

Post-Bin Laden Peace Hopes Dim

U.S. demands for an Afghan “footprint” dims hopes that Osama bin Laden’s death had opened a path to peace, reports Gareth Porter. May 9, 2011

By Gareth Porter

Editor’s Note: One hope from the targeted killing of Osama bin Laden was that it might open a path for ending the near-decade-old Afghan War, but that prospect has powerful enemies in Official Washington who want long-term U.S. bases in the central Asian country.

That desire for a continuing U.S. “footprint” in Afghanistan, in turn, makes prospects for a peace settlement with the Taliban less likely, as Gareth Porter reports in this guest article, which appeared originally at Inter Press Service:

President Barack Obama and top administration officials have taken advantage of the killing of Osama bin Laden to establish a new narrative suggesting the event will pave the way for negotiations with the Taliban for peace in Afghanistan.

That good news message, reported by Washington Post senior editor Rajiv Chandrasekaran last Tuesday, suggested that the administration would now be able to negotiate a deal that would make it possible for the United States to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.

The Chandrasekaran [article](#) quoted a “senior administration official” as saying that bin Laden’s death at the hands of U.S. forces “presents an opportunity for reconciliation that didn’t exist before.” The official suggested that administration officials were seeking to “leverage the death into a spark that ignites peace talks.”

The claim of new prospects for peace conveyed to Chandrasekaran appears to be dependent mainly on the assumption that the Taliban leaders in Pakistan will now fear that they will be captured or killed by the U.S. forces, as was bin Laden.

An official familiar with administration policy discussions on Afghanistan said the fact that the United States could locate and kill bin Laden “so deep inside Pakistan” is presumed to “have an impact on the Taliban’s thinking.”

The idea that U.S. policy is now on the road to an “endgame” in Afghanistan glosses over a central problem: the publicly expressed U.S. determination to keep a U.S. combat presence in Afghanistan indefinitely is not an acceptable condition to the Taliban as a basis for negotiations.

The Chandrasekaran report anticipated the announcement soon of a “strategic

partnership agreement” between the United States and the government of President Hamid Karzai as “another potential catalyst for talks.”

But that agreement is likely to reduce the Taliban willingness to open negotiations with the United States rather than increase it, because it is expected to include a provision for a long-term U.S. military presence to conduct “counterterrorism operations” as well as training.

None of the Taliban officials interviewed by Pakistani officials on behalf of the United States last year said that there could be a peace agreement in which U.S. troops would be allowed to stay in Afghanistan.

“There is no doubt that the number one aim of the Taliban in negotiations would be getting the U.S. military to leave,” said Michael Wahid Hanna, a program officer at the Century Foundation, who attended meetings held by a task force sponsored by the foundation with a wide range of Taliban and former Taliban officials in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Hanna said the signing of an agreement for a long-term U.S. military presence in Afghanistan “would not be a helpful step” for starting peace negotiations.

The new narrative portrays the Obama administration as sharply divided between military and Pentagon leaders who want to maximize the number of troops in Afghanistan for as long as possible and some civilian advisers who want a much bigger and faster drawdown.

But that description of the policy debate on Afghanistan, which is accurate as far as it goes, fails to make clear that the civilians in question – including Obama himself – are not aiming at withdrawing all U.S. forces from Afghanistan, even if there is a negotiated agreement with the Taliban.

In an interview with “60 Minutes” that aired Sunday night, Obama said the bin Laden killing “reconfirms that we can focus on al-Qaeda, focus on the threats to our homeland, train Afghans in a way that allows them to stabilize their country. But we don’t need to have a perpetual footprint of the size we have now.”

Obama’s statement hints at his intention to continue to maintain a much smaller military “footprint” in Afghanistan for many years to come.

The Chandrasekaran report suggested that the real obstacle to beginning talks has been the unwillingness of the Taliban to renounce its ties with al-Qaeda.

But there is no need for more pressure on the Taliban on the issue of its ties with al-Qaeda, according to observers who have met with Taliban officials.

Well before bin Laden's assassination, some senior Taliban officials with ties to the Quetta Shura, the Taliban's governing council, made statements to the Century Foundation Task Force that appeared to be open to such a commitment.

"They said this can happen something to that effect as part of an agreement," recalled Jeffrey Laurenti, director of foreign policy programs for the Century Foundation, who accompanied task force members in those meetings.

In early December 2009, the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" – the official name by which the Taliban identifies itself – sent out a statement to press organizations declaring it had "no agenda of meddling in the internal affairs of other countries and is ready to give legal guarantees if foreign forces are withdrawn from Afghanistan."

Although it did not explicitly mention al-Qaeda in the statement, it was clearly a response to the Obama administration pointing to Taliban ties with al-Qaeda as central to the rationale for the U.S.- NATO war.

But the Taliban are not expected to make a declaration explicitly naming al-Qaeda in advance of an agreement, much less before negotiations begin.

"It makes no sense for the Taliban to concede this point on the front end – without receiving any commensurate concession from the other side," the Century Foundation's Hanna told Associated Press this past week.

"They portray any pre-emptive severing of ties as a type of unilateral partial disarmament," he added.

The new narrative also suggests that the killing of bin Laden may now reduce another obstacle to peace negotiations Pakistani policy.

U.S. officials were said to believe that Pakistani officials had "interfered with peace efforts in the past," but now that Pakistan is under fire for possible complicity in bin Laden's living near the capital for years, "have an opportunity to play a more constructive role".

Pakistani policy has opposed peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan regime behind Pakistan's back. But contrary to the new narrative, Pakistan has been more eager to begin peace negotiations than the United States.

Pakistan has long complained that it was not being informed about U.S. negotiating aims and strategy especially with whom the United States is willing to talk and whether it hopes to impose stiff demands on the Taliban through military force.

Speaking at the New America Foundation on April 22, Pakistani Foreign Minister

Salman Bashir hinted strongly that his government disagrees with the U.S. strategy of hoping that military pressure will yield a better settlement.

“In Islamabad we have our own assessment of the situation in Afghanistan,” said the foreign minister. “The U.S. says the momentum of the Taliban has been halted, but is fragile and reversible. Our own assessment is that the security situation has continued to deteriorate.”

The new Obama administration narrative seems to suggest that Pakistan will now display a less skeptical attitude toward the U.S. diplomatic strategy and urge the Taliban to negotiate despite the signals of U.S. determination to keep a long-term military presence in Afghanistan.

Gareth Porter is an investigative historian and journalist specialising in U.S. national security policy. The paperback edition of his latest book, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam*, was published in 2006.

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By Robert Parry

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Robert Parry, Editor

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 as the Internet's first investigative magazine. He saw it as a way to combine modern technology and old-fashioned journalism to counter the increasing triviality of the mainstream U.S. news media.

In Case You Missed These Stories

Once a month, we look back at some of the previous month's special stories. Here's a selection from April.

Editor's Note: Because we've been publishing so many stories, some readers say they miss some that fly by. So, each month, we'll point out some special stories from the previous month.

