

CBW:

# Policy by Default

by Congressman

Richard D. McCarthy



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My concern about America's gas and germ warfare policies and practices developed during the evening of February 4, 1969. Like hundreds of thousands of other couples across the land, my wife, Gail, and I were sitting in our living room watching television. At nine o'clock NBC-TV presented its "First Tuesday" show. The principal segment documented aspects of British Canadian and U.S. Chemical and Biological Warfare programs. The Dugway sheep kill incident was pictured, along with CBW experiments with animals and the anthrax-ridden British island of Gruinard. When my wife fully realized what was being shown, she shooed away our five children and dispatched them to bed.

Shocked by what she saw about U.S. germ and gas warfare projects, Gail peered at me and pointedly asked:

"You're a Congressman. What do you know about this?" "Nothing," I answered. But my indignation climbed as I continued to watch the story unfold. I realized that I had undoubtedly and unwittingly supported this kind of activity by voting for appropriation bills in which funds for this purpose were buried.

One of the questions that came to bother me more and more, however, was how the United States had gradually drifted away from our traditional policy of no-first-use of chemical and biological weapons. Who or which group had been responsible for the change? Did Congress recommend an increased emphasis on CBW, as some military advocates claim? Did the Secretary of Defense single out this area for special attention and order the services to give it a high priority? Did the Department of State conclude that our

foreign policy and the climate of world opinion now make it necessary, and even acceptable, to use gas and germ weapons? Did the White House and the National Security Council direct the Pentagon to increase its capabilities in this area? Or did the clamor of American public opinion push policy makers into a greater reliance on this part of our arsenal? The answer, in my opinion, is something entirely different.

The change in our CBW policy has come from default by our top military and civilian policy makers and by Congress. It has occurred because of the slow but constant pressures of the technicians; the unnecessary secrecy that covers even the most pedestrian aspects of CBW; the failure to subject CBW to rigorous policy analysis following World War II; the acquiescence of top-level policy makers in a series of small policy changes that amount in total to a new policy; the small size of the CBW program in proportion to our other defense programs; and the frustrations of our professional military officers in attempting to win the war in Vietnam.

The source of constant pressure for the use of CBW weapons has come from the technicians, those civilian employees and those military officers who work with the development of this technology throughout their lives. It is admittedly difficult to devote a lifetime of effort to a project and not come to believe in it. What was once a program defensive in nature is gradually converted into one that is employed offensively. In sheer numbers, the CBW establishment that we inherited from World War II was bound to increase its influence unless there were clear policy guidelines that would enable their superiors to regulate this growth.

But perhaps more than anything else, it is the heavy curtain of secrecy surrounding CBW that has created (or permitted) the change in policy. There are legitimate grounds for secrecy about

certain aspects of our military. We do not release precise performance specifications of our ICBM's to the press. We do not say how often our ammunition must be replaced. We do not say what our tactical, as opposed to our strategic, plans may be. But we do make known the broad outlines of our strategy and our capability. To make our nuclear capability credible, we must let potential opponents know what we have. They must believe that we can and will do what we say we will do. As a result, the number of ICBM's, the number of Polaris submarines, the amount of money that we spend on our nuclear deterrents, the number of men that we have in Western Europe and the number of men that we have in Korea and Vietnam are a matter of public record. This is not true of CBW.

Information about CBW has been kept hidden. It has meant that CBW technicians must be called in to help prepare almost any policy statement or report on the subject, with a resulting influence on policy. This has meant that only a handful of members of Congress have been familiar with any of the details of the program. It has meant that even top policy makers in the Pentagon have been denied access to CBW information because they don't have "a need to know." It means that our State Department policy makers with the responsibility to develop a foreign policy that will most effectively draw on our military power have been denied access to CBW information. It has meant that our Arms Control and Disarmament policy makers have been denied access to information necessary to an intelligent pursuit of arms limitations. And it has meant that even the President has been uninformed of CBW activities that are fraught with significance for our nation.

Because aspects of CBW have been kept hidden, other departments of the Executive Branch, the Congress, and even the United Nations have been

forced to employ CBW experts when they deal with the subject. The Arms Control and Disarmament Agency of our State Department found that it could only obtain the information it needed on CBW by borrowing military officers with a background in the subject. No matter how conscientious these officers may be, they know that they will return to their service and that their performance will be judged according to the goals of the CBW establishment, not of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Similarly, on one of the rare occasions when a congressional committee reviewed CBW (the Committee on Science and Astronautics hearings in 1959) the report of the committee was written by a CBW officer. And when United Nations Secretary General U Thant appointed a panel to prepare a report on gas and germs in 1969, seven of the panel's 14 members were from their country's CBW establishment. In spy terminology, such penetration cannot help but have an influence on the policies that are adopted.

