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## *Chemical Warfare*

The scientists who have petitioned the President to undertake a study of over-all Government policy regarding chemical and bacteriological warfare have made a sound suggestion. It would be a good idea to have a commission or committee go over the complicated issues involved and make national policy recommendations.

It is too bad that the scientists' petition not only asked for a study but, at the same time and in the same document, set forth some of the findings at which the study ought to arrive. That seems to be prejudicing the inquiry in advance. But the tactical error does not diminish from the wisdom of the study.

The United States has had a policy against the employment of such weapons on our initiative. But in the meantime, expenditures for research in the field have multiplied many times. And the tactical use of defoliants, crop poisons and tear gas in South Vietnam has clouded the issue and confused the policy.

Issues involved in the use of these weapons transcend the considerations that confront local commanders. Judgments as to national policy cannot be left to the exigencies of field situations. It is frequently necessary to forego the employment of means that would be locally effective if their use, subsequently, by an enemy, might involve the loss of American lives. It seems certain that it would not be to our advantage, in the long run, to break the restraints that now limit the use of these fearful devices. All of the dreadful possibilities need to be examined coolly and carefully by competent officials. Probably the historic position of the United States would be supported by the study. In that case, a restatement of American policy would help prevent the world-wide proliferation of the use of these implements.