Here is a selection from April 2011, focusing on the war in Libya, the assault on Medicare and hypocrisy on terrorism:

["Libyan War Recalls Afghan Pitfalls"](#) by Robert Parry, reporting on Obama administration's worries about the Libyan conflict. (April 2, 2011)

["Analyzing Goldstone's Gaza Retreat"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, explaining Judge Goldstone's backtracking on criticism of Israel. (April 4, 2011)

["WPost Seeks Longer Iraq Occupation"](#) by Robert Parry, noting an obsession of the Washington Post's neocon editors. (April 4, 2011)

["Military Tribunal May Hide 9/11 Motives"](#) by Ray McGovern, explaining the loss of historical transparency. (April 5, 2011)

["Rep. Ryan's Free-Market Death Panel"](#) by Robert Parry, assessing the radical Republican changes to Medicare. (April 7, 2011)

["NYT Demands Libyan War Escalation'"](#) by Robert Parry, citing risks from the New York Times war demands. (April 8, 2011)

["Strange Twist in Wisconsin Battle"](#) by Lisa Pease, reporting on the strange case of a state judicial election. (April 8, 2011)

["Letting a Cuban Terrorist Go Free"](#) by Robert Parry, reviewing the perjury acquittal of the notorious Luis Posada. (April 9, 2011)

["Twenty Years Ago, a Lost Opportunity"](#) by Robert Parry, recalling a final chance to hold the Reagan-Bush team accountable. (April 15, 2011)

["How I View the American Crisis"](#) by Robert Parry, suggesting history can point to future strategies. (April 17, 2011)

"McGovern Reflects on Truth-Telling" by Ray McGovern, noting the role of honesty in a democracy. (April 18, 2011)

"Spy vs. Spy: the First Patriots Day" by Robert Parry, giving the larger context of Paul Revere's ride. (April 18-19, 2011)

"Giving War a Chance" by Robert Parry, explaining how neocons still hope to violently remake the Muslim world. (April 21, 2011)

"NATO Pushes 'Regime Change' in Libya" by Peter Dyer, exposing the West's strategy in the Libyan civil war. (April 22, 2011)

"News Flash: Iraq War Was About Oil" by Ray McGovern, examining new evidence on an old dispute. (April 22, 2011)

"Republicans Embrace 'Greedy Geezers'" by Robert Parry, observing a cynical ploy to split the retired and near-retired. (April 25, 2011)

"Trying 'Shock and Awe' in Libya" by Robert Parry, describing NATO's strategy of high-tech intimidation. (April 27, 2011)

"Petraeus: A Threat to CIA Analysis" by Ray McGovern, critiquing President Obama's selection of Gen. Petraeus to run the CIA. (April 28, 2011)

"Questioning Obama's Americanism" by Robert Parry, challenging the tactic of portraying the President as un-American. (April 29, 2011)

"The Robber Barons Are Back!" by Aeric Vondenburg, retracing the restoration of an unequal gilded age. (April 30, 2011)

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US Policy Still Misreads the Middle East

By focusing on the how of “targeted killings,” not the why of Muslim anger, U.S. runs the risk of endless war, warns Lawrence Davidson. May 9, 2011

By Lawrence Davidson

Editor’s Note: The neoconservatives who dominate Washington opinion circles have settled on the need for a never-ending “war on terror” using large-scale U.S. interventions, like the Afghan War and NATO’s attacks in Libya, to support “targeted killings” of alleged Islamic “bad guys.”

For instance, the Washington Post’s neocon editors want NATO to eliminate Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and his sons much like SEAL Team-6 killed Osama bin Laden, essentially a global version of Israel’s “targeted killings” of Palestinian militants. But this strategy ignores the root causes of the troubles, as Lawrence Davidson explains in this guest essay:

Last week, I was in Egypt, a country presently moved by an optimism that reflects a high state of political consciousness.

Almost everyone I met – be they workers (urban and rural), students, shopkeepers, and the ubiquitous taxi drivers – know *why* their country is beset by problems. They can itemize the structural flaws that led to massive corruption, economic deprivation and brutal repression.

For instance, they all know that the “laughing cow” dictator, Hosni Mubarak, had substituted his personal interests, and that of his friends, for the national interest.

Everyone has the same general notion of what needs to be done: destroy the power of this “party of thieves” and rid the country of the failed policies it has so long endured.

How all this will play out in the new environment of relative freedom, with its multiple-party formation and emotional debate, is uncertain. However, if the United States can refrain from its usual level of gross interference, things should end up better rather than worse. Hence the optimism.

What are the odds that the U.S. will leave the Egyptian reform process alone? In the long run, they are not good.

The new Egypt has already moved to repair ties with Iran and ease the blockade of Gaza. The latter, in particular, is immensely popular in Egypt and will be

just as unpopular in the U.S. Congress.

Egypt's military still exercises ultimate control and is supposedly guiding the nation on its path of political reform. That same military is the recipient of billions of U.S. aid dollars and Congress controls those purse strings. There is a lot of room for behind-the-scenes interference here.

The pressure to meddle will increase if the Muslim Brotherhood is successful in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. They are getting ready to contest up to half the legislative seats and their prospects look good.

However, such particulars are but catalysts that set in motion a more general, essentially structural, U.S. approach to places like Egypt. Ongoing meddling in the affairs of other "sovereign" nations has become a veritable part of the culture of the "intelligence" and military bureaucracies of the United States.

Here is a depressing example of this attitude: While in Cairo I picked up the April 29 edition of the International Herald Tribune. The story that caught my eye was entitled "New Missions, Blurred Roles."

In part, the opening paragraph went like this, "President Barack Obama's decision to send an intelligence chief [Leon Panetta] to the Pentagon [as Secretary of Defense] and a four-star general [David Petraeus] to [be head of] the CIA is the latest evidence of a significant shift ... in how the U.S. fights its battles: the blurring of the lines between soldiers and spies."

What level of awareness does this maneuver reflect of the problems that have long beset America's failed Middle East policies? In relative terms, certainly something short of that possessed by your average Egyptian cab driver.

The Egyptians now boldly think about and discuss not only what is wrong but also why it is so. A significant aspect of why their problems persisted so long was the decades of U.S. support for the country's dictator.

They know that and there is popular sentiment for avoiding that sort of "aid" in the future. If they can achieve this the Egyptians have a genuine shot at a better future.

On the other hand, America's leaders are fixated on what they think confronts them and have relegated the why of it all to irrelevancy. In other words, when it comes to foreign policy, U.S. leaders, to say nothing of soldiers and spies, are dismally short-sighted. Hence the policy failures.

The CIA, along with the rest of America's so-called "intelligence" agencies, are designed to tell the country's leaders what is going on in the world. Somewhere

buried deep in these information-gathering bureaucracies are people who can also tell them why things are happening as they are, but these folks carry little or no influence.

This is because the explanations they often give for events conflict with or call into serious question the special-interest motives and ends that drive U.S. policies. You see, just as in Egypt, special interests have supplanted national interests.

With rare exception, American foreign policy in the Middle East is designed to respond to the desires of domestic lobbies such as the Zionists and not to any U.S. national interest, or even to the conditions on the ground in foreign lands.

