The Road to Geneva

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The Trench

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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

THE TRENCH

Recalling where science, industry and military art converged
Challenging entrenched positions

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