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Professor Joshua Lederberg  
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April 15, 1971.  
RRN/GR

Dear Professor Lederberg,

Many thanks for your letter of April 8 and for your comments on Volume V of our CBW study. It raises a number of interesting and useful points.

One of the points in our argument about strategy and verification was that countries like Israel or Sweden might well see attractions in CW or show a concern about verification because the one-side possession of CW by their opponents could tip the military balance against them to a critical degree. (See page 91-2 and page 108, where Israel and Sweden are mentioned.) We note that at least in the case of Sweden they have not taken this position, presumably because of wider strategic and political considerations. We do not argue that the explanation for their present policies is that "chemical weaponry is only marginally useful for such a strategic purpose". So I do not think there is really any disagreement between us about the attractions of CW to the military establishment in middle powers of this kind.

As regards the nuclear powers - the United States and the Soviet Union - I am not clear whether you are arguing that the one-sided possession of CW would be critical in the direct confrontation between these two powers in Europe or whether you feel that one-sided possession by one of the superpowers would matter in connection with the Israel/Sweden type of scenario. I take it to be the former. The latter proposition links up with your idea of a non-proliferation treaty, on which more below.

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If it is the former, then I agree with you that assumptions can be made about the unuseability of nuclear weapons such that they cannot be counted on to deter in any degree an attack with conventional or CBW weapons. In that event, one-sided possession of CW could plainly have an effect upon the balance of strength - though how great an effect is a matter of debate. The important point to note is that the assumption is a very strong one, that it contradicts all those Western propositions about compensating for conventional weakness with nuclear weapons, whether by means of massive response, flexible response, or any other kind of response. This is not to say that the assumption should be ignored. Strong assumptions are often the most interesting ones. But I think one has to consider the radical implications it has for strategy and also what are the political premises beneath it. My hunch is that the difficulties of maintaining compulsory military service in the West may limit conventional manpower and so push strategy towards heavier dependence on weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. But this shift in military "economics" could always be offset by an increasing political feeling that nuclear weapons are unacceptable. But in that event one is postulating a shift in political attitudes to nuclear weapons. There have of course been swings in nuclear doctrine, but if there were to be an enduring shift in the direction you suggest, it would be a development of major importance. One would have to ask what it was that made use of nuclear weapons become more unacceptable - nuclear parity, the huge overkill, the problems of controlling use, internal political developments, détente, the threat of proliferation. There is a huge variety of factors that may come into play singly or in combination with one another, and one must think out which of them matter so that one can consider whether, and how, they impinge on the general disarmament picture or on chemical disarmament in particular. Some would make chemical disarmament more difficult, others not, and so on.

The military aspects will be discussed in more detail in Volume II which has yet to be prepared. We have had many discussions of them and have found it an extremely difficult game. There is so little experience to go on that one has to build strategic castles in the air.

I disagree with you rather strongly in your suggestion that there should be a chemical non-proliferation treaty. The nuclear non-proliferation treaty has been a very uncertain benefit so far and it has certainly provoked resentment amongst non-nuclear countries who regard it as an instrument of discrimination, imperialism, and so on. If the strong powers were again to propose a discriminatory treaty of this kind, I think it could be counter-productive, the more so since the use of CW, as we emphasize, has usually been "downhill", i.e. by a strong country against a weak one, as in Ethiopia or Vietnam. (Similarly, the Swedes would not, I think, take at all kindly to the idea that the superpowers should keep a careful bilateral balance in

CW capabilities in order to deal with a "Swedish embroil", if that is what you have in mind (see above). It would be a different matter if the weak countries themselves were to propose a CW disarmament treaty on a regional or general basis, thereby expressing their political stand against CW, attempting to reinforce their political defences against CW attack in the future, and so on.

I am afraid I do not understand your point about acquiescence in a loose agreement making it difficult to accomplish a meaningful one. Suppose there were inspection by challenge. Is that a loose agreement? Is it meaningful? And how do these points apply to the present BW draft treaties?

I would be very glad to have any further thoughts you may have on these points. Almost no one ever writes to us with substantial comments on our published work. I am most grateful to you for doing so.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "R.R. Neild", with a horizontal flourish underneath.

R.R. Neild