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Iraq Making Lethal Gas In Covert Sudan Pact

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Saddam hides secret arsenal behind women and children.

IRAQ is manufacturing poisonous gas at a secret location in **Sudan**. Bypassing the ban on weapons of mass destruction which the United Nations imposed on Baghdad after its defeat in the Gulf war, **Saddam** Hussein and the Islamist government of General Omar al Bashir in Khartoum are making and stockpiling mustard gas for their mutual benefit.

The Sunday Times has established through military intelligence and diplomatic sources in Kampala, the capital of neighbouring Uganda, that the gas is being made at a facility at Wau, in southwest **Sudan**, and that the Sudanese regime has already used it twice against rebels.

Production began in the autumn of 1995 under a clandestine deal between Khartoum and Baghdad to circumvent the UN's military and trade embargo on Iraq. The deal followed the visit of a high-level Iraqi military delegation, led by the head of the chemical weapons directorate of the Iraqi defence ministry.

In the first phase of the accord Iraq agreed to supply **Sudan** with weapons and pilots to help in its civil war. The co-operation later intensified to include chemical weapons production, the sources said.

Mustard gas was first used in the first world war and was deployed by Iraq in 1982 during its war with Iran. **Saddam's** regime is now the world's acknowledged expert in the use of the gas, having dropped it many times since - notably on the rebellious Kurdish population in northern Iraq, thousands of whom died.

Though not always lethal the gas causes severe damage to the eyes and lungs and horrifying blisters on the skin. It is fairly straightforward to produce and the raw materials are relatively inexpensive.

The Baghdad-Khartoum axis has prospered since Bashir supported **Saddam's** invasion of Kuwait. It is now so strong that Iraq has at least 20 dip lomats stationed at its Khartoum embassy, compared with 19 in New York and 26 in Amman, Jordan, its main opening to the outside world. Many are intelligence agents involved in sidestepping sanctions.

Production at the Wau factory is controlled by the Sudanese military. But Iraqi technicians working there provide the expertise to manufacture the gas and store it safely.

Since production started, the Sudanese armed forces are known to have used mustard gas against the **Sudan** People's Liberation Army (SPLA) on at least two occasions, the sources said.

The first was at Nimule in late 1995 and the second was at Kuya. Both sites are near Juba, the southern capital, which Khartoum is defending with tens of thousands of troops against the SPLA. The bombs were in the form of crude canisters rolled off the back of transport planes. They missed their targets because of poor co-ordination between Sudanese ground troops and the aircraft.

The raids may not have been the only occasions on which chemical weapons have been used in southern **Sudan**. In September 1995, before the Wau factory went into full production, the Sudanese opposition complained that the regime had sent planes piloted by Iraqis to drop chemical weapons around Kadugli and in the Namang mountains in the southern region.

The Sudanese opposition claimed witnesses had said "deaths and injuries occurred among residents and that there was a big change in the colour of the corpses and of animals and trees". Because of the region's remoteness there was no independent confirmation of the report and the type of chemical used could not be identified.

Middle East military experts believed the chemicals were from an early consignment of mustard gas shipped from Iraq to **Sudan** in the aftermath of the Gulf war to evade UN inspections. The Wau factory has given **Sudan** the capability of using its own "home-grown" mustard gas against rebels for the first time instead of relying on foreign suppliers.

While experts have suspected **Sudan** of having a mustard gas factory for some time, this is the first time its location has been pinpointed. The revelation that Iraq has helped its ally develop a full-blown chemical weapons programme comes as fighting in southern **Sudan** intensifies with the SPLA, reinvigorated by increased Ugandan military support building up its forces for a fresh drive to capture Juba.

Any use of mustard gas could well be a watershed in the civil war which has cost the lives of tens of thousands of civilians through fighting, starvation and disease. A big fear is that the Sudanese have managed with Iraqi technical help to perfect a reliable delivery system for the mustard gas produced at Wau.

Sudan is internationally isolated for dabbling in terrorism and for human rights abuses. America, in particular, regards it as a rogue state because it has aided Middle Eastern terrorist movements and was involved in an attempt to assassinate President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. As part of its strategy of neutralising the Sudanese threat, America has recently begun to provide the Ugandan army with military training.

Jon Swain

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