

The Lake Nyos Disaster 20 Years After: Revisiting Israeli Connection

By Dibussi Tande

On August 16, 1984, a gas eruption in Lake Monoun in the Western province of Cameroon killed 37. [Reports](#) revealed that "victims suffered vomiting, paralysis, and very rapid death; some lost the outer layer of their skin." Two years later on August 21, 1986, a similar but more deadly incident occurred in Lake Nyos in the Northwest province. Toxic gas emanating from the lake killed some 1834 people along with 3500 livestock within a 12-mile radius. According to [D'Amato & Engel](#),

The "Dead Land" is a perfect allegory to describe the affected areas in the aftermath of this incident. The once fertile lands in the Camerounian villages of Sobum, Chah, Koshing, and Nyos lay barren and defoliated, with charred remains of burnt crops and carcasses of rotting animals. Survivors of the disaster who were evacuated complained of heartburn, eye lesions, and neurological problems such as monoplegia, a condition that affects one muscle or group of muscles, one limb or one part of the body, and paraplegia, paralysis of the lower part of the body and limbs.

One survivor, Pa Ful Jeremiah (cited in *Times & Life* Vol. 1, no. 4. Sept. 1991, p. 7), describes the scene thus:

We thought the lake had overflowed its banks. Many people were so confused especially women and children. In Panic and fright they ran out of houses to escape from unknown and dropped dead like chickens during a plague. Some of us managed to keep our heads straight and only survived through the will of God. The next day we discovered that hundreds of people had died. They had burns on their bodies. It was only after another day that the first people arrived and decided that we should arrange to bury the dead.

From the beginning, scientists were confounded by the disaster. As [George Kling](#), an ecologist at the University of Michigan recalls, "It was one of the most baffling disasters scientists have ever investigated. Lakes just don't rise up and wipe out thousands of people."

In his 2003 [award-winning article](#) on the Lake Nyos and Monoun disasters, Kevin Krajick writes that “Conspiracy theories abound in Cameroon, where unexplained events are often attributed to political intrigues”. And that was exactly what happened immediately after the Nyos disaster. With the scientists unable to pinpoint the cause of this unprecedented event, the Cameroonian public quickly concluded that this was a man-made disaster. This belief was reinforced by numerous stories of alleged suspicious happenings in the Nyos area in the months preceding the explosion. According to one version which appeared in an article on the [Ambazonia Indymedia website](#),

...the most conspicuous incident prior to the explosion was the fact that the traditional ruler of Nyos and the Royal family moved out of the village a few days before the explosion... Did the Traditional ruler of Nyos know of a timed explosion, too? Other reports, even from the Cameroun radio stations, said many months earlier "a strange white man" or 'a geologist' had visited the Lake and warned that people should evacuate the village before a certain date.

The most prevalent theory was that the gas emission was due to the detonation of a neutron bomb in a secret military test. This theory obviously originated from national and international news reports which constantly compared the effects of the gas emission to that of a neutron bomb. For example, according to an August 26, 1986 [article in the Washington Post](#),

Reporters in the area described it as looking like the aftermath of a neutron bomb, with damage only to living things, and no visible effect on the village huts and other buildings. A few chickens seemed to be the only animals to have survived in the three hardest-hit villages.

This theory got a boost a few months later when the 4-14-1987 issue of the *National Examiner*, an American tabloid noted for its questionable and sensationalistic stories claimed that the gas emission,

was really a magnetic bomb perfected at secret hollow earth bunkers beneath Las Vegas, Nevada. The so-called underground nuclear tests there were actually strategic bombing of hollow earth forward attack lines using similar magnetic weapons. The nuclear blasts were merely side-effects of the device. [Cited on the [Axisofevilradio](#) website].

The Prime Suspects

Depending on which version catches your fancy, the neutron bomb was exploded in Lake Nyos, either by the Americans, the French or the Israelis. However, the most notable, most persistent and most widespread theory is that it was the handiwork of the Israelis. 20 years later this theory is still firmly rooted in the Cameroonian psyche as [comments](#) on a recent story on the *PostNewsline* website about planned Israeli development projects in the Northwest province indicate.

Proponents of the Israeli theory point to the fact that barely days (some say hours) after the incident, the Israeli Prime Minister arrived in Cameroon with a planeload of medical doctors and scientists. As the [New York Times](#) reported on August 26, 1986,

When Prime Minister Shimon Peres arrived from Israel for a one-day visit on the restoration of Israeli-Cameroon relations, he brought with him a 17-member medical team along with tons of medical supplies. The Israeli team went straight to the Nios area as soon as it arrived this morning. Other Aid Is Offered.

