

## THE AL-SHIFA BOMBING: SEPTEMBER 1998

### A TIMELINE OF SOME OF THE EVENTS FOLLOWING THE AMERICAN MISSILE STRIKE ON THE AL-SHIFA FACTORY IN SUDAN

**7 August 1998** Terrorist bombs badly damage the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Hundreds of people, twelve of whom American, are killed in the attacks.

**7 August 1998** The Sudanese government immediately condemns the embassy bombings, stating: "These criminal acts of violence do not lead to any goal"<sup>1</sup>

**11 August 1998** The Sudanese government states that: "We must pool our efforts to eradicate all the causes of terrorism" and 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> The Sudanese government offered to help in tracking down the terrorists involved, stating: "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>

**20 August 1998** The United States government, having claimed that Osama bin-Laden was behind the bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, launched military attacks, involving 75 Cruise missiles, on installations said to be part of 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>

**20 August 1998** 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>5</sup> Secretary Cohen also stated that Osama bin-Laden "has had some financial interest in contributing to... this

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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> 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).

particular facility”.<sup>6</sup> The American government said that it “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>7</sup> It was also claimed that the al-Shifa facility was heavily guarded and patrolled by the Sudanese military.<sup>8</sup>

**20 August 1998** Almost immediately after the American attack the Sudanese government condemned the attack, calling it “a criminal act” against Sudan.<sup>9</sup> The Sudanese President, Omer al-Bashir, said that Sudan would bring an official complaint about 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>10</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>11</sup>

**20 August 1998** The German ambassador to Sudan, Werner Daum, immediately challenged United States claims about the factory. In a communication to the German foreign ministry written within hours of the attack he stated that the factory had no disguise and there was nothing secret about the site, and reported: “One can’t, even if one wants to, describe the Shifa firm as a chemical factory.”<sup>12</sup>

**21 August 1998** British prime minister Tony Blair gives his support to the American missile strikes: “I strongly support this American action against international terrorists.”<sup>13</sup>

**21 August 1998** 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, stated in connection with American claims of chemical warfare links between Sudan and Iraq that:

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>14</sup>

**21 August 1998** 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>15</sup>

**22 August 1998** In its official complaint to the United Nations Security Council, the Sudanese government condemned the American attack on the factory, stating that the factory was privately owned and produced more than half of Sudan’s need for

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

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

<sup>9</sup> ‘Information minister accuses U.S. of “criminal” attack’, News Article by Associated Press on August 20, 1998 at 15:38:23.

<sup>10</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>11</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>12</sup> ‘Sudanese plant “not built for weapons”’, *The Observer*, 30 August 1998.

<sup>13</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>14</sup> ‘Experts Hear Tales, but Evidence Scarce: Sharing Efforts in Weapons?’, ABCNews.com, 21 August, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Support and criticism of Blair’s stance’, BBC News Online: United Kingdom, Friday, August 21, 1998 at 09:54 GMT 10:54 UK.

medicines. 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>16</sup> 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... 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.

**22 August 1998** The Sudanese president invited the United States Congress to send a fact-finding mission..<sup>17</sup>

**22 August 1998** Tom Carnaffin, a British engineer who had helped to build and equip the al-Shifa factory, and who had worked there as a technical manager for four years, challenged American claims that it could have been used to manufacture chemical weapons: "I have intimate knowledge of that factory and it just does not lend itself to the manufacture of chemical weapons."

**22 August 1998** British businessman Peter Cockburn also 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>18</sup>

**22 August 1998** 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>19</sup>

**23 August 1998** The British Sunday newspaper, *The Observer*, 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 newspaper reported that the American military had flown high-tech missions over the factory and had been unable to find nerve gas traces. *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."

**23 August 1998** The League of Arab States, made up of 22 Arab countries, condemned the United States missile strike on Sudan, calling the attack "a blatant violation" of the Charter of the U.N.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</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>17</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>18</sup> Letter to the Editor, *The Daily Telegraph*, London, 22nd August 1998.

