

For Release Monday Afternoon
September 19, 1966

Twenty two leading American scientists, including seven Nobel Prize winners, today initiated a petition to President Johnson requesting a White House review of U.S. policy regarding chemical and biological weapons. The petition calls for reaffirmation of the traditional U.S. policy of not starting the use of chemical or biological weapons and requests a high level study aimed at finding ways to maintain and reinforce world-wide restraints against chemical and biological warfare. Believing that the Nation has far more to lose than to gain from the use of such weapons, the scientists oppose the large scale use of anti-personnel and anti-crop chemical weapons in Viet Nam. The petition to the President has the support of the Council of the Federation of American Scientists.

STATEMENT TO ACCOMPANY NEWS RELEASE

Chemical and biological weapons could be far more dangerous as instruments of mass extermination than anything except nuclear weapons. The United States, along with other nations recognizes that the use of even the smallest nuclear artillery shell in war would raise issues of extreme gravity. It would break down barriers to the use of more powerful nuclear weapons, and no one could tell where the escalation might end. The use of chemical or biological weapons, even relatively mild ones, involves similar dangers.

Under the intense pressures of actual war, and without any carefully worked out and internationally recognized guidelines, it is difficult to keep even so mild a substance as tear gas from being used in ways that can set the stage for the introduction of lethal chemicals. For example, when, in Viet Nam, we spread tear

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Now is the time
for us to urge you
to write a piece for
The Post on this matter.
The weekend of the 25th
would be an excellent
time for
its appearance.

Dear Colleague:

The enclosed letter to President Johnson expresses our concern with policies and practices which we consider to jeopardize existing restraints on the employment of chemical and biological weapons. We urge you to join with us as co-signers and to help gather signatures of professional scientists among your colleagues.

Bur.
Matt

Signatures should be forwarded by October 31, 1966 to:

Presidential Letter
58 Washington Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140

Sincerely yours,

John Edsall
Matthew Meselson

The following persons are initial signers of the letter to the President:

Felix Bloch, Department of Physics, Stanford University
Konrad E. Bloch, Department of Chemistry, Harvard University
James F. Crow, Department of Medical Genetics, University of Wisconsin
William Doering, Sterling Chemistry Laboratory, Yale University
Paul Doty, Department of Chemistry, Harvard University
Freeman J. Dyson, The Institute for Advanced Study
John T. Edsall, The Biological Laboratories, Harvard University
Bernard Feld, Department of Physics, Massachusetts Inst. of Technology
Irwin C. Gunsalus, Department of Chemistry, University of Illinois
Robert Hofstadter, Department of Physics, Stanford University
Arthur Kornberg, Department of Biochemistry, Stanford U. Medical School
Fritz Lipmann, Rockefeller Institute
Robert B. Livingston, Department of Neurosciences, U. Cal., San Diego
Matthew Meselson, Biological Laboratories, Harvard University
Severo Ochoa, New York University School of Medicine
Ray D. Owen, Division of Biology, California Institute of Technology
Keith R. Porter, Biological Laboratories, Harvard University
Charles Price, Department of Chemistry, University of Pennsylvania
Eugene Rabinowitch, Department of Botany, University of Illinois
E. L. Tatum, Rockefeller Institute
George Wald, Biological Laboratories, Harvard University
Paul Dudley White, Boston

President Lyndon B. Johnson
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

We, the American scientists whose names appear below, wish to warn against any weakening of the world-wide prohibitions and restraints on the use of chemical and biological (CB) weapons.

CB weapons have the potential of inflicting, especially on civilians, enormous devastation and death which may be unpredictable in scope and intensity; they could become far cheaper and easier to produce than nuclear weapons, thereby placing great mass destructive power within reach of nations not now possessing it; they lend themselves to use by leadership that may be desperate, irresponsible, or unscrupulous. The barriers to the use of these weapons must not be allowed to break down.

During the Second World War, the United States maintained a firm and clearly stated policy of not initiating the use of CB weapons. However, in the last few years the U.S. position has become less clear. Since the late 1950's, Defense Department expenditures on CB weapons have risen several fold — and there has been no categorical reaffirmation of the World War II policy.

Most recently, U.S. forces have begun the large-scale use of anti-crop and "non-lethal" anti-personnel chemical weapons in Vietnam. We believe that this sets a dangerous precedent, with long term hazards far outweighing any probable short term military advantage. The employment of any one CB weapon weakens the barriers to the use of others. No lasting distinction seems feasible between incapacitating and lethal weapons or between chemical and biological warfare. The great variety of possible agents forms a continuous spectrum from the temporarily incapacitating to the highly lethal. If the restraints on the use of one kind of CB weapon are broken down, the use of others will be encouraged.

Therefore, Mr. President, we urge that you

- Institute a White House study of overall government policy regarding CB weapons and the possibility of arms control measures, with a view to maintaining and reinforcing the world-wide restraints against CB warfare.
- Order an end to the employment of anti-personnel and anti-crop chemical weapons in Vietnam.
- Reestablish and categorically declare the intention of the United States to refrain from initiating the use of chemical and biological weapons.