

**THE AL-SHIFA BOMBING: SEPTEMBER 1998**

**“CONFUSED, INCONCLUSIVE AND  
CONTRADICTIONARY”:**

**An Assessment and analysis  
of the American  
Government’s “evidence”  
for the Cruise missile attack  
on Sudan**

**INTRODUCTION**

This study provides as much of a picture of American government claims about its 20 August Cruise missile attack on the al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory as has been publicly made available by the Clinton Administration. It provides a clear perspective on the statements and allegations made by the United States government about the al-Shifa factory, and how the American government has shifted its position with regard to its claims as each of its five main allegations have come to be challenged by scientists, chemical warfare experts, European diplomats, and above all, the American and British media.

It has been drawn from international and national media sources including British papers such as *The Times*, *The Observer*, *The Guardian*, *The Financial Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Independent*, as well as American newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. It has also drawn heavily on reports from international news agencies such as Reuters and *Agence France Presse*.

**THE BACKGROUND TO THE AMERICAN MISSILE STRIKE ON SUDAN**

On 7 August 1998, terrorist bombs devastated United States embassy buildings in Kenya and Tanzania. Hundreds of people, some of whom American, were killed in the explosion in Nairobi and dozens in the blast in Dar-es-Salaam. Thousands more were injured. The

American government sought to identify Osama bin-Laden, the Saudi-born millionaire funder of Islamic extremism with these attacks.

The Sudanese government immediately and repeatedly condemned the embassy bombings. The Sudanese foreign minister, Dr Mustafa Osman Ismail, stated, for example, that:

These criminal acts of violence do not lead to any goal.<sup>1</sup>

On 11 August, *Agence France Presse* reported the Sudanese foreign minister's statement that "We must pool our efforts to eradicate all the causes of terrorism" and he had called for:

the solidarity and cooperation of all the nations in the region and the international community to stand up to international terrorism.<sup>2</sup>

It is a matter of record that the Sudanese government took its condemnation of the Kenyan and Tanzanian bombings one step further. Sudan offered to help in tracking down the terrorists involved. The foreign minister stated that:

Sudan supports Kenya in its efforts to reach the people who committed the incident and is prepared to cooperate fully with it in this regard.<sup>3</sup>

No one can claim that the Sudanese Government in any way supported or even sympathised with these despicable bombings. This was in clear contrast to the support, and indeed triumphalism, shown around the world by several terrorist groups, and their supporters - groups such as al-Muhajiroun in London.

On 20 August, the United States government launched missile attacks, involving 75 Cruise missiles, on installations said to be part of Osama bin-Laden's infrastructure inside Afghanistan. Washington also chose to attack the al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory in northern Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, alleging that it was making chemical weapons as part of Osama bin-Laden's infrastructure of international terrorism.

The al-Shifa plant was totally destroyed in the American attack. Twelve workers were killed in the attack.<sup>4</sup> Two food processing factories were also damaged in the strike.<sup>5</sup>

## **THE AMERICAN CLAIMS ABOUT THE AL-SHIFA FACTORY**

The United States government have made several, documented, claims about the al-Shifa factory. In the news briefing given by United States Defence Secretary, William Cohen, on 20 August, he stated that the al-Shifa factory "produced the precursor chemicals that would allow the production of... VX nerve agent".<sup>6</sup>

Secretary Cohen also stated that Osama bin-Laden "has had some financial interest in contributing to... this particular facility".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Sudan Condemns Bombings of U.S. Embassies', News Article by Reuters on August 8, 1998 at 08:54:19.

<sup>2</sup> 'Sudan offers Nairobi help to track down the "guilty men"', News Article by *Agence France Presse* on August 11, 1998 at 12:33

<sup>3</sup> 'Sudan offers to help find Kenya bombings', News Article by Reuters on August 11, 1998 at 12:28:46.

<sup>4</sup> 'Sudan foreign minister says all ties to Osama bin Laden now severed', News Article by *Agence France Press* on August 30, 1998 at 12:17:47.

<sup>5</sup> 'Two food processing factories hit in US raid: witness', News Article by *Agence France Press* on August 21, 1998 at 09:05:12.

<sup>6</sup> 'Text of news briefing given by Defence Secretary William Cohen and Gen. Henry Shelton on military strikes in Afghanistan and Sudan', *The Guardian* website, at [http://reports.guardian.co.uk/sp\\_reports/usbombs/376.html](http://reports.guardian.co.uk/sp_reports/usbombs/376.html).

<sup>7</sup> 'Text of news briefing given by Defence Secretary William Cohen and Gen. Henry Shelton on military strikes in Afghanistan and Sudan', *The Guardian* website, at [http://reports.guardian.co.uk/sp\\_reports/usbombs/376.html](http://reports.guardian.co.uk/sp_reports/usbombs/376.html).

The American government also claimed that no commercial drugs were made at the factory. *The New York Times*, for example, reported:

statements by a senior intelligence official hours after the attack that the plant in Khartoum... produced no commercial products.<sup>8</sup>

An Associated Press report on the evening of the American strike on Sudan, stated that United States intelligence “could find no evidence of” the production of medicines at the al-Shifa factory, and that it was a thinly disguised nerve gas plant.<sup>9</sup>

Associated Press also reported that:

senior U.S. officials who briefed reporters following the attack said they knew of no commercial products made at the Shifa plant.<sup>10</sup>

President Clinton’s National Security Advisor, Sandy Berger, went on record as stating that:

There is no question in our mind that facility, that factory, was used to produce a chemical that is used in the manufacture of VX nerve gas and has no other commercial distribution as far as we understand. We have physical evidence of that fact and very, very little doubt of it.<sup>11</sup>

ABC News also stated that senior intelligence officials had claimed that:

there was no evidence that commercial products were ever sold out of the facility.<sup>12</sup>

In the briefings shortly after the bombing United States officials also claimed that the al-Shifa facility was heavily guarded.<sup>13</sup> In a briefing on the al-Shifa factory soon after the strike on Khartoum, a senior American intelligence official told reporters in Washington that:

The facility also has a secured perimeter and it’s patrolled by the Sudanese military.<sup>14</sup>

It must be noted that the intelligence officials involved in these, and other briefings, would presumably be amongst the best available. They would also be presenting the latest intelligence material the United States government had to hand to justify its Cruise missile attack on Sudan - information which would have been gathered by the intelligence agencies of the most powerful country on Earth, intelligence agencies which have budgets running into billions of dollars.

And unlike intelligence gathering in other countries such as Libya, Iraq or Iran, which is very difficult given the closed nature of those countries, Sudan is, in the words of *The Guardian*, “one of the most open and relaxed Arab countries”.<sup>15</sup>

This evidence will be examined later in this briefing.

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<sup>8</sup> *The New York Times*, ‘Possible Benign Use Is Seen for Chemical at Factory in Sudan’, August 27, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> ‘U.S. Strike Hits Nerve Gas Plant’, News Article by Associated Press on August 20, 1998 at 8:31 PM EDT.

<sup>10</sup> ‘U.S.: Sudan Plant Worked With Iraq’, News Article by Associated Press, on August 25, 1998 at 11:04 AM EDT.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Sample From Sudan Plant Said to Link It to Weapons’, *International Herald Tribune*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>12</sup> ‘White House Has Trouble Explaining Attack on Sudan. More Questions Than Answers’, ABCNews.com, Barbara Starr, Washington, August 26, 1998.

<sup>13</sup> *The New York Times*, ‘Possible Benign Use Is Seen for Chemical at Factory in Sudan’, August 27, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> ‘CIA “has residue from Shifa plant”’, *The Guardian*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>15</sup> *The Guardian*, ‘Western envoys in Sudan faced with divided loyalties’, 27 August 1998.

## **THE RESPONSE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SUDAN**

Almost immediately after the American missile strike on the factory, the Sudanese government condemned the attack, calling it “a criminal act” against Sudan.<sup>16</sup> Within hours of the attack, the Sudanese President, Omer al-Bashir, said that Sudan would be bring an official complaint at the American action before the United Nations Security Council and that the Sudanese government would also ask the United Nations to establish:

a commission to verify the nature of the activity of the plant.<sup>17</sup>

President Bashir flatly denied American claims that the al-Shifa plant was being used to make chemical weapons. He accused President Clinton of lying:

Putting out lies is not new for the United States and its president. A person of such immorality will not hesitate to tell any lie.<sup>18</sup>

In a formal letter to the United Nations Security Council, Bishop Gabriel Rorich, the Sudanese Minister of State for External Affairs, condemned the American attack on the factory. The Sudanese government stated that the factory was privately owned and had been financed by several Sudanese investors and the Bank of the Preferential Trade Area (PTA), also known as Comesa. The factory produced more than half of Sudan’s need for medicines. The Sudanese government stated:

The allegations in U.S. statements that Osama bin-Laden owned this factory and that it produced chemical weapons and poisonous gases for terrorist purposes are allegations devoid of truth and the U.S. government has no evidence for this.

In conclusion, the Sudanese government said that:

The behaviour of the U.S. government... represents grave conduct and a flagrant transgression of the U.N. system and the U.N. Charter. It takes the contemporary world back to the law of the jungle, where force alone rules and where each state takes the law into its own hands, a situation which would definitely threaten international security and peace.

Sudan requested the convening of the Security Council to discuss the matter, and also requested a technical fact-finding mission to verify American claims.<sup>19</sup>

It is clear that if the American claims about the factory were true then the evidence would be in the ruins of the buildings. According to Alastair Hay, a chemical pathologist at Leeds University, there would be obvious traces if the factory had been producing the alleged chemicals. *The Guardian* reported that:

Chemicals the plant produced should still be in evidence in the soil and debris, he said. Though there might only be a few traces if production ended some weeks ago, it would be difficult to eliminate all evidence.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Information minister accuses U.S. of “criminal” attack’, News Article by Associated Press on August 20, 1998 at 15:38:23.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Sudan to protest to UN over US strike - Adds Beshir Comments’, News Article by Agence France Presse on August 20, 1998 at 22:17:17.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Sudan to protest to UN over US strike - Adds Beshir Comments’, News Article by Agence France Presse on August 20, 1998 at 22:17:17.