Conspiracy theorists wonder how the Israelis were able assemble the scientific team and be in Cameroon barely a few hours after, or within 48 hours of the incident, even though news of the incident filtered out to the world some 72 hours after it occurred. They argue that this could not have been possible without any prior knowledge of the event.

In an [article on his blog](#), veteran Cameroonian Journalist Ntemfac Ofege writes that

The arrival in Cameroon of the then Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, with a fully-equipped hospital plane, on a so-called State visit less than 48 hours after the Lake Nyos explosion, is very suspicious.

Actually, the Israelis remain Mr. Biya's guardian angels. They not only train and equip his close guards (the presidential guard) but they also monitor events in Cameroon from their Mont Febe hideout and other locations in Yaounde.

Ofege adds that:

Mr. Biya has also not reacted to a Denis Sassou Nguessou interview published in a San Francisco newspaper suggesting that the Lake Nyos gas explosion was an Israeli thermonuclear device. Mr. Sassou Nguessou said in that interview that he was approached by the Israeli to test the device in his country and he said no. Mr. Biya apparently accepted the indecent proposition.

Ambazonian activist Justice Mbuh who has written extensively about the Lake Nyos disaster on numerous Cameroonian Internet forums has also pointed to “the very perfect coincidence of the Israeli Prime Minister's visit to Cameroun with the explosion,” and [insists](#) that the Cameroonian government “accepted monies to test weapons of mass destruction in our country's beautiful lake Nyos...” In [his most recent posting](#) on the Nyos disaster, he writes that:

... suspected gas was used to test mass killing in the name of natural disaster at Lake Nyos. It was published in Cameroun newspapers that Paul Biya took Ten Billion Dollars to allow the testing of a neutron Bomb-like weapon. The effects of the devastation are now very similar to what we are seeing from Lebanon. Now it seems Israel has modified it twenty years after, making it a target-specific weapon with same but more deadly effects than did the Nyos mass killings!

Wrong Timeline

Evidently, if the timeline as presented by the conspiracy theorists is correct, then the presence of the Israeli team is hard to explain and merits closer scrutiny. But is this timeline correct? In an attempt to answer this key question, I spent some time looking at news reports from 20 years ago about the disaster and the visit of the Israeli Prime Minister to Cameroon.

According to news reports and stories from survivors, the explosion happened around on the night of Thursday August 21, 1986, around 9:00 p.m. It wasn't until Saturday August 23rd that the first outsiders arrived on the scene and began burying the victims. And it would be another 24 hours before the national and international community became aware of what had occurred in Nyos. And as soon as news of the disaster broke, the international mobilization began. According to [a BBC report](#) at the time,

Scientists from the United States and France are on their way to investigate the lake. They will bring with them rescue teams and emergency aid to help the survivors. The US has pledged \$25,000 in immediate aid, while France, Britain and other Western European countries have promised logistical support. The Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, has said he will not cancel his state visit to Cameroon, due to start on Monday ... He said he would be bringing a medical team and equipment for treating the victims.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres did arrive in Cameroon on Monday August 25 with the Israeli medical and scientific team as planned exactly four days after the explosion – enough time for the Israelis to put together a complete medical and scientific team. And the Medical team was still holed up in Bamenda 24 hours after it arrived in Cameroon. A [Washington Post report](#) filed from Yaounde on August 26, 1986 was categorical on this point:

No foreign disaster team has yet reached the lakeside area.

An Israeli medical team, which arrived here yesterday with Prime Minister Shimon Peres, was waiting this morning in the provincial capital of Bamenda, about 40 miles from the lake.

Although the team plans to set a field hospital closer to the site, officials acknowledged that the fatality rate was so high that there was little they could do beyond treating a relatively small number of injured survivors.

Conclusion

So what really happened at Lake Nyos? The scientific community seems to have concluded that it was a natural disaster caused by toxic gases trapped beneath the lake which rose to the surface – a Limnic eruption – hence ongoing attempts to [degas](#) the lake. [[Click here to view a webcam on Lake Nyos](#)].

I am in no position to confirm or refute this scientific conclusion. However, I believe there is ample evidence showing that the “perfect coincidence theory” regarding the Israelis is based on a false premise and wrong timeline. While this does not in itself eliminate the military test theory, it definitely knocks down one of the pillars on which the Israeli military test theory hinges, and gives us reason to pause.

So what do you think? Was the Lake Nyos disaster a natural disaster or man-made one? Was the killer a neutron bomb or Carbon-dioxide? And, do you believe the Israelis are responsible? Stop by my blog at www.dibussi.com and share your thoughts.