

AUG 15 1969

12 August 1969

Dear Dr. Meselov,

Thoughts: (with apologies for the "stream-of-consciousness style")

1. Why is the use of chemical weapons "justly condemned by the general opinion of the civilized world?" Who says it is? Has a poll been taken? But even if a majority should agree, is this sufficient basis for its being outlawed?

There must be a reason for the failure of the legislature to ~~not~~ ratify any of the proposed treaties (except for the 1921-22 Washington Conference). It is interesting to compare these failures with the numerous unsuccessful attempts to prohibit the use of ~~the~~ peyote among the American Indians. There were always expert witnesses to testify that this drug caused great harm, was immoral, etc. but when it came to a vote, not all were convinced. And it is hard to argue that vested interests were involved in the use of peyote by Indians.

I don't feel the acceptability of GW or BW weapons should be left to the lay public to decide, although I believe they should be given full exposure to the facts, and encouraged to enter rationally into the debate. But so much that passes for discussion is nothing more than the repeating of standard arguments which were as well expressed 70 years ago as they are today. This, of course, applies to many other seemingly endless go-rounds: abortions, marihuana, pornography, and so forth. People seem to form their opinions (which are usually a set of associated beliefs) and thereafter become impervious to new information.

Why the aversion to chemical weapons? You phrased it one way when you said it had something to do with a feeling that we should not throw open a whole new spectrum of ways to kill and control people. That sounds right, but is it consistent with our attitudes in other areas? For example, motor scooters, surfing, sky-diving, are all new ways which people have found to kill themselves. Of course we say that they choose to take these risks for the sake of sport, and they should have this right. So perhaps it is a poor analogy. But chemical weapons can kill, quickly, cheaply and with less mess. Does this mean it will be more tempting to make war? Too easy?

This may be closer to the answer. But to take a personal case, how many of us carry a loaded revolver? It is more efficient and easier than mastering judo, or using the heel of one's shoe to defend against would-be assailants, yet most of us would not want to risk "escalating" against an armed opponent. We fear that if we hesitated or fumbled, he might shoot us first. On the other hand, a gun in the home is not unusual (although I personally have never wanted one). The idea is that if someone invades our home, we may have to risk escalation to avoid more dire consequences. And what if a killer is loose in the streets? The police are not criticised for hauling out their best snipers, armored cars, tear gas or any other weapon.

Can an enemy be compared to a killer in the streets? This seemed a fair ~~way~~ way to characterize Hitler. Some would say the same of North Korean troops, or the Viet Cong. But there is obviously nothing like consensus in the last case. As citizens of the world we recognize cultural relativity. As national citizens we tend to be ethnocentric. In the end we despair of absolutes and become pragmatists.

In this light, can chemical weapons do us any good? This is what you deny, with certain exceptions. This deserves close examination,

and our examination should not be biased by the underlying doubts as to our moral rectitude in choosing to decide the fate of real or fancied adversaries.

Man does not exterminate man merely because he has only to push a button. It is not that simple. Pushing a button, pulling a trigger, or charging maniacally forward with club and sword, are merely the executive portions of programs whose algorithms remain more or less independent of the expenditure of energy or risk. When we are sufficiently angry, or sufficiently threatened, we act aggressively, with push button or sword. We do not kill idly, as a rule.

Besides, when push-buttons took the work out of killing, compensating obstacles were installed to prevent capricious use of the device. The system of checks and fail-safe procedures surrounding the release of nuclear weapons is the most ready example. Maniacs are simply not permitted the opportunity to push the button.

Is the control of people by force, be it conventional force or the more uncanny spell of chemical intoxication, wrong? In the context of a pyramidal structure of power with an all-powerful lord at the pinnacle, it would seem open to injustice and evil exploitation. But control is generally a feedback governed dynamic process. The ecology of power is both one of natural selection (competition) and symbiosis (coalition, contract, constitution, treaty, etc.) Since control is a corollary of power, and conversely, power arises from control, the predictable trend of individual and group behavior must be toward the acquisition of greater control over others.

This is nothing profound. Most war is between nations, but civil war between regions or states obviously still occurs in less stable nations. This is a failure of law to achieve universal control over men's actions, and failure to provide international peacekeeping military forces, an effective world tribunal, etc.

In the meantime, what do we do? We work toward world government, seek treaties to control arms, etc. But we deal with imponderable risks for which we try to prepare military responses. We play out games on computers and perfect strategies to optimize our gain in every foreseeable conflict of interest. We achieve and maintain a balance of power which makes world domination by any power virtually impossible.

