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468/119
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Sir
Trend
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St. R. Hooper



CABINET OFFICE
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FILE INSTRUCTIONS
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CABINET OFFICE
LONDON SW1

Telephone: 01-930 5422

Sir Solly Zuckerman, O.M., K.C.B., F.R.S.
Chief Scientific Adviser

6th August 1969.

Dear Fred,

I do not know whether you have met Professor Matthew Meselson of Harvard. At the instigation of one or two people in the executive of the previous administration, he set out to become an expert in the CBW field and has worked hard to make the U.S. conscious of the need to ratify the 1925 Geneva Convention and to outlaw this class of weapon. He still has a direct lead to the White House, and was a member of the expert committee set up recently at the request of the U.S. Army to look into the business of disposing of unwanted nerve gas weapons in Colorado. He was also the liaison man on a corresponding committee set up simultaneously by the State Department.

Meselson came to see me last week, just before I went on leave, to urge me to use what influence I have to see that it becomes declared U.K. policy to prohibit the use of harassing gases in warfare. As I understand it, our present position is that this is a matter to be settled not by the United Nations, but by the signatories of the 1925 Convention. On the other hand, the U.K. Government in the 1930s took a firm stand in line with what Meselson is now advocating, and he is firm in the view that were we to take a lead here now, we should have a considerable effect on U.S. policy. We could do this without in any way inhibiting support which we are seeking for our Treaty on Biological Weapons.

Meselson showed me figures which clearly indicated that there has been a vast increase in the production, deployment, and use of a growing variety of CS weapons in Vietnam. The use is essentially for the battle-field and at considerable ranges. Militarily, of course,

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The Right Honourable Fred Mulley, M.P.

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there is little value in these weapons against an opponent equipped with masks. With equally matched opponents, harassing agents impart no military advantage at all.

Meselson's point, with which I agree, is that our overriding interest in the CBW field is to stop further proliferation and to bring about an effective ban. So far as warfare goes, the latter would include harassing agents, which in the circumstances of hostilities are a potential step on the ladder of escalation. With the disengagement from Vietnam, there is a real chance of persuading the U.S. along these lines.

I understand that Meselson spoke to Hope-Jones in Geneva. Oughtn't we to restate our 1930 position about so-called non-lethal agents during the course of the debate in which you are now engaged?

Tom am,
SOLG.

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