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TO USIA WASHDC 5982
SECSTATE WASHDC 7606
SECDEF WASHDC
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

REVIEWED by MSJ DATE 11/3/88
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USIA
FOR: USIA ATTN. P/FW (HUDSON) AND INFO. EU; STATE FOR
EUR/P AND EAP/P; SECDEF FOR PA SANTANA; BANGKOK FOR PAO.

E.O. 12356 N/A
SUBJECT: BBC TV "HORIZON" DOCUMENTARY: "BIOLOGY AT WAR--
THE MYSTERY OF YELLOW RAIN."

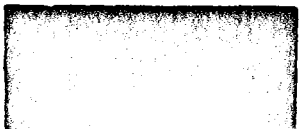
SUMMARY: THIS 60-MINUTE DOCUMENTARY, BROADCAST
PRIME-TIME, MAY 15, AND WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY JEREMY
TAYLOR, EXAMINED THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S CLAIM THAT THE
SOVIET UNION AND ITS ALLIES HAVE USED A CHEMICAL
WEAPON--"YELLOW RAIN"--IN S.E. ASIA AND AFGHANISTAN, AND
CONTENDED THAT THE U.S. INTERPRETATION OF AVAILABLE
EVIDENCE WAS UNSOUND. A RIGOROUS, IF NOT METHODOICAL
EXERCISE IN "DETECTIVE WORK," THE PROGRAM DID NOT ATTEMPT
TO REACH ANY CONCLUSION OTHER THAN SUGGESTING THAT, IF
CHEMICAL WEAPONS TREATIES HAD BEEN VIOLATED, "YELLOW RAIN"
WAS UNLIKELY TO BE THE CAUSE, AND THAT THE "BEE-EXCREMENT"
THEORY WENT FURTHEST TO EXPLAIN YELLOW RAIN'S "MYSTERY."
END SUMMARY.

1. AMONG THOSE INTERVIEWED, MOST NOTABLE WERE CONGRESSMAN
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JIM LEACH, WHO ARGUED THE ADMINISTRATION'S CASE, AND DR.

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CHESTER MIRCCHA, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, ON WHOSE RESEARCH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S ALLEGATIONS WERE SAID LARGELY TO DEPEND. HOWEVER, THOSE WHO SOUGHT TO REFUTE THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S CASE WERE GIVEN MOST PLAY: PROF. MATHEW MESELSON, HARVARD; AND GRANT EVANS, SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGIST AND AUTHOR OF "THE YELLOW RAINMAKERS." AS WELL AS INTERVIEWING THESE PROMINENT FIGURES, THE PROGRAM RELIED HEAVILY ON LOCATION FOOTAGE IN NORTHERN THAILAND AND LAOS, FEATURING CONVERSATIONS WITH HMONG TRIBESPEOPLE.

3. THE PROGRAM POINTED TO THE PHYSICAL EVIDENCE OF MYCOTOXINS IN YELLOW RAIN SAMPLES (WHICH, ACCORDING TO HORIZON, U.S. OFFICIALS HAD THOUGHT TO CONSTITUTE THE "SMOKING GUN" OF HARD-AND-FAST PROOF), AND ALLEGED THAT SOME SCIENTISTS HAD CLAIMED THAT THIS EVIDENCE WAS INCONCLUSIVE. PROF. MESELSON ARGUED THAT YELLOW RAIN WAS A NATURAL PHENOMENON, CAUSED BY FLIGHTS OF DEFECATING BEES. HOWEVER, THE LINK BETWEEN BEE-EXCREMENT AND THE REPORTED CASES OF DEATH AND SICKNESS THROUGH EXPOSURE TO YELLOW RAIN, WHICH JIM LEACH GAVE EXAMPLES OF, WAS NOT ADEQUATELY EXPLAINED, THOUGH THE HYPOTHESIS THAT BEE-EXCREMENT MIGHT SOMETIMES LAND ON FUNGI, ON WHICH MYCOTOXINS OCCUR, AND THAT FUNGI OFTEN FOUND ITS WAY INTO THE DIET OF NATIVES, WAS CITED.

4. MUCH OF THE DOCUMENTARY FOLLOWED GRANT EVANS' TRAVELS IN LAOS. HE SUPPORTED MESELSON'S THEORIES, BUT WENT FURTHER IN ATTEMPTING TO EXPLAIN REFUGEES' STORIES OF CHEMICAL ATTACK IN TERMS OF A "MYTH" I.E. THE RESPONSE OF AN ORAL SOCIETY TO YEARS OF EXPOSURE TO 20TH CENTURY WAR, IN WHICH AIR-RAIDS AND "BEE-DEFECATION" HAD BECOME LINKED IN THE MINDS OF LAOTIANS. IN THIS ATTEMPT HE WAS

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SUPPORTED BY TWO QUAKERS, JACQUI CHAGNON AND ROGER RUMPF, WHO HAD LIVED IN LAOS AND RETURNED TO INVESTIGATE YELLOW RAIN. IN FOCUSING ON THESE IDEAS, THE PROGRAM RELIED ON A SELECTIVE HISTORY OF U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE REGION, POINTING PARTICULARLY TO A U.S. PROGRAM IN 1973, WHICH HORIZON CLAIMED WAS AIMED AT DESTROYING THE NARCOTICS TRADE IN S.E. ASIA BY SPRAYING THE LAOTIAN OPIUM CROP WITH HERBICIDE. THE PROGRAM CONSIDERED THIS A "SKELETON IN THE AMERICAN CLOSET" WHICH HAD CONTRIBUTED TO THE YELLOW RAIN "MYTH."

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5. CONCLUSIONS IN THE WORDS OF THE DAIRY TELEGRAPH FOR
THE SUCCEEDING DAYS IN THE LONGER THIS PAINTSTRIKING
DOCUMENTARY WENT ON THE FARTHER IT MOVED FROM ANSWERS TO
THE QUESTIONS IT RAISED. CONCENTRATING ALMOST WHOLLY ON
LAOS AND THE EXPERIENCES OF THE HMONG TRIBESPEOPLE,
HORIZON IGNORED THE ISSUE OF CHEMICAL WARFARE IN
AFGHANISTAN. HOWEVER, GIVEN THE NON-POLEMICAL APPROACH TO
MOST OF THE ISSUES IT RAISED, THE PROGRAM WAS PRIMARILY
CONCERNED WITH COMPARATIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE
EVIDENCE. A CASSETTE OF THIS PROGRAM IS BEING POLISHED TO
B/TV.-ARNOLD

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