Privileged

BW Planning Meeting
September 23, 1987
Rockefeller University

Summary Minutes

A meeting to discuss the future activities of CISAC's biological weapons subgroup was held at Rockefeller University on September 23, 1987. Present were: Joshua Lederberg; Paul Doty; Wolfgang Panofsky; Malvin Ruderman; John Steinbruner; Victor Rabinowitch and Lynn Rusten.

Lederberg opened the meeting by saying that he agreed with what he believed was a consensus that the dialogue on biological weapons with our Soviet counterparts should be continued and that the purpose of this meeting was to discuss agenda for the next bilateral meeting.

Rusten then reviewed what Bob Mikulak in ACDA told her about the results of the April 1987 Experts Conference. The BWC signatories agreed to an exchange of data through the UN on October 15, 1987, and thereafter the data exchange would occur annually on April 15. The data exchange will cover: 1) declaration of location and activities of all PIV labs and identification of all biological defense labs (there are five in the U.S.); 2) information on unusual disease outbreaks; 3) promotion of scientific contacts and dissemination of information about the above mentioned labs and; 4) prior announcement of all conferences on BW defense.

Mikulak told Rusten that the next BWC Review Conference will take place no later than 1991 and will focus on whether to add verification measures to the Convention. The plan is to see what verification measures are agreed to in the Chemical Weapons Treaty now under negotiation and then see if those can be applied to the BWC.

Mikulak told Rusten that he thought the CISAC dialogue was useful and could lay some important ground work for the next review conference. He thought it would be useful for both sides to exchange

views on what aspects of new technology they view as most dangerous. He expressed his personal opinion that advances in biotechnology facilitating large scale production was most dangerous. Mikulak thought that rather than start from scratch, both sides could react to the official papers on this topic submitted to the 1986 Review Conference. Mikulak also thought that promoting visits to Soviet facilities and other cooperative measures would be very useful. He indicated the time was ripe for this given recent Western visits to Krasnoyarsk, a military installation in Minsk, and his upcoming visit with a CDE delegation to a Soviet chemical weapons storage site. This led to a brief discussion of the status of the CW negotiations and verification provisions.

Doty mentioned he had heard that Ovchinnikov had died recently. Rabinowitch later looked into this and learned that it was not true.

Panofsky said it might be useful to ask the Soviets to explain to us how they classify the levels of caution at their facilities. Lederberg agreed that a discussion of how pathogenic agents are handled and what are the inspection procedures and signatures of these facilities would be a good thing. He said it would be useful to have someone on the U.S. delegation familiar with pharmaceutical production. He said he would try to think of an appropriate individual, perhaps a quality control person.

Doty said there was someone at Merck he could ask. Lederberg said the Waxman Institute played a bridging role between research and development. He said Arnie Demain at MIT might be a good person to ask. He said there might be someone appropriate at Fort Detrick. Lederberg said he would think more about this and asked Doty to do so as well.

Ruderman asked about the possibility of technological developments that could change the scale of production. Rabinowitch said that scale changes were more likely to come on the delivery end than on the production end.

Lederberg then reported on the US government reaction to the Soviet explanation of the Sverdlovsk incident given to the CISAC

sub-group last October in Moscow. He said the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) for BW does not think the story is credible. He evidently believes the Soviets first tried out the story on Meselson, then cleaned it up and gave it to the CISAC group. Lederberg said the issue revolves around the raw intelligence data and that it is hard at this point to trace back and interpret the raw data. Lederberg said Colonol Huxsoll, at Fort Detrick, is not far from the view of the NIO.

Lederberg said he thought other people in the government were more open-minded and wanted more information, including a copy of the official internal Soviet report written at the time of the incident; the names of the doctors involved and detailed case histories of the patients; and permission to go back and interview the surviving victims. Lederberg expressed his view that Sverdlovsk would not be removed from the official list of accusations of Soviet violations, nor did he think the issue was important enough to take it to higher levels of government.

Steinbruner said one consideration was whether this issue would just fade away. He posed the question of what would be the value of discrediting everyone involved in the U.S. side or of getting a Soviet case that would stand up to scrutiny. He suggested letting it ride through 1989 and seeing what happens then.