<sup>19</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>20</sup> 'League of Arab States Supporting Sudan', News Article by XINHUA on August 23, 1998 at 18:29:38.

**23 August 1998** The Organisation of the Islamic Conference, a pan-Islamic organisation representing Islamic countries condemned the American missile strike on Sudan.

**23 August 1998** Irwin Armstrong, a British film journalist, who had visited, filmed and photographed the plant in August 1997, publicly challenged the American claims. He said 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: "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>21</sup>

**23 August 1998** Ghazi Suleiman, the lawyer, and leading opponent of the Sudanese government, representing Salah Idris, the owner of the al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory denied that the factory had any links to Osama bin-Laden, and stated that the factory produced only drugs, not chemical weapons: "I think the Americans are under bad information and they are not well briefed"

He stated that the factory had employed three hundred workers, supporting some three thousand people. 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.

**24 August 1998** Associated Press reported 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>22</sup>

**24 August 1998** Journalists from around the world continue to flood into Khartoum. CNN's Mike Hanna reported that the Sudanese government:

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>23</sup>

**24 August 1998** *The Guardian* journalist David Hirst reported that:

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.

**24 August 1998** *The Economist* also visited the scene of the American missile attack, and reported the following:

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<sup>21</sup> *The Observer* on 23 August

<sup>22</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>23</sup> 'Sudan Continues to Protest U.S. Bombings', Aired August 24, 1998 at 12:04 a.m. ET.

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>24</sup>

**24 August 1998** In its investigations of the ownership of the factory CNN reported that:

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>25</sup>

**24 August 1998** President Bashir 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>26</sup>

**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>27</sup>

**24 August 1998** The United Nations Security Council, under pressure from the United States, postponed a decision on whether or not to send a verification 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>28</sup>

**24 August 1998** The White House press spokesman, Mike McCurry, refused to identify the alleged compound that the American government claimed was its "physical evidence", stating: "The nature of that information is classified now."<sup>29</sup>

**24 August 1998** Donald Anderson MP, the chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the British House of Commons, asked for clear evidence to be made available to the British parliament: "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>30</sup>

**24 August 1998** The British government's support for the American claim of "self-defence" in its missile attack on the al-Shifa factory was challenged by Professor Chris Brown, of the University of Southampton, who 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

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<sup>24</sup> *The Economist*, 29 August 1998.

<sup>25</sup> 'Sudan Continues to Protest U.S. Bombings', Aired August 24, 1998 at 12:04 a.m. ET.

<sup>26</sup> 'U.S. Tells Sudan It Wasn't Personal', News Article by Associated Press on August 24, 1998 at 09:52:42.

<sup>27</sup> 'Sudanese president: Clinton 'war criminal' for missile strike', News Article by Associated Press on August 24, 1998 at 16:55:39.

<sup>28</sup> 'US "reveals" nerve gas evidence', BBC World: Africa news, Tuesday, August 25, 1998 Published at 10:42 GMT 11:42 UK.

<sup>29</sup> 'US Confident of Attacks' Success', News Article by UPI on August 24, 1998 at 26:50:41

<sup>30</sup> 'CIA "has residue from Shifa plant"', *The Guardian*, 25 August 1998.

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>31</sup>

**25 August 1998** *The Washington Post* reported that visiting reporters from American, British, French, German, Japanese and Arab media outlets were “picking through the rubble”.

**25 August 1998** 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>32</sup>

**25 August 1998** *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.

**25 August 1998** 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>33</sup>

**25 August 1998** 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>34</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>35</sup>

**25 August 1998** The United States ambassador to the United Nations, Bill Richardson, admitted that the American government had not presented its evidence in support of its attack on the al-Shifa plant to the United Nations Security Council, but

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<sup>31</sup> Letters to the Editor, *The Guardian*, 24 August 1998.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Sample From Sudan Plant Said to Link It to Weapons’, *International Herald Tribune*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>33</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>34</sup> ‘U.S. Intelligence Cites Iraqi Tie to Sudan Plant’, News Article by Associated Press on August 25, 1998 at 20:23:36.

