
Probable cause of mysterious illness among US and Canadian diplomats in Havana found

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Dalhousie University and Nova Scotia Health Authority scientists Thursday claimed to have discovered the cause of strange symptoms found in recent years among US and Canadian diplomats in Cuba, according to Radio-Canada's investigative TV program *Enquête*.

The research, led by Dr. Alon Friedman, from the Department of Neuroscience and Medical Pediatrics of that Canadian university, contends that neurotoxin exposure is believed to have been behind the mysterious cases of lack of balance and vertigo. The sickening chemicals are easy to be found in pesticides used to eradicate mosquitoes.

According to Cubadebate news website, during a meeting held last July in Havana, the Canadian researchers shared their thesis, in a preliminary way, with Cuban authorities and the Committee of Experts that has been studying U.S. allegations for almost two years.

The mysterious symptoms suffered since 2017 caused a diplomatic crisis between Cuba and the United States after Washington that year pulled non-essential embassy staff from the Cuban capital.

In April 2018, Canada withdrew the families of its diplomats stationed in Cuba before also reducing staff.

The findings of the Canadian specialists contradict Washington's theory that their diplomats' brain injuries were due to a "sonic attack."

The researchers studied 26 individuals, including a control group that never lived in Havana, and discovered a damaged area of the brain responsible for memory and ability to concentrate, among other functions.

"[The results] all support the diagnosis of acquired brain injury in the Canadian diplomats and their families posted in Cuba," the report said.

In addition, the scientists were able to examine several individuals before and after returning from Havana, and found changes in their brains after their stay on the island.

"There are very specific types of toxins that affect these kinds of nervous systems... and these are insecticides, pesticides, organophosphates – specific neurotoxins," according to Dr. Friedman.

In 2016, Cuban authorities launched aggressive fumigation campaigns to eradicate mosquitoes carrying the Zika virus.

In addition, Canadian researchers found that embassies also sprayed their offices, as well as inside and outside the residences of their diplomats, up to five times more frequently than usual.

Doctor Mitchell Joseph Valdes-Sosa, director general of Cuba's Neuroscience Center, told Cubadebate that the hypothesis presented by the Canadian team is a serious attempt to explain the symptoms , "although it is premature to reach conclusions,"

Valdes Sosa added that exchanges have already begun between Canadian scientists and the Cuban Committee of Experts to advance more studies in Cuba in the short term.

"Although the work of the Dalhousie University research team has been carried out with scientific consistency, Cuban specialists believe that by using a small and heterogeneous sample, it is difficult to reach definitive conclusions."

"It is not possible to exclude other explanations based on very common pathologies," Valdes Sosa said.
