

# U.S. State Dept. blocked FBI-Sudan cooperation on embassy bombings

by Linda de Hoyos

The U.S. State Department thwarted an investigation into two suspects in the Aug. 7, 1998, bombing of the U.S. embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya, which had killed more than 250 people, including 12 Americans, according to reports from MSNBC news filed on July 29.

MSNBC international editor Michael Moran reported that on Aug. 8, 1998, one day after the bombing, authorities in Sudan arrested two men they considered suspects in the Nairobi bomb-attack. The two were arrested as they stepped off a Kenyan Airways flight direct from Nairobi, because they were holding fake Pakistani passports. The Sudan government immediately informed the United States government that it was holding two suspects in the bombing, and invited U.S. law enforcement officials to Sudan in order to interrogate the two. But, according to Moran, the FBI's attempts to take up the offer and carry out the investigation in Sudan, were blocked by the U.S. State Department.

Instead, on Aug. 20, 1998, without warning or even an official protest lodged against Sudan on the U.S. embassy bombings, U.S. cruise missiles demolished the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum, Sudan, on the basis of reports—now understood to be false—that the plant was financially linked to the Saudi alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden, and that it was producing chemical weapons.

Moran cited as sources for his story two unnamed “senior law enforcement officials,” diplomatic sources, and confirming documents. “The law enforcement officials said that evidence suggested that the two men held in Sudan were directly linked to the Nairobi bombing and that they had intimate knowledge of the alleged guerrilla chief Osama bin Laden. Nonetheless, these officials said, the State Department refused to allow an FBI team to travel to the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, to discuss apprehending the suspects.”

Moran noted that a “U.S. source close to the investigation” of the two bombings, said that “there was evidence that they [the two arrested suspects] knew a great deal about the bin Laden organization and about its future plans. That is what really has the FBI fuming.”

According to Moran, the State Department blocked the

investigation because it said Sudan was on the list of state sponsors of terrorism. “The rationale was weak and it was in my view, unconscionable,” said the senior law enforcement official. “State simply would not let us even discuss the issue with the Sudanese.”

Even before the embassy bombings, as Moran noted, the Sudan government had been offering to work with the United States *against* terrorism. Sudan's Ambassador to the United States Mahdi Ibrahim Mohammed stated in a press conference on Sept. 2 that in May 1998, “I delivered a formal letter to a senior official of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, offering to establish a joint effort between our external security bureau to combat international terrorism. We thought our offer of cooperation with U.S. law enforcement officials would be welcomed. But after conferring with the administration, the FBI politely refused our offer.”

When such offers of help went so far as to include the arrest of suspects in a terror-bombing aimed at the United States, the offer was still refused on the advice of the State Department, where U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Susan Rice, with her sponsor, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, continue to pursue a policy of total war against Sudan concocted from London and Tel Aviv.

White House spokesman David Leavy on July 30 denied the Moran story, saying that “no one at the White House knows anything” about the FBI being blocked by another government agency in its efforts to investigate. State Department spokesman Philip Reeker further protested that the Moran story was “fundamentally inaccurate,” and then said that the State Department and the FBI have had a cooperative relationship on the issue of the bombings and attitude toward Sudan “all along.”

But Reeker's claim is contradicted by the fact that soon after the Aug. 20, 1998 U.S. bombing of the Al-Shifa plant, FBI Director Louis Freeh publicly aired his consternation over the attack, stating that the FBI had never been consulted on the intelligence concerning the plant or the attack, which was carried out purportedly in response to the bombings of the U.S. embassies which were under FBI investigation.

## Washington disputes

That Moran was given his story, along with corroborating documents, by senior law enforcement officials, is but one indication of the continuing brawl within the U.S. intelligence community on the issue of U.S. relations to Sudan and the proper line of investigation on terrorism. The U.S. bombing of the Al-Shifa plant is considered to be one of the most controversial foreign policy actions taken by the Clinton administration.

On the one side, since November 1997, U.S. policy toward Sudan has been held hostage at the State Department by Rice and the gang that put the unqualified Oxford graduate into that post, including Roger Winter, executive director of the U.S. Committee for Refugees; Rep. Donald Payne (D-N.J.),

a member of the House subcommittees on Africa and Human Rights and International Operations; and Secretary of State Albright. The policy has been war with Khartoum, under any pretext or guise.

In the course of 1998, the bombing of the Al-Shifa plant, combined with the continuing military failure of the British- and U.S.-backed Sudanese People's Liberation Army of John Garang, has forced an open debate on the entire policy.