<sup>35</sup> ‘U.S. Intelligence defends VX-Sudan link’, News Article by Reuters on August 25, 1998 at 7:27 PM EDT.

that it had been shown to United States congressional leaders. Richardson stated that “We believe that is sufficient”.<sup>36</sup>

**25 August 1998** The Sudanese government declared its intention to bring the al-Shifa incident before the International Court of Justice in The Hague: “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>37</sup>

**25 August 1998** 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>38</sup>

**25 August 1998** The Sudanese government make public the fact that al-Shifa plant 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>39</sup>

**25 August 1998** Associated Press reported on a change in the American approach: “Intelligence officials are leaning toward the theory that Iraq was spreading its knowledge of chemical weapons production to other Muslim countries.”<sup>40</sup>

**25 August 1998** In an open letter to the British Prime Minister, the London-based Sudan Foundation, quoted an earlier White House statement made on 17 February, and carried by Reuters, that “We have no credible evidence that Iraq has exported weapons of mass destruction technology to other countries since the Gulf War”.<sup>41</sup>

**26 August 1998** 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>42</sup>

**26 August 1998** 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.”<sup>43</sup>

**26 August 1998** Under intense international and national pressure to identify the compound the American government claimed to be its conclusive evidence for VX nerve gas production at the al-Shifa plant, the American Under Secretary of State, Mr Thomas Pickering, briefed journalists on the physical evidence held by the United States government:

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

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Sudan’s plea for inquiry is spurned’, *The Financial Times*, 25 August 1998.

<sup>37</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>38</sup> ‘Sudan dismisses US factory-attack explanation’, News Article by *Agence France Presse* on August 25, 1998 at 12:55:34.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Pharmaceutical is Sudan’s only “oil-for-food” export’, News Article by Reuters on August 25, 1998 at 4:57 PM EDT.

<sup>40</sup> ‘U.S. Intelligence Cites Iraqi Tie to Sudan Plant’, News Article by Associated Press on August 25, 1998 at 20:23:36.

<sup>41</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>42</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>43</sup> ‘White House Has Trouble Explaining Attack on Sudan. More Questions Than Answers’, ABCNews.com, Barbara Starr, Washington, August 26, 1998.

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>44</sup>

An American intelligence official stated in briefing journalists 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>45</sup>

**26 August 1998** There also appeared to be confusion in the official American government claims about the Empta compound. 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>46</sup>

**26 August 1998** Professor R J P Williams FRS, at Oxford University's Inorganic Chemistry Laboratory, directly challenged the American claims about Empta, 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>47</sup>

**26 August 1998** *The Independent* newspaper reported that American government claims about Empta had been challenged by chemical warfare specialists: "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."

**26 August 1998** *The Washington Post* reported in relation to earlier American claims of a financial link between al-Shifa and Osama bin-Laden, that: "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."

**26 August 1998** ABC News reported that the United States administration was itself unsure of its claims:

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<sup>44</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>45</sup> 'US strives to justify aid strike on Sudan attack on factory', *The Independent*, 26 August 1998.

<sup>46</sup> 'Smoking Gun' for Sudan Raid Now in Doubt', *The Chicago Tribune*, 28 August 1998.

<sup>47</sup> Letters to the Editor, *The Independent*, 26 August 1998.



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>48</sup>

**26 August 1998** *The Financial Times* interviewed a European diplomat in Khartoum who said in connection with the missile strike 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 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.

**27 August 1998** *The New York Times* challenged the American government's claim that Empta had no commercial applications: "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." *The New York Times* cited the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons 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. *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.

**27 August 1998** 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>49</sup>

**27 August 1998** 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>50</sup>

**27 August 1998** The United States government eventually conceded that the al-Shifa factory had in fact been commercially producing medicines and drugs. State Department spokesman James Foley admitted, for example: "That facility may very well have been producing pharmaceuticals."<sup>51</sup>

**27 August 1998** *The Guardian* newspaper interviewed a European diplomat in Khartoum who questioned present and previous American claims about Sudan:

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.