<sup>19</sup> Letter of H.E. Bishop Gborial Roric, State Minister at the Ministry of External Affairs to the President of the United Nations Security Council on the flagrant American aggression against the Sudan.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Show evidence for Sudan raid, MP demands’, *The Guardian*, 25 August 1998.

The United Nations Security Council postponed a decision on whether or not to send such a mission. The United States deputy ambassador to the United Nations, Peter Burleigh, dismissed Sudanese calls for independent verification of the site:

I don't see what the purpose of the fact-finding study would be. We have credible information that fully justifies the strike we made on that one facility in Khartoum.<sup>21</sup>

On 24 August 1998, the Sudanese president accused the American President Bill Clinton of being "a war criminal of the first degree" for its attack on the al-Shifa factory, stating that if the United States truly believed it had been a chemical weapons installation then bombing it would have endangered thousands of civilians.<sup>22</sup> The Sudanese government has also pointed out that if the plant had been a chemical weapons factory, the American strike would have caused the contamination of the Nile river itself.<sup>23</sup> The American ABC News has echoed Sudanese concerns about the possible humanitarian ramifications had American government claims been accurate:

Another murky point is to what extent the U.S. was concerned about unleashing a potentially toxic cloud of nerve agent when it bombed the plant. Officials say that they used a computer model to predict what would happen. But there are two difficulties with that argument. Precursors aren't toxic, so any worry about toxic fatalities would be minimal. And if the U.S. did suspect the presence of highly toxic VX at the plant, they certainly had no idea how much might be there - again making it impossible to predict impact of the explosion on the surrounding neighbourhood.<sup>24</sup>

The Sudanese government also stated that it was prepared to allow Americans to visit Khartoum to establish whether the al-Shifa factory was involved in the production of chemical weapons.<sup>25</sup> The Sudanese interior minister, Abdel Rahim Hussein, repeated invitations to investigate the site to *The Sunday Times*:

We are ready to receive specialists from the Americans and the West to investigate that the factory had nothing to do with chemical weapons.<sup>26</sup>

The Sudanese foreign minister also invited an investigation committee from the United States government itself:

We, as Sudanese, are ready to receive a specialized committee from the American administration to come and freely investigate whether this factory... has anything to do with chemical (weapons).<sup>27</sup>

On 22 August, the Sudanese president invited the United States Congress to send a fact-finding mission:

We have sent an official letter to the US Congress to send a fact-finding mission so as to verify the false claims of the US Administration... We are

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<sup>21</sup> 'US "reveals" nerve gas evidence', BBC World: Africa news, Tuesday, August 25, 1998 Published at 10:42 GMT 11:42 UK.

<sup>22</sup> 'Sudanese president: Clinton 'war criminal' for missile strike', News Article by Associated Press on August 24, 1998 at 16:55:39.

<sup>23</sup> 'Sudan Claims Relief Plane Spied', News Article by Reuters on August 30, 1998 at 1:06 PM EDT.

<sup>24</sup> 'White House Has Trouble Explaining Attack on Sudan. More Questions Than Answers', ABCNews.com, Barbara Starr, Washington, August 26, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> 'Sudan willing to accept US-led probe into factory attack', News Article by Agence France Presse on August 23, 1998 at 18:03:59.

<sup>26</sup> 'Was the Sudan plant really linked to nerve gas', *The Sunday Times*, 23 August 1998.

<sup>27</sup> 'Minister: Sudan invites an American verification committee', News Article by Associated Press on 22 August, 1998 at 00:16.

fully ready to provide protection and all other facilities to enable this mission to obtain all information and meet anyone it wants.<sup>28</sup>

President Bashir also stated that Sudan was critical of the United States government, and not American companies or citizens:

We have no animosity towards the American people and non-government agencies.<sup>29</sup>

The Sudanese government also declared its intention to bring the al-Shifa incident before the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The Sudanese justice minister, Ali Mohamed Osman Yassin wrote to the American secretary of state, stating:

As Sudan respects the law and loves peace, it asks of the US administration to consent to this proposal of taking the dispute to the court of justice.<sup>30</sup>

On 30 August, the Sudanese foreign minister reiterated the need for a fact-finding mission from either the United Nations Security Council or the United States government to visit the factory and investigate allegations that it was producing chemical weapons:

We want a fact-finding mission to come from the U.S. Administration, to come from the U.S. congress, to come from a neutral responsible person like (former President) Jimmy Carter or (U.S. civil rights leader) Jesse Jackson, to come from the Security Council. It is not difficult to investigate. The factory is there, it has been closed from the day it was bombarded.<sup>31</sup>

## **THE AL-SHIFA PHARMACEUTICAL FACTORY IN KHARTOUM**

Almost immediately following the American attack and their claims that the factory was producing chemical weapons, credible voices began to doubt the American justification for their strike. Amongst these voices were several Britons who had either worked at the factory, or who had visited it.

One such observer was Tom Carnaffin, a British engineer who had helped to build and equip the al-Shifa factory. He had worked as a technical manager for four years. He said that it could not have been used to manufacture chemical weapons. He stated:

I have intimate knowledge of that factory and it just does not lend itself to the manufacture of chemical weapons.

Mr Carnaffin said he doubted the US claim that the factory was manufacturing chemical-warfare related material in the veterinary part of the factory:

I have intimate knowledge of that part of the establishment and unless there have been some radical changes in the last few months it just isn't equipped to cope with the demands of chemical weapon manufacturing.

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<sup>28</sup> 'Sudan president invites fact-finders, warns of retaliation', BBC Online Network, World Mediawatch, Saturday, August 22, 1998 Published at 17:47 GMT 18:47 UK.

<sup>29</sup> 'U.S. Tells Sudan It Wasn't Personal', News Article by Associated Press on August 24, 1998 at 09:52:42.

<sup>30</sup> 'Sudan's image-boosting efforts fall victim to US missile strikes', News Article by *Agence France Presse* on August 25, 1998 at 13:09:04.

<sup>31</sup> 'Sudan Denies any links with Osama Bin Laden', News Article by Reuters on August 30, 1998 at 11:50:59.

You need things like airlocks but this factory just has doors leading out onto the street.<sup>32</sup>

Mr Carnaffin further stated that:

It was a very simple mixing, blending and dispensing pharmaceutical facility. It wasn't a large plant. Part of it was used to make veterinary medicines and ointments and part for human medicines. There was never anything like that (making precursors). It was a very open situation. Many people from different countries visited the factory. It would have been a very difficult thing to do (making precursors). That wasn't the intent of the factory at all.<sup>33</sup>

Mr Irwin Armstrong, a British film journalist, who had visited, filmed and photographed the plant in August 1997, publicly challenged the American claims. He stated that the al-Shifa factory was fully open to inspection, and that there were none of the restricted areas and special protections that one would associate with a military function.<sup>34</sup> In newspaper interviews, Mr Armstrong stated:

The Americans have got this completely wrong. In other parts of the country I encountered heavy security but not here. I was allowed to wander about quite freely. This is a perfectly normal chemical factory with the things you would expect - stainless steel vats and technicians.<sup>35</sup>

Another visitor to the al-Shifa factory was British businessman Peter Cockburn. He too publicly contradicted the American claims:

I was courteously received and shown round every area [in March 1998]. I recognised it as a normal factory for the production of simple pharmaceutical products - syrups for humans, powders for goats and camels. Just who are the terrorists in this case, and why is the British Government supporting acts of incomprehensible barbarity? <sup>36</sup>

Mr Alan White, the head of operations in Sudan for the DHL courier company, had also visited the plant and was sceptical of the American claims:

I have been there. It is a very modern facility and a well reputed factory for pharmaceuticals.<sup>37</sup>

It should also be noted that the British Ambassador to Sudan, Mr Alan Goulty, had visited the factory on at least two occasions. Several other ambassadors and visiting heads-of-state had also visited the plant.

Mr Dino Romantti, from Italy, whose company supplied the al-Shifa factory with powders that that were formed into pills, stated that the managers of the plant left him and his technical staff alone in the factory when they worked late, and that he did not see any equipment which could be used for the production of chemical weapons.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> 'British engineer who worked at Sudan factory disputes US claim', News Article by Agence France Presse on August 22, 1998 at 14:03:50.

<sup>33</sup> "Smoking Gun" For Sudan Raid Now in Doubt', *The Chicago Tribune*, 28 August 1998.

<sup>34</sup> Mr Armstrong was interviewed on BBC One Television News on 24th August 1998.

<sup>35</sup> *The Observer* on 23 August

<sup>36</sup> Letter to the Editor, *The Daily Telegraph*, London, 22nd August 1998.

<sup>37</sup> *The Independent*, 22 August 1998.

<sup>38</sup> 'Sudanese Factory's U.S. Designer, Italian Supplier Cast Doubts', *The Wall Street Journal* Interactive Edition, 28 August 1998, [www.wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com).

Three Jordanian engineers who had assisted with the construction of the factory, and who supervised production at the plant, also denied the factory had any chemical weapons capability. One of the engineers, Mohammed Abul Waheed, said that:

The factory was designed to produce medicine and it would be impossible to convert it to make anything else.<sup>39</sup>

One of his colleagues, Ahmed Salem, said that there was no link between the factory and Osama bin-Laden:

Osama bin Laden has no relation to this matter, whether financial, organisational, administrative or anything.<sup>40</sup>

What the factory produced, and its ownership, was addressed by Ghazi Suleiman, the lawyer representing Salah Idris, the owner of the al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory. Mr Suleiman said that Mr Idris did not know Osama bin-Laden, and that the factory produced only drugs, not chemical weapons. He said:

I think the Americans are under bad information and they are not well briefed.... I think it would have been prudent before destroying the plant to come and investigate the site.