If foreign opposition develops to what U.S. domestic special interests desire, we want to know what it is and then destroy it. Why it arises is a question to avoid because it opens space for questioning the influence of the special interests.

If the CIA is stuck at the “what” stage of things (say, the “what” of Israeli security or the “what” of Iranian nuclear energy development), the Defense Department is dedicated to designing tactical responses to the “what.”

Now the efforts of these two aggressive government organizations are to be closely coordinated within a political environment that refuses to look objectively at the roots of its own policies. So what can this move really mean?

In the post-Cold War era, the decision was made that ability to carry on classical warfare, the warfare between fielded armies, is a less immediate priority than “special operations” designed to “penetrate, disrupt, defeat and destroy” small militant groups which stand against U.S. policy positions in the Third World.

Beyond the supporting of dictators and their armies, how does this presently translate into practice?

Well, under Leon Panetta, the CIA oversaw “a sharp escalation” of the agency’s “bombing campaign in Pakistan using armed drone aircraft and an increase in the number of secret bases and covert operations in remote parts of Afghanistan.”

On the Defense Department side, in 2009, Gen. Petraeus, acting as head of the U.S. Central Command signed a classified order “authorizing U.S. special operations troops to collect intelligence in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iran and other places outside of traditional war zones.” The intelligence gathered is to be used to “prepare the environment for future military attacks.”

What we have here is an admission that both the CIA and the Defense Department have taken up the tactic of assassination as a major adjunct to the support-the-dictator policy. These are not like the horridly romanticized James Bond "license to kill" actions, nor even the cruder, but still selective, operations of the 11th century Assassins.

What Washington has elevated to the level of high tactics is the extraordinarily messy fighter bomber and Predator drone attacks that are as likely to massacre entire families, wedding parties, mosque gatherings and café crowds as they are any intended victims.

And now the fighter bombers of the Defense Department and the Predator drones of the CIA will be oh so better coordinated. Of course, none of this touches on the question of why the "bad guys" are out there, in so determined a fashion, in the first place.

The refusal to consider why opposition to American foreign policy in the Middle East has grown steadily since the end of World War II and finally, on Sept. 11, 2001, reached an unparalleled level of destructiveness, suggests that this latest tactical maneuver will be of little long-term worth.

It will not alter the U.S. policy of allying with dictators and oppressors. It will not alter the U.S. policy of destructive economic exploitation. It will only intensify American violence against the innocent people who happen to be in the vicinity of those whom the U.S. government decides are guilty.

And, in doing so, this approach will drive them into the arms of extremists that is those who stand against the U.S. by pursuing tactics as extreme as those used by the U.S. itself. Keep in mind that the violence of the oppressed tends to rise to the level of the violence of the oppressor.

There is a difference between being smart or clever, and being truly intelligent. The men and women who run the United States are very clever, but they are not equally intelligent.

They are clever enough to design deadly responses to specific situations. However, the responses are almost always bounded by *a priori* domestic political positions. Our leaders never display the intelligence and the political courage to challenge those positions no matter how disastrous they prove to be.

The most recent example of this stuck-in-a-rut scenario is the national hoopla that followed the assassination of Osama bin Laden. In President Obama's speech announcing this action, and the subsequent media discussion about what it might mean for the future, no attention was paid to *why* the 9/11 attacks were originally launched.

President Obama solemnly declared that “justice had been served,” but he dared not note the fact that bin Laden had launched the attacks of 2001 in order to obtain “justice” for what American policy in the Muslim world had wrought.

Unless the U.S. changes its policies in the Middle East the so-called “war on terror” cannot be won.

There is a symbiotic relationship between U.S. policies and the resistance the U.S. encounters, between “our” state terrorism and “their” non-state terrorism. You cannot bludgeon the connection away by simply honing your tactical abilities to “penetrate and disrupt” because doing so does not “destroy” the reasons for continuing opposition.

That is the truth that comes from an objective consideration of the “why” of things. Unlike the Cairo taxi drivers, America’s leadership just does not get it.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America’s National Interest*; *America’s Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.

The Anti-War Message of Mother’s Day

The first Mother’s Day wasn’t a sentimental celebration of moms; it was a fierce call to end the horrors of war, writes Gary G. Kohls. May 8, 2011

By Gary G. Kohls

Editor’s Note: Mother’s Day has become an occasion for sentimental remembrances of moms, celebrated with cards, flowers, brunches and other gifts.

However, at its origin 141 years ago, Mother’s Day had a different purpose, an observance of the wastefulness of war and a plea for mothers to stop their husbands and sons from being dispatched for more killing and carnage, as Gary G. Kohls notes in this guest essay:

In 1870 five years after the American Civil War ended the disastrous long-term

human and economic consequences of the conflict were becoming increasingly apparent, especially to the mothers of the sons and the wives of the husbands who had seen their patriotic men march off to that “inglorious” war and had come home dead or wounded.

Most Civil War-era women on either side of the battle lines had willingly participated in the flag-waving fervor that all war planners and all war-profiteers of all ages cunningly elicit from the people who will be expected to patriotically pay their war taxes.

Such propagandistic techniques are universally aimed at the poor and working-class soldiers who must be fooled into doing the soul-damning dirty work. But the war finally ended in 1865 with the North and South experiencing mutual exhaustion.

The war had resulted in a total of 600,000 dead American soldiers, with no accurate count of the probably much larger number of those soldiers who were wounded, missing in action or committed suicide after the war was over.

Julia Ward Howe, author of the Mother’s Day Proclamation of 1870, was a life-long abolitionist and therefore, early on, she was a supporter of the Union Army’s anti-slavery rationale for going to war to prevent the pro-slavery politicians and industrialists in the Confederate South from seceding from the Union over the slavery issue.

Howe was a compassionate and well-educated middle child of an upper-class family. She was also a poet who, in the early days of the Civil War, wrote “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” using many biblically-based lyrics.

Howe had intended her song to be sung as an abolitionist song; however, because of some of the militant-sounding lyrics and the eminently marchable tune, it was rapidly adopted by the Union Army as its most inspiring war song, a reality that Howe likely regretted when the true nature of the world’s first modern “total war” became clear to her.

Howe, who wrote the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” in one sitting (in the early hours of Nov. 18, 1861), later became a pacifist and antiwar activist.

At the time she wrote the song, the Civil War was just starting and had not yet degenerated into the wholesale mutual mass slaughter that was made possible by the technological advances in weaponry that would eventually make cavalry charges, the bayonet and the sword obsolete.

Howe’s evolution into pacifism came about because of the horrors of the War Between the States (1861-1865). By the time she proposed a national day of

mourning for the war's victims, she had also become aware of the carnage that was occurring overseas in the Franco-Prussian War, which had started in July of 1870.

That war, won by Germany, was a very short war but nevertheless it had resulted in almost 100,000 killed in action plus another 100,000 severely wounded.

Howe's awareness of the new realities of war had been made possible because of the relative lack of press censorship about the barbaric nature of modern warfare, which appropriately horrified sensitive humans like her.

