

APR 7 1971

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REMARKS ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A CW BAN

(SIPRI Report V)

Chapter 3, Part 2 "National Security and CB Weapons" touches on the most sensitive considerations that will bear on national policies on BW disarmament. Many good arguments are stated, but I feel that a great zeal to justify the abolition of CW has glossed over some troublesome problems. In particular, the argument is founded on the assumption that the nuclear balance will remain somewhere near its present point of stability and that this will be a security blanket to cover every important contingency. But, of course, if this were the case there would be no motive for any party to invest in CW in the first place!

↑ nuclear power

The shortcomings of mutual strategic deterrents have been discussed at great length elsewhere and need no general elaboration here. The chief concern is that the threat is so terrible that it cannot be credibly invoked except for threats which reach the essential core interests of the major nuclear powers. A great deal of mischief continues to go on in the world directed at disrupting the various coalitions that relate in more or less marginal ways to those core interests.

The scenario that is of gravest concern is the potential use of CW by a nuclear power, or one of its surrogates, against a non-nuclear adversary who is, or is believed to be, or may be made to be marginal to our own core interests. In these circumstances the use of nuclear weapons might be too risky a breach of the nuclear fire-break and a surprise chemical attack would then have some advantages. For example, the recent history of Middle Eastern affairs offer little complacency about the possible threat of a surprise attack against Israel. In the present context some other contingencies are less likely, but various erosions of world order could bring Greece, Turkey, Finland or even Sweden within the orbit of similar threats. In these circumstances the strategic use of CW could facilitate the rapid consolidation of a fait accompli that would preempt an effective counter-reaction short of an ultimate nuclear confrontation. How much trust can we place in the precise and correct fore-calculation of the outcome! As unlikely or unpredictable as such events may appear to be at present, no military establishment can afford to overlook such contingencies in its force planning. And then technical expectations inevitably interact with political motives.

There is little doubt about the desirability, on behalf of world order, of the abolition of chemical weaponry. However, chemical disarmament should not be confused, as sometimes occurs during this chapter, with a token, vague, or unverifiable Treaty agreement. Vague prohibitions would be the most mischievous by inciting mutual recriminations, internationally, and internal divisions in democratic societies.

I do not argue that a CW counter-capability is a preferred response or deterrent. The nuclear powers, including the USSR, would scarcely fail to regard a strategic CW counter-attack on their home territory as equivalent to a nuclear response. (On the other hand, retaliatory tactical use of CW against incursive forces may be the most credible defensive potential short of pressing the nuclear button and the anticipation thereof may continue to be some deterrent to CW aggression. These arguments are at least debatable.)

The central issue is not whether the US could tolerate an evasible ban on CW. In view of the alternative hazards of a technology race an unverified ban might not be extraordinarily more hazardous than the present hardly controlled situation.

The point is that a verifiable CW ban would represent the only important tangible improvement of the present situation. Support for vague and or unverifiable agreements helps to make this goal unachievable.

re printing
2/20/71