He stated that the factory had employed three hundred workers, supporting some three thousand people.<sup>41</sup> Mr Suleiman said that the factory produced 60 percent of Sudan's pharmaceutical drugs, including antibiotics, malaria tablets and syrups, as well as drugs for diabetes, ulcers, tuberculosis, rheumatism and hypertension. The factory's components had been imported from the United States, Sweden, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, India and Thailand.<sup>42</sup>

Mr Suleiman has also stated:

The US has the right to defend itself against terrorism. But on behalf of my client, an international businessman who lives in many countries, I want to persuade the Americans that they have made a mistake. This was no chemical weapons factory; do you think that, if it was, all the country's pharmacy students would come to visit as part of their training. The Americans could not have found its equal, for quality and sophistication, in all of Sudan.<sup>43</sup>

It should be noted that that Mr Suleiman is no friend of the present government in Sudan. He is, in the words of *The Economist*, "the country's leading human-rights lawyer and an outspoken critic of the regime".<sup>44</sup> He spent 25 days in detention earlier this year.

Mr Suleiman also told *The Toronto Star* that the factory had no connection with the manufacture of chemical weapons, and that speaking out put him in a quandary:

I was caught between two options: to speak the truth, or follow my heart and seek cheap popularity.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> 'Engineers deny Sudan factory could have produced VX gas', News Article by *Agence France Presse* on August 22, 1998 at 14:05:18.

<sup>40</sup> 'Engineers deny Sudan factory could have produced VX gas', News Article by *Agence France Presse* on August 22, 1998 at 14:05:18.

<sup>41</sup> 'Sudanese lawyer claims factory had no links to bin Laden', News Article by CNN on August 23, 1998 at 09:41:34.

<sup>42</sup> 'US bombing accelerates health crisis, says Sudan', Electronic Mail & Guardian, 25 August 1998.

<sup>43</sup> 'Factory rubble yields no sign of arms', *The Guardian*, 24 August 1998.

<sup>44</sup> *The Economist*, 29 August 1998.

<sup>45</sup> 'Sudan's rogue regime savours sudden public relations victory. Harsh critic a poster boy in counter-attack against U.S.', *The Toronto Star*, 29 August 1998.



Mr Suleiman also echoed Sudanese government calls for a fact-finding mission to examine the factory ruins to verify American claims of chemical weapons production.<sup>46</sup>

The factory had been designed by an American, Henry Jobe, of the MSD Pharmaceutical Company. Interviewed by *The Observer*, Mr Jobe stated:

We didn't intend a dual use for it. We didn't design anything extra in there. The design we made was for pharmaceuticals.<sup>47</sup>

Mr Jobe in the same interview also flat contradicted American claims that the factory was not a commercial enterprise, and that nothing had ever been sold out of the factory:

That is misinformation, because it was designed for it.

Mr Bekheit Abdallah Yagoub, the deputy commissioner of the Sudanese Human Aid Commission, said the factory supplied 70 percent of the drug needs of southern, eastern and western Sudan, areas wracked by famine and disease.<sup>48</sup>

The Sudanese government also made public the fact that al-Shifa had been in the process of filling a United Nations-approved contract to provide Iraq with \$200,000 worth of 'Shifzole 2.5 percent (Albndazole 2.5 percent for Levamisole)', a deworming drug for animals. The U.N.'s Iraqi sanctions committee had approved the contract in January 1998 as part of the "oil for food" programme.<sup>49</sup> It must also be noted that the sanctions committee is, in the words of Gabriel Carlyle, a research fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford, who has followed the work of the committee closely:

notorious for blocking - or subjecting to prolonged delay - the most innocuous of requests, For example, the committee once deliberated for 170 days before approving one consignment of syringes to Iraq. Is it really plausible that Washington would have permitted the American representative on the committee to approve such a contract if it had any reason to suspect that the factory was manufacturing VX nerve gas precursors?<sup>50</sup>

Mr Neil Partrick, head of the Middle East programme at the Royal United Services Institute, said that there had to be a "huge amount of doubt" about the American claims because of the difficulties in defining a plant that could have a "dual use" capability.<sup>51</sup>

On 23 August 1998, the respected British Sunday newspaper, *The Observer*, a newspaper noted for its independence, and a paper not known for its support either for American foreign policy or the Sudanese government, stated that President Clinton had "bombed civilians on purpose" and that "American tests showed no trace of nerve gas at 'deadly' Sudan plant. The President ordered the attack anyway". *The Observer* reported that the American military had flown high-tech missions over the factory and had been unable to find nerve gas traces.

The Sudanese government had invited journalists from the print and electronic media into the country to inspect the bombed factory. *The Washington Post* reported that whereas the government has "routinely declined visas to American journalists because

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<sup>46</sup> 'Sudanese rally behind government over US attack', News Article by *Agence France Presse* on August 29, 1998 at 23:27:18.

<sup>47</sup> 'Sudanese plant "not built for weapons"', *The Observer*, 30 August 1998.

<sup>48</sup> 'Sudan dismisses US factory-attack explanation', News Article by *Agence France Presse* on August 25, 1998 at 12:55:34.

<sup>49</sup> 'Pharmaceutical is Sudan's only "oil-for-food" export', News Article by Reuters on August 25, 1998 at 4:57 PM EDT.

<sup>50</sup> Letter to the Editor, *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 August 1998.

<sup>51</sup> 'Was the Sudan plant really linked to nerve gas', *The Sunday Times*, 23 August 1998.

the United States has declared it to be a terrorist state” it now “ushered in reporters by the score... to photograph, videotape and broadcast live”. *The Washington Post* reported that visiting reporters from American, British, French, German, Japanese and Arab media outlets were “picking through the rubble”.<sup>52</sup>

Amongst the dozens of journalists who visited the site, were the following. The flagship American international news gatherer, CNN, reported:

The utter destruction in the wake of a missile attack... Laid out in display: what the government says are remnants of the missiles salvaged from the rubble, all part of a concerted campaign to persuade the international community that Sudan has nothing to hide. And repeated calls, too, for an independent inspection team to investigate the site. The government here apparently confident that no trace of any agent used in the manufacture of chemical weapons will be found.<sup>53</sup>

CNN’s Mike Hanna also reported on the Sudanese government’s clear attempts to cooperate with the international media:

have been giving the media here every access to the site. They brought in a mobile crane on this day to allow elevated shots to be taken of the missile site. Certainly, the Sudanese government is going out of its way to insist that it has nothing to hide, and it continues to call for that international investigation team to come inspect this missile site, and determine, once and for all, exactly what was produced here.<sup>54</sup>

*The Economist* also visited the scene of the American missile attack:

Given free access to the site, your correspondent spent more than two hours clambering over - and under - the smoking ruins and found nothing to suggest that it was anything but a plant producing medicines for humans and veterinary drugs for animals. There was no sign of the hidden laboratories or storage rooms underground which some had darkly hinted at.<sup>55</sup>

*The Observer* newspaper describes al-Shifa as “The ‘secret’ chemical factory that no one tried to hide”, and stated that the al-Shifa plant:

certainly did not try to hide its existence. Signs in plenty direct you to it long before you get there.<sup>56</sup>

British journalist David Hirst, in an article in *The Guardian* on 24 August, reported that there was little untoward at the factory site:

There was precious little sign of anything sinister when foreign journalists go to the controversial chemical plant which the American cruise missiles hit. No sign, anyway, that anyone had been trying to hide anything, or planned to do so. Access was easy. I simply said I was a journalist, and was invited to go around as I pleased - provided I did not disturb anything. Everything had to be left in place.

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<sup>52</sup> ‘U.S., Sudan Trade Claims on Factory’, *The Washington Post*, 25 August, 1998.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Sudan’s President Says Blame Falls on Clinton, Not the American People’, August 24, 1998 at 4:14 p.m. ET.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Sudan Continues to Protest U.S. Bombings’, Aired August 24, 1998 at 12:04 a.m. ET.

<sup>55</sup> *The Economist*, 29 August 1998.

<sup>56</sup> *The Observer*, 23 August 1998.

## **DISBELIEF AMONGST FOREIGN DIPLOMATS IN KHARTOUM**

It is evident that there is distinct unease amongst Khartoum's foreign diplomatic corps at the targeting of the al-Shifa factory.

It was reported that the German ambassador to Sudan, Werner Daum, had immediately contradicted United States claims about the factory. In a communication to the German foreign ministry, he stated:

One can't, even if one wants to, describe the Shifa firm as a chemical factory.<sup>57</sup>

The German ambassador also stated that the factory had no disguise and there was nothing secret about the site.<sup>58</sup>

*The Economist* reported that:

One western ambassador, who worked on chemical-weapons control for five years, is particularly dismissive.<sup>59</sup>

*The Guardian*, reporting from Khartoum, stated that "most European diplomats here are as aghast at the raid, and above all the choice of target, as they (the Sudanese government) are".

The paper interviewed a senior European diplomat who said that:

There was absolutely nothing secret about the plant and there never has been.<sup>60</sup>

The senior diplomat in question stated that since the end of the Gulf War, Sudan had been strictly monitored in accord with the chemical weapons precursor substance convention to which all industrialised countries have signed up and which bans the export of any substance on the proscribed list. The diplomat pointed out that a tight monitoring system means it would have been practically impossible for any such substances to have entered Sudan unnoticed.<sup>61</sup> The diplomat stated that:

The substances are severely controlled and are firmly in the hands of producers in the industrialised world. There's a system of internal alert which makes sure that information on any order for the substances which was out of the ordinary would be shared with police in the countries which are potential suppliers.<sup>62</sup>

The diplomat added that Sudan had never been discovered trying to circumvent the international monitoring of substances and equipment essential to the production of chemical weapons precursors.

*The Financial Times* interviewed another European diplomat in Khartoum who said that:

On the basis of what we know of the factory and the evidence we have been given by the US so far, there is no reason to believe that the US

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<sup>57</sup> 'Sudanese plant "not built for weapons"', *The Observer*, 30 August 1998.

<sup>58</sup> 'Destroyed Sudanese Factory Produces only Drugs: German Ambassador', News Article by Xinhua on August 30, 1998 at 00:00:31.

<sup>59</sup> *The Economist*, 29 August 1998.

<sup>60</sup> *The Guardian*, 27 August 1998.

<sup>61</sup> *The Guardian*, 27 August 1998.

<sup>62</sup> 'Diplomats query US allegations on Sudan', *The Financial Times*, 29 August 1998.

knew what was going on inside that factory, other than with regard to its function as a major supplier of pharmaceuticals. Nor is there any evidence that the factory had links with bin Laden. This robust support by other governments for the US action was frankly very stupid.<sup>63</sup>

*The Financial Times* reported that several other diplomats in Sudan viewed their governments' support for the US attack as "seriously misguided".

