

# Was the US missile attack on Sudan justified?

11 September 1998

To the editor,

I read your article 'What are the real reasons for the US missile strikes?' that is linked on Yahoo's World News U.S. Missile Strikes page. How difficult it is to find realistic descriptions of what is going on these days. There is some criticism of Clinton's actions, but your article got right to the point in a comprehensive manner.

Thanks,

EJ

26 August

To the editor,

Thank you for the well written, well thought-out response to 'Operation Infinite Reach.' This is unfortunately for me the first sober news report I've read on the web regarding these events. Does the US have to justify its actions to any one? Will the corporate media always applaud gratefully to blowing people up? Will the reactionary forces of finance capital continue to control US policies even as new generations take the places of those who pass?

It's hard to feel like we have no control over our military. Do we have carte blanche to invade or just bomb whomever we please? I don't want to pay taxes for this stuff, at all! Do I have any recourse?

Thanks again for the clear-minded reporting.

BA

26 August

Dear editor,

Your article on U.S. foreign policy could not have been said better.

Thank you.

KG

26 August

Dear Editor:

Your articles have brought back reality in journalism. The rating-driven and submissive US media plots that we are constantly bombarded with have left us unable to utilize our brain power in judging for ourselves. Sensationalism has preceded all normal thought process. The governing bodies have found a wonderful mouthpiece in its media--a goal that has come to fruition and envied by many.

Your editorials are well thought out and beautifully refreshing vs the bland government propaganda machines all around us. Keep up the good work!

PS: Apologies for the anonymity. Can't be careful enough with our wonderful security services listening in.

27 August

Dear Sirs,

The CIA took secret soil samples at the factory in Sudan before the bombs fell. The soil showed traces of a compound called EMPTA, which has no known use except for the production of VX nerve gas. The US government has a witness in the form of a top bin Laden lieutenant, who confirms that bin Laden had a financial stake in the plant, and knows a great deal about bin Laden's global operations. These items have all been reported on ABC News.

Sincerely,

HH

30 August

Dear HH,

The events of the past eight days have already refuted the claims made in your letter. The main US government charges have now been admitted by the US government itself to be false. It is not true that there is no known use for EMPTA except in production of nerve gas, and it is not true that bin Laden has a financial stake in the Sudanese plant.

Just as important as the exposure of US government lies and disinformation is the exposure of the role of the media. You cite certain information as 'fact' because it was reported on ABC News. But what was the source for ABC News? The television network simply reported what it was told by the US Central Intelligence Agency. It served as a willing and uncritical conduit for US government propaganda.

Martin McLaughlin

WSWS editorial board

To the editor:

The following is a copy of the letter I sent to the local paper, the Arizona Daily Star (the portions in brackets were cut when the article was printed). It was restrained so that it might be printed, but the arguments are in any case valid. To paraphrase Lenin, 'the careful reader will easily substitute 'American imperialism disguised as world leadership' for 'an American commitment to world leadership,' etc.'

[President Clinton's strike against sites in Sudan and Afghanistan immediately met with widespread support across the country; in fact the only dissenters were those who questioned whether the strikes were a response to Clinton's problems with Ken Starr. Almost no American, however, has questioned the legitimacy of Clinton's actions.

These strikes were carried out against terrorists alleged to be connected to the East African bombings two weeks ago, and said to be necessary because the Defense Department claims to have evidence of planned attacks on more American Embassies. Yet none of this evidence has been made public, although it was in the name of the American people that missiles were launched on Thursday against two foreign nations.]

No one argues that those responsible for the cowardly bombings in East Africa should not be brought to justice and punished for their bloody crime. But the world has known since the Nuremburg Trials that a judicial arraignment is more effective at discrediting a foe than military action. Naturally a 'decapitation strike' against the supposed mastermind of the recent bombings, Osama bin Laden--the leader of forces quickly labeled 'fanatical'--would only make him a martyr if successful. On the other hand, if the mission was only designed to destroy the infrastructure of bin Laden's organization as those responsible for the strikes maintain, then those remaining will feel further the necessity of their mission and they'll view these actions as further persecution by the United States.

[Amazingly,] there has been almost no discussion of the real meaning of the President's use of destructive weapons against targets inside two countries with which the United States is not at war. [A large number of missiles were in fact launched across the Afghan and Sudanese borders without the prior knowledge of either government;] certainly secrecy and surprise were important components of the strikes, but we need to reverse the situation to gain perspective, and imagine what would happen if a foreign country unexpectedly attacked targets within the U.S. border. No

doubt a state of war would be declared and the attacks would be met with a quick military response. Moreover, the American actions of Thursday were taken without even the knowledge of the United Nations or of the Kenyan and Tanzanian governments, those whose countries lost far more citizens to the recent bombings than ours. [And] an American commitment to international leadership begins to look like a fraud when we take unilateral military action without any sort of international cooperation.

