



**POORLY INFORMED
AND
CONFRONTATIONAL:**

**THE UNITED STATES
CONGRESS
AND SUDAN**

**THE EUROPEAN-SUDANESE
PUBLIC AFFAIRS
COUNCIL**

**17 Bedford Square,
London WC1B 3JA ENGLAND**

Telephone: 020 7323 2722

Telefax: 020 7631 4659

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WORKING FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

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One of the mechanisms of oversight on American governments has traditionally been the United States Congress. With regard to the Sudanese issue, however, the U.S. Congress has itself been caught up in the anti-Sudanese frenzy put into motion by the Clinton Administration. The United States Congress, the legislature of the most powerful country in the world, has passed resolutions on Sudan whose poor drafting and factual inaccuracies would embarrass a high school debating society.

The 1999 Sudan Peace Act, a horrendously misnamed piece of legislation, committed the United States to providing US\$ 16 million to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) rebel movement in southern Sudan to develop "a viable civil authority, and civil and commercial institutions". This despite the fact that John Prendergast, the former Africa director at the National Security Council, has stated that the SPLA has:

attained possession of adequate means of coercion and has terrorized the southern population into passive compliance. The predominant instruments of the movement since 1983 have been and still are coercion and corruption. It has not managed to integrate society around any positive values.¹

The Act also specified that the President detail options and plans for the "provision of nonlethal assistance to participants of the National Democratic Alliance". Both these items served to materially bolster the evidently coercive and corrupt SPLA and to encourage it to continue with its war. The Act spoke in terms of an "ongoing slave trade" in Sudan (S.1453, 106th Congress, 1st Session, 19 November, 1999). A typical Senate resolution (S. Res. 109, 106th Congress, 1st Session, 1 July, 1999) spoke of "slave raids", "slave markets", "tens of thousands" of slaves, stated that Sudan was a "rogue state because of its support for international terrorism", and that it was implicated in the "World Trade Center bombing in New York City in 1993". It further declared that on August 20, 1998, American forces "struck a suspected chemical weapons facility in Khartoum" in retaliation for the bombings of the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The Senate resolution contained, therefore, as two major indictments, the al-Shifa "chemical weapons" factory and the World Trade Center allegations, which were demonstrably untrue.

With regard to the World Trade Center bombing, the Clinton Administration, clearly no friend of Sudan, has on three separate occasions denied that there was any Sudanese government involvement in the World Trade Center bombing. This finding was comprehensively restated in 1996 by Ambassador Philip C. Wilcox Jr., the Department of State's Coordinator for Counterterrorism. On the occasion of the release of the 1995 **Patterns of Global Terrorism**, on 30 April 1996, Ambassador Wilcox made it very clear that there was no Sudanese involvement whatsoever in the World Trade Center bombings:

We have looked very, very carefully and pursued all possible clues that there might be some state sponsorship behind the World Trade Center bombing. We have found no such evidence, in spite of an exhaustive search, that any state was responsible for that crime. Our information indicates that Ramzi Ahmed Yousef and his gang were a group of freelance terrorists, many of whom were trained in Afghanistan, who came from various nations but who did not rely on support from any state.²

The al-Shifa bombing is equally clear cut. The factory had no chemical weapons link whatsoever. There are House and Senate inquiries being pursued at the moment into the al-Shifa bombing fiasco. Several Congressmen have questioned the Administration's grounds for attacking the factory. Senator Pat Roberts, for example, has stated:

[T]he strike in regards to the Khartoum chemical plant cannot be justified... These are pretty harsh words. I know one thing for sure. The intelligence agencies of other countries look at that and they think, 'Wait a minute, if you hit the wrong target or if in fact the justification was not accurate, it is either ineptitude or, to get back to the wag-the-dog theory, something else is going on. That gets to our credibility. And that is why both the administration and the Congress must insist on a

¹ John Prendergast, **Crisis Response: Humanitarian Band-Aids in Sudan and Somalia**, Pluto Press, London, 1997, p.57.

² **Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1996 Briefing**, Press briefing by Ambassador Philip C. Wilcox Jr, Washington-DC, 30 April 1996 on US Government Home Page, at <http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/960430.html>

foreign policy where if you draw a line in the sand, if you make a statement, your credibility is tremendously important.³

This did not stop Senator Roberts from voting for similarly distorted and discredited claims about Sudan in patently flawed legislation and resolutions on Sudan. Congress has therefore clearly included in resolutions on Sudan very serious claims that are clearly inaccurate. If Congress cannot get simple, well-documented facts correct regarding very grave matters such as weapons of mass destruction technology, and the bombing of New York city, many of its other claims about that country must also be questioned.