## **SURPRISE AMONGST INTERNATIONAL CHEMICAL WARFARE EXPERTS**

It is also apparent that the United States claims about Sudan and the al-Shifa factory have come as a surprise to international experts on chemical warfare, many of them based within the United States.

Perhaps the most important and relevant comment was that of Ewan Buchanan, spokesman for the United Nations Special Commission, a body in charge of disarming Iraq of all nuclear, chemical, biological and ballistic missile systems. Interviewed by ABC News shortly after the missile strike, he said:

We have heard lots of claims like these and there are various reports about cooperation between Iraq and Sudan, but we have been unable to confirm it ourselves.<sup>64</sup>

Amy Smithson, a senior associate at the Henry L. Stimson Center, a national security think tank in Washington-DC, said that there was "no concrete evidence" that Iraq was involved in developing a chemical weapons capability in Sudan:

This bombing incident came out of the blue for a number of people. Sudan has never appeared on any public list ever released by intelligence agencies in the U.S., Europe or Russia.<sup>65</sup>

Sudan was not a country identified as having a capacity for producing chemical weapons. The internationally-renowned Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in the United States, also stated that there was "no confirmed evidence of a chemical weapons program", and "no confirmed evidence of a biological weapons program".

The Center for Nonproliferation Studies concluded that:

Studies of chemical weapons proliferation do not identify Sudan as a country of concern.<sup>66</sup>

Tony Cordesman, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington-DC, challenged claims of Osama bin-Laden working with Iraq in Sudan on acquiring chemical weapons:

I never exclude possibilities of linkages, but there just isn't the evidence that he is working with Iraq in Sudan. Does he have ties with Iraq? Of course. But that doesn't mean a network of conspiracy.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> 'Doubts raised on US target claims', *The Financial Times*, 26 August 1998.

<sup>64</sup> 'Experts Hear Tales, but Evidence Scarce: Sharing Efforts in Weapons?', ABCNews.com, 21 August, 1998.

<sup>65</sup> 'Experts Hear Tales, but Evidence Scarce: Sharing Efforts in Weapons?', ABCNews.com, 21 August, 1998.

<sup>66</sup> 'Sudan: Weapons of Mass Destruction Capabilities and Programs', Center for Nonproliferation Studies, at <http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/wmdme/sudan/htm>.

<sup>67</sup> 'Experts Hear Tales, but Evidence Scarce: Sharing Efforts in Weapons?', ABCNews.com, 21 August, 1998.

## **AN ASSESSMENT OF THE AMERICAN CLAIMS ABOUT THE AL-SHIFA PLANT**

As we have seen above, the United States government has now made five claims about the al-Shifa factory in its attempts to justify its Cruise missile attack on the plant. These are as follows: The al-Shifa plant was making precursors to the VX nerve gas, namely a compound known as Empta; that Osama bin-Laden either owned or had a financial link to the al-Shifa factory; that the al-Shifa factory did not produce any medicines or drugs; that the al-Shifa factory was a high security facility guarded by the Sudanese military; and that there were weapons of mass destruction technology links between Sudan and Iraq

After just over one week of sifting through American government claims, *The Observer* has spoken of:

a catalogue of US misinformation, glaring omissions and intelligence errors about the function of the plant.<sup>68</sup>

An examination and assessment of the evidence released by the United States would appear to be confused, inconclusive and contradictory. The American evidence was immediately challenged by American and European scientists, chemists and chemical warfare experts.

### ***Claim Number 1*    The al-Shifa plant was making precursors to the VX nerve gas**

While claiming to have “physical evidence” to support their attack on al-Shifa, United States officials initially said that they would not be able to release it for security reasons.

Speaking on CNN’s Late Edition on 22 August, the President’s National Security Adviser, Sandy Berger, refused to describe the “physical evidence” the government had, saying that it was necessary to protect intelligence methods and sources. In the days following the attack, Bill Richardson, the United States ambassador to the United Nations, said that that the United States government was in possession of “undeniable physical evidence” that al-Shifa was being used to manufacture chemical weapons. He admitted that the American government had not presented this evidence to the United Nations Security Council, but that it had been shown to United States congressional leaders. Richardson stated that “We believe that is sufficient”.<sup>69</sup>

After further international pressure, the United States government officials then stated on 24 August that the United States had material from the plant, including equipment and containers which carried residues of a chemical substance with no commercial uses, but which it was said was exclusively used in VX nerve gas.<sup>70</sup> It was additionally stated by the two anonymous officials that the CIA had used light spectrum data collected by spy satellites to analyse emissions from the plant and that they may also have employed banded migratory birds that fly through Khartoum to gather information about production at the plant.<sup>71</sup>

The United States position then shifted, and on 25 August it claimed that the key evidence justifying its destruction of the al-Shifa plant was in fact a soil sample of a precursor chemical in the making of the VX nerve gas obtained months previously from

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<sup>68</sup> ‘Sudanese plant “not built for weapons”’, *The Observer*, 30 August, 1998.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Sudan’s plea for inquiry is spurned’, *The Financial Times*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>70</sup> CIA “has residue from Shifa plant”, *The Guardian*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>71</sup> Britain and Sudan trade blows as US claims VX gas “evidence”, *The Independent*, 25 August 1998.

the factory.<sup>72</sup> The United States government then refused to identify what they claimed to be the precursor.<sup>73</sup>

The White House press spokesman, Mike McCurry, speaking on 24 August, stated, for example, that:

The nature of that information is classified now.<sup>74</sup>

After several days of attempting to avoid naming the compound, the American government stated that the chemical was said to be O-ethylmethyl-phosphonothioic acid, or EMPTA.

No less a person than the Under Secretary of State, Mr Thomas Pickering, went on record to state that:

The physical evidence is a soil sample, analysis of it shows the presence of a chemical whose simple name is EMPTA, a known precursor for the nerve agent VX... We think that it was this evidence, and evidence like it, which made our decision to carry out this strike on this particular target the correct and proper decision under the circumstances.<sup>75</sup>

Pickering dismissed the need for an independent investigation of the site:

I don't believe that an international investigative committee needs to have an additional role. The evidence in our view is clear and persuasive.<sup>76</sup>

The soil samples were said to have been obtained from the factory itself.<sup>77</sup> An American intelligence official added that:

It is a substance that has no commercial applications, it doesn't occur naturally in the environment, it's not a by-product of any other chemical process. The only thing you can use it for, that we know of, is to make VX.<sup>78</sup>

The American claims were almost immediately challenged by independent sources. *The Independent* newspaper reported, for example, that:

Chemical weapons experts believe the evidence presented so far is not strong enough. They point out that key components of chemical weapons have "dual use" and are also used in medicines, even bubble bath and shampoo.<sup>79</sup>

The newspaper quoted Alfred Frey, a chemical weapons expert working for the United Nations, who said that EMPTA was not conclusive scientific evidence of involvement in producing nerve gas. Mr Frey is a United Nations Iraqi weapons inspector. He stated:

That would tell me I found this product (the compound) and no more.

Even more damning was the finding by *The New York Times* that:

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<sup>72</sup> 'U.S. Says Iraq Aided Production of Chemical Weapons in Sudan', *The New York Times*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>73</sup> 'US had "precursor" to nerve gas sample from Sudanese plant: Newsweek', News Article by *Agence France Presse* on August 23, 1998 at 19:49 GMT.

<sup>74</sup> 'US Confident of Attacks' Success', News Article by UPI on August 24, 1998 at 26:50:41

<sup>75</sup> 'U.S. State Dept. says soil showed VX-Sudan link', News Article by Reuters on August 26, 1998 at 6:43 AM EDT.

<sup>76</sup> 'U.S. State Dept. says soil showed VX-Sudan link', Article by Reuters on August 26, 1998 at 6:43 AM EDT.

<sup>77</sup> 'US strives to justify aid strike on Sudan attack on factory', *The Independent*, 26 August 1998.

<sup>78</sup> 'US strives to justify aid strike on Sudan attack on factory', *The Independent*, 26 August 1998.

<sup>79</sup> 'US strives to justify aid strike on Sudan attack on factory', *The Independent*, 26 August 1998.

The chemical precursor of a nerve agent that Washington claimed was made at a Sudanese chemical factory it destroyed in a missile attack last week could be used for commercial products.<sup>80</sup>

*The New York Times* cited the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) as stating that the chemical could be used “in limited quantities for legitimate commercial purposes”. These purposes could be use in fungicides, and anti-microbial agents. It should be noted that the OPCW is an independent international agency which oversees the inspections of governments and companies to ensure they are not making substances that contravene the chemical weapons ban treaty.

There also appeared to be confusion in the official American government claims about the Empta compound. On 26 August, the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency stated that Empta was listed as a so-called Schedule 1 chemical - an immediate chemical weapons precursor with no recognised commercial use - by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency then changed its public stance within a matter of hours, after OPCW officials said that Empta could have commercial uses. Contradicting American government claims, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons said that the organisation classifies Empta on its Schedule 2b of compounds that could be used to make chemical weapons but which also have commercial uses. The OPCW said that Empta is identified with a process to make plastics flexible and also with some fungicides and anti-microbial agents.<sup>81</sup>

Concerns were raised by chemical weapons experts. Jonathan Tucker, of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, voiced concern about the soil sample: “There are a lot of questions about the soil sample: Where was it taken? Who took it?”. He also queried “the chain of custody” and asked if it had been ensured that the soil sample had not been contaminated. All in all, he stated:

it’s a bit of a dilemma in terms of the credibility of the U.S. case.<sup>82</sup>

On 27 August, *The New York Times* also stated that:

Today several American experts in chemical weapons and analysis offered another possible explanation of what the plant made. They said the chemical’s structure resembled that of an agricultural insecticide, known as fonofos, which is commercially available in Africa. While the two are not identical, they have molecular similarities and could be confused in a laboratory test performed under less-than-ideal conditions, such as a delay between the taking of a soil sample in Khartoum and a scientific test of the sample.

