

170. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for Science and Technology (Hornig) to President Johnson/1/

Washington, February 14, 1967, 3:30 p.m.

/1/Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Subject File, Warfare, Chemical and Biological, Box 51. Secret. A copy was sent to Rostow.

SUBJECT

Scientists' Petition on Chemical and Biological Weapons

This morning (11:00 a.m.) Mr. Adrian Fisher, Deputy Director of ACDA, and I received on your behalf the attached petition and transmittal letter,^{2/} opposing any actions weakening the present prohibitions and restraints on the use of chemical and biological weapons and specifically criticizing the U.S. for the use in Vietnam of "non-lethal" anti-personnel chemical weapons and anti-crop herbicides.

^{2/}Neither the petition nor the transmittal letter has been found, but the petition is extensively summarized in *The New York Times*, February 15, 1967, pp. 1, 16.

The petition has been signed by over 5,000 scientists and physicians, including 127 members of the National Academy of Sciences. I was informed that the group would discuss the petition with the press at 2:00 p.m. today.^{3/}

^{3/}The scientists' press conference was reported *ibid*.

Specifically, the petition urges you to:

- Institute a White House study of government policy regarding CB weapons.
- Order an end to the employment of anti-personnel and anti-crop chemical weapons in Vietnam.
- Declare the intention of the United States to refrain from initiating the use of chemical and biological weapons.

The covering letter commends the United States for its recent support of the UN General Assembly Resolution calling on all States to observe the principles and objectives of the Geneva Protocol^{4/} and recommends that the United States should now accede to the Geneva Protocol of 1925.

^{4/}See footnote 2, Document 154.

Mr. Fisher and I had a very good discussion with the scientists who delivered the petition. The group has clearly given this problem a great deal of responsible thought. They are seriously concerned about the broader implications of the problem, and this is not simply a disguised criticism of the Administration's policy in Vietnam.

In our initial reaction, I recommend that we simply state we are studying the petition and that I acknowledge the letter on your behalf along these same lines.

As a follow up, I would recommend that at an early press conference in response to a question on the petition, you make a statement clearly stating that we have a "no first use" policy with regard to chemical and biological warfare, with the exception of riot gases and herbicides. Although this would not directly respond to all the points in the petition or transmittal letter, it would deal directly with the most important general question. As you recall, I suggested such a statement in a memo to you (copy attached)^{5/} setting forth the concern of your Science Advisory Committee on the general problem of biological warfare. Although Secretaries McNamara and Katzenbach both agreed with the proposed statement, McNamara preferred not to push the matter at that time in the face of JCS objections unless there were a clear and urgent reason for doing so. If you are interested, I believe it would be possible to clear such a statement within the government, particularly if the statement were a low-key reiteration and clarification of the position we have already taken in supporting the UN resolution.

^{5/}Document 154.

Donald Hornig

1. Hornig to acknowledge petition, stating the matter under study.
2. Hornig to clear statement on "no first use" of chemical and biological weapons with McNamara and Katzenbach.^{6/}

^{6/}Neither of these options was approved or disapproved or marked to "Discuss."