It hadn't taken too long for peace-loving, justice-oriented and compassionate observers to recognize that war was indeed, the equivalent of hell on earth. Howe recognized that reality even before the infamous U.S. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman uttered his famous statement about the satanic nature of war.

Sherman's statement had indicted his era's "ChickenHawks": "I confess without shame that I am tired and sick of war. Its glory is all moonshine. It is only those who have neither heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded, who cry aloud for more blood, more vengeance, more desolation. War is Hell."

(ChickenHawks are flag-waving war-mongers who have never truly experienced the gruesome realities of combat war and yet have no problems sending their nation's sons and daughters off "into harm's way.")

Women have often seen their sons and husbands returning home broken in body, mind and spirit. These men, no matter what side they had fought on and whose side claimed the hollow victory, were all equally defeated when the war ended.

And none of them regarded themselves as heroes. Their minds had been forever changed. They had at last seen through the lie that war was glorious.

What was an unexpected development for many of the families of the returning soldiers – both North and South – was the fact that many of the veterans who had no visible scars were still disabled mentally, many of them getting worse after they came home.

The healing effect of time didn't work like it was supposed to in the combat-traumatized victim of war. These ones commonly became melancholy, suffered horrendous nightmares, couldn't function in society and were frequently suicidal, homicidal and/or turned to a life of crime.

It is a fact that many of the most infamous train and bank robbers and serial killers of the late 1800s got their start as Civil War soldiers (the members of the James gang were a good example).

Because of the inability of normal families to deal with the massive numbers of traumatized warriors, the first “veterans homes” in America were constructed for the long-term care of invalided ex-soldiers who, without society’s help, would have otherwise starved to death – homeless, despairing, jobless and helpless.

Many of these unfortunates were diagnosed as having “Soldiers’ Heart”, also known in the Civil War era as “Nostalgia”, a commonly incurable malady, then as well as now, known today as “Combat-Induced PTSD” (posttraumatic stress disorder).

Julia Ward Howe was a humanist who cared about suffering people. She was also a feminist, a social justice activist and a suffragette, and it was because of her ultimate antiwar commitment that she wrote the famous “Mother’s Day Proclamation” in 1870, five years after the end of the Civil War.

The Mother’s Day Proclamation was partly a lament for the useless deaths and partly a call to stop future wars. The call to action was not directed at men, most of whom would have refused to admit, because of their masculine pride, that their dead buddies had actually died in vain.

Rather, the call was directed at women, who were more thoughtful, humane and compassionate than the more violence-prone male members of the species.

Sadly, Howe’s original intent in calling for a Mother’s Day protest against war has been censored from the consciousness of our capitalist, militarized, war-profiteering culture. Her call to action has been watered-down to a sentimental shadow of its original intent.

Rather, Mother’s Day in America has been exploited into a profit-making venture, as have most other holidays (including the originally religious ones like Easter and Christmas). Mother’s Day seems to be just another annual opportunity for gift-buying, gift-giving and the marketing of non-essential consumer goods to a gullible public.

No mention is made of its original purpose. What was originally a call to mobilize outraged mothers to keep their sons and husbands from going off half-cocked to kill and die for some corporate war profiteer or other, has become just another opportunity for boosting the corporate bottom line.

One wonders what “irrelevant agencies” Howe was talking about in line two of the Proclamation below.

One can be sure that the predecessors of our modern militarists, politicians, bankers, media moguls, autocratic corporatists and various bureaucratic agencies that have been royally messing things up in places like Vietnam, Central

America, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Muslim oil states, the Gulf of Mexico, Japan (and the rest of the irradiated world), were also ignoring the wishes of compassionate mothers and the critically thinking public back in 1870.

Note in Howe's manifesto how strongly she felt about wives and mothers never again having to be put in the position of comforting or applauding their soldier-husbands or soldier-sons when they come home from war "reeking of carnage."

Howe clearly felt that mothers should never again let war-making institutions make killers out of their sons who they had raised to be ethical, humane sons with a love for humankind. The prevention of such "reeking" is so much simpler than the attempt to reverse the often untreatable consequences of the gruesomeness of combat war.

Let the people of good will begin again to promote the peacemaking vision of Julia Ward Howe in our current chaotic time of perpetual war. A good place to begin would be this Mother's Day, 2011.

Julia Ward Howe's 1870 Mother's Day Proclamation

Arise then, women of this day! Arise, all women who have hearts, whether your baptism be that of water or tears!

Say firmly: 'We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies.

Our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause.

Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have taught them of charity, mercy and patience.

We women of one country will be too tender of those of another to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs.

From the bosom of the devastated earth, a voice goes up with our own. It says, "Disarm, disarm!"

The sword of murder is not the balance of justice. Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor does violence indicate possession.

As men have often forsaken the plow and the anvil at the summons of war, let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel.

Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead. Let them

solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, each bearing after his own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar but of God.

In the name of womanhood and of humanity, I earnestly ask that a general congress of women without limit of nationality may be appointed and held at some place deemed most convenient and at the earliest period consistent with its objects, to promote the alliance of the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international questions and the great and general interests of peace.

Dr. Kohls is a retired physician from the Duluth, Minnesota, who writes about issues of war, peace and mental health.

The Curious Bush/Bin Laden Symbiosis

Special Report: George W. Bush engaged in a feckless eight-year pursuit of Osama bin Laden while using him for a political edge, says Robert Parry. May 7, 2011

By Robert Parry

Since Osama bin Laden's killing on May 1, it has become shockingly clear that the terrorist leader did not spend most of the last decade on the run or hiding in caves. He was holed up in the Pakistani city of Abbottabad enjoying the comforts of family life with his twenty-something-year-old latest wife.

And, while criticism has fallen on Pakistani authorities for being either complicit or incompetent, almost no attention has focused on the curious symbiotic relationship that has existed since 9/11 between Osama bin Laden and George W. Bush and even longer between the bin Laden family and the Bush family.

At nearly every turn, President George W. Bush acted presumably with incompetence, not complicity in ways that enabled bin Laden to remain free, and the terrorist leader repaid the favor by surfacing at key political moments to scare the American people back into Bush's arms.

Although Bush talked tough about getting bin Laden "dead or alive," he consistently failed to follow through. In November 2001, when bin Laden and his top lieutenants were cornered at the Tora Bora mountain range in eastern Afghanistan, Bush ordered the U.S. military to prematurely pivot toward planning

the next war with Iraq.

According to a later Senate Foreign Relations Committee report, Bush's order to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to freshen up the plans for an Iraq invasion literally pulled Gen. Tommy Franks, head of the Central Command, away from planning the assault on Tora Bora.

The White House also rebuffed CIA appeals for the dispatch of 1,000 Marines to cut off bin Laden's escape routes, the report said. Denied the extra troops to catch bin Laden, U.S. Special Forces couldn't nab the terrorist leader before he made his getaway to Pakistan. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Finishing a Job: Obama Gets Osama."]

