

462 Remarks Announcing Decisions on Chemical and Biological Defense Policies and Programs.

November 25, 1969

Ladies and gentlemen:

I have just completed a meeting with the legislative leaders of the House and the Senate, the Foreign Relations and the Armed Services Committees.

In that meeting, we discussed some major initiatives in the disarmament field, initiatives that are the result of decisions that have been made after a Security Council meeting that was held last week.

I would like to summarize the decisions that have been made as a result of the Security Council meeting and the meetings with the legislative leaders, and also to indicate the actions that we hope will be taken by the Senate to affirm the decisions that the administration has made.

The United States is taking two steps today toward advancing the cause of peace and reducing the terror of war. Since this administration took office, the National Security Council has been reviewing our policy regarding chemical warfare and biological warfare. This has been the first thorough review ever undertaken of this subject at the Presidential level.

I recall during the 8 years that I sat

on the National Security Council in the Eisenhower administration that these subjects, insofar as an appraisal of what the United States had, what our capability was, what other nations had, were really considered taboo.

And it was felt when we came into the administration that we should examine all of our defense policies and defense capabilities, because it has always been my conviction that what we don't know usually causes more fear than what we do know.

What we have tried to do in this examination by the Security Council, an unprecedented examination, is to find the facts and to develop the policies based on the facts as they are, rather than on our fears as to what the facts might be.

On the basis of this review, I made a number of decisions which I believe will sharply reduce the chance that these weapons, either chemical or bacteriological, will ever be used by any nation.

First, in the field of chemical warfare, I hereby reaffirm that the United States will never be the first country to use chemical weapons to kill. And I have also extended this renunciation to chemical

weapons which incapacitate.

I am asking the United States Senate for its advice and consent in the ratification of the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which prohibits the first use in war of chemical warfare weapons.

Since 1925, this proposal has been affirmed by the United States as a matter of policy, but never approved by the United States Senate.

And I have asked the leaders this morning to expedite action in this field.

These steps should go a long way toward outlawing weapons whose use has been repugnant to the conscience of mankind.

Second, biological warfare, which is commonly called germ warfare—this has massive, unpredictable, and potentially uncontrollable consequences. It may produce global epidemics and profoundly affect the health of future generations.

Therefore, I have decided that the United States of America will renounce the use of any form of deadly biological weapons that either kill or incapacitate.

Our bacteriological programs in the future will be confined to research in biological defense, on techniques of immunization, and on measures of controlling and preventing the spread of disease.

I have ordered the Defense Department to make recommendations about the

disposal of existing stocks of bacteriological weapons.

This program of research and development, incidentally, can have a very important byproduct for the United States and for the world, because we thereby, we think, can break new ground with regard to immunization for any kind of diseases that might spread either nationally or internationally.

The United States positively shall associate itself with the principles of the Draft Convention prohibiting the use of biological weapons of warfare presented by the United Kingdom and the U.N. Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Conference on August 26, 1969.

Up to this time, only Canada has indicated support of this United Kingdom initiative.

The United States, as of today, now indicates its support of this initiative and we hope that other nations will follow suit.

Mankind already carries in its own hands too many of the seeds of its own destruction. By the examples that we set today, we hope to contribute to an atmosphere of peace and understanding between all nations.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:31 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.