The policy of secrecy has also kept CBW from effective congressional scrutiny.

Only a handful of members of the 435-member House of Representatives and the 100-member Senate, perhaps five per cent, are thoroughly familiar with what is going on in the CBW area. Only five House Appropriations Committee members are cleared for "Top Secret."

One afternoon, in 1968, as we stood at the lunch counter near the House floor, Congressman Daniel Flood (D-Pa.) told several Congressmen, including me, that even Majority Leader Carl Albert does not know the identities of these five men. They are the ones familiar with funding for the CIA, the Green Berets, CBW, and other secret projects and organizations.

The chief defender of the CBW pro-

gram and the Congressman most knowledgeable about it is Robert L. F. Sikes (D-Fla.), a major general in the Army's Chemical Reserve. His congressional district is also the home of the major Air Force CBW research laboratory and test station, Eglin Air Force Base. As chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, he has been instrumental in funding the germ and gas warfare operations.

The morning after the NBC show, I found myself still deeply concerned about what I had seen. After discussing the matter with Wendell Pigman of my staff, I telephoned the two Democrats from my state on the House Armed Services Committee, Otis G. Pike and Samuel S. Stratton. Each told me he knew little about CBW but suggested I request a briefing from the Army on the various aspects of the program. I followed this advice, took to the floor at noon to announce the plan, but soon discovered that the Pentagon insisted that it be conducted in a totally secret context. I was equally insistent that at least part of the briefing be unclassified. The army, I stressed, should be able to answer pertinent questions of public policy—the kind of questions which, in the nuclear field, our government makes a point to answer. After all, I asked, how can you say a weapons system is a deterrent if you don't publicly tell a potential adversary that you've got it? The Army finally consented to the two-part briefing. It was held on March 4th, exactly one month after the NBC documentary on CBW.

To say that I was disappointed with the briefing would put it mildly. It failed to provide adequate answers to my questions. The briefing officer, Brigadier General James A. Hebbeler, would not even admit that the nerve gas had killed the sheep in Utah. Instead, he used the briefing, as Congressman John Brademas (D-Ind.) said later, to campaign for more funds from the Congress. Con-

gressman Sikes, whom General Hebbeler had invited to the briefing, emerged early to tell the press that the Soviet Union has a CBW capability "seven to eight" times that of the U.S. He told the *Washington Post* that the current U.S. CBW budget which he oversees "is comparatively small and should be expanded to include the development of counter-agents and antidotes as well as promotion of public education and the distribution of gas masks."

Congressman Claude Pepper (D-Fla.), whose days in Congress go back to the New Deal, came out of the briefing to say that this was the first time he ever heard any of the details of our CBW effort. And one of the senior members of the U.S. Senate, Allen J. Ellender (D-La.), says flatly that the military has kept nerve-gas production hidden from Congress. A member of defense appropriations subcommittees for 20 years, Ellender told his Louisiana constituents in a taped broadcast on July 26, 1969, that in all those two decades he "never came across any line item [in appropriations bills] for the production of nerve gas."

Alluding to "evidence" recently produced that "tremendous stockpiles of various deadly compounds are on hand at centers throughout the country," he declared: "Most of this work has been done without the knowledge of Congress."

"Why," he asked, "should so much of these deadly compounds of all varieties be stockpiled that it's now proving difficult to dispose of them without endangering many of our people? Why should these materials be stored abroad unless there is a clear and present danger of the outbreak of a war that might place our national survival at stake?"

A former top Pentagon official told me this summer that information about CBW often is released only on a "need to know" basis. In Washington's world

of security classifications, there are many more categories than just "confidential," "secret," and "top secret." As a result, some policy makers who really did have a need to know were excluded from the decision-making process. State Department Assistant Secretaries, for example, have been unaware of the agreements—signed by U.S. military leaders and military leaders in seven or eight other nations—concerning the stockpiling and use of CBW arms. The agreements were never sent to the State Department for approval. And as I pointed out earlier, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency found that it was able to get necessary information about the Pentagon's gas and germ programs only after it had added military officers to its staff on a loan basis.

The unnecessary secrecy was revealed in its most startling aspect on Friday, July 18, 1969, when *The Wall Street Journal*, in an article by Robert Keatley, reported that the United States had "apparently deployed operational weapons armed with lethal chemical agents as part of its deterrent force overseas." Keatley indicated that this conclusion could be drawn from an "accidental release of deadly VX nerve gas at the U.S. base on Okinawa last week. A container of the gas, or a weapon carrying it, broke open there, and 24 persons were hospitalized after exposure to it. Word of the incident has just gotten back to Washington...high Defense and other Administration officials were debating what to say about the matter or whether to say anything."

