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CBW Chemical and Biological Warfare, edited by Steven Rose

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BOOK REVIEW

CBW CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WARFARE. Edited by Steven Rose. Boston: Beacon Press. 1969. Pp. 209. \$7.50.

Except for the probable but unproven use of poison gas by the Egyptians in Yemen during 1963,¹ the United States is the only country to use chemical weapons since World War I.² True, the weapons used were officially classed as nontoxic, but when they are applied to underground bunkers in high concentration or used in conjunction with conventional weapons to kill troops, the classifications tend to blur. Further, America has not limited its use of CBW agents to antipersonnel weapons. The employment of defoliants in Vietnam represents a lethal CBW tactic which is directly injurious to the civilian population, for the toxic effect is not limited to jungle growth, but also results in the destruction of food crops and/or the poisoning of the food consumer.

Sixty-three nations, including the USSR and the People's Republic of China, have signed the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which prohibits "the use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and all analogous liquids, materials or devices."³ The United States has never signed the protocol, and as this timely book points out, our official policy as to the use of such weapons vacillates. President Roosevelt renounced the first use of CBW weapons in 1943, yet the Pentagon and State Department refused to endorse a similarly worded declaration in 1960.⁴ In recent years the White House position has been that the use of "nontoxic" antipersonnel gas or defoliants does not require a presidential order; rather, it is a decision which can be made by commanders in the field. Whether the use of these "nontoxic" substances is proscribed by the body of international law governing chemical and biological weapons is debatable, but most non-Americans versed in international law contend that such activity is forbidden. Nevertheless, America's national CBW policy continues to evolve by default, with little discussion or public debate by those who create that policy, the elected officials.

Recently, President Nixon first renounced the use of chemical

¹ CBW CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WARFARE 99 (S. Rose ed. 1969).

² *Id.* at 87.

³ *Id.* at 143.

⁴ *Id.* at 127.

weapons, and then totally repudiated offensive use of biological weapons. Those who are concerned with the preservation of life as we now know it can only hope that the presidential statement portends a cessation of America's current practice of ecocide (ecological murder) in Vietnam. To date, more than 4 million acres have been defoliated, with nearly another half million acres of crops destroyed.⁵ No one knows what the ecological effect of this will be,⁶ but it seems most ironic that while we ban the sale of Coho Salmon from Lake Erie because it contains 20 parts per million of DDT, we continue to dump millions of gallons of herbicides on Vietnam. Hopefully the President will demonstrate the depth of his conviction by ordering the destruction of our stockpile of biological weapons. Even those persons who are not appalled by CBW agents' ghastly destructive potential should rejoice, for the President has renounced the use of a weapon which is of doubtful military value. Because their incidence is largely controlled by atmospheric conditions, biological weapons are unpredictable in effect, often presenting an equal threat to friend and foe alike.

While radioactivity is a much more precise and predictable way of inflicting mass death, to provide a second strike capability chemical weapon research and development programs will probably be continued. The defensive and offensive aspects of biological warfare are interdependent, and, therefore, the research effort may well continue to produce an endless succession of intramural thrusts and parries. The program is inherently self-perpetuating, for the discovery of each new offensive agent necessitates the development of a defensive antitoxin, which, in turn, invites the development of a new lethal offensive agent.⁷ This means that while the national policy may limit or eliminate the stockpiling of agents, a significant portion of the program will continue.

These and other problems were considered in 1968 by an international group of scholars meeting in London. Their papers were edited into *CBW Chemical and Biological Warfare* in the hope that the spread of factual knowledge about the nature and menace of these weapons would both precipitate their elimination and encourage complete disarmament. The book details the nature of these weapons, their use by the United States and Egypt, the research policies of the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet

⁵ *Id.* at 64.

⁶ Harvey & Mann, *Picloram in Vietnam*, 10 *SCIENTIST & CITIZEN*, Sept. 1968, at 165.

⁷ *CBW CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WARFARE*, *supra* note 1, at 48.

Union, and explores the legal and ethical problems surrounding CBW. It is well written and very significant, for CBW agents do not lend themselves to controlled application and their very existence is intolerable. When nerve gas escaped from the Dugway Proving Ground in Utah thousands of sheep died; they could have just as easily been humans.⁸

Other writers have warned of the dangers of these weapons. Seymour Hersh and Richard McCarthy both have recently produced books on the subject.⁹ The alarm is being sounded. President Nixon's policy change is most welcome, and hopefully meaningful disarmament will follow. How can a nation justify spending \$600,000 to study the use of birds for spreading disease?¹⁰ What kind of subhuman university faculty member can accept such money? A study of this subject forces one to conclude that a substantial amount of our national policy is formulated by cretins whose code is overkill.

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⁸ Brodine, Gasper & Pallman, *The Wind From Dugway*, 11 ENVIRONMENT, Jan.-Feb. 1969, at 2.

⁹ S. HERSH, CHEMICAL & BIOLOGICAL WARFARE: AMERICA'S HIDDEN ARSENAL (1969); R. MCCARTHY, THE ULTIMATE FOLLY: WAR BY PESTILENCE, ASPHYXIATION AND DEFOLIATION (1969).

¹⁰ The Pentagon signed a \$600,000 contract with the University of Mississippi the nominal purpose of which was to study whether birds could take over various facets of war including search and destroy missions. *Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 13, 1969, at 14.

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