

**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES**  
**COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND ARMS CONTROL**  
2101 Constitution Avenue Washington, D.C. 20418

May 14, 1993

**TO: Members of the BW Working Group**  
**FROM: Jo Husbands**

**SUBJECT: Notes from Meeting with Yablokov and Two Reports on Conversion**

We will fax everyone an update on the meeting, along with information about travel and other logistics on Tuesday. This package contains:

1. Notes from the meeting John Steinbruner and I had with Alexei Yablokov on April 30th. **Please treat these notes as confidential and do not copy or circulate them.** Yablokov was very candid with us and if we can help it we do not want him to pay a price for that candor.

2. Two reports by other Academy groups working with the Russians on conversion issues. Neither mentions nor relates directly to BW, but I thought it would be useful to see how other Academy projects are addressing the general problem.

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both at Sverdlovsk and in the broader offensive BW program. He suggested that Academician Pakrovsky of the Academy of Medical Sciences, who was part of the first Soviet group permitted to visit Fort Detrich (Yablokov has also been part of that group), might be a good candidate. Yablokov said he would discuss the question with Pakrovsky.

Yablokov said flatly that we could not trust any of the Russians who were coming to the meeting in May, that all of them had had ties to past activities. This included Academician Bolshakov from Sverdlovsk, whom he described as an old friend. Steinbruner responded that we were aware of their histories, but were nonetheless interested in talking with them on the premise that they might lead their organizations away from those activities. He said that the American committee also wanted to engage people who had not been compromised by past involvement. Such people might find it easier to be fully candid and would give independent impetus to a new, more open and forthcoming attitude.

Yablokov said that it would take a special order from Yeltsin, comparable to what he had received to explore the ocean dumping of radioactive waste, to really get at the truth. Such an order was the only way to gain access to Top Secret documents, which would otherwise not be available. Yablokov said that it would require pressure on the political level within Russia to make such an investigation happen. Steinbruner responded that the threat posed by biological weapons is becoming acute. He noted in particular the possibility of manipulating the influenza virus to produce a virulent, rapidly spreading strain.

Steinbruner added that the unresolved questions about Sverdlovsk, especially the official statements that an illegal offensive BW program had been sustained after the 1972 BW Convention, posed risks to future biomedical research and cooperation and to aid to the former Soviet Union to convert its facilities to private use. A credible and reasonably complete understanding of what had happened -- and in particular an identification of any unusual agent strains that had been created -- would eventually be necessary to establish the basis for new relationships. He said that the meeting in May would review the history, and stress the importance of resolving the questions, but that we hoped to transcend the past and develop an agenda for future work, even though we knew we were dealing with tainted individuals.

Yablokov said that there were two additional ways in which the history might be explored:

- (1) by organizing a group of committed individuals in the U.S. and Russia who could continue and support what Matthew Meselson is doing, and
- (2) by sparking an investigative journalist to tackle the problem.

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**MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION**

Meeting on April 30th at the Brookings Institution

Participants: Alexei Yablokov, Counselor to the Russian President for Ecology and Health; John Steinbruner; and Jo Husbands

Steinbruner began the meeting by briefly describing the past work of CISAC's BW group and plans for a meeting in late May to explore whether to revive the group's activities. He then made several basic points about the biological weapons issue:

1) The Biological Weapons Convention has unfortunate ambiguities that can make it difficult to achieve "compliance" since it can be hard to establish the nature of a violation. The BW Working Group has spent considerable time reviewing the agents of mutual concern and discussing practical means of clarifying the Convention.

2) Future success in preventing BW proliferation will require significant transparency. Since detection of clandestine programs is virtually impossible, an international regime of disclosure is the only defense. Internal monitoring and disclosure is a necessary base for an international arrangement.

3) The BW group's work suggests that there is genuine potential for dangerous experiments and for spontaneous emergence of dangerous agents. If the most dangerous agents were deliberately created or naturally appeared, the world is currently ill-prepared to respond. An effective international response would require:

- a) global environmental monitoring
- b) sharing of information
- c) rules for international cooperation, and
- d) domestic transparency

Steinbruner then turned to the Sverdlovsk incident, saying that CISAC was not interested in recriminations or assigning blame, but that two important unresolved questions needed to be answered: (1) what strain was it? and (2) how did the accident occur? [NOTE: Yablokov made notes on the two questions.] Since this was a clandestine program and since there were some odd patterns to the epidemic, the question of whether this was an unusual strain was important. Yablokov whether the slides that Matthew Meselson had obtained were sufficient to answer the question of what kind of strain. Steinbruner said no, that identification would require access to samples of the strain.

Yablokov said that he had met with Matthew Meselson in Boston earlier in the week and discussed the Sverdlovsk issue. He said that what was needed was a Russian scientist who could provide the counterpart to Meselson and honestly try to dig up what happened,

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He said that a crucial obstacle was that there was no strong public sentiment or pressure to investigate and reveal past BW activities, as there were for nuclear matters. The strong Russian antinuclear organizations and popular feelings provided serious political pressure on the government. Steinbruner agreed, saying that internal monitoring was a vital part of a nonproliferation strategy. He noted that in the West relations between independent monitors and the organizations they watch are often strained, but that their role could be very important.

Yablokov commented that some 30-50% of the Russian Academy's members were military or involved in military-related activities. Since elections were secret, new members appeared whom no one knew. He also suggested that one way to encourage openness would be to have Americans and Russians working in each other's laboratories. This would provide an assurance of openness and confidence that nothing clandestine was occurring in the facility. Steinbruner replied that this had been a major recommendation emerging from the earlier discussions of the two working groups and was beginning to happen. He agreed it was a good confidence building measure and should be pursued further.

As the discussions ended, Yablokov raised the issue of a Comprehensive Test Ban, asking whether the Clinton Administration had decided whether to extend the Congressional moratorium on testing, which expires July 1st. He also asked about what Great Britain might do. Steinbruner doubted that the new Administration had yet formulated a final policy, and gave some details about the various pieces of legislation that affect testing. He said that the main CISAC committee had not been particularly active on the issue in the past, but that a number of individual members were very interested. He said that he would raise the CTB issue when the committee met again.