r Chemical and Biological War

Germ War: What Nixon Gave Up

By ROBERT M. SMITH
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WASHINGTON, Nov. 25—By the time President Nixon made his statement today on chemical-biological warfare, there was nearly unanimous agreement among the top members of his Administration on the decision he announced. This was because the President gave up a few horrible and probably unusable weapons in the American arsenal to gain possible advantages of security for the nation and prestige for himself. This is the view of informed sources here, who say the President's decision on chemical-biological weapons was both shrewd and quick. They are asking people to look at what the President really gave up, and they suggest that he will now take other important steps, hough probably with less fanfare.

News Analysis

What the President gave up, they say, was this:

¶The first use of incapacitating chemicals — The United States has only one "incap" chemical, a gas called BZ. BZ enters the body through the lungs and interferes with the normal mental and physical processes. But BZ, the Pentagon has said, is terribly expensive (20 a pound, and it takes 10 tons toknock out, say, a battalion). And its effects vary: While it makes some people passive, it may make others fly off the handle; in addition, it can, in certain cases, kill its victims.

¶The use of germs to incapacitate and kill in war—It has been American policy that biological agents would be used to "retaliate in kind" against an enemy who used them on American forces or population. However, experts in chemical-biological warfare point out that there were several problems that would probably have prevented the United States from ever using germs as weapons, even in retaliation.

Identifying the Attacker

In the first place, the germs and toxins (the dead but poisonous products of bacteria) stockpiled in refrigerated igloos at the Pine Bluff arsenal in Arkansas have never been tested; it is not clear what effect they would have on enemy forces or population.

Second, there is a central problem of "retaliation in kind": identifying the attacker.

Forsworn Weapons Called Probably Unusable

How could the United States tell whether it was, say, Peking or the Soviet Union that had spread a particular disease?

Third, and this is probably the most common argument of those opposed to the stockpiles at Pine Bluff, how could the United States distribute germs against an enemy so that it could be sure that the germs stayed in hostile territory? How, they ask, could the diseases be kept from spreading into neutral or friendly territories or even from triggering a worldwide "pandemic" that would boomerang on the United States?

In light of all these uncertainties, the experts say — and Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird apparently agreed — both the incapacitating agent BZ and the arsenal of germs have very dubious strategic value, and it is only these weapons that the President forswore the use of today.

On the other hand the gains to the nation, and to Mr. Nixon personally, appear substantial, according to informed sources.

First—and perhaps most important—because biological and chemical agents neither cost as much nor require the technical ability of nuclear weapons to produce, the United States, by maintaining a stock of biologicals and refusing to sign the Geneva protocol banning the use of gas and germs, may have been engendering interest in chemical and biological weapone on the part of small, poorer countries keen to create their own arsenals.

Much of the criticism aimed at Government policy has focused on the failure of the United States to ratify the Geneva Prodocol of 1925. By the interpretation of some of the 80-odd states that have signed it, the protocol prohibits the use of tear gas. The United States is using CS, a souped-up form of tear gas, in Vietnam.

The Administration made clear today that it did not regard tear gas as banned by the protocol. The Administration also said that the protocol did not apply to the use of herbicides, which the United States is using in large quantities in Vietnam.

This will not get Mr. Nixon off the hook with those opposed to the American use of these chemicals. However, it is reliably reported that the President intends shortly — though probably privately—to maintain much tighter control on the use of tear gas by the Army in Vietnam.

The Army has said that it is using the gas only to save lives, but there have been reports that American forces are using the gas to drive Vietcong troops into exposed position where they can be bombed or shot.

In addition, it is believed that Mr. Nixon will attempt to draw up guidelines delimiting in what situations American troops can use the gas.

Present Situation

At present, according to reliable reports, American commanders in the field may use tear gas in any situations they wish with only one exception: they must get permission from higher headquarters to use the gas when only Vietnamese civilians are involved.

The National Security Council review of Policy that culminated in today's decision began May 28 with interagency staff meetings. At first, representatives of both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Pentagon took "hard" lines against reducing the American biological capability.

In late summer, however Mr. Laird called back the study paper prepared by the Pentagon and shortly thereafter issued a memorandum recommending a halt in the manufacture of biological agents.

From that point on, apparently, there was little disagreement concerning what stance the Administration should take, although it it reliably reported that the Joint Chiefs of Staffs' representative followed the "hard" line right through the last National Security Council staff meeting.

Rumors began to circulate that the president would make the announcement yesterday; he did it this morning—a week after the broad decision had been made.

Only yesterday staff members of the Administration were scrambling to inform themselves about the details of the Geneva Protocol.

There is every likelihood, informed sources say, that the decision will be warmly received. "At the very least," said one Government official, "it's going to show that the President is not owned by the generals and the chemical industry, and that—at least on some issues—he is open to persuasion."