This possibility was put forward by Mr Hank Ellison, a counter-terrorism expert who ran the American army’s chemical and biological warfare programs at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, in the 1980s. Mr Ellison stated that the chemical characteristics of Empta and fonofos were “very similar” and that those similarities “could be misinterpreted in a lab analysis”. Mr Ellison said:

I imagine this soil sample wasn’t taken under the best of circumstances by somebody placing it in a cooler and immediately sending it to a lab. And quality control for the storage and manufacture of pesticides and

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<sup>80</sup> ‘Chemical made at bombed Sudanese factory had commercial uses: report, News Article by *Agence France Presse*, August 27, 1998 at 11:38 GMT.

<sup>81</sup> ‘“Smoking Gun” for Sudan Raid Now in Doubt’, *The Chicago Tribune*, 28 August 1998.

<sup>82</sup> “Smoking Gun” for Sudan Raid Now in Doubt’, *The Chicago Tribune*, 28 August 1998.

insecticides is not the highest in the world, so that could increase the possibility of seeing similarities in the chemical structure.

*The New York Times* also interviewed an official with the chemical weapons organisation in the Hague who said that research also suggested that Empta could be the by-product of the breakdown of other pesticides. The official also stated that companies such as Mobil and International Chemical Industries of America had researched commercial applications using Empta.<sup>83</sup>

Mike Hiskey, an expert at the world-renowned Los Alamos National Laboratory in the United States, said that the chemical had commercial uses, including the manufacture of some herbicides and pesticides.<sup>84</sup>

*The Guardian* has also reported that:

a search of scientific papers showed that it could be used in a variety of circumstances.<sup>85</sup>

*The Observer* has also stated that:

US credibility has been further dented by Western scientists who have pointed out that the same ingredients are used for chemical weapons and beer, and that mustard gas is similar in make-up to the anti-clogging agent in biro ink. It has also been pointed out that the cherry flavouring in sweets is one of the constituent parts of the gas used in combat. Empta also has commercial uses not linked to chemical weapons.<sup>86</sup>

Professor R J P Williams FRS, at Oxford University's Inorganic Chemistry Laboratory, has also directly challenged the American claims, stating:

Types of the compound... an ethyl-methyl-phosphorus derivative, can be bought on the open market. If every laboratory which has such a chemical is to be bombed, then it is goodbye to many chemistry departments in UK, USA and all over the world... The public must know the facts about the chemicals concerned in order to feel sure that terrorist targets were attacked and not innocent parties. People world-wide will support the effort to eliminate terrorists, but not just random reprisal raids, just to show the ability to strike anybody, anywhere. The USA must come clean, as must our government.<sup>87</sup>

Professor Williams has also stated that the compound in question:

could also be linked to quite other synthetic chemical compounds. Insect and nematode (worm) agricultural chemicals are not unrelated. Nerve poisons are used against such "biological enemies".<sup>88</sup>

He warned that:

We must not be misled by technical language to cover up speculation. The UN or the Hague Court must ask the US and now the UK to say clearly what information provoked the attack on Sudan. If we want law and

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<sup>83</sup> 'Possible Benign Use Is Seen for Chemical At Factory in Sudan', *The New York Times*, 27 August, 1998.

<sup>84</sup> "Smoking Gun" for Sudan Raid Now in Doubt', *The Chicago Tribune*, 28 August 1998.

<sup>85</sup> 'Expert queries US labelling of Sudan chemicals', *The Guardian*, 28 August 1998.

<sup>86</sup> 'Sudanese plant "not built for weapons"', *The Observer*, 30 August 1998.

<sup>87</sup> Letters to the Editor, *The Independent*, 26 August 1998.

<sup>88</sup> Letters to the Editor, *The Independent*, 28 August 1998.



order to prevail we must show that we have just cause for such action, otherwise we are approving terrorist methods of our own.<sup>89</sup>

*The Guardian* has also reported on 28 August that:

Several American experts in chemical warfare say there is an agricultural insecticide, with similar properties, that can be easily mistaken for Empta.

*The New York Times* voiced continuing concerns about the American government claims:

Despite the Administration's offer of details about its evidence, there were still unanswered questions. The soil sample, which presumably measured either a spill or airborne particulars, did not prove that it was the pharmaceutical plant that produced the chemical, Empta.<sup>90</sup>

The Sudanese government had itself declared that it was unsatisfied with the American claims to have a soil sample. The Sudanese information minister, Dr Ghazi Saleheddin, stated:

They have not produced any convincing evidence. We have to be satisfied that the United States is not making this up. It's not enough to produce soil which could have been made up in the United States itself, and to claim that the soil contains toxic agents. For a factory to produce toxic agents, you need special facilities, special preparations, special storage areas and preparations facilities. You can't keep things to yourself and keep claiming you have the final proof without allowing people to verify your claims.<sup>91</sup>

It should also be pointed out that the export manager of the al-Shifa factory, Alamaddin al-Shibli, challenged the American claim to have obtained a soil sample:

There's no way to take a sample of soil from this factory, according to the construction of this factory. It's either concrete or cement or carpet.<sup>92</sup>

By 26 August, ABC News reported that the United States administration was itself unsure of its claims:

Now, U.S. officials say they do not know with certainty whether the VX precursor was manufactured at the plant, was stored there, or may have represented a small quantity of research and development material.<sup>93</sup>

*The Observer* reported that American intelligence sources were moving to "less and less credible positions".<sup>94</sup> By 28 August, just over one week after the destruction of the al-Shifa factory, a United States Defence Department spokesman said:

There may have been better places to go. That doesn't mean it was the wrong place to go.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Letters to the Editor, *The Independent*, 28 August 1998.

<sup>90</sup> 'U.S. Says Iraq Aided Production of Chemical Weapons in Sudan', *The New York Times*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>91</sup> 'Sudan demands U.S. evidence that factory made nerve agents', News Article by Associated Press on August 25, 1998 at 12:50:46.

<sup>92</sup> 'U.S. State Dept. says soil showed VX-Sudan link', News Article by Reuters on August 26, 1998 at 6:43 AM EDT.

<sup>93</sup> 'White House Has Trouble Explaining Attack on Sudan. More Questions Than Answers', ABCNews.com, Barbara Starr, Washington, August 26, 1998.

<sup>94</sup> 'Sudanese plant "not built for weapons"', *The Observer*, 30 August 1998.

<sup>95</sup> 'Sudanese plant "not built for weapons"', *The Observer*, 30 August 1998.

**Claim Number 2 That Osama bin-Laden either owned or had a financial link to the al-Shifa factory.**

The United States government claimed that Osama bin-Laden had a financial interest in the al-Shifa factory. This was denied both by the owners and the Sudanese government. Mr Suleiman, the al-Shifa company's lawyer said that the owner was a Sudanese businessman, Salah Idris. The plant had been established by Bashir Hassan Bashir, and had been sold in March 1997 to Mr Idris.<sup>96</sup>

*The Financial Times* stated with reference to the ownership that:

The factory is owned by Salah Idris, a Saudi Arabia-based Sudanese. Mr Salah is from a family with close ties to Sudan's Khatmiyya religious sect which is vehemently opposed to Sudan's Islamist government and by implication an unlikely business partner for Mr bin Laden.<sup>97</sup>

On 25 August a United States intelligence official, giving an official briefing to the media on the American missile strikes admitted that the ties between bin-Laden and the al-Shifa factory were "fuzzy".<sup>98</sup> On the same day, Reuters reported that a United States intelligence official had said that he:

could not confirm any direct financial link between Bin Laden and the plant.<sup>99</sup>

*The Washington Post* reported that:

Within days, however, U.S. officials began pulling back from directly linking bin Laden to El Shifa Pharmaceutical. Instead, they said that his link was to the Sudanese military industrial complex - and that the Sudanese military was, in turn, linked to the VX precursor at El Shifa.<sup>100</sup>

This would appear to jar somewhat with a 24 August CNN report which investigated the ownership of the factory:

The Sudanese government says that this plant is privately owned. It produced ownership papers of the individuals who actually own this plant. It is part of private ownership. The government, itself, has nothing to do with this plant.<sup>101</sup>

By 31 August, it was being reported by *The New York Times* that:

<sup>102</sup>Some U.S. officials now say Mr. bin Laden's financial support... did not directly flow to the plant itself"

**Claim Number 3 That the al-Shifa factory had no commercial products**

The American news service, ABC News, stated that senior intelligence officials had claimed in relation to the al-Shifa factory that:

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<sup>96</sup> 'Sudan tells British ambassador to go as diplomatic row grows', *The Guardian*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>97</sup> 'Doubts raised on US target claims', *The Financial Times*, 26 August 1998.

<sup>98</sup> 'U.S. Intelligence Cites Iraqi Tie to Sudan Plant', News Article by Associated Press on August 25, 1998 at 20:23:36.

<sup>99</sup> 'U.S. Intelligence defends VX-Sudan link', News Article by Reuters on August 25, 1998 at 7:27 PM EDT.

<sup>100</sup> 'Employees Dispute Charge That Plant Made Nerve Agent', *The Washington Post*, 26 August 1998.

<sup>101</sup> 'Sudan Continues to Protest U.S. Bombings', Aired August 24, 1998 at 12:04 a.m. ET.

<sup>102</sup> 'Doubts Surround U.S. Explanation for Attacking Sudan Factory', *The New York Times*, 31 August 1998.

there was no evidence that commercial products were ever sold out of the facility.<sup>103</sup>

President Clinton's National Security Advisor, Sandy Berger, personally stated that the Al-Shifa factory

has no other commercial distribution as far as we understand. We have physical evidence of that fact and very, very little doubt of it.<sup>104</sup>

The factory's lawyer, and leading Sudanese human rights activist, Ghazi Suleiman, said that the factory produced 60 percent of Sudan's pharmaceutical drugs, including antibiotics, malaria tablets and syrups, as well as drugs for diabetes, ulcers, tuberculosis, rheumatism and hypertension.<sup>105</sup>

Journalists who visited the site were able to find thousands of containers and bottles of human medication and animal drugs, clear evidence of the factory's commercial production.