The hunt for bin Laden was soon put on the back burner. As the Washington Post reported on Friday, "A few months after Tora Bora, as part of the preparation for war in Iraq, the Bush administration pulled out many of the Special Operations and CIA forces that had been searching for bin Laden in Afghanistan, according to several U.S. officials who served at the time."

Just six months after 9/11 and three months after bin Laden evaded capture at Tora Bora, Bush personally began downplaying the importance of capturing al-Qaeda's leader. "I don't know where he is," Bush told a news conference. "I really just don't spend that much time on him, to be honest with you."

Using Osama

Yet, with bin Laden at large, Bush enjoyed an advantage. He could use the specter of bin Laden as an all-purpose bogeyman to scare the American people. A living bin Laden allowed Bush to create a plausible scenario for additional al-Qaeda attacks inside the United States and thus the justification for Bush to assert unprecedented powers as Commander in Chief.

Bush also cited the continued threat from bin Laden to stampede the American people and Congress into allowing the invasion of Iraq.

One of Bush's key arguments was that Iraq's Saddam Hussein might share weapons of mass destruction with bin Laden's operatives, even though Hussein, a secularist, and bin Laden, a fundamentalist, were mortal enemies in the Islamic world.

But the American people didn't know such details. Many fell in line behind Bush's claims, trusting him in the face of periodic panics over heightened, level-orange terrorist threats.

In 2003, the invasion of Iraq and the toppling of Hussein further enhanced

Bush's reputation as the heroic, self-proclaimed "war president." As Bush declared a premature "mission accomplished" in Iraq, he also consolidated his extraordinary claims of presidential powers.

But bin Laden was another winner. His escape from Tora Bora in 2001 not only burnished his reputation as an Islamic folk hero who had defied the Americans, but Bush's invasion of Iraq allowed bin Laden to recruit new terrorist cadre over resentments about the Iraq War.

By bogging down U.S. military and intelligence assets far from bin Laden's Pakistani hideouts, the Iraq War helped bin Laden in another way. His life-style improved. His growing sense of security led him to leave the rough tribal areas and begin to settle down in more civilized environs of Pakistan.

Returning this favor, bin Laden gave Bush a big assist in the tense final days of Campaign 2004.

With no WMD found in Iraq and the war going badly, Bush was struggling and Democrat John Kerry was within reach of victory. It was then that bin Laden ended nearly a year of silence by taking the risky step of releasing a new video on Oct. 29, 2004.

Bin Laden's rant attacking Bush was immediately spun by Bush's supporters as bin Laden's "endorsement" of Kerry.

According to two polls taken during and after the videotape's release, Bush experienced a bump of several percentage points, from a virtual tie with Kerry to a five or six percentage point lead. Tracking polls by TIPP and Newsweek detected a surge in Bush support from a statistically insignificant two-point lead to five and six points, respectively.

On Election Day, Nov. 2, the official results showed Bush winning by a margin of less than three percentage points. So, arguably the intervention by bin Laden urging Americans to reject Bush and thus having the predictable effect of boosting Bush may have tipped the election and given Bush a second term.

A CIA Assessment

Immediately after bin Laden's videotape appeared, senior CIA analysts reached just that conclusion about bin Laden's intent.

"Bin Laden certainly did a nice favor today for the President," said deputy CIA director John McLaughlin in opening a meeting to review secret "strategic analysis" of the videotape, according to Ron Suskind's *The One Percent Doctrine*, which drew heavily from CIA insiders.

Suskind wrote that CIA analysts had spent years “parsing each expressed word of the al-Qaeda leader and his deputy, [Ayman] Zawahiri. What they’d learned over nearly a decade is that bin Laden speaks only for strategic reasons. Today’s conclusion: bin Laden’s message was clearly designed to assist the President’s reelection.”

Jami Miscik, CIA deputy associate director for intelligence, expressed the consensus view that bin Laden recognized how Bush’s heavy-handed policies such as the Guantanamo prison camp, the Abu Ghraib torture scandal and the war in Iraq were serving al-Qaeda’s strategic goals for recruiting a new generation of jihadists.

“Certainly,” Miscik said, “he would want Bush to keep doing what he’s doing for a few more years,” according to Suskind’s account.

As their internal assessment sank in, the CIA analysts were troubled by the implications of their own conclusions. “An ocean of hard truths before them such as what did it say about U.S. policies that bin Laden would want Bush reelected remained untouched,” Suskind wrote.

Bush enthusiasts, however, took bin Laden’s videotape at face value, calling it proof the terrorist leader feared Bush and favored Kerry. In a pro-Bush book, *Strategy*, right-wing journalist Bill Sammon portrayed bin Laden’s videotape as an attempt by the terrorist leader to persuade Americans to vote for Kerry.

But Bush himself recognized the real impact of bin Laden’s rant. “I thought it was going to help,” Bush told Sammon after the election. “I thought it would help remind people that if bin Laden doesn’t want Bush to be the President, something must be right with Bush.”

In *Strategy*, Sammon also quoted Republican National Chairman Ken Mehlman as agreeing that bin Laden’s videotape helped Bush. “It reminded people of the stakes,” Mehlman said. “It reinforced an issue on which Bush had a big lead over Kerry.”

So how hard is it to figure out that bin Laden a longtime student of American politics would have understood exactly the same point?

Getting Comfortable

We now know that Bush’s second term meant a continuation of bin Laden’s relative safety. In 2005, Bush closed down a special CIA unit that had been tracking bin Laden’s whereabouts for almost a decade, with its responsibilities merged with a broader counter-terrorism office.

In 2006, more information also surfaced about how Bush's pivot to Iraq had protected bin Laden. Lt. Gen. John Vines told the Washington Post that his troops were within a half-hour of catching bin Laden but needed three drones to cover the escape routes. The general said only one drone was available because the others had been reassigned for service in Iraq.

According to new evidence that has surfaced since bin Laden's death, it appears that early in Bush's second term, bin Laden moved into the compound in Abbottabad, an hour-or-so drive from Pakistan's capital of Islamabad, where he set up house with family members, including his young wife.

By late 2005, bin Laden's inner circle also understood that their safety and success were tied to dragging out the U.S. military debacle in Iraq, which Bush called the "central front in the war on terror," even though bin Laden was about 1,500 miles away in Pakistan.

In a letter, dated Dec. 11, 2005, a senior al-Qaeda operative known as "Atiyah" lectured the then-leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, on the necessity of taking a long view on the Iraq conflict rather than rushing things.

"Prolonging the war is in our interest," Atiyah told Zarqawi.

The "Atiyah letter" was discovered by U.S. authorities at the time of Zarqawi's death on June 7, 2006, and was translated by the U.S. military's Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. [To view the "prolonging the war" excerpt, click [here](#). To read the entire Atiyah letter, click [here](#).]

The hard truth is that Bush and bin Laden shared a common goal in Iraq. They both wanted U.S. forces to "stay the course."

Meanwhile, back in the United States, the Republicans continued using the specter of bin Laden to undermine Democrats, sometimes juxtaposing a photo of bin Laden next to the image of a Democratic candidate who was being smeared as "soft on terror."

