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September 11, 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF STATE

SUBJECT: Biological Warfare Ban;
Campaign Against Biological Disease

In following through on my memorandum of May 29, I would like to inform you that we have been working on a tentative proposal for a Biology for Peace program. The tentative proposal embodies your idea of a ban on biological warfare coupled with a constructive international program in biology and medicine. The ban and the cooperative international program to combat plant, animal, and human diseases could be one aspect of broad international scientific cooperation.

Our primary conclusion so far is that it would be premature to consider the ban prior to a major re-evaluation of U. S. policy regarding biological weapons and biological warfare. The re-evaluation should encompass the technical potential of biological weapons development and its political and military implications. It should take into account the hazards of developing these relatively cheap instruments of mass destruction including large-scale production and domestic and extra-continental field testing of biological agents. We plan to take the initiative in such a re-evaluation in the immediate future.

If acceptance of a ban or other controls on biological weapons is consistent with the results of the re-evaluation, the US will be confronted with a procedural problem in arriving at an international agreement. The Soviets and others might exploit the fact that the United States did not ratify the Geneva Protocol of 1925 outlawing chemical and biological warfare whereas the Soviet Union and other

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major powers are signatories. Because of the linkage of biological warfare and chemical warfare in the Geneva Protocol and the difficulty in drawing a line between the two, it may be desirable or necessary to extend the scope of our investigation to include chemical warfare. We are studying the political and legal problems of proposing a ban in light of the Geneva Protocol.

In regard to the peaceful side of the Biology for Peace proposal, we should rely heavily on the guidance of scientists to select the most constructive areas for cooperation. One attractive possibility suggested by biologists is for joint research and standardization in the field of fundamental toxicology and ecology of disease organisms and environmental health hazards. The combination of the ban and peaceful cooperation also offers a unique opportunity for restraint on biological weapons development in other countries through an active scientific exchange.

/s/ William C. Foster

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