

Risking a nuclear war

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26 August 1998

The Afghan training complex which was the other target of the US missile strikes on August 21 is a leftover from the guerrilla war of 1979-89 against Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. It was built under CIA auspices using the 'latest NATO techniques,' according to one Russian account.

While the Clinton administration initially claimed that cruise missiles had struck bin Laden's headquarters, the casualty reports indicate that most of those killed and wounded were Pakistanis, members of Islamic groups waging guerrilla warfare against targets in Kashmir, the border province between Pakistan and India which is claimed by both countries. Afghan and Pakistani officials said only two of the six camps hit by the US missile barrage had any links to bin Laden, and these were the most lightly damaged. Neither bin Laden nor any of his top aides was hit.

In a chilling sidebar to the event, the *Wall Street Journal* revealed on August 24 that Gen. Joseph Ralston, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had gone to Pakistan just before the raid so that he would be present when Pakistani radar detected the cruise missiles fired by American warships in the Arabian Sea.

His job was to reassure nervous Pakistani commanders that these were American missiles aimed at Afghanistan, not a sneak attack from India against Pakistan's nuclear testing center, which is in the Baluchistan desert near the Afghan border. Both Pakistan and India tested nuclear weapons earlier this year, and the US missile attack risked triggering a nuclear exchange in the Indian subcontinent.

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