Even during Campaign 2006, when the American voters were finally catching on to this ruse, the Republican National Committee released a campaign ad to rally voters to the GOP banner by showing threatening quotes from bin Laden followed by the pitch: "These are the stakes."

Desperate to hold onto a Republican congressional majority, President Bush flogged the same theme in lashing Democrats who favored a military withdrawal from Iraq.

“If we were to follow the Democrats’ prescriptions and withdraw from Iraq, we would be fulfilling Osama bin Laden’s highest aspirations,” Bush said at an Oct. 19 campaign speech in Pennsylvania. “We should at least be able to agree that the path to victory is not to do precisely what the terrorists want.”

But we now know that what al-Qaeda’s leaders really wanted was for the United States to stay stuck in Iraq, all the better not to have the resources to track down bin Laden at his compound in Abbottabad and not to have enough troops in Afghanistan to thwart a comeback by the Taliban.

The Historic Ties

Perhaps even more curious about this Bush/bin Laden symbiosis is that it predated the 9/11 attacks and involved other family members and friends.

In 1979, Bush’s former National Guard buddy James Bath was the sole U.S. business representative for Salem bin Laden, scion of the wealthy Saudi bin Laden family and Osama’s half-brother. While fronting for Salem bin Laden, Bath helped bankroll Bush’s first company, Arbusto Energy, by investing \$50,000 for a five percent stake. [For details, see [Neck Deep.](#)]

In the 1980s, the fortunes of the Bush and bin Laden families crossed paths again. George H.W. Bush as vice president and president supported a CIA program to aid Islamic mujahedeen in their anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan. It was during that conflict against the Soviet army that Osama bin Laden traveled to Afghanistan and established himself as a legendary Islamic fighter.

In early 1989, President George H.W. Bush spurned Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev’s proposal for a political settlement in Afghanistan and chose to continue the CIA war, even after the Soviets withdrew. That decision contributed to the rise of the Taliban in the mid-1990s and the formation of al-Qaeda out of veterans of the anti-Soviet jihad. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Why Afghanistan Really Fell Apart.”](#)]

By the late 1990s, the Clinton administration recognized Osama bin Laden and his new al-Qaeda organization as a major terrorist threat to the United States. However, once in the White House, President George W. Bush let down the nation’s guard.

When the CIA warned him on Aug. 6, 2001, that bin-Laden was determined “to strike inside the U.S.,” Bush brushed off the warning and went fishing. Rather than rallying the government to examine available clues and tighten security, he continued a month-long vacation.

A little more than a month after the CIA warning, on the morning of Sept. 11,

George H.W. Bush and members of the bin Laden family were participating in a Carlyle Group investment meeting in Washington. It was disrupted by the machinations of another branch of the bin Laden family, when Osama's al-Qaeda operatives hijacked planes and crashed them into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon.

According to one source, a bin Laden family member at the Carlyle meeting immediately sensed who was behind the terror attacks and removed his name tag.

In the following days, as the Justice Department was jailing hundreds of Arab cab drivers and other "usual suspects," George W. Bush cleared the bin Ladens to fly out of the United States, after only cursory interrogations by the FBI, by letting them board some of the first planes that were allowed back into U.S. air space. [For details, see Craig Unger's *House of Bush, House of Saud.*]

Going After Osama

It was not until George W. Bush finally was out of office in 2009 that the U.S. government refocused its attention on getting bin Laden. President Barack Obama said he ordered CIA Director Leon Panetta to make the killing or capturing of bin Laden the agency's top priority.

Obama also drew down U.S. forces in Iraq and bolstered the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. Further, the new president authorized more aggressive use of Predator drones to attack suspected Taliban militants and al-Qaeda operatives inside Pakistan.

The pressure was building on bin Laden. However, the terrorist leader apparently had grown accustomed to his relative security at his compound in Abbottabad. He was careful not to use electronic communications or to step outside into the open, but the 54-year-old Saudi exile stayed put with his family and young wife.

When CIA analysts concluded that the preponderance of evidence indicated that bin Laden was in the compound, President Obama ordered the May 1 nighttime raid by U.S. Special Forces without telling the Pakistani government.

Members of SEAL Team-6 and other personnel quickly secured bin Laden's compound, killing four of his associates, apparently including one son. Upon spotting bin Laden on the third floor, the commandos shot and killed him. They then carried bin Laden's corpse to a helicopter and spirited the body away. It was later taken to a U.S. aircraft carrier and buried at sea.

One might have thought that given the strange history of the Bush/bin Laden symbiosis, the American Right would have simply given Obama credit for the successful operation and tried not to mention Bush. But that isn't how the Right

and its media machinery work.

Almost immediately, Republicans and right-wing media figures began claiming that George W. Bush deserved substantial credit for bin Laden's death because one or two shards of information about the identity of bin Laden's top courier, Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti, had been extracted from al-Qaeda operatives subjected to "enhanced interrogation techniques" at CIA black sites.

Ironically, however, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged operational mastermind of the 9/11 attacks who was waterboarded 183 times, continued to lie about al-Kuwaiti's significance as did another al-Qaeda leader, Abu Faraj al-Libi who also was subjected to harsh treatment.

Bush defenders have spun those facts to claim that the failure to elicit the truth from these individuals also reveals the value of the torture techniques because supposedly the continued lying by the two men after being tortured indicated how important al-Kuwaiti must have been.

However, as CIA Director Panetta and FBI interrogators have noted, it's impossible to say whether the captives would have revealed as much or more information if they had been subjected to professional questioning using traditional interrogation methods.

The Scourge of Torture

There's also the legal and moral issue of whether torture is ever justified. The Inquisition extracted many confessions some of them surely valid but most civilized people thought those methods had been consigned to the shameful trash heap of the Dark Ages and more modern barbaric regimes.

Yet, what is perhaps most audacious about the Right's demand that Bush be given substantial credit for the elimination of bin Laden is that Bush had nearly eight years to make good on his "dead or alive" threat and failed.

Now, more than two years after Bush left office, Obama's administration finished the job and Bush's acolytes can't bring themselves to admit Bush's failure or Obama's success.

Similarly, after the 9/11 attacks, the Right tried to palm off blame on President Bill Clinton, although Bush had been in office almost eight months and had ignored the CIA's terror warnings.

Protecting Bush's legacy was the main point of the 2006 docu-drama "The Path to 9/11," produced by Disney's ABC-TV which assigned pro-Bush operatives as directors. The program, which ABC touted as a public service shown "with no

commercial interruptions,” mixed real and fabricated events to put Democrats in the worst possible light and portray Bush as the hero who finally set things right.

In other words, when Bush failed to take action as president to prevent 9/11, the blame had to be shifted to his predecessor, and now when his successor succeeds at getting bin Laden, the credit must accrue to Bush.

Then, the power of the right-wing news media and the influence of the neoconservatives ensure that many gullible Americans accept this narrative.

But the real history presents a more troubling picture, one in which Bush failed to protect the nation from al-Qaeda’s 9/11 attacks and then exploited the public’s fear to justify an expansion of his own powers and an aggressive war against Iraq, a country which had nothing to do with 9/11.