Soon after the Al-Shifa bombing, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* aired stories that showed that the evidence used to motivate the bombing was not only inconclusive but false, and that U.S. relations with Sudan had continually fallen victim to false intelligence reports.

No evidence has been put forward to prove that the Al-Shifa plant was involved in producing chemical weapons. On Aug. 29, the *New York Times* reported that the evidence on the plant had "proven to be inaccurate, misleading, or open to question." On Aug. 30, it was reported that Germany's Ambassador to Sudan, Werner Daum, had cabled his Foreign Ministry to say that "one can't, even if one wants to, describe the Al-Shifa firm as a chemical factory."

U.S. officials had claimed that the Al-Shifa plant produced no commercial products. But as the *Los Angeles Times* reported Sept. 1, 1998, "The [U.S.] officials did not believe that the plant actually produced such medicines, because they saw no evidence of such an output when they accessed an Internet website for it. Websites for five other pharmaceutical plants in Sudan listed the medicines produced at those plants." In fact, the United Nations itself had cleared the Al-Shifa plant for export of medicines to Iraq as part of the UN's food-for-fuel program with Iraq.

The allegations that bin Laden was a co-financier of the Al-Shifa plant also turned out to be completely false. In acknowledgment of this fact, in May, the Clinton administration unfroze the assets of the plant's owner, Saudi businessman Salah Idris.

## Investigation blocked

Calls by the Sudan government for a United Nations investigation into the plant, given the United States military attack on Sudanese soil, were blocked. And when former President Jimmy Carter called for a U.S. probe into the Al-Shifa plant and the bombing in September 1998, he was publicly reprimanded by U.S. National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, who claimed that there was "no doubt that it also produced EMPTA," a precursor compound for chemical weapons.

A month after the U.S. bombing of the plant, a *New York Times* story indicated that the mistaken intelligence about the Al-Shifa plant was part of a pattern of falsified intelligence concerning Sudan. "In January 1996," the *Times* reported, "the CIA formally withdrew more than 100 of its intelligence reports on the Sudan after concluding that their source was a fabricator. The reports, many of which dealt with terrorist

threats against Americans in the Sudan, were withdrawn within weeks of decisions to pull American diplomats and spies out of the Sudan because of the dangerous political conditions there."

In short, the false reports had been used to justify the withdrawal of U.S. Ambassador Tim Carney and most of the embassy staff from Sudan. However, once the reports were concluded to be false, *the policy was not reversed*.

This raises the question as to whether the intelligence is being produced to justify a policy *ex post facto*. This is the question also raised in the May 20 editorial page commentary in the *Wall Street Journal* by former CIA station chief in Khartoum Milt Bearden, who retired from the Agency in 1994 after 30 years. The soil sample containing EMPTA allegedly taken from the plant, which is the sole remaining evidence left standing, was taken by an Egyptian agent, reported Bearden, who then asks: "Does it make sense for the sole remaining superpower to attack a small African nation, without warning, based solely on unconfirmed evidence provided by an agent of a third country?" And, a country which at the time was in conflict with Sudan?

"There is an immutable Washington reality," concluded Bearden. "When bad things happen abroad, the immediate choices narrow to intelligence failure or policy failure. Intelligence failure is preferred. But it won't play out this time." Chastising the administration for failing to own up to its mistake and thus damaging its credibility internationally, Bearden noted that the "the questions about El-Shifa will not go away."

Now they have come up again right at the anniversary of the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and just as the United States is making a highly publicized bid once again to apprehend Osama bin Laden from his presumed redoubt in Afghanistan.

On July 30, one day after the Moran story broke, the SPLA of Garang charged that the Sudan government had bombed the villages of Kaaya and Lainya in Western Equatoria province with chemical weapons. The charges were further aired by the Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA), which was renounced by the Norwegian government for its open partisanship toward the SPLA, and was exposed by *EIR* for involvement in gun-running to Garang. The NPA and SPLA demanded a full UN investigation on-site. In contrast to its refusal to investigate the Al-Shifa plant as per the requests of the Sudan government, the UN has complied, sending a medical team over to the alleged chemical target. It is of course Garang's sponsors, including British Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords Baroness Caroline Cox of Christian Solidarity International, who have played a key role in fabricating and circulating fake stories on Sudan.

It would appear that despite the known falsification, the policy against Sudan remains intact in Washington, a policy whose consequences have made a debacle of U.S. policy in all of East and Central Africa.