



**"CHEMICAL WEAPONS"
IN SUDAN:**

**THE BARONESS COX
ALLEGATIONS FIASCO**

**THE EUROPEAN-SUDANESE
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WORKING FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

"Chemical weapons" in Sudan: The Baroness Cox Allegations Fiasco

In July 1999, the rebel Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) and Norwegian Peoples Aid, a pro-rebel solidarity group operating in southern Sudan, alleged that the Sudanese armed forces had used chemical weapons in attacks on Sudanese rebels in three places, including Lainya and Kaya, in southern Sudan. Norwegian People's Aid went so far as to issue a press release on 2 August headed 'Confirmed Chemical Bombing in Southern Sudan'. These allegations were reported extensively in the international media. In August 1999, for example, several British newspapers repeated them, and the BBC Online Network published no less than six articles mentioning the allegations, with headlines such as 'Sudan "Chemical" Attack on Rebels' and 'Warning on Sudanese "Chemical Attack"'.

The allegations were also subsequently repeated by Baroness Cox, President of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, in the British House of Lords on 12 and 13 October, 1999. Cox specifically claimed that the after effects in these incidents were "compatible" with symptoms associated with poisoning by arsenical compounds such as Lewisite. Cox also claimed that there was "cumulative evidence of the likely use of chemical weapons by the NIF" and that the Sudanese government were able to "use these unconventional weapons with impunity". Cox provided the British government with soil, water and shrapnel samples to back up her claims.

The Sudanese government categorically denied any such use of chemical weapons, and immediately agreed to a United Nations investigation of the claims. This investigation took the form of an Operation Lifeline Sudan medical team which travelled to the areas in which it was alleged chemical weapons attacks took place. A number of samples, including blood and urine specimens, were taken and sent for analysis to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), an independent and world-renowned laboratory in Atlanta. These tests "indicated no evidence of exposure to chemicals".

In a letter dated 5 June 2000, the British government revealed the results of the "very careful analysis" of the samples provided by Baroness Cox and all other evidence. The samples had been tested by the British Defence Ministry's chemical and biological weapons establishment at Porton Down (CBD). The results showed that the samples provided "bore no evidence of the CW [Chemical Weapons] agents for which they had been tested". The British government also pointed out that in addition to the American tests, further samples had been tested by the Finnish institute responsible for chemical weapons verification. These too had been negative. The Government commented on the "consistency of results from these three independent sets of analysis".

The text of this British Government letter is appended to this publication.

It has to be said that allegations of involvement in weapons of mass destruction technology are amongst the most serious that can be levelled at any government. These particular allegations are unusual in that the United Nations, and others, were able to scientifically collect samples from the area concerned and from the people said to have been affected. Usually such claims are made and there is no way of independently verifying what has been alleged.

Once again Baroness Cox has been proved wrong with regard to her claims about Sudan. She has made very serious allegations against the Sudanese government - allegations that were manifestly unfounded. This allegation is but one in a series that Baroness Cox has made which have subsequently been found to be unsupported by the evidence. Surely it is time that Baroness Cox reconsiders both her position, and the accuracy of her sources, with regard to Sudan and ceases to be the over-eager and all too questionable partisan that she so clearly is on Sudanese issues?

The text of the British Government's Letter to Baroness Cox Regarding Her Allegations of Chemical Weapons Use in Sudan.

Ministry of Defence,

Whitehall London SW1A 2HB

From Baroness Symons

Minister of State for Defence Procurement

Reference D/MIN(DP)/ECS/13/3/3

5 June 2000

Dear Caroline

You wrote to me on 6 October about allegations that chemical weapons had been used by Sudanese Government forces against its internal opponents. I know that you have subsequently pursued the matter in the House of Lords and that Baroness Scotland has responded to a number of your points. I am sorry that it has taken so long to reply but, as I am sure you appreciate, on a question of such sensitivity we needed to carry out very careful analysis of all the available evidence.

First of all, I would like to assure you that the Government treats very seriously all allegations that chemical weapons have been used. As you know, the limited information available from the reports of the incidents in Sudan last July suggested that if chemical agents had been used, then they were likely to have been arsenical "riot control agents", ie chemicals that produce sensory irritation or short-lived disabling physical effects. The initial analysis carried out at CBD Porton of the samples provided by Damien Lewis was therefore undertaken on the assumption that such agents may have been involved. Given the lapse of time between the alleged incident and the collection of the samples, CBD assessed that no intact trace of such agents would remain. Accordingly, tests were carried out only to determine the presence of elemental arsenic. This was found to be present but only in concentrations well below normal background levels. Mr Lewis was then informed of these results by CBD.

Although there was no clear evidence indicating the use of chemical weapons, I concluded that, given the seriousness of the allegations, further analysis should be carried out to screen for chemical agents, their environmental degradation products, and riot-control agents. This has now been completed. The methods used involved gas and liquid chromatography, combined with mass spectrometry for chemical agents and riot control agents, and atomic absorption spectrometry for arsenic. These techniques are also used in carrying out analysis of samples to meet the requirements adopted by the Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). A total of 17 samples of water, soil, and shrapnel collected from three sites in the Sudan were analysed for the presence of known chemical agents, ie the classical nerve agents, mustard, and other recognised agents, for their environmental degradation products, and for riot-control agents. They were also screened for the presence of arsenic.

No intact CW agents, their associated environmental degradation products, or riot-control agents were identified in any of the samples. Low levels of arsenic were detected in 15 of the samples, but, again, only at levels well below expected natural limits for environmental samples. Conventional TNT explosive was present in eight of the samples, mainly those collected from near to the alleged bomb craters or from presumed bomb fragments. CBD concluded from its analysis that these samples bore no evidence of the CW agents for which they had been tested. I enclose a copy of the CBD report.

You may be aware that a separate set of samples taken from the sites of the alleged CW attacks in the Sudan was tested independently in the US. The results of these tests also indicated no evidence of exposure to CW agents. I understand that Mr Lewis also passed samples to the Finnish institute responsible for chemical weapons verification ("VERIFIN") and I am advised that this analysis likewise found evidence of TNT but none for CW agents. Given the consistency of results from these three independent sets of analysis, I believe we must conclude that there is no evidence to substantiate the allegations that chemical weapons were used in these incidents in the Sudan.

The Government is informing OPCW and the Sudanese Government of the results of the CBD analysis. I am also arranging for a copy of my letter and the results of the CBD's analysis to be passed on to MR Lewis.

I am copying this letter to Baroness Scotland, Lord McNair, Viscount Brentford and Lord Ahmed who took part in the debate on the Sudan in the House of Lords on 13 October.

Yours ever

Liz