All the while, Bush pursued at best a feckless strategy for tracking down al-Qaeda’s top leader and even chuckled about how bin Laden had helped assure his election victory in 2004.

The end result of this strange symbiosis appears to have been that bin Laden grew increasingly confident of his own security. Perhaps, Bush’s apologists will next claim that Bush deserves credit for getting bin Laden because he gave the terrorist leader what turned out to be a false sense of security.

[For more on these topics, see Robert Parry’s *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a two-book set for the discount price of only \$19. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & ‘Project Truth’* are also available there.

America’s Need for a ‘Public Good’

America’s Christian churches have failed to provide moral leadership on behalf

of a "public good," observes Rev. Howard Bess. May 7, 2011

By the Rev. Howard Bess

Editor's Note: On the Christian Right, it has become an article of anti-historical faith that the United States was founded as a "Christian nation," thus making Jews, Muslims, atheists and other religious minorities second-class citizens who must accept Christian dominion over government policies.

Ironically, this insistence on a country controlled by a deformed concept of "what would Jesus do" i.e. persecute gays, repress women and stigmatize non-Christians has merged with a "free-market" extremism that sees no role for government helping the poor who were at the heart of Jesus's ministry, a contradiction addressed by the Rev. Howard Bess in this guest essay:

The United States was never meant to be a Christian nation. Instead, the Founders envisioned a secular state in which religion would be pursued with complete freedom, but they also understood the need for the young nation to have a moral compass.

James Madison, one of the chief architects of the U.S. Constitution, wrote: "The public good, the real welfare of the great body of the people, is the supreme object to be pursued."

Madison recognized that for America to achieve its promise, it had to maintain a public virtue, a virtue that could not be captured or insured by a written document such as the U.S. Constitution.

Religion had the power to give meaning to that public virtue. After all, the core ethical message of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures support Madison's idea of "the public good." They recognized that a people's moral well-being demands that we answer "yes" to the question "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The Old Testament laws of hospitality demand that a moral people provide for the vulnerable. The needs of sojourners, widows, orphans, the blind, the lame and the poor are a part of the "public good."

And at times of national stress from the days of the nation's founding religious people often did bring these moral values to the table.

Notable examples were the roles played by religious leaders in the Abolitionist movement to end slavery and in the last century to bring voting rights to women and civil rights to African-Americans. At such key moments, religious people demonstrated the ability to shape the conscience of the nation.

The 1960s and 1970s could have been American Christianity's finest hour if its leaders had been up to the challenge of guiding the nation through a period of turmoil, but mostly they were not.

America was fighting a senseless war in Vietnam that produced chaotic anti-war protests at home. Racism was challenged. Women demanded their full partnership in society. Patriarchal marriage was battered. The seeds of gay rights began to sprout.

Yet, with the exception of the African-American churches under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr., the social revolution that took place found little moral direction from ministers and established religions.

Many churches escaped from the public chaos into a message of personal salvation, which was enhanced by the ecstatic experiences of Pentecostalism. High-tech entertainment was added to the churches' tool bag. Passion for the "public good" was lost in the process.

In retrospect, during the last half of the 20th century, while Billy Graham was filling the world's largest stadiums and televangelists were dominating America's television screens, the moral sensibilities of the nation were turned over to the pursuits of the super-rich and the rule of giant corporations.

Neither operated with the restraint of conscience. Wealth and power guided their operations.

So, today, the United States is at a crossroads in its history. We are a nation at a pinnacle of world influence, an empire with unparalleled wealth and power. Yet, as America has attained its place as the world's dominant empire, public virtue has weakened to a point of impotence.

I recently saw a cartoon by William Haefeli that caught the essence of this dilemma. Four adults are in the midst of dinner conversation as one remarks, "I'm in the market for an easier religion." Yet, this easy religion will never provide moral direction for the nation.

The current economic crisis is the fruit of this folly. At the center of the financial collapse were corporations that were "too big to fail." From the perspective of a government lacking a moral compass, there was no choice but to bail out the most selfish and corrupt influences that have ever threatened the nation.

Corporations by definition have no soul and no ethic beyond the bottom line of profit. As corporations have evolved in America, people are no longer in charge of corporations; corporations are in control of people who have become nothing

more than puppets on corporate strings.

During the recent financial scandal, most of America's religious leaders and institutions have remained silent, complicit in America's moral and ethical demise. They should have known better.

I would like to lay the blame for this failure on the large corporations and on those who have bought in to their riches. However, the real blame falls to religious institutions and leaders who have abandoned the nation's need for public virtue.

Unless we regain our moral compass, the Founders' dream of a nation built on the common good will be a dream that died.

The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska. His e-mail address is hdbss@mtaonline.net.

Politics of Revenge and Submission

Osama bin Laden is dead, but the decade-long "war on terror" has drained the life blood of the U.S. Republic, writes Phil Rockstroh. May 5, 2011

By Phil Rockstroh

Editor's Note: Many Americans felt giddy over the killing of Osama bin Laden in part because his name was associated with the latest round of personal depredations foisted on them, from the humiliating strip-downs at airports to the loss of civil liberties to the costs of enhanced militarism around the world.

But the key question now is whether anything will really change with his demise, whether bin Laden was just the latest excuse for further encroachments, whether the dying Republic can be revived after many decades of ceding its vigor to a snarling Empire, as Phil Rockstroh explains in this guest essay:

Osama bin Laden is dead. And so is the U.S. republic. We had to destroy our freedoms in order to save them.

What is left to save from the next rampaging dragon when the knights, sworn to kill the monster, destroy everything in their path in the pursuit of him? One

killer is dead. Now what are we going to do with all the killers in our midst who killed him.

Since 9/11/2001, due to the lust for revenge of the people of the U.S., hundreds of thousands of innocent Islamic people are dead. These human beings were killed in our name.

Be very careful when you proclaim: "I'm glad 'we' got bin Laden. He deserved it." Be very grateful most of us don't get what we deserve.

To appropriate a classical understanding of the situation: Aeschylus, in his Oresteia trilogy, dramatized that civilization begins when (in fact, civilization is not even possible until) retribution yields to justice i.e., The Furies, goddesses adorned with serpent-seething headdresses and an abiding passion for retribution, must be transformed into the Eumenides (the kindly ones).

They must cease their seeking of revenge (which engenders endless revenge cycles, inflicting a trauma-wrought callowness on the people of a culture) and become the enemies of those who bear false witness and stand against the democratic process.

In contrast, in the U.S., a state policy of genocide against its native inhabitants determined the geographical dimensions of the nation itself, and, in many ways, determined the inner dimensions of its collective mindscape, which created and maintains the death-cult calculus of U.S. militarist imperium.

(The U.S. military still envisages its enemies as "Red Indian savages." Witness: Osama bin Laden having been given the code name, "Geronimo.")

Hence the isolated, alienated U.S. populace (its males in particular) clutch, to the point of fetishizing, their guns, because they feel powerless before the deprivations of an exploitive system rigged to benefit a small class of privileged insiders.

