

Washington's official story unravels, confirming extra-legal execution of Bin Laden

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It took less than two days for Washington's official story of the commando raid that killed Osama bin Laden to unravel, revealing amidst the rubble of the initial lies a cold-blooded extra-legal execution.

The American media, in accordance with its willing and eager role as propaganda arm of the government, is doing its best to limit the damage from the retraction of earlier claims and continue utilizing the murder of Bin Laden and four others, including a woman, to intimidate, debase and brutalize public opinion.

On Monday, Obama's top counter-terrorism adviser, John Brennan, told a press conference that Bin Laden was killed by Navy SEALs after having "engaged in a firefight," weapon in hand. "Whether or not he got off any rounds, I frankly don't know," Brennan added.

Less than 24 hours later, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney admitted that Bin Laden was unarmed when he was shot in the head.

Carney was obliged to correct another falsehood put forward the previous day by Brennan. The counter-terrorism official had reported that Bin Laden's wife was killed after the terrorist leader used her as a human shield to protect himself. On Wednesday, Carney, reading from a brief statement drafted by the Pentagon, said Bin Laden's wife had been wounded in the leg, not killed, and had not been used as a human shield.

The White House further acknowledged that it had misidentified which of Bin Laden's sons was killed—it was Hamza, not Khalid. It said that the woman killed in the raid was the wife of Bin Laden's courier. She was allegedly caught in the crossfire between the SEALs and Bin Laden's defenders on the first floor of the three-story compound in a well-off section of Abbottabad, Pakistan.

According to official US accounts, Bin Laden and his family members were on the third floor when the attack came early Monday morning, Pakistan time.

The original version put out by Brennan was designed to debunk the view that the purpose of the mission was to execute Bin Laden and bolster the claim, made for legal reasons, that the commandos had orders to capture their target if he did not resist.

"If we had the opportunity to take Bin Laden alive, if he didn't present any threat," Brennan said, "the individuals involved were able and prepared to do that."

In his press conference Tuesday, Carney continued to claim that the commandos were prepared to take Bin Laden alive if he did not resist. Asked by a reporter how he could resist without a gun, Carney said

vaguely that there were "other ways" to resist than with arms.

On Monday, Brennan made much of Bin Laden's supposed use of his wife as a human shield. In line with the policy of demonizing and dehumanizing those singled out to serve as bogeymen and pretexts for US military aggression, Brennan said: "Here is Bin Laden, who has been calling for these attacks, living in this million-dollar-plus compound, living in an area that is far removed from the front, hiding behind women who were put in front of him as a shield. I think it really just speaks to just how false his narrative has been over the years."

This, it was soon revealed, was concocted out of whole cloth.

There is evidence that the new official version is no less a tissue of lies. *Al Arabiya* on Wednesday cited senior Pakistani security officials who said a 12-year-old daughter of Bin Laden who survived the attack and is in Pakistani custody told them the US forces captured her father alive and shot him dead in front of family members. The Pakistani officials added that Bin Laden was killed in the first few minutes of the operation and on the first floor of the compound.

This flatly contradicts the US government story that the commandos had first to shoot their way into the first story in order to get to the third floor, and that they confronted Bin Laden in the midst of ongoing firefights with his defenders. *Al Arabiya* reported that there was no gunfire from the residents of the compound and that Pakistani officials who investigated the scene after the raid found no weapons.

The newspaper wrote: "According to information Pakistani officials collected from detained persons, Osama was neither armed nor did inmates at the compound fire at the US choppers or commandos.

"Not a single bullet was fired from the compound at the US forces and their choppers. Their chopper developed some technical fault and crashed and the wreckage was left on the spot," a well-informed official explained.

"Security officials said they did not recover any arms and explosives during their detailed search of the compound on Monday and Tuesday."

This report was almost universally ignored by the US media. At the daily White House press briefing on Wednesday, Carney announced that the White House would give out no further details on the raid, lamely asserting the need to protect counter-terrorism sources and operational methods.

The clumsy efforts to cover up the flagrant illegality of the raid—both the violation of Pakistani sovereignty and the extra-legal execution of Bin

Laden and others—point to the broader context of unanswered questions and non-credible claims. US politicians and media outlets have railed against Pakistan for harboring Bin Laden in a mansion a few hundred yards from the Pakistani equivalent of America's West Point military academy, in a town populated by retired military personnel and active military regiments, and only 35 miles from the capital city of Islamabad. There has been no explanation, however, as to how Washington could be unaware of Bin Laden's presence.

If, as American officials are broadly asserting, Pakistan was aware of Bin Laden's fortified safe house, how could Washington, which counts Pakistan as one of its closest allies in the "war on terror" and maintains the closest relations with the country's intelligence and military establishment, be unaware?

Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani implicitly raised this question on Wednesday, when he declared that Pakistan shared intelligence "with the rest of the world, including the United States," so if there were what he called "lapses" in Pakistan "that means lapses from the whole world."

Gilani went on to assert that the United States possessed the most extensive and sophisticated surveillance technology and networks, including spy satellites, and was in a better position to track down Bin Laden than Pakistan.

Punching a hole in the official story given out by President Obama Sunday night that the US first became aware only last August of the likely presence of Bin Laden in the Abbottabad compound, another senior Pakistani official, Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir, told the BBC that Pakistan had drawn the attention of American intelligence agencies in 2009 to suspicions about the building.

It is far more plausible that the US wanted to keep Bin Laden alive to serve as a useful focus of the post-9/11 "war on terror," which has been used to justify wars of aggression in Afghanistan, Iraq and now Libya, until other strategic considerations, both foreign and domestic, argued for his elimination. Once the decision was made to get him—at a point when his real influence was generally agreed to be negligible—Washington had every reason to kill him, rather than capture him and bring him to trial for his crimes.

The last thing the US wanted was for the longstanding and intimate ties between Al Qaeda and US intelligence—dating back to Bin Laden's days as a CIA contractor in the anti-Soviet mujahideen guerrilla movement in Afghanistan—as well as Al Qaeda's ties to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other US allies in the "war on terror" to be exposed to the public.

There was also, no doubt, the belief that a sudden and bloody "hit" against Bin Laden would send a useful signal to other figures who have run amok in the United States, such as Iran's Ahmadinejad and Libya's Gaddafi. The latter barely survived a targeted assassination attempt just one day before the killing of Bin Laden.

There has been some criticism of the execution of Bin Laden internationally. Former West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt told German TV, "It was quite clearly a violation of international law. The operation could also have incalculable consequences in the Arab world in light of all the unrest."

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, called on the United States to give the United Nations full details about Bin

Laden's killing. "The United Nations has consistently emphasized that all counter-terrorism acts must respect international law," she said.

However, the Obama administration has vigorously asserted that the action was entirely lawful, and there has been virtually no dissent from within the political, media or academic establishment. In testimony Tuesday and Wednesday before the House and Senate judiciary committees, Attorney General Eric Holder hailed the killing of Bin Laden as a testament to American justice.

He told the House committee that the action was "lawful, legitimate and appropriate in every way." He told the Senate, "I'm proud of what they did. And I really want to emphasize that what they did was entirely lawful and consistent with our values."

Congressional Democrats have competed with their Republican counterparts in their praise for the elimination of Bin Laden. Steny Hoyer, the No. 2 Democrat in the House of Representatives, declared that the operation "will be a great source of pride to every American... It's incredible what our people can do."

Not deterred in the least from its propaganda in support of the killing by the admission that the victim was unarmed, the *New York Times* published a celebratory editorial Wednesday headlined "The Myth of Mr. Obama's Weakness."

"President Obama's display of leadership in directing the killing of Osama bin Laden," the principal organ of American imperialism wrote, "raises the prospect that American politics can move away from mindless debates over the president's loyalties and fortitude..."

"Mr. Obama's risky and audacious decision to attack the Bin Laden compound in Pakistan has demolished the notion that he cannot make tough decisions or cares primarily about the nation's image abroad."

Times columnist Maureen Dowd, in an op-ed piece entitled "Cool Hand Barack," approvingly compared Obama's performance to that of Michael Corleone in *The Godfather*.

The *Washington Post*, in an editorial Wednesday headlined "Targeting Mr. Gaddafi," wrote: "For the record, we think targeting Mr. Gaddafi and his sons—if that is what is really going on—is as legitimate as striking Al Qaeda."

Sections of the US political and media establishment are seizing on the success of the raid to justify the use of torture and rehabilitate the barbaric practices developed first under Bush. In an interview on "NBC Nightly News" Tuesday, CIA Director Leon Panetta made a point of declaring that the team of Navy SEALs was authorized to kill Bin Laden. "The authority we had on Bin Laden was to kill him," he said.

Panetta went on to claim that intelligence obtained by means of "enhanced interrogation techniques," i.e., torture, against detainees in Guantanamo and CIA prisons had contributed to tracking down Bin Laden. He confirmed that those techniques included waterboarding.

The *Financial Times* published a column Wednesday entitled "Waterboarding Resurfaces as Tool that Helped Track Down Prey," which cited New York Republican Congressman Peter King declaring that "we obtained vital information several years ago about the courier for Bin Laden—we obtained that through waterboarding." The piece continued: "For those who say that waterboarding does not work, Mr. King

concluded with the answer to end all questions: the practice gave the US 'vital information that directly led us to bin Laden.'”

In a similar vein, House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi called former President George W. Bush to thank him. “We have all recognized in our public comments that his role was important in having this success,” she said.



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