If this was not enough evidence, al-Shifa had been in the process of filling a United Nations-approved contract to provide Iraq with \$200,000 worth of a deworming drug for animals, a contract approved in January 1998 by the United Nation's Iraqi sanctions committee. One would have presumed that the American government, and particularly its intelligence agencies would have been vigorously monitoring any of the United Nations contracts for Iraq.

The United States government eventually conceded that the al-Shifa factory had in fact been commercially producing medicines and drugs. Some days after the missile strike, State Department spokesman James Foley admitted, for example:

That facility may very well have been producing pharmaceuticals.<sup>106</sup>

*The Times* has also confirmed the Clinton Administration's belated acceptance of this fact:

Now they admit it made 60 percent of Sudan's medicine.<sup>107</sup>

On 31 August, it was reported that the Pentagon itself admitted that there had been an intelligence failure on the part of the United States government in not being aware of the commercial production of medicines and drugs:

Some of the intelligence people didn't know they would find any of that there.<sup>108</sup>

For the National Security Advisor to have publicly made such a mistake over what should have been the very easily verifiable issue of whether al-Shifa produced medicines or not is a key indicator as to the quality and accuracy of American intelligence on the factory. A simple call to the Sudanese chamber of commerce would have sufficed.

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<sup>103</sup> 'White House Has Trouble Explaining Attack on Sudan. More Questions Than Answers', ABCNews.com, Barbara Starr, Washington, August 26, 1998.

<sup>104</sup> 'Sample From Sudan Plant Said to Link It to Weapons', *International Herald Tribune*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>105</sup> 'US bombing accelerates health crisis, says Sudan', *Electronic Mail & Guardian*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>106</sup> 'Sudan's rogue regime savours sudden public relations victory. Harsh critic a poster boy in counter-attack against U.S.', *The Toronto Star*, 29 August 1998.

<sup>107</sup> 'America reviews Sudan chemical evidence', *The Times*, 29 August 1998.

<sup>108</sup> 'Doubts Surround U.S. Explanation for Attacking Sudan Factory', *The New York Times*, 31 August 1998.

**Claim Number 4 That the al-Shifa factory was a high security facility guarded by the Sudanese military**

In a briefing on the al-Shifa factory soon after the strike on Khartoum, a senior American intelligence official told reporters in Washington that:

The facility also has a secured perimeter and it's patrolled by the Sudanese military.<sup>109</sup>

United States government claims that the factory was a heavily-guarded, military installation with restricted access, have been comprehensively contradicted by western journalists. *The Economist*, for example, reported that the al-Shifa factory was "open to the street", contrasting with other heavily guarded areas of Khartoum.<sup>110</sup> Associated Press stated that:

There are no signs of secrecy at the plant. Two prominent signs along the road point to the factory, and foreigners have been allowed to visit the site at all hours.<sup>111</sup>

Thomas Carnaffin, the British engineer who worked at the factory for several years up until April 1998, said that he had been "into every corner of the plant":

It was never a plant of high security. You could walk around anywhere you liked, and no one tried to stop you.<sup>112</sup>

This was also confirmed by the British film-maker Irwin Armstrong who visited the factory in late 1997.

It is also worth noting that Alastair Hay, the Leeds University chemical pathologist, has said that if there was no restricted access at the plant, then Sudan seemed to have a good case.<sup>113</sup>

**Claim Number 5 That there were weapons of mass destruction technology links between Sudan and Iraq**

Some four days after the attack on the al-Shifa factory, the United States government position and focus shifted once again. Unable to prove anything specific, the American government then fell back on to broader claims.

In a news article on 25 August 1998, entitled 'U.S. Intelligence Cites Iraqi Tie to Sudan Plant', for example, Associated Press reported that:

Intelligence officials are leaning toward the theory that Iraq was spreading its knowledge of chemical weapons production to other Muslim countries.<sup>114</sup>

On the same day, in an article entitled 'Times: U.S. says Iraq aided Sudan on chemical weapons', Reuters reported on American government claims of weapons of mass

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<sup>109</sup> 'CIA "has residue from Shifa plant"', *The Guardian*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>110</sup> *The Economist*, 29 August 1998.

<sup>111</sup> 'Questions Remain, but Some Sudanese Claims on Factory Prove True', News Article by Associated Press on August 24, 1998 at 08:34:09.

<sup>112</sup> 'Possible Benign Use Is Seen for Chemical At Factory in Sudan', *The New York Times*, 27 August, 1998.

<sup>113</sup> CIA "has residue from Shifa plant", *The Guardian*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>114</sup> 'U.S. Intelligence Cites Iraqi Tie to Sudan Plant', News Article by Associated Press on August 25, 1998 at 20:23:36.

destruction technology transfer from Iraq to Sudan.<sup>115</sup> The United States government then claimed that the factory was attacked because of alleged links with Iraq. *The Guardian* reported, for example, that:

President Clinton's decision to launch the strikes was at least partly influenced by reports that intelligence officers had intercepted phone calls between scientists at the factory and top officials in Iraq's chemical weapons programme.<sup>116</sup>

This American claim can only be described as verging on the farcical. The American government wants the international community to believe that it launched an attack involving several Cruise missiles on a factory in part because telephone calls had been made between un-named people at that factory and Iraq.

Presumably had the people concerned actually involved in the incredibly dangerous and secretive process of attempting to transfer weapons of mass destruction technology, the last thing they would have used would have been telephone lines - knowing as they do, and as the rest of the world would assume - that every telephone call into and out of Iraq and Sudan is listened to by the electronic intelligence agencies of the United States government. Those said to be involved in weapons of mass destruction technology would presumably be especially cautious. In any instance, are the Americans suggesting that weapons of mass destruction technology was actually being transferred in the course of any telephone calls?

Perhaps needless to say the American government has refused to name the Sudanese scientists who were said to be in telephone contact with people in Iraq, and has not released transcripts or tapes of the alleged conversations.

It is a matter of record, however, that in February 1998, the United States government itself denied that there was no evidence for chemical weapons or technology transfers from Iraq to Sudan, stating that

We have no credible evidence that Iraq has exported weapons of mass destruction technology to other countries since the (1991) Gulf War.<sup>117</sup>

In addition to the American government, in February and March 1998, the British government also stated that there was no evidence for any weapons of mass destruction technology transfers from Iraq to Sudan. This was the view of both the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Defence Intelligence staff of the British Ministry of Defence.

On 17 February, for example, the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr Robin Cook MP, was asked about reports of weapons of mass destruction technology transfers from Iraq to Sudan. Mr Cook replied:

I am not aware of those reports. It would be a very difficult transfer to effect.<sup>118</sup>

On 10 March 1998, replying to allegations of chemical weapons technology transfers from Iraq to Sudan, Tony Lloyd MP, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, clearly stated that:

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<sup>115</sup> 'Times: U.S. says Iraq aided Sudan on chemical weapons', News Article by Reuters on August 25, 1998 at 7:45 AM EDT.

<sup>116</sup> 'Expert queries US labelling of Sudan chemical', *The Guardian*, 28 August 1998.

<sup>117</sup> 'White House Says No Sign Iraq Exported Arms', News Article by Reuters on February 17, 1998 at 10:20:45.

<sup>118</sup> House of Commons *Hansard*, 17 February 1998, column 903.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Sudanese chemical warfare capabilities....The Foreign and Commonwealth Office cannot validate those reports, and is not aware of any fresh or substantiated evidence on the matter.<sup>119</sup>

Lord Avebury laid down a written parliamentary question on this subject on 11 March 1998. Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs, replied:

We are concerned at recent reports alleging such transfers, although we have not seen evidence to substantiate them.<sup>120</sup>

On 19 March 1998, Baroness Symons stated in the House of Lords in relation to claims of weapons of mass destruction technology transfers, including chemical and biological weapons, from Iraq to Sudan, that:

We are monitoring the evidence closely, but to date we have no evidence to substantiate these claims.... Moreover, we know that some of the claims are untrue...The defence intelligence staff in the MoD (Ministry of Defence) have similarly written a critique which does not support the report's findings.<sup>121</sup>

Baroness Symons also stated that:

Nor has the United Nations Special Commission reported any evidence of such transfers since the Gulf War conflict and the imposition of sanctions in 1991.<sup>122</sup>

As mentioned previously, perhaps the single most telling comment is that made following the American attack on the al-Shifa factory by Ewan Buchanan, spokesman for the United Nations Special Commission, a body in charge of disarming Iraq of all nuclear, chemical, biological and ballistic missile systems, when he said:

We have heard lots of claims like these and there are various reports about cooperation between Iraq and Sudan, but we have been unable to confirm it ourselves.<sup>123</sup>

Even the broad American claim of weapons of mass destruction technology transfer from Iraq to Sudan is simply unsustainable.

## **PREVIOUS AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE BLUNDERS**

American intelligence agencies, and particularly the CIA, have not had a good reputation as intelligence gatherers for some time now.

In May 1998, for example, India conducted a series of underground nuclear explosions. Melvin Goodman, the CIA's chief Soviet analyst during the 1970s, admitted that the CIA had learnt about the Indian tests from CNN.<sup>124</sup> The United States intelligence community was taken by surprise by the explosions, despite the fact that the party now in power in India had promised just such a course of action in its political manifesto during that country's general elections.

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<sup>119</sup> House of Commons *Hansard*, 10th March 1998, col. 462.

<sup>120</sup> House of Lords *Official Report*, 11 March 1998, column WA 65/66.

<sup>121</sup> House of Lords *Official Report*, 19th March 1998, cols. 818-820.

<sup>122</sup> House of Lords *Official Report*, 19th March 1998, cols. 818-820.

<sup>123</sup> 'Experts Hear Tales, but Evidence Scarce: Sharing Efforts in Weapons?', ABCNews.com, 21 August, 1998.

<sup>124</sup> 'What the CIA didn't know', BBC News Online World, Tuesday, August 25, 1998 at 10:39 GMT 11:39 UK.

