

reference is made to the missile attacks. (24 Mar., pp. 1, 4) The *Guardian*, on the other hand, reports that Clinton Administration officials were asked in hearings 'why they had failed to take more aggressive action against al-Qaida in the wake of the 1998 bombings of US Embassies in Africa' – without referring to the fact that these bombings led to the failure of the Saudi initiative. (24 Mar., p. 11) Neither the *FT* (p. 8) nor the *Telegraph* (p. 1) made the connection.

Madeline Albright told the panel, referring to the 1998 missile attacks, 'We didn't launch cruise missiles to serve legal papers. We did everything we could.' (*Times*, 24 Mar., p. 13) An oblique admission of the illegality of the attacks, and a failure to admit (to recognise?) that the Clinton Administration had done 'everything they could' to sink the deal that secured the expulsion of bin Laden.

EMBOLDENED OR EMBITTERED?

Mr Straw lies when he says, 'What you can say is that the evidence was **very, very clear** that the al-Qa'eda organisation, and Osama bin Laden in particular, was becoming increasingly emboldened by the **lack of reaction...** by the international community, following the **previous pretty astonishing attacks.**' (*Telegraph*, 20 Mar., p. 11)

On the contrary, the evidence is **very, very clear** that al-Qa'eda, its Afghan hosts, and its supporters became increasingly **embittered** by the **lack of justice** offered to the world's Muslims by the international community, and by the series of **pretty astonishing** attacks on Muslims by the US, and by Israel – supported by the US.

The evidence is **very, very clear**, to be specific, that the illegal cruise missile attacks of 20 Aug. 1998 not only killed tens of thousands of people; they increased support for bin Laden's network.

Far from '**turning the other cheek**' the US and UK were committed, and remain committed, to **smashing the cheek of the other** – and to lying about it. **The costs have been borne by the innocent.** 'Earlier [military] action' could not, and did not help to prevent 11 September. The 'earlier' aggression in 1998 (with a far greater death toll) only helped to pave the way for 11 September.

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TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK?

Jack Straw, Al-Qa'eda And The 1998 Bombings
JNV Anti-War Briefing 58 (24 March 2004)

THE OUTRAGEOUSNESS OF JACK STRAW

In a wide-ranging interview, the British Foreign Secretary has expressed regret that the international community failed to take 'earlier action to deal with al-Qa'eda and the failing state which was harbouring it, which was Afghanistan.' If this 'earlier action' had been taken, according to Mr Straw, 'we might have avoided September 11 and everything that has followed.' (*Telegraph*, 20 Mar. 2004, p. 11)

The Foreign Secretary recalls 'eight years of a rising crescendo of outrageous attacks from al-Qa'eda' from the 1993 attempt on the World Trade Centre to the attacks on the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and on the USS Cole in 2000.

Looking back, Mr Straw believes that al-Qa'eda became 'increasingly emboldened' by the 'lack of reaction' from the international community, following these 'pretty astonishing attacks.' '**And that led to these amazing attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon...**'

TURNING THE CHEEK: SUDAN AND AFGHANISTAN 1998

This is an amazing rewriting of history. Mr Straw told the *Telegraph*, 'I am fully signed up to the biblical injunction of turning the other cheek in certain circumstances but [9/11] was not one of them.' He implies that the West had 'turned the other cheek' on the previous occasions he listed, and that this weakness led to 11 September.

Leaving aside the other incidents, it is hard to believe that Mr Straw can have forgotten that after the US Embassy bombings in 1998 Washington actually carried out the bombing of not one but two sovereign nations: Sudan and Afghanistan. If that was 'turning the other cheeks', let us pray the West never takes revenge.

'TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK': THE DIRECT COSTS

The airstrike on Sudan destroyed a pharmaceutical factory which produced half of Sudan's pharmaceutical supplies. It specialised in producing drugs to kill the parasites which pass from herds to herders, 'one of Sudan's principal causes of infant mortality.' (James Astill, 'Strike one', *Guardian*, 2 Oct. 2001)

Sudan could not afford to import drugs to replace the supplies formerly produced at the factory, and was also under sanctions. US journalist Jonathan Belke reported a year after the attack that as a result of the destruction of the pharmaceutical factory 'tens of thousands of people – many of them children – have suffered and died from malaria, tuberculosis, and other treatable diseases. (*Boston Globe*, 22 Aug. 1999)

Noam Chomsky remarks that if these consequences were scaled up to be proportional to the US population, it would be as if the bin Laden network, in a single attack on the US, caused 'hundreds of thousands of people – many of them children – to suffer and die from easily treatable diseases.' (*9-11*, p. 51)

'TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK': THE INDIRECT COSTS

According to the *Financial Times*, the US attack 'appears to have shattered the slowly evolving move towards compromise between Sudan's warring sides' and terminated promising steps towards a peace agreement to end the civil war that had left one and a half million people dead since 1981, which might also have led to 'peace in Uganda and the entire Nile basin'.

The missile strike seems to have 'shattered... the expected benefits of a political shift at the heart of Sudan's Islamist government' towards a 'pragmatic engagement with the outside world,' along with efforts to address Sudan's domestic crises, to end support for terrorism, and to reduce the influence of radical Islamists. (*FT*, 8 Sept. 1998, cited in Chomsky, *9-11*, p. 51)

UNDERMINING US SECURITY

Not only were the US missile strikes on Sudan and Afghanistan terrorist attacks of quite staggering proportions, they also directly led to a worsening of US national security.

By summer 1998, Mullah Omar, the head of the Taliban, had become so fed up with his unwanted guest Osama bin Laden that he concluded a secret agreement with Saudi intelligence to expel the al-Qa'eda leader from his country.

But just before Mullah Omar's order to oust the 'arrogant, publicity-seeking' bin Laden was carried out, President Clinton launched his missiles against Sudan and Afghanistan.

Prince Turki bin al-Faisal, the head of Saudi intelligence who had brokered the expulsion deal, says that after the missile strikes, 'The Taliban attitude changed 180 degrees.' Returning to Afghanistan a month after the strikes, he found Mullah Omar 'absolutely rude', and the deal was off. (*Times*, 3 Aug. 2002)

EARLIER ACTION: TWO LESSONS

Returning to Mr Straw's bizarre rendition of events, it is quite untrue to claim that there was no 'earlier action' against al-Qa'eda or their hosts in Afghanistan.

On the one hand, there were **criminal missile attacks** against Sudan and Afghanistan by the US Government **which succeeded in causing the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians – many of them children – and which also shattered a regional peace process.**

On the other hand, there were also non-military negotiations by the Saudi Government which were effective in winking the leader of al-Qa'eda out of his hideout in the mountains of Central Asia – **an achievement smashed by US military aggression.**

In short, effective 'earlier' non-military action which **increased** the security of the West was taken by Saudi Arabia. Criminal 'earlier' military aggression which **diminished** the security of the West was carried out by Washington (with support from London).

MEDIA MISREPRESENTATION

When the US National Commission on Terrorist Attacks published a preliminary report and held hearings on 23 Mar. 2004, the *Independent* notes the finding in the report that the Saudi expulsion deal 'fell apart in September 1998 during talks in Afghanistan between Prince Turki and the Taliban leader Mullah Omar.' No