.

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