And then there is the Lockerbie affair. A Panam airliner was blown up over the Scottish village of Lockerbie in December 1988 with an appalling loss of life. American intelligence claims about Lockerbie were explored by Francis Wheen in *The Guardian*:

By the following spring, the Americans had “convincing evidence” that the culprits were a Palestinian group, the PFLP-GC, acting on behalf of Iran and with the assistance of Syria. “From an intelligence point of view this case is solved,” said Vincent Cannistraro, the CIA’s counter-intelligence chief. “There is a lot of evidence which puts this at the doorstep of the Iranian government.” But then Saddam Hussein marched into Kuwait. Desperate not to antagonise Syria or Iran, the US announced that there was nothing to connect either of these countries - or the PFLP-GC - with the Lockerbie bomb. Instead... “convincing evidence” pinned it on the Libyans.<sup>125</sup>

*The Guardian* also mentioned that Mr Cannistraro was one of the terrorism experts commenting on Osama bin-Laden, chemical weapons and Sudan in the wake of the missile attack on Khartoum.

*The Economist* has also pointed out that American intelligence is “not infallible” and that “America’s armed forces can make terrible mistakes”, pointing to the American destruction of an Iranian airliner in 1988 by the USS Vincennes, an incident which resulted in the deaths of 290 passengers.<sup>126</sup>

On the subject of the United States and allegations of chemical warfare, the Leeds University chemical pathologist, Mr Hay, has also pointed out that “for years the US had insisted that the Soviet Union and North Vietnam had used ‘yellow rain’ chemicals during the Vietnam war, only to discover that the product contained pollen from indigenous trees and the ‘rain’ was bee excrement”.<sup>127</sup>

## **SUDAN AND PREVIOUS AMERICAN ALLEGATIONS OF INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM**

Underpinning the American strike on Sudan, is the image of Sudan as a country in some way involved with international terrorism. This has been very much a picture of Sudan put forward by the United States government - with, it has to be said - as much clarity and evidence as Washington has put forward to support its claims that Sudan was involved in the production of chemical weapons and other weapons of mass destruction technology.

In 1993, for example, Sudan was listed by the United States government as a state sponsor of terrorism. The American government has consistently refused to provide hard evidence for the listing. The absence of any such evidence has been confirmed by former United States President Jimmy Carter. He asked to see the evidence:

In fact, when I later asked an assistant secretary of state he said they did not have any proof, but there were strong allegations. I think there is too much of an inclination in this country to look at Muslims as inherently terrorist or inherently against the West.<sup>128</sup>

Indeed, one year after having listed Sudan as a sponsor of state terrorism the State Department was still unable to produce evidence, as was admitted in its official reports:

<sup>125</sup> ‘Mr X marks the spot’, *The Guardian*, 26 August 1998.

<sup>126</sup> *The Economist*, 29 August 1998.

<sup>127</sup> ‘Show evidence for Sudan raid, MP demands’, *The Guardian*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>128</sup> *The Independent*, London 17th September 1993

There is no evidence that Sudan... conducted or sponsored a single act of terrorism in 1994.<sup>10</sup>

It must also be pointed out that being listed by the United States government as a state sponsor of international terrorism would appear first and foremost to be based on political acceptability and expediency. Iraq, for example, was listed by the American State Department as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1979. The Americans then removed Iraq from the list in 1982 when it went to war with Iran. Iraq was then re-listed following its invasion of Kuwait.

Sudan has itself perhaps been the victim of a “political” listing by an American government unhappy with its Islamic orientation. As the London-based Sudan Foundation, in its open letter to Tony Blair criticising British support for the raids, stated:

Not only has the Sudanese Government consistently denounced terrorism, it has also assisted very materially in the war against it. It was the Sudanese government who, unlike several Western “allies” in the Middle East, identified, arrested and extradited the arch-international terrorist Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, otherwise known as “Carlos”, to France in 1995. In 1996, the Sudanese Government expelled Osama bin Laden at the request of the United States and Britain.<sup>129</sup>

It is also a matter of record that following the horrific terrorist murder of tourists at Luxor in November 1997, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said that the terrorists who sponsored the outrage were living in Britain:

Terrorists are present and living on English territory... where they collect funds and plan.<sup>130</sup>

Sudan was not accused of any involvement, even though it is alleged to be a state sponsor of terrorism and a neighbour of Egypt.

It must also be pointed out that the United States government is actively supporting terrorist actions by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in southern Sudan. This support includes military, financial and diplomatic assistance to the rebels. - assistance which according to the United States government’s own legal definition amounts to terrorism and international terrorism. Osama bin-Laden is, of course, was himself the beneficiary of such American assistance in the 1980s. At least some of the installations struck by American Cruise missiles were constructed by the CIA in the 1980s.

In the wake of the attack on the al-Shifa factory, with the American justification that this was a blow against international terrorism, perhaps not the last word but certainly food for thought can be given to American claims of Sudan’s involvement in international terrorism, by the European diplomat interviewed by *The Guardian*:

So far as we know the US has never formally accused Sudan of trying to produce chemical weapons, but it has accused it of harbouring international terrorists. Why on earth did it not hit those - as it did in Afghanistan?... Perhaps it didn’t because, in reality, there are no such bases.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *Why Has Britain Supported American State Terrorism Against Sudan? Where is the Evidence? An Open Letter to the British Prime Minister, Rt Hon Tony Blair MP*, Sudan Foundation, August 1998.

<sup>130</sup> “Mubarak’s terrorist claim angers Britain”, *The Daily Telegraph*, London, 24th November 1997.

<sup>131</sup> *The Guardian*, 27 August 1998.



It should also perhaps be noted that the Sudanese government warned of the dangers of forcing Osama bin-Laden from Sudan in 1996. The Sudanese information minister, Dr Salaheddin revealed that:

We gave (U.S. officials) a piece of advice that they never followed. We told them: 'Don't send him out of Sudan because you will lose control over him'. Now, the United States has ended up with war with an invisible enemy.<sup>132</sup>

### **WHAT WOULD SUDAN HAVE STOOD TO GAIN FROM SUCH A CHEMICAL WEAPONS FACTORY?**

It is a simple matter of record that over the past several years the Sudanese government had been involved in repairing the image of Sudan. It has tried to end the civil war in southern Sudan. The government has introduced a federal system, a long-standing southern Sudanese demand, negotiated the 1997 Khartoum peace agreement with several rebel factions, and has agreed to an internationally-supervised referendum in four years time whereby the people of southern Sudan would be able for the first time ever to opt for unity or separation. In the mean time, southern Sudan is ruled by a government made up of southerners. And, with the help of the British government, the Sudanese government had agreed a cease-fire within parts of southern Sudan in order to maximise humanitarian assistance to communities affected by famine. It has also offered a full cease-fire throughout the south.

Only a few months ago, the government drafted new constitution, which was accepted by referendum. This constitution guaranteed a multi-party dispensation. It extradited the international terrorism known as "Carlos", and expelled Osama bin-Laden at the request of the United States. It has also introduced visas, thereby ending previously unhindered travel to Sudan by Arab nationals. It has vigorously adhered to the adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund.

CNN's Mike Hanna has commented on these government moves:

Certainly, in recent years, relations were warming somewhat after a very deep period of freeze on relations between the two countries. And people we've spoken to here in Sudan insist that they were attempting to change the society in certain ways, despite the fact that it remains a very seriously religious Islamic society. But at the same time, there were moves to free the economy, there were moves to create greater freedoms for the people here.<sup>133</sup>

*Agence France Presse* has spoken of "Khartoum's months-long effort to improve its image on the world stage".<sup>134</sup> European diplomats interviewed by *The Guardian* have also stated that the government has in recent years been making efforts to clean up its reputation.<sup>135</sup>

### **BRITAIN AND THE AMERICAN ATTACK ON THE AL-SHIFA FACTORY**

The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, wholeheartedly supported the American strikes on Sudan and Afghanistan:

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<sup>132</sup> 'Sudan Seeks an Apology from the United States along with U.N.', News Article by AP on August 24, 1998 at 08:26:28.

<sup>133</sup> 'Protests Continue in Sudan Over U.S. Missile Strike', Aired August 24, 1998 at 8:06 a.m. ET.

<sup>134</sup> 'Sudan's image-boosting efforts fall victim to US missile strikes', News Article by *Agence France Presse* on August 25, 1998 at 13:09:04.

<sup>135</sup> *The Guardian*, 27 August 1998.

I strongly support this American action against international terrorists.<sup>136</sup>

Mr Blair also stated:

A country like the United States, when its citizens are under attack in this way and when they are at risk, must have the right to defend itself and we support our allies in this cause.<sup>137</sup>

Mr Blair's support for the American claim of "self-defence" was immediately challenged by British experts. Professor Chris Brown, of the University of Southampton, stated that:

The self-defence provisions of the UN Charter are clearly designed to cover circumstances in which it is impossible or unfeasible to refer an act of aggression to the Security Council; for example, in 1990, the Kuwaiti government obviously did not need the permission of the UN to respond forcibly to the Iraqi invasion of their country. Article 51 could also be used to legitimate action if the Security Council is unwilling or unable to act, or in the face of an immediate threat, when delay could bring disaster. None of this applies to the bombing of a chemicals factory or a training camp. Not only was this an illegal act, it was politically stupid, drawing world attention away from the killing of so many innocents in Kenya and Tanzania.<sup>138</sup>

While no-one can deny any country's right to defend itself and its citizens in accordance with international law, at the same time any armed response - even in self-defence - must be legal and measured, and, above all, when dealing with terrorism and international terrorism must be based on sound intelligence.

It is clear that Tony Blair took initial American assurances about the validity of its Cruise missile strike on Sudan at face value. It is the support any friend would have looked for in a similar crisis. It is also incumbent, however, on a friend to point out mistakes and shortcomings. It is now clear, in the cold light of day, that the targeting of the al-Shifa plant by the Americans was deeply flawed. Tony Blair's uncritical support of the American attack has been roundly condemned within Britain.

The Sudan Foundation, for example, wrote:

In the 1980s, many... in the Labour Party denounced Margaret Thatcher for her close personal alliance with President Reagan. In truth, she was often a restraining influence on American foreign policy... We had to wait for your election, Mr Blair, before we could really see a British Prime Minister act as a poodle for the American President.<sup>139</sup>

There also appeared to be considerable unease about the strike both within the British government and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. *The Financial Times* quoted a government minister as saying:

Many of us were mortified when the prime minister rushed to support Clinton.

