



OFFICE OF
THE DIRECTOR

UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY

WASHINGTON 20547

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable
Henry A. Kissinger
The White House

SUBJECT: U. S. Policy on Toxins (NSSM 85)

The statement of the arguments for and against the three options in NSSM 85 represents an improvement in clarity. The new public affairs rationale for each option fills a need that was overlooked in the earlier version of the paper and gives a more realistic picture of the problems and advantages of each of the three alternative positions. I feel that the public affairs rationales contain valid points and helpful arguments but do not give enough attention to the drawbacks or probable negative public reaction that would follow the adoption of either Option I or II and that certain additional factors might usefully be considered.

In considering the public treatment of this subject, the first aim should be to maintain the credibility of the President's November 25 renunciation of biological weapons and if possible to extend the wide and highly favorable momentum his statement produced at home and overseas (see attached summary of foreign media reaction).

First, an assessment of the general problem: The toxins issue while presently a "sleeper" could grow, once attention is focused on it, into a major public controversy which could damage the President's reputation at home and abroad. The repugnance with which the public regard such agents -- whether they are classified as chemical or biological -- is so great that technical explanations and attempts to justify rationally their possible military use would fall mainly upon deaf ears.

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Public awareness of toxins as possible military weapons is very limited at the moment, but it could rapidly increase if critics at home and abroad were to find a means of attacking the Government through this issue. The groundwork has been laid by several press stories highlighting toxins as a fearful and unsolved problem. A major public controversy over toxins might well occur during the Senate hearings on the Geneva Protocol.

Our position reserving the right to use riot control agents and herbicides has already drawn fire from some members of the Senate, and if the decision is made to reserve the option to develop and use toxins we should be prepared for sharp and emotional criticism from both Congress and the press. Thus, our opponents abroad would be handed not only an issue but arguments voiced by American legislators and publications.

The revised paper points out that the principal drawback of Option I from the public affairs standpoint would (not could) be the accusation that in spite of the President's renunciation of all biological weapons the U.S. in effect was retaining them under a different label. We should expect charges that we were opening a major loophole in the November 25 statement after second thoughts about the value of toxins as weapons. The impression would be either that the government regretted the original renunciation of biological weapons or intended all along to water it down after the fact.

The argument over whether toxins are chemical or biological is not meaningful to the public nor would it be effective in overcoming public resistance to them. To the extent there is public awareness, the public only knows and cares that toxins, however produced, can cause swift and fatal diseases. In fact, to insist that toxins are chemical (and therefore admissible) in the face of conflicting public usage would create an impression of trickery. (This does not dispute the fact that toxins are technically chemical and that most experts agree on this. We are

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faced with the fact that public usage does not coincide: the two dictionaries in most common use in the U.S., Webster's Collegiate and Webster's New World, define them in biological terms, as does the famous Petit Larousse in France.) To justify the development and military use of toxins on the ground that they were chemicals would most likely only reinforce the impression that we were playing a version of the shell game.

For these reasons, USIA believes that Option I would be costly and damaging to the reputation of the government and highly undesirable from the public affairs standpoint.

In dealing with public attitudes the best would be Option III, since this, by clearly including toxins with the renounced biological weapons, would raise no issue of duplicity and would carry here and abroad a forthright ring of honest follow-through on the President's announcement.

The seven points mentioned on pp. 23-24 of the revised paper would be essential in any public defense of Option II. (We assume that point four should read "... defensive research purposes" as in point seven, p. 27.) I suggest our public position under Option II concerning chemically synthesized toxins might be better defended by explaining initially that:

- 1) At the present state of scientific knowledge toxins are produced through biological not chemical processes; therefore our renunciation of biologically produced toxins includes all forms that have been produced.
- 2) If it should become possible to synthesize toxins chemically this would constitute a new situation which the U.S. would naturally review at that time. This explanation would be understood by the public, and although it might not answer all concerns it would be accepted, I believe.

The three points suggested on p. 24 of the paper could be used to reply to any journalists who wished to pursue technical

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aspects of the subject further, although they do not provide an answer to the probable question whether the U.S. has a research and development program to achieve the chemical production of toxins. Depending upon the facts of the matter, our good faith might still be called into question.



Frank Shakespeare

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