

US officials question official rationale for Sudan missile attack

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22 September 1998

A month after the US missile attack that destroyed the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum, the initial American assertions of 'compelling' evidence tying the factory to Osama bin Laden and chemical weapons production have become so discredited that high-level US national security and intelligence officials are admitting, anonymously, that the justifications for the raid were without substance.

The attack was an unprovoked act of war. Al-Shifa was Sudan's largest commercial manufacturer of prescription drugs for both medical and veterinary purposes, producing 50 percent of the country's supply. The consequences of its destruction on the lives of the Sudanese people will be immense.

At the time the American media reported uncritically the claims of the Clinton administration and sought to whip up public support for the attacks on Sudan and Afghanistan. But within days of the missile raids, US officials were compelled to drop their claims that the Khartoum plant was a secret military-type facility that did not manufacture products for general commercial use. In the wake of widespread condemnation abroad and public statements from technicians and managers associated with Al-Shifa, including citizens of the US and Britain, denying that the factory had any chemical weapons capacity, Clinton administration spokesmen have been forced to backpedal further, while continuing, on the record, to defend the missile strike.

The *New York Times* of September 21, in an article headlined 'Decision to Strike Factory in Sudan Based on Surmise,' reports the most telling acknowledgments to date from unnamed US officials, undercutting the public rationale for the attack. 'But now some State Department and CIA officials argue that the Government cannot justify its actions,' the *Times* writes. It quotes one administration official as saying,

'As an American citizen, I am not convinced of the evidence.'

The article continues: 'Hours after the launched cruise missiles at the factory on Aug. 20, senior national security advisers described Al-Shifa as a secret chemical weapons factory financed by Mr. bin Laden. But a month after the attack those same officials concede that they had no evidence directly linking Mr. bin Laden to the factory at the time the President ordered the strike. Nor are they certain whether their soil sample proves that Empta, the suspected precursor chemical for VX, was made at Al-Shifa or was just stored or shipped through there.'

The article further quotes a 'senior intelligence official' who defends the missile strike on Sudan as saying the case for the raid was based on 'evidence plus inference.'

These admissions from within the Clinton administration, the State Department and the CIA underscore the reckless and provocative character of the August 20 missile raids, the routine use of lies and fabrications to justify military aggression, and the contempt of government officials for the American public.

It is worth noting that the *New York Times* article appeared on the same day that Clinton spoke before the United Nations General Assembly, asserting US leadership in what the White House portrays as an international campaign against terrorism, the very banner under which it carried out the missile assault on Al-Shifa.

See Also:

'The Al-Shifa factory was not making chemical weapons or their so-called 'precursors''

Interview with Tom Carnaffin, technical manager at the bombed Al-Shifa Pharmaceutical Factory in Sudan

[12 September 1998]



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