Other, similarly flawed, resolutions, such as House of Representatives Resolution 75, also passed in 1999, contained all of the above, and spoke of genocide and an “extremist and politicized practice of Islam”. Resolution 75 also called for the provision of anti-aircraft missiles to the SPLA, and to provide the SPLA’s “humanitarian” wing, the SRRA, with funds and assistance.

It can be argued that the Clinton Administration’s questionable Sudan policies have come full circle. The US Congress has been the focus of pressure group politics, by organisations and individuals themselves at least in part reacting to the unjustified and unprecedented demonisation of Sudan by the Clinton Administration. The Administration’s own rhetoric and propaganda about Sudan has painted it into a corner. Deeply questionable and unproven allegations have been accepted at face value by a Congress led on this issue by a handful of anti-Sudanese legislators influenced by questionable and discredited groups such as Christian Solidarity International. These legislators have also aligned themselves with a rebel movement in southern Sudan that has been responsible for some of the most brutal and cold blooded war crimes of the Sudanese conflict.

Even a cursory examination of some of the sources from which the United States Congress draws its information on Sudan explains its poor judgement. The Congress, and the Washington establishment, appear to be content to form their opinions from congressional hearings limited time and time again to the same circle of discredited and partisan anti-Sudanese activists. These include people such as Roger Winter, director of the federally-funded United States Committee of Refugees. He has openly admitted that he was “not neutral in this situation”, and that he “promotes” the “demise” of the Sudanese government. Winter also refers to SPLA-controlled areas as “liberated areas”.⁴

Another frequent “witness” appearing before Congressional hearings has been Baroness Cox, an anti-Sudanese activist associated with Christian Solidarity Worldwide and Christian Solidarity International. Her claims with regard to Sudan have long been questioned.⁵ She has been described as “overeager or misinformed” by reputable human rights activist Alex de Waal, with regard to claims about slavery in Sudan.⁶ Her claims that Sudan was involved in chemical weapons have been denied by the British government and UNSCOM.⁷ Cox’s allegations about genocide in Sudan were contradicted by the British government.⁸ And her assertions, as late as 1999, that Sudan was involved in the World Trade Center bombing have even been contradicted by the Clinton Administration itself. Even the very sympathetic biography of Cox records that full-time humanitarian aid workers in Sudan “feel she is not well-enough informed. She recognizes a bit of the picture, but not all that’s going on”.⁹ In February 2000 a Canadian government report stated that CSI reports “were questioned, and frankly not accepted”.¹⁰ Nonetheless, Baroness Cox is presented to Congress as a key commentator on Sudan.

One further partisan vehicle for anti-Sudanese activity has been the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a body brought into being by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, passed by Congress. This Act requires an annual report on religious freedom. It perhaps comes as no surprise that Sudan features among the five countries cited as “countries of particular concern”. The others are China, Iran, Iraq, and Myanmar.¹¹ Indeed, at the March 2000 United Nations Commission on Human Rights meeting in Geneva, Rabbi David Saperstein, the chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and Ambassador Robert Seiple, U.S. Ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, chose to focus on Sudan during their discussions with non-governmental organisations and the press. It perhaps also comes as no surprise that Saudi

³ ‘Roberts Calls US Missile Attack on Sudan Unjustified’, by Dennis Pearce, **The Wichita Eagle**, 28 October 1998. Senator Roberts is a member of both the Senate Intelligence and Armed Forces Committees.

⁴ Speaking at the ‘Meeting on Religion, Nationalism and Peace in Sudan’, United States Institute of Peace, Washington-DC, 17 September 1997.

⁵ See, for example, **Baroness Cox and Sudan: How Reliable a Witness?**, The British-Sudanese Public Affairs Council, London, 1999.

⁶ De Waal was formerly a co-director of African Rights. Before that he had worked with Africa Watch. He is an acknowledged expert on Sudan.

⁷ House of Lords **Official Report**, 19 March 1998, cols. 818-820.

⁸ House of Lords **Official Report**, 10 December 1998, Written Answers, column 103.

⁹ Andrew Boyd, **Baroness Cox: A Voice for the Voiceless**, Lion Publishing, Oxford, 1998, p.324.

¹⁰ John Harker, **Human Security in Sudan: The Report of a Canadian Assessment Mission**, Prepared for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ottawa, January 2000, available at <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc-foreignp-3110186-e.pdf>

¹¹ ‘U.S. Adds Religious Freedom to Old Sanctions’, News Article by Reuters on 23 December 1999.

