

The killing of Osama bin Laden

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President Barack Obama announced Sunday that US special forces had killed Osama bin Laden, the long-time leader of Al Qaeda, in a raid on a residence in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

Obama issued the statement after 11.30 p.m. Eastern time in the United States, more than an hour after the major media news networks announced that he would be making within minutes a major statement relating to national security.

Obama's statement left critical questions unanswered and raised a host of new ones.

First, Obama stated that “shortly after taking office, I directed Leon Panetta, the director of the CIA, to make the killing or capture of bin Laden the top priority of our war against Al Qaeda, even as we continued our broader efforts to disrupt, dismantle and defeat his network.”

In other words, Obama implied, without offering an explanation, that between 2001 and his inauguration in January 2009, the capture or killing of bin Laden had not been the major priority of the “war on terror.”

Second, the location of bin Laden's killing is highly significant. Obama stated that US intelligence “had located bin Laden hiding within a compound deep inside of Pakistan.” Obama then identified the location more precisely as Abbottabad. He did not explain that this town is located approximately 40 miles from Rawalpindi, the center of the Pakistani military establishment and only a few miles further from Islamabad, the country's capital. This is the equivalent of a fugitive hiding next to a police station.

Nor did Obama describe the nature of the

“compound.” But the press is now reporting that the “most wanted man in the world” was living in a comfortable mansion. Moreover, the town of Abbottabad is located on the strategically critical Route N35, the Karakoram highway, which connects Pakistan and China.

In another cryptic remark, Obama said that “our counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan helped lead us to bin Laden and the compound where he was hiding.”

The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that bin Laden—as many have suspected—had enjoyed, at least until very recently, high level protection from powerful forces in the Pakistani government, military and intelligence agencies.

Although Obama called on the country to “give thanks to the countless intelligence and counterterrorism professionals who've worked tirelessly to achieve this outcome,” the major factor in the killing of bin Laden was, quite clearly, a shift in the position of his long-time protectors in the Pakistani state. For reasons that will eventually emerge, the Pakistani regime decided to toss bin Laden overboard.

The extraordinary facts relating to the whereabouts of bin Laden make a mockery of Obama's claim that the United States “went to war against Al Qaeda to protect our citizens, our friends, and our allies.” No, it did not.

While the supposed terrorist mastermind has been protected by the Pakistani state, a critical ally in the “war on terror,” the United States has deployed a huge armed force in Afghanistan for the past ten years. This force has been tripled since Obama took office.

Nothing in Obama's remarks suggested in any way that the killing of bin Laden will lead to a significant change in American foreign policy—let alone an end to the relentless expansion of military interventions.

The three wars in which the United States is currently engaged—in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya—have nothing to do with the fight against Al Qaeda and the capture of bin Laden. Both the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, which the United States invaded in 2003, and the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, which is now being bombed by US and NATO forces, opposed Al Qaeda. In Afghanistan, Al Qaeda forces are politically and militarily insignificant.

Both Obama's speech and the press commentary was clearly an attempt to rally public support for wars that have become deeply unpopular. Obama asked Americans to "think back to the sense of unity that prevailed on 9/11. I know that it has, at times, frayed." Media commentators repeatedly expressed the hope that the killing of bin Laden would restore the morale of soldiers fighting in Afghanistan and justify the loss of thousands of lives.

Bin Laden is indelibly associated with a monstrous crime, the murder of nearly 3,000 people on September 11, 2001, most of them dying in the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in New York City, as well as other bloody terrorist attacks around the world. But he was not the cause of the explosion of American militarism that followed the 9/11 attacks, merely the pretext.

One conclusion can be stated with certainty: the killing of bin Laden will not put an end either to the "war on terror" for which he served as a bogeyman, nor to the imperialist wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, in which American military forces have been deployed to secure strategic positions and oil resources of vital interest to American imperialism.

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