JK

1 September

To the editor

In your article [US backpedals over Sudan raid] you mention that a chemist and explosives expert at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico who disputed CIA and Pentagon claims that the chemical substance EMPTA, allegedly found by a US spy in a soil sample taken from the Al-Shifa plant, was only used in chemical weapons. 'It's fairly commonly known that these are used in pesticides and herbicides,' the chemist, Mike Hiskey, said.

But you do not raise the question as to why a pharmaceutical plant is potentially producing this substance. Why exactly would a medicine producing facility be manufacturing something used in pesticides (something that is poisonous to humans as well as pests) This alone is enough information to call into doubts the believability of the Sudan government as to the function of this plant. OK, so we were wrong the only commercial use for EMPTA is for creating poison. Am I the only one who finds this strange? Perhaps you reporters should draw from the same common sense the rest of America is using when looking at this and perhaps they should be less ready to accuse the government that is trying to protect them than accuse it of something.

In addition you wrote: 'Among the official lies were the claim that bin Laden was linked to the plant, the description of the plant as a highly secret and secure military-type facility, and the claim that the plant had no commercial output.'

There is overwhelming evidence that bin Laden and the Iraqi military complex responsible for Chemical weapons are very connected with this site. In fact there a quite a number of articles published BEFORE YOURS that state there are taped conversations between Iraq and the plant, that the owner lives in [a] bin Laden house and that he paid for it. What exactly is unambiguous about this?

In addition what credibility does the original designer of the plant have. Is it so impossible to believe that NEW equipment was purchased and installed, and a beaker is a beaker, so is a vat, you can mix any kind of chemical in these factories.

And I have not read anywhere that the government stated this is a factory that makes nerve gas. The US Government made quite clear it was making no nerve gas but rather a precursor or rather the stabilizing agent for the VX. The headlines claiming it was a nerve gas factory can be attributed to the increasingly sensationalistic US media who can seemingly no longer be trusted to simply report the facts.

I am all for an official investigation myself, however after reading your article I concluded that it was very sloppy, biased, relied on quotes from people who gave their opinion with no basis in fact (I bet we can turn a plant originally designed to create cars and trucks into a chemical plant if we wanted to, this is a no brainer, c'mon guys), and did little more than support false allegations that this was a shoot first and ask questions later operation. In fact from all accounts I am seeing more evidence every day that this was a ritious [sic] shoot. Hope I am wrong. And I hope your future reporting is more based on fact than hearsay.

AC

2 September

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Dear AC,

You ask why the Sudanese factory should be manufacturing pesticides or their components, as though this was implausible. It is quite possible that a single chemical factory, particularly in a country without a well-developed industrial sector, could be making products with very disparate uses. But aside from that, the US government claimed to have found EMPTA, not in the factory, but in the soil outside it--exactly where one might expect to find the residue of a pesticide or insecticide.

The more basic problem is that you are highly suspicious of the credibility of the Sudanese government but uncritical and credulous towards the claims of the American government. Why should anyone believe the unsupported claims by unidentified CIA spokesmen of an 'Iraq connection' for the Sudan factory? Especially when the European press has widely reported that the pharmaceutical plant had sold quantities of veterinary medicine to Iraq, and therefore would have a perfectly natural and legitimate reason for contact with Iraqi officials.

As for your contention that it is a 'no brainer' to convert a factory from one purpose to another, you might consider in that context the US demand that Iraq should be deprived, not merely of chemical and biological weapons--there is no evidence that it possesses any--but of the *capability* of building such weapons. As the WWS has argued, this is tantamount to demanding that Iraq be reduced to pre-industrial conditions, with all that implies for the living standards and health of the population.

Martin McLaughlin

WSWS editorial board

To the editor

Subject: (1) What are the real reasons for the US missile strikes? (26 August 1998); and (2) US backpedals over Sudan raid (2 September 1998). Two great articles. Keep up the good work, I've book-marked 'wsws.org' as my official site for news. Very detailed information on the issue, and an in-depth reaction from various parts of the world.

Thank you

AP

3 September

See Also:

Amid mounting international criticism US backpedals over Sudan raid  
[2 September 1998]

Security Council rejects appeal from Sudan over US missile attack  
[29 August 1998]

'Nerve gas factory' claim exposed as hoax: What are the real reasons for the US missile strikes?

[26 August 1998]



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