Their sensitivity was understandable. The news shook the pro-American government of Japanese Premier Sato to its very foundations on the eve of a visit by U.S. Secretary of State William P. Rogers to discuss the continued U.S. use of Okinawa as the main American strategic base in Asia. New York *Times* correspondent Takashi Oka



cabled a report that Sato's government "has been severely embarrassed by the incident...." Oka quoted a source close to the Premier as saying: "It's a nasty problem and the Government is agonizing over the possibility that it will be used to fan anti-base feeling, anti-American feeling."

Alluding to anti-nuclear weapons feeling in twice atomic-bombed Japan, a high official told Oka: "We used to say, 'No nukes on Okinawa.' Now we will have to say, 'No nukes and no gas.' It's going to become a national demand."

Premier Sato had succeeded in reducing domestic concern over the renewal of the United States-Japan security treaty by focusing on Okinawa. But the uproar over whether Washington consulted Tokyo before storing nerve gas on Okinawa threatened the prospects for treaty renewal and did little

to further United States-Japanese relations. Japan, of course, is regarded by the United States as a vital link in a workable post-Vietnam Asia, and the matter caused grave concern in Washington.

The United States quickly assured Japan that U.S. forces on Japan proper do not have chemical weapons "at present" but it waited four days before commenting directly on *The Wall Street Journal* report. Then the Pentagon admitted that GB nerve-gas weapons were stockpiled in Okinawa and announced that they would be removed from the island. It pointedly refused to comment on an allegation by Neil Sheehan in *The New York Times* of July 19, 1969, that nerve gas munitions had secretly been issued to U.S. forces deployed at other overseas bases.

I later heard, from individuals in a position to know, that President Nixon and Secretary of State Rogers did not know that we had nerve-gas munitions abroad. Secrecy surrounding a minor Defense program had caused a major storm in U.S. relations with its allies.

A second reason for the shift away from our traditional CBW policy has been the failure to subject it to a continuous and rigorous analysis of strategy. What little CBW strategy there is comes from the First and Second World Wars. One of the major fears during World War II was that cities would be attacked by bombers with gas. This was seen at the time as one of the most destructive threats. The nuclear bomb was used so late in the war that there was little time to assess the meaning of the new weapon for gas before massive demobilization began.

During the 1950's and the early 1960's our most brilliant strategists, both civilian and military, concentrated on restructuring our armed forces to fight the wars of a nuclear era. Unfortunately CBW was not important enough to receive much attention. The result

has been that we have designed ICBM warheads to carry gas and germ weapons—warheads that are either less effective than nuclear warheads or too dangerous to use, as is the case with germs. We have also couched our strategy in terms of a direct deterrent—that is, if the enemy uses germs, our only effective defense is the threat that we will use them, too. This argument doesn't make much sense when we have more powerful and more reliable weapons in our arsenal.

A third reason for erosion of our policy against using gas or germs has been the acquiescence of top policy makers in a series of small changes. The sum of these small changes, when coupled with the relatively small size of the CBW program in our Defense establishment, amount to one major change. Minor changes in CBW policy and practice do not receive White House attention because, as former Presidential Press Secretary George Reedy so cogently put it, that kind of thing isn't decided at the White House level. Other White House aides didn't pay attention to CBW policy because at the time it didn't seem very important in comparison with other items. And Congress, with rare exceptions, paid little attention to our gas and germ warfare activities.

When decisions about the use of chemicals or germs have come up at the White House level during the Vietnamese conflict, they have been on small but, in my opinion, important changes. The use of defoliants in Vietnam was initiated as a result of Project Agile, a program initiated in the early 1960's to apply the results of research and technology to guerrilla wars. I was informed by a Pentagon official familiar with the history of this project that the first defoliation test was conducted by the Pentagon's Advanced Research Project Agency as a part of Project Agile. Each use of defoliants had to be

approved "way up," even perhaps at the White House level, in the early days of the program. But this close top-level supervision soon stopped. The approval authority moved to the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. Then Secretary McNamara said that field commanders could defoliate where needed. This change illustrates the point that the National Security Council or the White House can't administer a program; they can set guidelines for others, but there are too many activities to permit continuous administration. The shift from a humanitarian use of gas in Vietnam to the widescale deployment by 1969 is indicative of the same point.

Another reason for the adoption of a CBW policy contrary to our best interests has been the frustration of our military officers with the war in Vietnam. Facing the task of winning a civil war with military means, they gradually were willing to use almost whatever might be necessary to succeed. The result was a willingness to employ gas with the threat of escalation from tear gas to the more deadly varieties. Most military men don't like gas because it makes war so cumbersome. Defensive measures are very inconvenient. But the inability to bring the Vietnamese conflict to a successful conclusion first led to the use of defoliants. It then led to the use of tear gas. It even led to consideration of the use of soil sterilants when the infiltration barrier along the Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Vietnam was first discussed.

