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'Yellow rain' spread by Soviets, nations silently agree

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Other nations have independently confirmed U.S. charges that "yellow rain" reported in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan is caused by Soviet chemical weapons but have kept quiet for fear of internal repercussions, according to a highly classified government report.

The intelligence analysis, made last year, disputes the theory first stated several years ago and repeated in an article in the current issue of Scientific American that yellow rain is actually a mist made by the feces of millions of high-flying bees.

"Since March 1982," the intelligence report says, "when the U.S. presented to the U.N. its evidence regarding [chemical weapon] and toxin use in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan, a number of nations have indicated privately that their own analysis supports the U.S. conclusions.

"However, for a variety of domestic reasons, most of these countries have refused to make public statements to that effect."

The secret report was prepared by analysts at the Central Intelligence Agency and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency for the National Security Council.

It confirms that the Soviets have tested chemical weapons on humans, a subject about which U.S. intelligence agencies have refused to comment, and rejects the "bee-feces" theory advanced by a Harvard professor, Matthew Meselson.

Since the mid-1970s, hundreds of witnesses have reported that people exposed to the sticky yellow mist — sometimes said to be sprayed from airplanes — suffer blisters, vomiting, diarrhea and death.

According to the report, the United States has made several high-level diplomatic protests to the Soviet Union since then about the

use of yellow rain, but the Soviets have continued to profess their innocence.

But the NSC report states that "while some have tried to explain the presence of toxins in Southeast Asia as natural contamination of pollen-laden bee feces or other naturally

occurring phenomena, the accumulated intelligence data and scientific scrutiny will not support these postulations."

It summarizes evidence supporting the U.S. "yellow rain" charges and provides details about the Soviet role in producing and distributing chemical weapons in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan.

"Scientific analyses of physical samples collected from sites of 'yellow rain' attacks in Laos and Kampuchea, from a Soviet protective gas mask acquired in Afghanistan and of human blood and tissue from 'yellow rain' victims . . . confirmed that toxins were being used as agents of warfare," the report says. "Various mycotoxins, produced by fungi of the Fusarium genus, have been identified as components of 'yellow rain.'"

"Mycotoxins" are lethal substances produced from molds. Production, storage and use of such toxins in warfare is banned by international treaties to which the Soviet Union is a party. The United States has destroyed its own stocks of biological and toxin weapons and currently has only stores of outdated chemical weapons.

According to the report, Soviet scientists have been experimenting in the use of the Fusarium fungus to make toxin weapons since the 1940s.

"The Soviets conducted toxicity studies in humans and investigated techniques for enhancing the toxic effects by combining different toxins," the report states. "It is possible that the 'yellow rain' agent used in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia was derived from this research program."

The report says that, among other things, the bee pollen theory doesn't account for eyewitness reports of the clouds being dispensed from planes and artillery shells, the fact that levels of toxin high enough to cause rapid ill effects in humans would "certainly [be] enough to kill a bee," and that yellow rain has only been observed in war zones.

It says that intelligence data indicates that the Soviets "are directly involved in Laos in the support of

chemical warfare operations, including storage and inspection" of the weapons.

The report says it is "most likely" that the Soviet Union itself produced the weapons but doesn't rule out the possibility that the Soviets have transferred the technology to Southeast Asian countries.

"In Afghanistan, it is clearly Soviet troops which have conducted chemical and toxin warfare operations against the mujahideen," the report adds.

The secret report also details continual Soviet obstinacy in rejecting U.S. behind-the-scenes diplomatic protests regarding the chemical warfare treaty violations.

It reveals that in 1982 former Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko angrily rejected an effort by former Secretary of State Alexander Haig to deliver a U.S. note objecting to Soviet use of chemical agents.

"During the Haig-Gromyko meeting of January 1982, Secretary Haig made a strong presentation on U.S. evidence regarding Soviet complicity in use of 'yellow rain,'" the report states. "Foreign Minister Gromyko reacted angrily, calling the U.S. charges a 'pack of lies,' and refused to accept a 'non-paper' summarizing the U.S. evidence."