

September 25, 1969

Mr. George C. Wilson
The Washington Post
515 "L" St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. Wilson:

Yesterday I sent you copies of the neutral nations proposed resolution on CBW (ENDC/265), the August 19 statement of Indian Ambassador Husain, and an article by Julian Perry-Robinson and myself entitled "Escalation of Chemical Warfare". I hope these have arrived in good shape.

I was glad to see your feature article this morning on US CBW policy. For the record, I'd like to correct the impression I must have left you with that "small nations could easily match the US in non-lethal gas". This is not my view. Rather, it is lethal gas which would work a disadvantage to us if introduced into guerilla warfare. The reasoning goes something like this. At present, the main advantage we have in conventional warfare is the enormous fire power our unmatched wealth allows us to procure. Now the main military utility of "non-lethal" gas is in driving the enemy into the open where conventional fire power can be brought to bear on them. For this reason, "non-lethal" gas is of no great utility to guerillas or small nations who lack the massive conventional fire power required to back it up. However, lethal gas is quite another story. Lightweight munitions such as mortar cartridges and rockets filled with nerve gas have a much greater kill radius than would the same weapons loaded only with conventional high explosives. Because of our enormous preponderance in conventional weaponry, any major increase in the kill radius in lightweight munitions eats away at our military advantage and is to the interest of less sophisticated forces.

There are also some additional reasons why the introduction of lethal gas would be to our disadvantage: in guerilla warfare, the enemy could use lethal gas weapons to attack government base camps and as terror weapons to attack cities. In contrast, the guerillas would offer no comparable

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targets.

Another reason why it is in our interest to keep lethal chemical capability from proliferating and to keep such weapons from being used is that lethal gas warfare enormously complicates the battlefield. This works the greatest disadvantage on that military force which is most complicated. We and the Soviets both have very complicated military forces. Behind each combat soldier there are dozens of support troops with complex jobs to perform. If all of them have to be on the lookout for poison gas attack and if they must spend appreciable amounts of time in the cumbersome suits and masks required to protect against modern lethal gas, their fighting efficiency will be degraded much more than that of a simpler military force.

Finally, lethal gas can be used to provide a limited capability for the strategic attack of cities. A bomber or converted commercial air transport dispensing one of the more toxic nerve gases can, under meteorological conditions chosen by the attacker, kill most persons within the central area of a large city.

To summarize, it is not in our interest to initiate the first-use of any chemical weapon, whether lethal or non-lethal because the advantage to us is in any case marginal and because the proliferation of lethal chemical capability would not only greatly increase the level of violence in wars of all kinds in which it is used,-- it would also work a military disadvantage against us. My view is that we should strongly discourage the use of chemicals and biological weapons by every reasonable means at our disposal. Unfortunately, our policy has fallen far short of this up until now.

Sincerely yours,

Matthew Meselson

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