President Nixon ordered a thorough and comprehensive Executive Branch review of our chemical and biological warfare policies and practices early this summer. This was the first such review ordered in more than a decade. It offers the possibility to reverse the trend of a CBW policy that I regard as being against the best interests of the United States, a policy that has been more by default than by choice.

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Translated from West Germany's life-like magazine, *Stern*, a startling interview with the "new woman" of East Berlin. According to Sepp Ebelseder, chief of *Stern's* Berlin Bureau, contrary to the image we have of the undernourished female dressed in a potato sack, these young girls are sweet-smelling, suede-booted, and well-informed.

By arrangement with *L'Express* of Paris, Servan-Schreiber's worldwide column appears first in the U.S. in ATLAS Magazine. In his most recent editorial, "France on a Foggy Road," he states that the future of France has been left in doubt due to the performance of the electorate and politicians in the recent elections.

From Berlin, the editor of *Der Monat* calls today's Americans "The New Babbitts." Now there's George F. Babbit, Jr., the progressive

but careful drinking man from Westport, and George F. Babbit III, the pot-smoking and "almost communistic" student at Columbia or Berkeley, in this stinging analysis of today's Americans.

Also: from *Corriere della Sera*, the respected Milan daily, you'll find the answer to the question, "Is it possible that cinematic exploration of sex-twisted sex will go much further?" From Prague's brave but now banned intellectual monthly *Listy*, a beautiful, tragic fantasy. From Rome's *L'Espresso*, a dramatic charge by a rebellious priest. From *The Jerusalem Post* weekly, Israel's Art Buchwald states his terms for a Mideast settlement.

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## BOOKS:

# From Clean to Antiseptic

A review by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

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### **The Year of the People**

by Eugene J. McCarthy

Doubleday, 360 pages. \$6.95.

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Like everything else Senator McCarthy has done since the Chicago convention, this book is an anti-climax. In the author's defense it must be conceded that political autobiography is not one of the higher art forms. How many really honest books can one recollect from politicians, especially from those still in the game? Yet McCarthy had displayed sufficient originality, both as a man and as a campaigner for the Democratic nomination, to encourage the hope that, when he wrote his book, he might again break precedent. Even those, like this reviewer, who had reservations about him in 1968 have never doubted the force and sharpness of his mind nor his ability to make a lasting contribution to the literature of American politics. Perhaps some time he may; but this perfunctory work, alas, is not it.

*The Year of the People* is a routine recital of the circumstances which led McCarthy to run, the evolution of the campaign, the dénouement in Chicago, and the significance of the effort. As a friend of poets and a poet-aspirant himself, McCarthy has shown concern with the use of words and the integrity of language. But, except for a few "lyrical" nature passages, the writing is bland and flat—hurdy-gurdy narration interspersed with digs at politicians and reporters who displeased him, with paraphrases of his speeches, and with excerpts from his favorite poets (ranging from Whitman, Yeats, and Frost through C. Day Lewis, Robert Lowell, Robert Bly, and Philip Booth to Thick Nhat Hanh, John Haag, William Stafford, Sue Brown, Gladys Johnson, Caroline Kandler, Annette Williams, and Eugene J. McCarthy).

The general effect is one of those famous McCarthy campaign addresses in which he seemed increasingly bored himself and left his audience baffled and disappointed.

It is too bad. Eugene McCarthy showed himself in 1968 to be not only a brave but an impressively astute political leader. One could wish that he had been stimulated now to discuss the changing environment of American politics that he seemed to understand so well as a campaigner—the impact, for example, of education, television, and suburbanization on the traditional political structure. He offers some heated but not very illuminating passages on the need for party reform; but, beyond this, all we get are some commonplaces about "participatory politics" based on the apparent assumption that "members of the academic community, a large number of nuns, a great many educated young women...business and professional men" and so on had never taken part in political campaigns before 1968. McCarthy himself was around and active when precisely these people (he was one of them) took part in the campaigns of Franklin Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, and John Kennedy; and it would have been interesting and useful if he had explained the ways that the "participatory politics" of 1968 differed from that of 1936, 1952, or 1960.

Another striking aspect of McCarthy's 1968 campaign was his fidelity to his own sense of himself—his refusal to say things out of character in order to please an audience or gratify the mass media. One could hope that this would have led to comparable candor

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Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., teaches at The City University of New York and is the author of *A Thousand Days* and *The Age of Roosevelt*.