Now we ask: could chemical weapons strengthen our position in any plausible military conflict? You say, excepting a small reserve supply of nerve agents in Europe, we gain little and imperil our future considerably. First, do we have little to gain? If massive retaliation were our only strategy, it would seem we would always have the nuclear capability remaining to deal an overwhelming blow to any provocateur. But how should we respond to a massive infantry invasion of a ally, e.g. South Korea? Must we go back to costly and bitter fighting with guns, troops, tanks, etc? Or could we discourage this action by a limited but intensive use of nerve gas, thus avoiding destruction of friendly soil? We could, in my view, precede this by appropriate warnings and ultimatums. Even if this resulted in the use of masks and protective clothing, the continuance of aggressive action would be suddenly quite impractical. Surprise, contrary to what you say is only necessary if the goal is annihilation. If the goal is defeat or unsupportable harassment, frequent intermittent attack with persistent agents would force the invader to operate under conditions so cumbersome as to be not worth the candle. If he retaliates in kind, this merely

makes it awkward for all concerned. Friendly troops can withdraw to protected areas, leaving the enemy to slosh around in rubber suits to his heart's content in the contaminated countryside, with frequent renewals of the hazard by air dispersal. You ask if this is the kind of warfare we wish to encourage. I say yes indeed, for one way to make war unpopular is to make it very difficult. It is not necessary to kill large numbers to do this. As to whether soldiers in wierd clothing will appeal to the civilian#, I think that his own soldiers will always look good to him, in any clothing.

In this situation we retain the ultimate retaliation and permit the enemy to reconsider his action. He is free to withdraw, and after a suitable interval, we can repossess the area. It is rather like letting the rigors of winter do much of the fighting against the invading Germans or French in Russia. We create an unfriendly environment by this kind of use of chemical agents. To me it seems worth considering.

The same technique could be used to break up small scale conflicts between impetuous minor powers. A buffer zone, contaminated by percutaneously active materials, could be created along restless borders by UN forces or ad hoc peace-keeping coalitions.

I have been speaking of uses of lethal agents which to me seem both humane and feasible in contrast to the alternatives available. ~~More~~ But the use of incapacitating agents of low-lethality, including CS, is a subject which I think deserves fuller treatment than you have given it. You deal with this possibility, as I interpret your comments, by saying it is not really totally non-lethal, it can't be controlled, and it leads both to abuse (flushing dug-in troops before bombing) and to probable escalation. The first point we can concede: there may well be some lethalties. The second is certainly possible and may have happened frequently; the answer is simply to decide not to permit this type of application without higher approval; if all other recourses fail, and the enemy persists, I see no reason to forbid this approach; it would have reduced American casualties in some of the Pacific islands to ~~has been~~ ^{have} forced Japanese snipers into the open this way. It seems preferable to burning them out, for example.

The third point is most debatable. Why should escalation necessarily result? Lethal agents can easily be detected if they are used. Escalation can be answered by the use of protective equipment and retaliation in kind, producing the situation discussed earlier. The point is that mass destruction is not the likely consequence, because that would bring out the nuclear weapons, but local escalation, if it did occur, would ultimately play into the hands of the stronger side, producing the desired outcome for the originator of the chemical attack with non-lethal agents. It takes great resources to attack on a wide scale with chemical agents and it seems unlikely that in the type of limited war we are discussing, the participants (other than ourselves) would have such resources.

Is it more horrible to die from chemical weapons? I would say emphatically no. Whence the scariness of these weapons? Clearly on the level of uncanny fear, of the invisible, the unknowable, the mysterious, the irresistible. It isn't "cricket." But if the shoe were on the other foot, do you doubt that there would be much hesitation in VietNam to use such weapons against us? I doubt seriously that respect for the rules of the game is what is deterring the opposition. Not when you review the forms of terrorism that have been employed to demoralize the government forces and civilians in the South. I think it is lack of technology ~~xxxxxxx~~ and fear of consequences that is operating.

What if we find still subtler methods of control and destruction? Suppose a radio frequency could paralyze the skeletal muscles, except for those of respiration. Another button to push. Should we welcome such an addition to our arsenal? Should it be outlawed?