Doty referred to a new book by Joseph Douglass that argues that the U.S. should withdraw from the Convention. Everyone present agreed that was not a mainstream view.

Steinbruner said it would be hard to visit the Soviet facility at Sverdlovsk without mentioning the incident. Lederberg said the facility was a different issue from the Sverdlovsk incident. He said he thought the Sverdlovsk facility was a BW defense facility on a large scale. Steinbruner asked how we could go there and then on return say we were agnostic on the subject of the Sverdlovsk incident. Rabinowitch agreed with Steinbruner, saying we would have to be prepared to discuss the incident.

Steinbruner outlined two alternative approaches: a) say we want to go to the facility and encourage them to build a definitive case about the incident by letting us talk to people in Sverdlovsk and having Nikiforov go on a lecture circuit in the U.S., explaining that without further evidence we could not take a definitive stand; or b) separate current use and the Sverdlovsk facility from the past incident and focus on what is taking place in that facility now.

Ruderman expressed concern about having a short visit to Sverdlovsk with a set agenda, which would make it hard to make a definitive judgement. Lederberg said we should explain to the Soviets that we cannot press this issue further in the government, and that Soviet unwillingness to go the last mile is keeping the case from being resolved. He said we should ask them what is the barrier and urge them to finish the process they began. Regarding bringing Nikiforov here, Lederberg said this was not so important as having a scientifically thorough and credible publication. He added that Nikiforov, who is not an epidemiologist, is not the best witness. Steinbruner conceded that a Nikiforov speaking tour might not be desirable.

Rabinowitch suggested that when we are negotiating the agenda, we can explain why we think it is important for them to follow through with a credible publication explaining the incident. Doty said it could be explained to the Soviets that this incident might be raised in the ratification hearings on the INF treaty; others questioned whether this linkage should be raised.

Lederberg suggested they move on to discuss a possible agenda for the next meeting. He noted that one important item not on the list (See attachment #1, meeting agenda) was the issue of how to deal with third party capability to develop BW. He suggested they first discuss the problem that the fundamental R&D is dual capable. Doty said that if the research is medical, then openness and access should be total. Panofsky asked to what extent is openness a standard now in U.S. medical research and development, given proprietary concerns.

Lederberg responded that in practice no one lags more than a year in publishing their results, and that it is well known who is working for whom. He said the Board of Directors of a pharmaceutical company can make inquiries about what is being done, and so could act like an audit committee to comply with a Treaty regime.

Doty noted that the leading trade group, Industrial Biotechnology Association, supports the idea of openness and is supporting a pending bill that would apply the BWC to nongovernment activities.

Rabinowitch expressed the concern that our calls for greater openness might sound hollow given that the U.S. government keeps vetoing U.S.-Soviet cooperation in biotechnology. Lederberg said, however, that openness was generally complied with on the academic level. Doty said U.S. government labs and pharmaceutical companies were not so open.

Lederberg noted that the Soviets are eager for our industry to be more open, but that there are proprietary interests and concerns on the part of U.S. industry. He said he thought the U.S. could declassify information on its government facilities and activities if the Soviets would do the same. For instance, there could be systematic reporting on all PII and PIII facilities conducting medical research related to the military. He said openness about people was an outstanding difference between the two countries. He also said the Soviets could much improve their public health reporting.

Lederberg said registration of personnel would go beyond current levels of openness. Promotion of international exchange programs to get people in each other's labs would also be positive.

Panofsky said then that it would be useful to discuss with the Soviets standards of openness in fundamental R&D and reporting procedures about one's activities.

Doty suggested the problem was when one went beyond R&D to large scale production. Steinbruner asked whether one could define scale of production criteria. Lederberg said it would be very difficult

because the scale is modest. However, the high level of protection has a signature and this would focus attention on a limited number of sites. He said the packaging was telling.

