

August 3, 1966

Dr. Matt Meselson  
Department of Biology  
Harvard University  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear Matt:

So Arthur has told you, I share your views on the folly of our policy on CBR weapons, and had already intended to speak out on it.

You may already know that I have started a weekly column (Sundays) in the Washington Post. I think I can be more effective in retaining an independent position by not signing public group petitions. However, I would like to comment on your proposals at any time they are made public or might be most effective in rousing attention. (This could also be premonitory).

My only comment on the text of the petition is to focus more sharply on the arms-control aspect and the dangers of escalation, encouragement, escape, irresponsible use, etc. of CBR. I would shun the "humanitarian" side, or anything that smacks of it, as diversary. For the U.S. not to escalate CBR is important, but what about the technical problems of non-proliferation agreements? Should there be a Geneva Conference to explore routes to test-monitoring? (Not that I can see a practical route now.) What about trying self-inspiration here, since CBR weapons are not really a matter of prime national interest?

Scientists do have a special basis for comment since they can advise the President how easily such weapons might be aped by nth powers, and how they might get out of hand (at least BW).

From this standpoint, Johnson might be particularly responsive to the names of people who have been associated with Fort Detrick or other CBR work. Werner Braun might be a key person for this. Again, you might well attract him and others on the non-proliferation issue, and would probably lose them on "how awful it is".

It might be just as interesting if we did not totally converge -- for the sake of some more interesting flavor for a column.

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If you don't have an independent route, I would also be glad to recommend a position for a Post editorial; if you sharpen the issue properly, I imagine the staff would be pretty sympathetic to your approach, and I think it would be extremely helpful to you if this is so.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

JL:eif