


Saturday Review



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The Fiendish Vials

The Congress of the United States has been shocked by reports of shipments of poison gases, high-potency disease germs, and other chemical-biological weapons from one point to another within the United States, and has acted with indignation and unanimity to prevent further shipments within the country. Outside the country similar cries have gone up over the transport or storage of such weapons by the United States. It is possible that the Congress may feel that the concern of other nations in this matter warrants similar protective measures.

The Congress has identified the smallest part of the problem. The principal danger of these weapons is represented by their manufacture and possible use, and not by their deployment. The focus of Congressional attention should be on the existence of such devices and on what is required to abolish them altogether. For included in this arsenal, and the arse-

nals of other nations, are aerosol sprays that cause the delicate nerve structure of the brain to deteriorate; a chemical substance so powerful that a speck of it no larger than a pencil point, when it touches human skin, can produce a massive heart attack; and viruses and disease germs so virulent that no known antibiotic or other therapeutic agent can prevent them from precipitating plagues over wide areas. It is the bulging and expanding existence of these horrors, rather than the possibility that an accident may cause some spillage, that should inflame the public sense of outrage.

Anyone who has read the recent U.N. report on chemical and bacteriological warfare knows that the fiendish vials that now abound in such large quantities throughout the world must not merely be kept free of the hazards of transportation, but must be eliminated altogether.

How does it happen that the American government is spending hundreds

of millions of dollars each year on ways of creating and spreading incurable diseases? It has happened the same way thermonuclear weapons and ICBMs and now ABMs have "happened." First, the scientists declare a weapon is theoretically possible. Then there is alarm over reports that the Soviet Union is secretly planning to develop the new weaponry. We are told that the Department of Defense cannot take the responsibility for the security of the United States unless it is given complete authority to develop appropriate new counter-weapons, and then to pursue superiority, whatever the cost, whatever the implications.

What about the possibility of agreements with the Soviet Union aimed at bringing under control the more monstrous aspects of the world arms race? This race is being conducted in the name of national security, but is actually producing mutual insecurity, disfiguration of human values, and disruption or destruction of programs designed to enhance life and the conditions of life. What happens when such arms-control agreements are proposed has by now become something of a pattern. The statement is made that we must of course pursue the possibility of agreements but that such pursuit should not be allowed to interfere with the immediate and thoroughgoing development and manufacture of the new weapons. End of any possibility of arms control.

This is not a uniquely American situation. In 1963, I had an opportunity to see the same scientific-military reflexes at work in the Soviet Union. President John F. Kennedy had asked me to undertake informal and unofficial talks with Soviet Chairman Nikita S. Khrushchev in an attempt to unsnarl the negotiations for a limited ban on nuclear testing. During the discussions, Mr. Khrushchev said he had been under mounting pressure from his scientists and generals to proceed with a full nuclear weapons program, for which unrestricted testing was mandatory. He said these scientists and generals claimed to have secret information that the United States had ways of circumventing any agreement, and that the proposed test-ban treaty was only a ploy to open up the Soviet Union to expanded American espionage. He said that if he had to depend on his military people for reducing tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, he would have only torches and thorns to work with.

The limited nuclear test ban is regarded by many contemporary historians as the most significant achievement in an otherwise almost unbroken series of escalating moves in the world arms race. Let it be noted that this



particular treaty was passed by the U.S. Senate over the opposition of most of our military leaders.

And now the same men who did their best to maintain unlimited nuclear testing are using the same arguments for unlimited development of bacteriological, chemical, and radiological weapons; and anti-ballistic missiles; and multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles [for more on the latter, see the article by Leo Sartori in this issue]. It is not unnatural for them to apply such pressure, for, in a very real sense, this is part of their job. But it is both unnatural and hazardous for the American people to be acquiescent or uncritical witnesses to this process. It is their clear historical right not to let their government get away from them.

The notion that peace is possible in an open-ended arms race has no basis in human experience. To this may be added a profound observation by Richard M. Nixon before he became President: he said the best time to bring weapons under control is before, not after, they get into the stage of manufacture and stockpiling.

By now, the complexities of the world arms race have reached a point where even the most painstaking, persistent, and genuine efforts may not yield dramatic or immediate results. But it would clear the air if the United States announced to the world that we would rather die ourselves than to loose chemical and bacteriological horrors on mankind—and that, accordingly, we were taking a first step in what we **hoped would be a program to** eliminate these weapons altogether. We would specify the nature and quantity of weapons to be destroyed in the first phase, and invite U.N. Secretary General U Thant to appoint personnel to observe and report. We would announce that, if other nations carried out similar phased reductions under U.N. certification, we would be prepared to continue this reciprocal process until the world's arsenals were fully purged. Most important, we could say we were prepared to extend this process to the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons, so long as others will proceed with us.

At the same time, we could move mightily in the direction of strengthening the U.N. itself, broadening its authority in order to enable it to deal with world tensions and conflicts on a statutory rather than makeshift basis. For it will not be enough to bring the world arms race under control. Nations themselves must be brought under responsible control. The advocacy of such an approach to peace is where security begins.

—N.C.