

The Road to Geneva

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Opposition to CW after WW1

- Among soldiers and civilians on the Western Front
 - Gas resented because of stealthiness and inevitability
 - However, experienced as one nuisance among many (weather & mud, sleep deprivation, disease, hunger, snipers & artillery harassment, ...)
 - Last war year: gas was omnipresent all the time
 - Gas masks worn for 48 hours and longer in front trenches
 - Extreme gas discipline developed over years
 - All frontline soldiers poisoned to some degree
- Opposition to gas emerged first in societies far removed from frontlines
 - Canada & USA:
 - Coughing & wheezing among repatriated casualties and veterans most tangible evidence of war horrors
 - Moral opposition led to political and diplomatic action (e.g., 1922 Washington Submarine & Gas Treaty)
 - Netherlands:
 - Moral revulsion against the slaughter in the trenches
 - Many Belgians escaped to the Netherlands & fed into local war perceptions
 - War opposition in the Netherlands eventually gave rise to *War Resisters International* (1921)
 - Greatly influenced socialists, communists & anarchists in Belgium
 - Strongly opposed to gas warfare
 - Fed into the movement to emancipate Flemish in Belgium (workers' education was key to achieving socialist ideals)

Towards the Geneva Protocol

- WW1 & aftermath
 - Proliferation of CW was preferred policy option
 - Sale to countries without production capacity in WW1 (e.g., France & GB to Belgium and USA)
 - Threat perceptions in Europe
 - Disproportionate accumulation of CW capacity by one state rather than number of countries with CW
 - Assistance with 2nd-tier power CW programmes
 - E.g., France to Belgium in 1920s & 1930s
- League of Nations
 - 1925: Conference for the Supervision of the International Trade in Arms and Ammunition and in Implements of War
 - US proposal to *'prohibit the export from their territories of any such asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and all analogous liquids, intended or designed for use in connection with operations of war'*
 - Practical problem: several *'asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases'* had widespread legitimate industrial & commercial application
 - Could not be resolved → Proposal for protocol banning use in war
 - Moral imperative as issue of gas had been raised in diplomatic forum
 - Drew on language from 1899 Hague Declaration (IV, 2) & 1922 Washington Treaty
 - 'Protocol' was agreed in anticipation of comprehensive disarmament treaty to be negotiated by League of Nations

Discovery of 'dual use'

- French immediate reaction when welcoming US proposal:
 - *Need "to define, if possible, the characteristics of gases and chemicals which cannot be utilised in war, or of those which can be utilised both for warlike and non-warlike purposes."*
- Top scientists set to task, but Military Technical Committee reported back:
 - *'Such substances are not by any means rare; the majority are common materials ordinarily manufactured and employed in large quantities for peace-time requirements, so that there is very little difference between the manufacture of pharmaceutical products and that of injurious substances used in war.'*
- Fear that trade ban would place non-producing countries at major security disadvantage
 - Conclusion was consonant with contemporary threat perceptions in Europe
- Problem awareness gave rise to the '*General Purpose Criterion*'

British draft convention (16.03.1933)

- Article 52

- In order to enforce the aforesaid general prohibition it shall in particular be prohibited:

- (1) To manufacture, import, export or be in possession of appliances or substances *exclusively suited* to chemical or incendiary warfare.

- The quantities of chemical substances necessary for *protective experiments, therapeutic research and laboratory work shall be excepted*. The High Contracting Parties shall inform the Permanent Disarmament Commission of the quantities of the said substances necessary for their protective experiments.

- The manufacture of and trade in these substances may not be undertaken without government authorization.

- (2) To manufacture, import, export or be in possession of appliances or substances suitable for *both peaceful and military purposes* with intent to use them in violation of the prohibition contained in Article 48.

- (3) To instruct or train armed forces in the use of chemical, incendiary or bacterial weapons and means of warfare, or to permit any instruction or training *for such purposes* within their jurisdiction.

Lasting impact of the Geneva Protocol

- Laid the foundation for *disarmament* (rather than arms control & non-proliferation)
 - 'No use' pushed CW to the margins of military doctrine
 - Technology was not forgotten, but how to use it in war gradually was
 - Gas discipline levels of WW1 were never achieved again
 - No commander could afford gas attrition rates of WW1 ever again
- Not the violation weakens a norm, but lack of response to the violation does
 - See attitudes to Italy (1930s), Egypt (1960s), Iraq (1980s)
 - Now reinforced by CWC
 - Syria prime example of strength of prohibitory norm today



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