Arabia was not singled out in the Congressionally-funded Commission's first annual report on religious freedom. nor was Saudi Arabia, or any other countries apart from Sudan and China, mentioned in the comments of Rabbi Saperstein and Ambassador Seiple during their presentation at the Commission on Human Rights.¹²

The double standards of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom are central to its usefulness to the Clinton Administration. These double standards were highlighted by the fact that the Commission has also taken a stance, on grounds of "religious freedom" against investment in Sudanese oil projects, while it remains mute with regard to the Saudi Arabian oil industry.¹³ It is a matter of record that the Sudanese government has on several occasions invited the U.S. State Department's Committee on Religious Freedom, the Commission's forerunner, to visit Sudan to assess at first hand the religious situation in Sudan. They never visited.

Even Congressional organisations such as the House Republican research committee, the Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, have produced patently false claims with regard to Sudan. In February 1998, this organisation claimed, amongst other things, that in the wake of the Gulf War, Iraq had secretly transferred 400 Scud missile systems, some twelve hundred vehicles, to Sudan. This was supposedly accomplished in the face of the unprecedented satellite, electronic and physical surveillance of that country by the United States, the United Nations and other concerned members of the international community. Even the Clinton Administration felt it had to contradict these wild claims: "We have no credible evidence that Iraq has exported weapons of mass destruction technology to other countries since the (1991) Gulf War."¹⁴

Claims made in the House Task Force report were also contradicted by the British government, the British Defence Intelligence Staff, and UNSCOM, the United Nations body tasked with disarming Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction. On 19 March 1998, the British government stated:

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 [Ministry of Defence] have similarly written a critique which does not support the report's findings...Nor has the United Nations Special Commission reported any evidence of such transfers since the Gulf War conflict and the imposition of sanctions in 1991.¹⁵

The Federation of American Scientists has also stated with regard to this report that "material produced by this Task Force has historically consisted of an uneven admixture of unusually detailed information and blatantly incredible fabrications".¹⁶

"Opinion" on Sudan has also in part been led by Congressionally-funded bodies such as the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). While claiming, despite its federal funding, to be "independent" and "nonpartisan", USIP has merely echoed the Administration line on Sudan. It has held "consultations" on Sudan during which the Sudanese government perspective was noticeably absent. Present were several Sudanese opposition groups, Sudan "experts" such as John Prendergast and Roger Winter, as well as Congressional aides and government departments hostile to Sudan.¹⁷ Given that the board of directors of the United States Institute of Peace includes senior Administration officials, including intelligence and defence chiefs, USIP's anti-Sudanese stance is unsurprising.

Given that the United States Congress derives at least some of its information regarding Sudan from the above selective, partisan and questionable sources, it is not surprising that it is as ill-informed as it so clearly is regarding the reality of Sudan.

In passing, it should be mentioned that there is also considerable hypocrisy with regard to Congressional positions on Sudan. In April 1998, for example, the Clinton Administration, in response to lobbying from its grain producers, lifted sanctions with regard to Sudanese imports of grain. An Administration official stated that: "I believe the change came from a lot of pressure from [Congress], from agricultural senators who want to sell their wheat".¹⁸

¹² 'Transcript: Amb. Seiple/Rabbi Saperstein on Religious Freedom', The Office of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State, 31 March 2000, Web site: usinfo.state.gov

¹³ 'U.S. Religion Task Force to Scrutinize CNPC's Stock Offer for Sudanese Ties', **The Wall Street Journal**, 22 December 1999.

¹⁴ 'White House Says No Sign Iraq Exported Arms', News Article by Reuters on 17 February 1998 at 10:20:45.

¹⁵ House of Lords **Official Report**, Westminster, 19 March 1998, cols. 818-820.

¹⁶ See, 'Missiles - Sudan', Federation of American Scientists, Washington, at <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/sudan/missile/>

¹⁷ See, for example, **A New Approach to Peace in Sudan**, United States Institute of Peace, Washington-DC, 1999.

¹⁸ See, for example, 'US to Lift Sanctions on Iran, Libya and Sudan', News Article by Reuters on 28 April 1998 at 10:58:28; 'Sudan Says US Easing Sanctions in Own Interest', News Article by Reuters on 29 April 1998 at 10:03:54; and 'Sudan Shrugs Off US Easing of Sanctions', News Article by Reuters on 29 April 1998 at 12:13:03.

