

Military Rebuffed On CBW 11/17/69 Nixon, Laird Barred Plea for More Weapons

By Richard Homan
Washington Post Staff Writer

President Nixon and Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird overrode strong objections by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in deciding this week to impose new limitations on U.S. chemical and biological warfare activities.

The nation's military chiefs were rebuffed on virtually every major recommendation they made during formulation of the new U.S. policy on CBW, sources close to the National Security Council confirmed yesterday.

In effect, the recommendations made by the Joint Chiefs would have led to increased activity by the United States in the fields of both chemical and biological warfare.

Pentagon sources acknowledged yesterday that the recommendations of the generals had been overruled, but they characterized the Joint Chiefs as "not heartbroken."

"They carried their views to the National Security Council," one Pentagon figure said, "but they accepted it. It wasn't something they were willing to go to the wall on."

Officially, the Defense Department said the Joint Chiefs "concurred" in the President's decision and that the original recommendations by the JCS were "privileged" and would not be made public.

See CBW, A2, Col. 4

CBW, From A1

The case for the service chiefs was presented directly to the President and the NSC by Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, during a tense, two-hour session on Nov. 18 which Laird attended.

Specifically, the JCS opposed the destruction of germ warfare stockpiles and the ban on offensive germ warfare research. The President later ordered both.

They wanted to preserve for the United States the option for first use of incapacitation agents, both chemical and biological, and to continue the national policy of being prepared to "retaliate in kind" to germ attacks by an enemy. Both were repudiated by the President.

The Joint Chiefs were partially successful on their request that the Geneva Protocol, if resubmitted to the Senate for ratification, be given a broad U.S. interpretation exempting from its ban all tear gases, herbicides and incapacitating agents. The U.S. uses both tear gas and herbicides in Vietnam and it has greatly expanded its research on incapacitating gases, a relatively new field.

The Nixon administration, instead, interpreted the Proto-

col as permitting first use of tear gases and herbicides, but not incapacitants.

According to most sources, the position adopted by the President corresponded closely to that recommended by Laird and Deputy Defense Secretary David Packard, who had made the unusual concession of allowing the generals to present a competing view to the President.

President Nixon announced Tuesday that the nation will never engage in germ warfare, will destroy its stockpiles of bacteriological weapons and will limit its research in this field to defensive measures.

The President also said he will ask the Senate to ratify the 1925 Geneva accord that prohibits its signers from first using poison gas or germs in warfare.

In repeating the nation's renunciation of first use of lethal chemical weapons, the President extended the renunciation to first use of incapacitation chemicals.

The President's decision ended two broad assumptions of U.S. strategic policy: that the nation must develop and maintain an offensive capability in germ, as well as chemical and nuclear, warfare to deter use of corresponding weaponry by an enemy, and that it be pre-

pared to retaliate in kind to germ warfare, as well as chemical and nuclear.

Military officials have argued repeatedly in planning sessions and before Congress for expanded opportunities to engage in development of poison and incapacitating gases.

Lt. Gen. Austin W. Betts, chief of research for the Army, told the House Appropriations Committee in July, according to testimony made public this week:

"It seems to me that it would be absolutely indefensible for us to cease all offensive lethal weapon development . . . it would be foolish if we ceased doing offensive development work that denied us the knowledge of what it takes to defend against any agent that our technology might conceive."

Dr. Donald M. MacArthur, deputy director of research for the Defense Department, told the same committee that "the prime emphasis in agent R&D (Research and Development) is on developing better incapacitating agents."

He defined those as "substances which cause incapacitation with an extremely small risk of death or permanent injury to personnel" and said, "compounds investigated include LSD, which was discarded as unsuitable in view of deleterious side effects, including possible genetic effects."

The Defense Department said yesterday that it was exploring methods of complying with the President's order to destroy all stockpiled biological agents and felt it could be completed "well within a year."

Though Pentagon spokesmen talked of hazards and a need for elaborate safety precautions in disposal of the bacteriological agents, earlier testimony before congressional

committees indicated there would be no major problems.

The Washington Post