On 27 August, *The Financial Times* reported that:

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<sup>136</sup> 'Support and criticism of Blair's stance', BBC News Online: United Kingdom, Friday, August 21, 1998 at 09:54 GMT 10:54 UK.

<sup>137</sup> *The Financial Times*, 27 August 1998.

<sup>138</sup> Letters to the Editor, *The Guardian*, 24 August 1998.

<sup>139</sup> *Why Has Britain Supported American State Terrorism Against Sudan? Where is the Evidence? An Open Letter to the British Prime Minister*, Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, Sudan Foundation, August 1998.

The UK Foreign Office is increasingly concerned that the US last week bombed an innocent target when destroying a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. Senior officials believe Tony Blair, prime minister, was too hasty in backing President Bill Clinton's strike on the plant in Khartoum.

The newspaper quoted a foreign office official as saying that the Prime Minister's support for President Clinton's attack was "knee jerk and a bit obtuse". Some of Britain's most eminent scientists, chemists and lawyers have now publicly challenged and contradicted the claims made by the American government.

There also appeared to be contradictory statements coming out of the British government. The British Defence Secretary, Mr George Robertson MP, stated on 22 August that his counterpart, Defence Secretary Cohen, had told him that the American government had "absolutely compelling evidence" that the factory was making biological and chemical weapons.<sup>140</sup> Mr Robertson also stated that the British government had independent evidence of the al-Shifa factory's involvement in the manufacture of chemical weapons. This appeared to be contradicted by a Foreign Office spokesman on 26 August, who said that the United Kingdom had taken on trust American claims to have proof.<sup>141</sup>

On 24 August, Mr Donald Anderson MP, the chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the British House of Commons, asked for clear evidence to be made available:

Since the Government went out on a limb in supporting the US action it is surely reasonable that the evidence should be passed to us. That has not yet been done.<sup>142</sup>

Andrew Mackinlay, a member of the foreign affairs committee, stated that British support for the strike:

appears to run counter to the government's ethical foreign policy.<sup>143</sup>

Mr Mackinlay also went on record as saying:

There hasn't been any real indication as to what grounds there were for attacking what we are told was a pharmaceutical plant. Therefore I think there is a burden on both the US, and the UK Government, if they are going to support the US, to show parliament and the people why there has been this heightening of what is a very dangerous situation.<sup>144</sup>

Tony Benn MP, a former Cabinet member and long-standing pacifist, wrote to the British Foreign Secretary to ask;

Would an attack of this kind, in which innocent civilians may be killed or injured, be covered by the proposed International War Crimes Tribunal to which the government is committed?<sup>145</sup>

It is clear that there has been considerable "collateral" damage in Britain as a result of the American strike. Anglo-Sudanese relations at a government level have been badly affected.

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<sup>140</sup> 'CIA "has residue from Shifa plant"', *The Guardian*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>141</sup> *The Financial Times*, 27 August 1998.

<sup>142</sup> 'CIA "has residue from Shifa plant"', *The Guardian*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>143</sup> *The Financial Times*, 27 August 1998.

<sup>144</sup> 'Blair defends Sudan missile raid as UK envoys pull out', *The Scotsman*, 29 August 1998.

<sup>145</sup> 'Support and criticism of Blair's stance', BBC News Online: United Kingdom, Friday, August 21, 1998 at 09:54 GMT 10:54 UK.

In the wake of uncritical British support for the missile strikes on Sudan, the Sudanese government asked for the British ambassador, and his deputy to be withdrawn from Khartoum, and at the same time withdrew its own ambassador and deputy from London.

One clear casualty of the British government's support for the Cruise missile attack on Sudan is the work towards a permanent and lasting cease-fire within the Sudanese civil war that Britain was so closely involved in.

Britain's large Muslim communities are somewhat disturbed at what has been described as a flagrant attack on a desperately poor Third World Islamic state. Some British Muslims have seen this attack, and the British government's support for it, as a thinly veiled attack on Islam.

Many of international aid agencies and aid workers were aghast at the American strike on Khartoum, and are also deeply disturbed at the ramifications for their work and programmes in Sudan. This concern was best summed up by two respected aid experts, John Hammock and Sue Lautze, who wrote that:

Today, relief operations for those who suffer in Sudan have been grossly disrupted by the US cruise missile attacks. As a result, large, vulnerable populations are being left without life-saving humanitarian assistance.

All United Nations agencies based in Khartoum have evacuated their American staff, as have many other Western-based relief organisations. As a result, much-needed relief efforts - including a crucial one run by the International Rescue Committee in Wau, in southern Sudan, where 50 people die each day - have been postponed indefinitely...

In the weeks before the US attack on Khartoum, initiatives were underway for improved and expanded relief operations based in northern Sudan, to augment those underway from Uganda and Kenya. Ironically, these initiatives had been resulting in improved relations between the Sudanese government and relief organizations.<sup>146</sup>

It is also clear that Tony Blair's support for the American strike on Sudan may have also placed British citizens, companies, installations and holdings at risk throughout the world.

The simple fact is that the longer that Britain continues to support the American action, regardless of the facts now emerging out of Sudan, the longer Britain will continue to be associated with American arrogance on the issue. Bill Richardson, the United States ambassador to the United Nations, admitted shortly after the missile attack that the American government had not presented American evidence to the United Nations Security Council, but that it had been shown to United States congressional leaders. Richardson stating that "We believe that is sufficient". One week later despite numerous international calls for an independent enquiry into the al-Shifa missile attack, Richardson was still saying:

We don't think an investigation is needed. We don't think anything need to be put to rest.<sup>147</sup>

Britain will also continue to be associated with America's indefensible position. Why, if the United States and Britain believe their own claims that Osama bin-Laden is actively seeking a chemical weapons capability, for possible use against the United States and

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<sup>146</sup> 'Sudan The other casualty: famine relief. Missile strikes disrupt humanitarian aid for 2 million', *The Boston Globe*, 30 August 1998.

<sup>147</sup> 'No international probe needed for Sudan bombing: Richardson', News Article by *Agence France Presse* on August 30, 1998 at 12:15:50.

Britain, and if both governments believe their additional claims that the al-Shifa factory was a facility engaged in the production of chemical weapons as part of the Osama bin-Laden infrastructure, do they not jump at the chance to send a verification team to go over the al-Shifa factory with a fine-tooth comb?

Is it not the case that in February 1998, the United States and Britain were poised on the brink of war with Iraq over Iraq's refusal to cooperate with United Nations weapons inspectors who wished to examine precisely the sort of facility American intelligence claims the al-Shifa plant to be? Why are the United States and Britain holding back from investigating precisely the sort of installation which they were prepared to go to war over six months ago?

Is this reluctance not all the more puzzling as the United States is now resurrecting claims it had itself previously dismissed that the factory was part of a weapons of mass destruction technology transfer from Iraq to Sudan? The simple fact is that the United States government is doing everything in its power to avoid examining the plant. In the words of the London-based Sudan Foundation:

President Clinton appears to be as reluctant to submit the Khartoum factory to independent tests as he appeared to be about independent tests of Monica Lewinsky's dress.<sup>148</sup>

For the British government not to be irreversibly associated with this act of American state terrorism, and in the interests of natural justice, the British government must distance itself from the transparently flawed American attempts at justifying its attack on Sudan.

The longer that the British government is silent on this issue the more damage there will be to our reputation within the international community.

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<sup>148</sup> *Why Has Britain Supported American State Terrorism Against Sudan? Where is the Evidence? An Open Letter to the British Prime Minister, Rt Hon Tony Blair MP*, Sudan Foundation, August 1998.

## **APPENDIX NUMBER ONE**

### **Questions for Tony Blair and the British government**

Will the British government support the Sudanese government's call to have the whole al-Shifa incident investigated by the United Nations Security Council?

Will the British government send its own highly-respected chemical weapons experts from the world-renowned Porton Down establishment to inspect the site of the al-Shifa factory for evidence of chemical weapons production?

Will the British government support the Sudanese government's call to have the al-Shifa attack put before the International Court of Justice in The Hague?

How does support for a Cruise missile attack on a sovereign country, destroying an innocent target and killing and injuring civilians square with the Labour party's ethical foreign policy?

Will the British government support the investigation of the al-Shifa factory by a verification team from the European Union?

When was the British government informed that the al-Shifa factory was to be, or had been, a target in the American missile strikes?

Was the British government notified in advance that the al-Shifa factory was a target?

Did the British government discuss with the Clinton Administration the targeting of the al-Shifa factory?

Can the Prime Minister confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Defence Intelligence staff at the Ministry of Defence reported in February and March 1998 that there was no evidence of Iraqi transfers of weapons of mass destruction technology to Sudan?

Can the Prime Minister confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Defence Intelligence staff at the Ministry of Defence reported in February and March 1998 that there was no evidence of chemical weapons facilities in Sudan?

Can the Prime Minister confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office stated in March that the United Nations Special Commission, the body tasked with disarming Iraq of all weapons of mass destruction, has said there was no evidence of Iraqi transfers of weapons of mass destruction technology to Sudan?

Is the British government aware that the United Nations Special Commission, stated in the wake of the attack on the al-Shifa plant that it still had no evidence to indicate any link between Iraq and Sudan?

Does the British government believe that the United Nations Special Commission is a competent body?

Has the Foreign Office and Commonwealth Office or the Defence Intelligence staff seen evidence that Sudan had developed a chemical weapons capability in the past four months? Would it be able to show such evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons?

Has the British government been able to independently verify American claims that the al-Shifa factory was producing precursors for the VX nerve agent?

Has the British government been able to independently verify American claims that Osama bin-Laden owned, part-owned or had a financial interest in the al-Shifa factory?

Is the British government aware that the German ambassador to Sudan has denied American claims that the al-Shifa factory was involved with the production of chemical weapons?

Did the British government share intelligence on the al-Shifa factory prior to the attack?

How often had the British ambassador to Sudan visited the plant. How often had other members of the embassy visited the factory?

Was the British ambassador to Sudan aware that the factory was producing medicines and drugs?

Was the British ambassador aware of British business interests or links with the al-Shifa factory. Had the British ambassador or his staff assisted British businessmen or British companies in any way with dealings with the factory?