I think one could argue that it should be, but how could this be enforced? First, we would need the counterweapon. Then we would place the counterweapon in the hands of the arms control agency. Then we would force agreement to a treaty forbidding its development and production. Why? Because to permit such a weapon to come into being would be to create absolute power, which as we know corrupts absolutely. (cf. Tolkien: The Lord of the Ring)

But chemical weapons do not confer absolute power. In my view they are most likely to be effective as defensive weapons used against an enemy operating outside its own territory and hence vulnerable. They could be dropped on cities, it is true. But the implications of such action would be ~~rather~~ rather clearly aggressive, and would invite the kind of desperate retaliation which we wish to avoid. Again, the use of chemical weapons which I contemplate and might advocate involves their employment as a countermeasure to a provocative challenge by an outsider attacking friendly soil. It is a countermeasure which could extricate us from the exasperating and wasteful expenditure of great resources in a futile attempt to contain a small, cheap, troublesome insurgency. It would be flypaper to deal with pesky flies instead of nerve-frazzling forays with flyswatters.

Control of people? We already exert considerable control through economic power. I think we prefer to extend our control by this means, as does the Soviet Union. I don't feel chemical weapons will lure us into adventuristic sorties aimed at military or political expansion. We are not especially inclined in that direction, and the time for that sort of thing has passed. Only impoverished, backward nations are likely to see this as a quick solution.

Do we create problems by proliferation of these weapons to other nations? I see the argument, but I wonder. They, like we, if they are civilized, are restrained in part by the pressure of world disapproval of the first use of these weapons. But I would never suggest that we use them ~~xxxx~~ first except defensively, to punish an aggressor, or deny land to a probable invader. I think there is no harm in condoning such use by any nation. In fact I doubt that our example will affect the use or non-use of such weapons very greatly. World opinion is based on fear of U.S. employment of these weapons, I think, or Soviet use. No one complained much about the use in the Yemen. Nor was the Yemen deterred from using them by our forbearance in this area. So already the argument falters. I do agree that to use them under any but carefully considered circumstances, described in advance if possible, would tend to break down taboos.

As to incapacitating agents, there is a need for fuller discussion, as you indicate (I think) in your testimony. It is difficult, but not ~~impossible~~ impossible, to develop such agents and to use them in a sufficiently predictable manner. They could be used on a small scale in a limited set of tactical situations. Properly and intelligently deployed they could destroy the ability of an enemy to fight effectively, making capture relatively safe. I think we should endeavor to find such weapons.

Would the use of a systemic incapacitating agent lead to lethal agents? The use of CS does not seem to have produced this result, even granting the possibility that it may have caused, directly or indirectly, some lethalties (I have no facts on this.) Would its use give little or no tactical advantage? How can you say without specifications of its mode of action? It is here that I feel it is unfair to make sweeping judgments and pessimistic assessments.

Gen. Rothschild's book, which I have just read, along with CBW (I'm trying to get Hirsh's book and Brown's is on order) seems to present the case for CBW very rationally, and when I read it, in fact, I became very discouraged because he was saying much that I would have said, and he ~~was~~ being generally rejected as unconvincing, or worse yet, a horrible example of the mindless crusader. Yet he does not hesitate to excoriate the government for its refusal to release the facts, and he argues strongly for arms control and disarmament efforts in these areas.

Though you object to "scare" tactics in your testimony, a good deal of this type of psychological warfare (which I feel should be condemned by rational men everywhere as a truly inhumane type of warfare to practice on one's countrymen) pervades CBW, and even the pages of Science and other responsible publications. To use pictures of rabbits or mice in terminal convulsions as a device to influence public opinion ~~was~~ is comparable to showing movies of patients receiving shock treatments in an effort to discredit psychiatry. I don't aim this at you, but at the news media primarily.....

As you can see, the above was composed in two sittings, and without any attempt to be systematic or even completely logical. I have not dealt with all the points you make, many of which are entirely sensible and brook no argument. As I said in my first letter, I am less concerned (most of the time) about engaging in debate than in a joint reconnaissance of a difficult terrain, hoping to agree on the best path. I am tempted to write more, but perhaps it would be better to stop and hear your reaction.

Let me say on a personal note that I was very happy to receive your reply and I appreciate your thoughtful summary of your views. I am particularly interested in pursuing the point you raise in the last paragraph which I think touches on a very essential ingredient in this entire problem, but I will defer saying more than I have already.

Receiving your letter also taught me a lesson. Differences between people are magnified by unacquaintance, and we tend to underrate and expect and fear the worst from those with whom we have no opportunity to communicate. An old lesson, and a trite one, but a valid and good one nonetheless.

Hoping to hear from you soon,

Tom Kat chum