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NEWS RELEASE

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The Destabilizing Danger of “Non-Lethal” Chemical and Biological Weapons in the War on Terrorism

(Austin and Hamburg, 19 September 2001) - The US must not succumb to the temptation to use less lethal chemical and biological weapons - such as calmatives and other riot control agents - in the war it has declared on terrorism. Failure to take these steps may worsen conditions conducive to terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction and trigger chemical and biological war.

(Please also see the News Release “Avoiding Bioterrorism Starts with US”, also issued today, for more information on other urgent changes needed in US policy.)

The Danger of Non-Lethal Chemical and Biological Weapons

A major destabilization risk of the US war scenario is the possible use of a new and dangerous class of weapons. US strategy will require it to attempt to separate large numbers of civilians from a handful of targeted terrorists in remote and rough terrain and in densely populated cities. Suppression of civil unrest abroad - or in the US itself - is possible. Public image demands that this dissent be quashed in a television-friendly way.

Since the US military's last major attempt to impose order in a developing country with a hostile population - its disaster in Mogadishu, Somalia - the US armed forces have turned to a new class of so-called "non-lethal weapons" to exert control while minimizing unsightly and inhumane casualties. "Non-Lethal" should not be understood as benign. In fact, non-lethals are powerful weapons designed to kill less often - as opposed to not killing at all. Non-lethal weapons are to control rioters (such as the Somalis who killed US Marines) and to incapacitate persons in a specific area in order to identify and capture targets (such as Somali "warlords" surrounded by noncombatants).

The pursuit of these weapons has led the Pentagon's Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Program to investigate a dazzling array of technologies to control civilians and to kill fewer noncombatants who get in the way or who choose to resist. The weapons include publicized items such as microwaves to heat the skin, sound generators to vibrate human internal organs, and lasers to overwhelm the senses.

Cloaked in greater secrecy are investigations into chemical and biological weapons. The Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Program (JNLWP) has entertained proposals to use sedatives, calmatives, opioids (the class of chemicals in heroin), foul smelling substances, muscle relaxants, and other drugs on "potentially hostile civilians" (and combatants). JNLWP has weighed genetically engineered microbes to disable enemy vehicles and machinery or to destroy supplies. Delivery mechanisms studied include backpack sprayers, land mines and binary weapons, mid-air exploding mortar shells for riot control, and as payloads in unmanned aerial vehicles.

Beyond simply studying possibilities, the JNLWP has assembled information on these weapons and distributed it to other US government officials. JNLWP is known to have planned computerized simulations of the offensive use of calmativ agents, signed a contract with a major US military contractor to develop an overhead-exploding chemical mortar round, and field tested new non-lethal weapons (but not biological ones) on humans in Kosovo.

Indeed, JNLWP has been gearing up specifically for the type of "unconventional" and/or "special forces" mission cited as a possibility by senior US officials. The calmatives wargame was planned by the JNLWP to *"identify alternative means of offensive operations that will provide the National Command Authority and Joint Force commanders additional operational options when executing a coercive campaign."* A coercive campaign is being planned, one that involves military scenarios suited to US non-lethal weapons.

In a war of retaliatory cycles, the consequences of using chemical or biological non-lethals could be catastrophic for the US and its allies. The victims are exceedingly unlikely to interpret being gassed with chemicals as a humane act. Further alienated civilian victims will be justifiably enraged at the forcible violation of their thoughts and bodies and ignore protestations of more benign intent as the excuse making of an repressive aggressor. It is far more probable that chemical and biological non-lethal weapons would be seen by civilians and terrorists alike as repressing freedom of thought and expression and, ominously, as first use of chemical or biological weapons. This interpretation of use of non-lethal chemical or biological weapons as an escalation is in fact supported by international arms control law, which strongly discourages military use of riot control agents in part because of their escalation risks.

These weapons must be rejected for what they are: chemical and biological weapons - not as deadly as a vial of anthrax or bottle of nerve gas; but enormously provocative and pertaining to same class of arms. It is therefore imperative that the US military not be allowed to use these weapons. Allies of the US must insist on this point. The potential consequences of failure to do so will enable conditions conducive to the use of weapons of mass destruction and heighten the possibility of chemical and biological war.