

Owner of bombed pharmaceutical plant wins release of assets, Sudan demands compensation

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On May 3 the Clinton administration lifted its freeze on the bank accounts of Saudi businessman Saleh Idris, the owner of the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum, Sudan that was destroyed by US cruise missiles last August 20. The US had claimed that the plant produced chemical weapons and that Idris had ties to alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden. In the wake of this decision the Sudan government is demanding the United States pay compensation to everyone affected.

The decision to release Idris's funds amounts to tacit admission that the US government claim of a connection between the bombed factory in Sudan and terrorists was a lie. The order to unfreeze the assets came the same day that the government was required to reply to a civil suit filed by Idris on February 26. The Saudi businessman demanded the release of more than \$24 million on deposit at the Bank of America on the grounds that the US had failed to provide any evidence to justify its action.

Ali Nimir, Sudan's minister for Foreign Affairs, said the unfreezing of Mr. Idris's assets was "proof against the allegations" that the Al-Shifa plant was producing chemical weapons. He called for compensation for those affected by the cruise missile attack and for the end of "political, trade and economic sanctions" against the impoverished African country, which the US has put on its list of nations that sponsor terrorism. The bombed factory produced much of Sudan's supply of human and veterinary pharmaceuticals.

Idris, a Sudan-born Saudi citizen, purchased the Al-Shifa plant four months before the US destroyed it following the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Since then he has waged a determined campaign to disprove the claims of the US government

of a link to terrorism. He retained the prominent Washington, DC law firm Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld to represent him. Idris also commissioned independent tests by a leading US chemist of soil samples taken from the site of the plant. The investigation turned up no signs of the manufacture of chemical weapons. Idris also hired a private international security firm, Kroll & Associates, to investigate possible terrorist connections. They found no link between Idris and bin Laden.

Steven R. Ross, one of Idris's attorneys said, "Mr. Idris was a Saudi banker who went to sleep one night and woke up in the morning with the US government describing him as a terrorist."

Idris is considering plans to sue the US government for compensation. With the unfreezing of his bank accounts he is dropping pending civil suits against the US Treasury and Bank of America.

The exposure of US government claims about the missile attack on Sudan raises an obvious question: If the US was prepared to employ such brazen and easily disproven lies to justify its bombing of a defenseless and impoverished country, why should anyone believe the statements of US government officials about the allegedly "humanitarian" reasons for its ongoing assault on Yugoslavia?



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