

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
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Dear President Tilghman and Dean Slaughter,

I write to express concern about the adequacy of the oversight procedures employed in the preparation of a Princeton doctoral dissertation with which I have been peripherally involved. The dissertation in question is *Yellow Rain Revisited: Lessons learned for the investigation of chemical and biological weapons allegations, May 2005*, by Rebecca Lynn Katz. As you know, the US government allegation, first made in 1981, that trichothecene mycotoxins were being used as weapons against Hmong tribespeople in Laos and Cambodia is a matter of serious dispute bearing on the reliability of US technical intelligence in areas of biology and chemistry.

In September 2002, at the invitation of Ms. Katz and Mr. Del Freeman of the Defense Intelligence Agency where she had been an intern, I traveled to the Battelle Corporation in Crystal City, Virginia to meet with her, Mr. Freeman, and her dissertation advisor, Professor Burton Singer. Joining me was Dr. Jeanne Guillemin, Professor of Sociology at Boston College, who had conducted research on a large body of Hmong interviews and had co-authored articles on the Yellow Rain. It was agreed that the purpose of the meeting was to enlist our help and advice in the dissertation research and it was proposed that I serve as an outside member of the dissertation committee. Mr. Freeman explained his intention, subsequently carried out, to have declassified for the use of Ms. Katz a large body of then classified material. I agreed to make available my own considerable archive. It was understood that all of the declassified material would be made publically available.

Soon after our meeting in Virginia, Ms. Katz sent me a draft prospectus, to which I responded with comments and suggestions, prompting a cordial message from Professor Singer expressing the hope that we might "consult at multiple junctures" and suggesting that we meet in future for "in depth discussion". A few days later, Ms. Katz sent a more complete prospectus in which I am listed as a proposed dissertation committee member. That was the last I knew about the dissertation until a few weeks ago when a colleague sent me a copy of the completed document, now also available from Amazon.com, which I have only now had time to read.

The dissertation, submitted to the Princeton Faculty in May 2005 concluded that "There appears to be sufficient information from a variety of sources to make a confident

Evaluation by the UK. The Porton laboratory was heavily involved in analysis of environmental and biomedical samples from alleged attacks for trichothecenes. Some were aliquots of samples reported positive by the US. The dissertation accurately quotes the 2002 Parliamentary testimony of Thomas Inch, Deputy Chief Scientific Officer at Porton until 1985, which states "In this country our scientific community was never convinced; nothing really held together; the materials in question were insufficiently toxic; there was a whole raft of information that just did not fit. Eventually it was proven to our satisfaction that yellow rain was simply the droppings from flocks of bees."

But the dissertation also states, citing a statement of the Armed Forces Medical Intelligence Center that, on the contrary, the British "concluded that there was a 'strong presumption' that mycotoxins were being used as weapons in Southeast Asia". From these two contrasting portrayals of the UK position, the dissertation concludes that "Thus, it is not entirely clear what the United Kingdom believed with respect to Yellow Rain."

While it might be argued, improbably, that the cited US intelligence source knew the UK position better than did Dr. Inch, had I been consulted, I would have provided Ms. Katz with a statement by the then Director of Porton Down, Dr. Graham Pearson, writing in his official capacity and expressing in 1987 the same view as that of Dr. Inch, his former subordinate.

These examples are representative of the numerous materials which Ms. (now Doctor) Katz) would have been able to include in her considerations if she had been encouraged by her advisors to search the record more broadly and also to avail herself of the materials at Harvard. Additional materials here that would have been of relevance to her research include memoranda regarding trichothecene analyses done in French and Swedish military laboratories; extensive records and transcripts of translated testimony of alleged victims; detailed studies of the pattern of reported symptoms; additional US Government telegrams and statements by US officials on the scene questioning the reliability of the alleged witnesses; laboratory and field studies of materials claimed by alleged witnesses to be the toxic material itself; field studies by US officials of bee feces showers in Thailand; and numerous other items.

Where a dissertation is heavily based on formerly classified materials and those materials are provided by an entity that is under criticism for the express use of a doctoral candidate whose dissertation concerns the matter in dispute, there is an inherent risk of selective provision of information and attendant bias. The essential safeguard is oversight to ensure that every effort is made to obtain and consider possibly countervailing information – as was not done in this case.

Sincerely,

Mattina Mesels

assessment that a chemical or toxin agent was used...". The dissertation makes extensive use of the declassified material provided to Ms. Katz mainly or perhaps entirely by the US Armed Forces Medical Intelligence Center (AFMIC), which had the lead role in the analysis and interpretation of biomedical samples from alleged victims of yellow rain, but gives inadequate attention to other available relevant materials and is without benefit of the additional documents and consultation that we would have been glad to provide. This has led to a doctoral dissertation that risks being seen as an attempt of a part of the US intelligence community to vindicate an investigation and analysis that I, my colleagues, and other knowledgeable individuals believe to have been badly flawed and grossly misleading. Let me cite a few examples.

Reliability of analyses for mycotoxins. The case for toxin warfare rests on the reliability of laboratory analyses for trichothecenes in samples from alleged attacks. Although the dissertation points out some of the difficulties and shortcomings of the analyses done in the US, it accords a high confidence rank to the overall results. In particular, the dissertation states that "All biomedical control samples analysed as part of the United States investigation were negative." But among the documents I would have encouraged Ms. Katz to consider and evaluate are:

(1) A 1987 report written by an AFMIC staff member involved in the sample evaluation program, apparently not given to Ms. Katz, stating that there were numerous false positives in reports from the Minnesota laboratory on which the US claims are primarily based and that reports of mycotoxins in biomedical samples from alleged victims therefore "cannot be used as evidence that mycotoxins were used as CW agents in Southeast Asia".

(2) A letter from the DoD to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee stating that none of the 251 environmental samples from alleged attacks analyzed at the US Army Chemical Research and Development Laboratory was found to contain mycotoxins.

(3) A statement to the House of Commons by the responsible minister that none of the samples analysed at the MoD Chemical Defense Establishment at Porton Down had been found to contain mycotoxins.

(4) A letter from the Director of Porton stating that none of the *ca* 50 environmental and *ca* 20 biomedical samples from alleged attacks analyzed at Porton had been found to contain mycotoxins.

(5) A memorandum of my visit to Porton in 1984 where I was told that scientists there, using advanced and scrupulously controlled methods, had been unable to detect mycotoxins in environmental and biomedical samples from alleged attacks, including a sample that had been reported strongly positive by the Minnesota lab and suspected that the positive US reports resulted from contamination.

Lao Pilot: As evidence for chemical warfare, the dissertation cites a "Lao L-19 pilot who defected and reported involvement in chemical attacks". While the pilot claimed that he had conducted chemical attacks, I would have suggested that Ms. Katz consider a telegram to Washington from the US Embassy in Bangkok, apparently not provided to Ms. Katz, reporting an interview with the Lao pilot done at the request of the Embassy by a US Air Force pilot who concluded it was "very unlikely that the rockets fired contained toxic CW agents."