Panofsky asked whether there was any hope for defining R&D quantities vs production quantities. Lederberg said you could try to quantify the treaty and say that amounts above x must be declared and registered. Steinbruner asked if one could define storage facilities? Lederberg said yes, that this could be defined as over 100 liters of pathogens. However, the said that recombinant DNA is defined as a pathogen, so this complicates the matter. Lederberg said in order to bolster the verification aspects of the treaty, one had to focus on quantity as the criterion rather than on types. Steinbruner asked then if large scale quantities could be considered offensive. Lederberg said yes, unless it is part of a research program for vaccines. Steinbruner said if you register something and there's a question about it, there should be a way to sample and investigate. Lederberg said this would pose proprietary problems, and also gets into the technology transfer issue, which is something the Soviets want to promote. He said you'd have to evaluate loss vs gain. He said one side could get a lot of the technical capability by sampling the strain, and that maintaining security by using dead samples would be much easier. Steinbruner said there could be a mutually run test facility with safeguards. Doty said he did not go along with this. Doty noted the spread of the practice of putting in a sequence that has a unique signature that can be traced back to the inventor. Panofsky said this issue of quantitative delineation would be a good issue to discuss with the Soviets. Lederberg agreed, saying it would force them to bring a delegation who could competently discuss the issue.

Rabinowitch suggested we proceed by producing an outline and discussion paper which would hint to the Soviets the type of expertise they should have on their delegation. It was agreed that Steinbruner, Rabinowitch and Rusten would carry this paper to Moscow in October and arrange in advance a meeting with the Soviet BW

delegation head and Sagdeev to discuss in detail our agenda ideas. Rabinowitch will then try to get a response when he is back in the USSR in December.

There was then a discussion of Soviet charges concerning ethnic weapons. Lederberg said the danger was in developing something lethal for which you have a defense for your own people through large scale production and distribution of a vaccine. He said he did not want to discuss this issue with the Soviets early on. He noted Meselson had once proposed that each side declare its vaccination programs and provide samples to the other.

Lederberg said reviewing the magnitude and character of each side's program should stay on the agenda. He said we could review the annual DOD reports to Congress on the US BW program. Doty said there should be some visits to US facilities. Steinbruner noted a Wall Street Journal article discussing the increase in US spending on BW defense, saying that we could explain where that extra money is going. The idea is over time to get the Soviets to share similar information with us. Someone said that Ustinov last time expressed concern about the purpose of US activities at Dugway.

Regarding cooperative programs, Rabinowitch said he did not have the details on the inter-academy cooperation on vaccines, but that there would be planning workshop for this in Moscow next spring. Therefore we can say we've implemented that recommendation from the first meeting and are moving ahead on it.

On the topic of AIDs, Lederberg pointed out that Soviet scientists have now criticized the Soviet media for charging that AIDs was a DOD-created lethal weapon.

Lederberg said we could discuss the possibility of cooperation in AIDs research. Rabinowitch said that by next spring, the IOM will have made some progress on this with the Soviet Academy of Medical Sciences. Steinbruner said we could then give an update on the state of cooperation on AIDs. It was agreed not to put AIDs explicitly on the agenda but to let it come up under the issues of cooperation and confidence building.

On the third party issue, Lederberg said there could be mutual assessment of the risk and sharing of information with each other about this, and perhaps discussion of civil defense measures. He suggested Rusten ask Mikulak whether there is any official bilateral exchange of information on third party BW activities. Steinbruner said we could discuss precedents for this in other areas and why it is useful. He said we could also discuss the possibilities for tracking end use if you transfer biotechnology capability. Rabinowitch said this was very hard to track and that it would again bring you to the problem of intent.

Panofsky said all the measures we discussed needed to be made multilateral, and that the multilateral aspect should be brought up under each agenda item.

A discussion of the probable American delegation resulted in the following list: The original delegation: Joshua Lederberg, Ivan Bennett; Theodore Woodward, Paul Marks, Alex Rich and John Steinbruner; and additionally: IOM President Sam Thier; Spurgeon Keeny; Paul Doty; Robert Chanock (NIH); and a person with experience in engineering and production.

It was agreed we would try to arrange a visit of both delegations to Fort Detrick, and that we would facilitate other scientific visits in the hope of setting up a reciprocal exchange of visits.

The meeting then adjourned and Lederberg, Steinbruner, Panofsky and Rusten worked on an agenda outline and accompanying prose to be carried to the Soviets in October. (For result see attachment #2).

Lynn Rusten