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November 3, 1969

Mr. R.C. Hope-Jones  
Disarmament Department  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
London, S.W.1  
England

Dear Hope-Jones,

Thank you for your kind letter of October 24. I shall be in London November 20-24 and will attempt to contact you then.

I have sent the copy of your letter to Russell Wiggins who, being an outdoorsman and a naturalist, will enjoy the story of your father's multilateralism on the Thames.

My own view is that efforts to obtain a BW Convention or an expanded Convention covering chemicals too should be delayed until after U.S. ratification of the Geneva Protocol. Without U.S. ratification, attempts to obtain additional agreements will be greeted with skepticism and opposition by many countries and will complicate efforts to persuade the U.S. Senate to ratify the Protocol.

Once the U.S. has ratified the Protocol, a more far-reaching convention on CBW should have a fairly good chance of success. I suspect you would then want to extend your concept of veto-free investigation of complaints of actual use to include chemicals as well as germs. Such an agreement would certainly be a useful adjunct to the Protocol and should not run into the objection that many nations have expressed to splitting chemicals from germs. The only objection I can see to a complaint investigation procedure is that it might cause more friction and trouble than it is worth. After all, any large scale attack will be quite obvious and should not require much verification. Nevertheless, I agree with you that the threat of impartial investigation unfettered by a Security Council veto will act as an additional deterrent. Have you considered attempting to get a convention for investigation of complaints of use before attempting to get an agreement on production and possession?

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I like Wiggins' proposal of unilateral renunciation of the possession of germ weapons. Mainly this is because I fear the haggling and possible stimulation of interest in these weapons that would result from protracted negotiations over a convention. Perhaps the solution is to begin with a few unilateral declarations to create a mood in which a convention can glide through with little discussion. I very much agree with your point that the purpose of such a convention should be to provide some fairly modest complaint investigation procedure rather than to verify absolute compliance.

Recently, the White House has curtailed the use of 2,4,5-T, a defoliant widely used in Vietnam and used on a much lesser scale in the U.S. It has been found to cause a high frequency of fetal malformations in rats and mice. Whether it does so to humans is not known; however, some additional concern on this score has been generated by several articles during June of this year in the Saigon Press alleging a high incidence of birth malformations. All of this has made me reconsider the problem of anti-plant warfare. I have never seen any objection to the use of defoliants along roadsides and in the immediate vicinity of military bases. However, the block spraying of large areas is quite another matter. The essential point is that it departs very sharply from the traditional concept of confining attack only to the immediate vicinity of enemy forces. It opens the door to what one might call "area warfare" or "environmental warfare". Our general ignorance of the physiological and ecological effects of such activities enhances the hazard. Therefore, I think some line must be drawn. A relatively simple line that would allow the use of defoliants along roadsides and around bases would be that they could be disseminated only from the ground and not from the air.

I look forward to seeing you in London.

Sincerely yours,

*Matthew Meselson*

Matthew Meselson

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