The bin Laden assassination and the lies of the “war on terror”

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The 10,000-word essay by Seymour Hersh on the US killing of Osama bin Laden, published Sunday by the *London Review of Books*, is a devastating blow to the entire narrative of the US “war on terror,” as it has been elaborated by both the Bush and Obama administrations.

The central thrust of Hersh’s exposure—that the Obama administration systematically lied about the raid by US Navy Seals that killed bin Laden on May 1, 2011—has been rapidly confirmed by other media outlets, including several that are hostile to Hersh and supportive of the White House.

NBC News reported, citing three unnamed sources, two of them in US intelligence, that a “walk in” from Pakistani intelligence told the CIA where Osama bin Laden was hiding a year before the US raid, and that the Pakistani government knew that bin Laden was hiding in Abbottabad, a headquarters town for the Pakistani military.

Several Pakistani news outlets reported the name of the former intelligence official who tipped off the CIA about bin Laden, identifying him as former brigadier Usman Khalid of the Inter-Services Intelligence agency, the Pakistani military intelligence service, who has been moved to the United States and is working with the CIA. They also confirmed that Pakistani officials at the highest level were aware of bin Laden’s presence and identified one intelligence official, Ijaz Shah, as the man who arranged to house bin Laden in Abbottabad, at the direction of then-president Pervez Musharraf.

It has also been revealed that many of the key allegations made by Hersh—the Pakistanis holding bin Laden, the Saudis paying the expenses, the “walk in” providing bin Laden’s location to the CIA, the Pakistani cooperation with the raid by the Navy Seals, the US plan to claim bin Laden had been killed by a drone-fired missile—were previously made by R. J. Hillhouse, a US college professor and blogger on national security issues, in several postings during August 2011. Hillhouse now says that Hersh’s story “has been spot on,” but that she had different sources within the military-intelligence apparatus.

There are continued attempts in the US media to rebut Hersh’s account by focusing on various alleged inconsistencies, and US officials and the White House have denounced the Hersh exposure while refusing to deal with any of its substantive charges. In other words, the military-intelligence apparatus and its media apologists proceed as they always do in response to exposure of US government crimes, with a mixture of stonewalling and character assassination.

Seymour Hersh is a courageous journalist with a record of exposing official crimes, going back to the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War. He has relatively few resources—above all his reputation for being willing to defy the official media consensus in order to report truthfully. He stands in sharp contrast to a media establishment where every significant report on the national security apparatus is cleared in advance with the government, and where most “exposures” are leaks planned and directed by the military-intelligence apparatus.

After the killing of bin Laden, the American media swallowed the official story without question. No official notice of instruction was required. The newspaper editors and the network executives knew immediately what it was they were *not* to investigate, and they proceeded accordingly.

The principal response of the media to Hersh’s revelations has been to bury them. After limited coverage on Monday, there was very little further

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commentary on Tuesday. CNN subordinated any references to the story to a manufactured terror scare over alleged threats posed by the Islamic State to the US "homeland."

The reaction is itself a reflection of the explosive and far-reaching implications of Hersh's exposures. The assassination of bin Laden, after all, was proclaimed by the Obama administration as its greatest foreign policy achievement, used to drum up support for the US military and intelligence apparatus and its illegal activities. The entire apparatus of the media, including Hollywood in the form of the CIA propaganda movie *Zero Dark Thirty*, was mobilized for this purpose. The entire narrative was a monumental fiction.

At issue, moreover, is not just the murder of bin Laden. Indeed, there is little doubt that the US government decided to kill the Al Qaeda leader to forestall a trial at which bin Laden could testify about his longstanding relationship with sections of the Saudi state and US intelligence agencies.

Ever since the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, American foreign and domestic policy has been founded on the lie of the "war on terror." Under that scenario, vicious terrorists attacked America out of the blue, killing nearly 3,000 people, and forcing the US government to go to war against them in response.

This lie required covering up the real origins of the 9/11 attacks, in the CIA recruitment and training of Islamic fundamentalist terrorists—including Osama bin Laden—for the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet military occupation. It required covering up the ongoing connections between the US intelligence agencies and Al Qaeda, which have resurfaced again in Libya and Syria, where Al Qaeda forces have been a key element in US-backed operations for "regime change."

The 9/11 attacks provided the pretext not only for US wars abroad, but for the enormous build-up of police-state powers within the United States: the creation of the Department of Homeland Security; the Pentagon's Northern Command; the vast expansion of spying on telecommunications and the Internet; and dress rehearsals for military-police dictatorship like the crackdown that followed the Boston Marathon bombing.

All these actions are driven by the deepening social, economic and political crisis of American and world capitalism. It is impossible to maintain democratic forms of rule in a society where a tiny fraction of the population monopolizes virtually all the wealth. But the steady drive towards a dictatorship of the financial oligarchy, directed against the democratic rights of the American people, is passed off as an effort to defend ordinary Americans from the threat of terrorism.

Certain conclusions can be drawn. Lying on a staggering scale is an essential feature of American foreign and domestic policy. There are profound class reasons for this. The fundamental role of the US government is to defend the interests of a rapacious financial aristocracy, a few tens of thousands of the super-rich, while pretending to represent the American people as a whole. Lying is therefore intrinsic to its operation.

The corporate-controlled media plays a central role in this process of mass deception. The government is able to lie on a colossal scale and get away with it, in large measure because of the uncritical parroting of these lies by the television networks and leading "mainstream" newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* .

If the American government and its media accomplices have lied so brazenly about the assassination of bin Laden, absolutely nothing they say about anything can be believed.

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