

December 22, 1969

Mr. Richard L. Garwin
Watson Laboratory
612 West 115th Street
New York, N.Y. 10025

Dear Dick,

Thank you for sending a copy of your "post-conference contribution" to the SOCHI meeting. I sympathize with your attempt. Indeed, I tried something along similar lines myself not so long ago. A copy of my attempt is enclosed. A few days after writing it, I did give a copy to someone in the White House but could never get up enough enthusiasm about it to give it general circulation. You will see that it contains a suggestion rather closely related to your own. Namely, certain specified non-lethal gases would be allowed in war with no restrictions regarding the type of military operations in which they could be employed. The main difference is that I sought to specify only those substances whose weight requirements and short persistence time would make them generally unsuitable for large-scale operations in support of lethal weapons. I venture this suggestion that CN might be such a substance. I know this choice could be criticized and I do not wish to press it.

I now think that all suggestions to legitimize the use of harassing agents in war are "non-starters". Beyond that, and more important, I think it is in the long-term interest of the United States to repair to our traditional standard "no gas". My reasons are not novel: they are simply that the integrated political cost and the risk of escalation are not worth any likely security benefits. Sometimes the escalation hazard is sited without much attention to the mechanism whereby escalation might actually occur. Julian Robinson and I tried to say something about this last August in an article in New Scientist. I would greatly appreciate your comments. If I am allowed to quote myself, I would lay emphasis on the sentence near the end " the military option of using

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irritants in tactical operations is surely not so valuable as to have attracted immutable pressure to keep it open. Apathy may be as serious a block to remedial action as opposition from military establishments."

Finally, for your interest, I enclose a copy of the telegram I sent President Nixon following his statement of November 25.

With best regards,

Sincerely yours,

Matthew Meselson

MM:ls
cc: Prof. Paul Doty
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