**27 August 1998** *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

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<sup>48</sup> 'White House Has Trouble Explaining Attack on Sudan. More Questions Than Answers', ABCNews.com, Barbara Starr, Washington, August 26, 1998.

<sup>49</sup> 'Possible Benign Use Is Seen for Chemical At Factory in Sudan', *The New York Times*, 27 August, 1998.

<sup>50</sup> *The Financial Times*, 27 August 1998.

<sup>51</sup> 'Sudan's rogue regime savours sudden public relations victory. Harshes critic a poster boy in counter-attack against U.S.', *The Toronto Star*, 29 August 1998.

who said that: "There was absolutely nothing secret about the plant and there never has been."

**27 August 1998** *The Financial Times*, in reporting on British reaction to the American attack, and Tony Blair's uncritical support for the strike on Khartoum, stated that:

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".

**28 August 1998** 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>52</sup>

**28 August 1998** *The Guardian* reports that: "Several American experts in chemical warfare say there is an agricultural insecticide, with similar properties, that can be easily mistaken for Empta." *The Guardian* also reported that: "a search of scientific papers showed that it could be used in a variety of circumstances."

**28 August 1998** Just over a week after the destruction of the al-Shifa factory, a United States Defence Department spokesman stated in relation to the plant: "There may have been better places to go. That doesn't mean it was the wrong place to go."<sup>53</sup>

**28 August 1998** *The Guardian* reported on new allegations that the American government were using to justify the al-Shifa strike: "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>54</sup>

**28 August 1998** Interviewed by *The Chicago Tribune*, Thomas Carnaffin, one of the men who built the plant, 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>55</sup>

**29 August 1998** *The Times* confirmed that the Clinton Administration had conceded the al-Shifa factory was a commercial producer of drugs: "Now they admit it made 60 percent of Sudan's medicine."

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<sup>52</sup> "Smoking Gun" for Sudan Raid Now in Doubt', *The Chicago Tribune*, 28 August 1998.

<sup>53</sup> 'Sudanese plant "not built for weapons"', *The Observer*, 30 August 1998.

<sup>54</sup> 'Expert queries US labelling of Sudan chemical', *The Guardian*, 28 August 1998.

<sup>55</sup> "Smoking Gun" For Sudan Raid Now in Doubt', *The Chigago Tribune*, 28 August 1998.

**29 August 1998** Andrew Mackinlay MP publicly called for evidence from the United States and British governments for the bombing of the al-Shifa plant:

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>56</sup>

**30 August 1998** After just over one week of sifting through American government claims, *The Observer* spoke of "a catalogue of US misinformation, glaring omissions and intelligence errors about the function of the plant."<sup>57</sup> *The Observer* has reported 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.

**30 August 1998** The factory's American designer, Henry Jobe, of the MSD Pharmaceutical Company, denied American government claims: "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>58</sup> He 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."

**30 August 1998** The Sudanese government reiterated the need for a fact-finding mission 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>59</sup>

**30 August 1998** One week after the American attack on the al-Shifa factory, despite numerous international calls for an independent enquiry into the incident, American ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson was still saying: "We don't think an investigation is needed. We don't think anything need to be put to rest."<sup>60</sup>

**30 August 1998** *The Observer* newspaper reports that American intelligence sources were moving to "less and less credible positions".<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> 'Blair defends Sudan missile raid as UK envoys pull out', *The Scotsman*, 29 August 1998.

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

<sup>58</sup> 'Sudanese plant "not built for weapons"', *The Observer*, 30 August 1998.

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

<sup>60</sup> 'No international probe needed for Sudan bombing: Richardson', News Article by *Agence France Presse* on August 30, 1998 at 12:15:50.

<sup>61</sup> 'Sudanese plant "not built for weapons"', *The Observer*, 30 August 1998.