Much damage is done by this compensatory fantasy: Vulnerable children and teens are bullied by their troubled peers to the point of clinical depression and suicide; in domestic situations, crimes of passion take deadly turns; and episodes of mass shootings erupt across the landscape of exploitation, alienation and anomie.

The collective mode of mind of the corporate consumer/militarist empire leaves both the hoi polloi and the privileged unable to even approach the problem of their alienation thick walls of self-protection must be breached In the U.S., individuals have become so withdrawn into themselves, it seems as if Home Depot

outlets sell ready-to-assemble, prefab bubbles of self-enclosure, with optional mounted gun turrets.

How is it possible for troubled individuals to live in a culture in which the response of their government (mirrored in its movies, television programs, and video games) to almost every problem abroad involves military force and imperialist coercion – and not have these death-leveling policies leave their mark on the psyches of the populace?

All too frequently, in the increasingly desperate and denial-ridden nation, deranged chickens come home and reap havoc in the roost (also known as The Law of Perpetual Poultry Return).

As above with its government, so below with its populace: With troubling frequency, in shooting rampages, unhinged individuals stage freelance, military-style commando raids, defending (in the tormented perception of their besieged minds) their internal homeland.

The rigid hierarchical structure of U.S. corporate oligarchy (but veiled by the internalization of its upward class mobility hagiography) imposes a type of domination and control compulsion (and attendant low-level hysteria) in the psyches of the nation's males.

Hence, the need for disproportionate amounts of control to displace their own sense of being dominated by brutal power (e.g., they feel so deeply diminished by their own submissive position in the economic order that the men and boys of the nation are driven to taunt other males by bandying demeaning invectives, such as, "You're my bitch.")

What they are expressing is the displaced anger, engendered by their helplessness before the dictates of the corporate state.

An insidious order that determines the course of their day: At what hour, they will rise (at the insistence of an alarm clock) to meet the day; what they will eat (generally, processed or fast food); the roads and routes they will travel (stranded in the grinding limbo of commuter traffic); who they will be in contact with during the day (the dharma-decimating exigencies of the workspaces of the neo-liberal economic order).

In short, how their day unfolds (exploited for the benefit of the oligarchs of the corporate state) and how their day ends (on edge, enervated, muck-brained, in hyper-attenuated communion with some form of the mass media hologram).

The inimical effect of this mode of being has come to be known as "the American way of life." Therein, individuals, reduced to mere assets of the economic

elite, grow bereft of the means and motivation for personal transformation.

Moreover, the culture – always an organic, collaborative effort between individuals and the collective mind of an age – withers into an economic, as well as, psychic wasteland, because the means of social engagement have been denuded due to the full-spectrum domination of both cultural real estate and individual mindscape by the corporate state.

Corporate domination of everyday life has left the soul with a scant amount of wiggle room. But it has not always been so, even in the Deep South, in the belligerent ignorance and staggering naivety, of my youth.

Homer counseled that we should straddle time with our backs to the future, our faces to the past. Thus this digression:

In the year, 1970, in the summer I turned 14, in Piedmont Park, in Atlanta, Georgia, the Allman Brothers, among other bands, would perform free, impromptu concerts for a tie-dye-clad, reefer-reeking, bell-bottoms-caressing-the-Georgia-red-dirt gatherings of “freaks” – which was the preferred tribalist term, as opposed to the media-created, socially pejorative hippies which, when bandied among counterculture insiders, was generally applied ironically.

Although the park was located only a few miles from my family’s home, undertaking the trip presented a degree of peril. To make one’s way to the park included traversing a tough, in-town, white-working-class neighborhood (now a gentrified into soul-sucking blandness, yuppie enclave) where, from the perspective of its denizens, their world, and all they held in reverence and reference, was under siege.

And, although inchoate, their animus was instantly distilled, simply upon a glimpse of the untamed tresses of a singular, thin of wrist, dirty hippie, commie faggot – whose mere presence was considered an affront to their pomade-crowned, muscle-car-thundering parcel of redneck paradise.

Accordingly, the locals were pledged to do their part to fight the scourge by increasing their intake of PBRs and Jack Daniels, and, upon sight of said dirty hippie interlopers, bestowing ass-stompings – and for no-extra-charge – involuntary haircuts upon errant longhairs caught in their midst.

Yet as the era progressed, the savage dance between hippie freak and redneck belligerent changed in tone and tempo, an extemporaneous type of metaphysical jujitsu occurred, in which the predator was subdued and seduced by the prey as if by cultural contact buzz, redneck fury yielded to counterculture insouciance.

“When the individual feels, the community reels” ... Aldous Huxley

Briefly, this was the anatomy of the seduction: In their pursuit of fleeing freaks into the park, the young males of the cracker tribe happened upon a few of the things of this vast and vivid world even more compelling than the possibility of ass-kicking in the form of attractive young women.

Yet to the young men, the hippie sphinxes, sirens, waifs and gypsy queens were baffling, unapproachable; these women were less than taken by their greasy, pompadoured forelocks and aggressive bearing.

In short, and to appropriate the parlance of the era, the hippie chicks didn't get off on these young men's "bad vibes it, like, really harshed their high."

But these great, great grandsons of the Lost Cause proved much more malleable in countenance than the ossified in memory, now enshrined in marble statuary, of their confederate forefathers.

Consequently, a kind of cracker Lysistrata started to unfold. The pomade lacquer faded from stiff pompadours, yielding to lank, draping locks of hippie plumage. The habit of rebel bellicosity was sublimated into an avidity to "boogie." The zealots of ass-kicking became the acolytes of acid and devotees of the gospels of kicking back and getting down.

As time passed, on weekends, as the Allman Brothers preached Sunday sermons vis-a-vis guitar and drum solos, these newly minted freaks could be found in positions of repose and reflection upon the grassy hills of the park, eating Orange Sunshine and drawling, "aw mahn, Dwayne's guitar is shootin' sparks into mah brain"

Or as Marcel Proust put it, "The real act of discovery consists not in finding new lands but in seeing with new eyes."

Yet, in our time, the fervor of the 1960s seems, in the words of a Latin proverb: "Parturiunt montes nascetur ridiculus mus" – The mountains have labor pains and a ridiculous little mouse is brought forth."

As the psychedelic nimbus of the early 1970s transmogrified into a Nixonian shit-storm, and the long, silent war waged by Disaster Capitalists on the U.S. working class dissipated their hopes and buffeted their sense of wellbeing, a familiar class system wrought aura of misery and meanness began to reassert itself.

The Dixieland Woodstock Nation increasingly began to resemble a southern-fried Weimar Republic, as the Corporate State Altamont grew increasingly pervasive, punitive, and imposed more and more demeaning demands upon the lives of working-class Americans.

Yet the present paradigm and its dependence upon a corporate consumer/militarist mindset persists because: "A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of being right."—Thomas Paine.

Osama bin Laden was taken out by a rival gang of terrorists: And, across the land, the parade of death-reveling fools prattles onward.

Hence, the desperate, diminished souls of the empire are driven to contort themselves, collectively, into all manner of positions of casuistry, in a vain attempt to rationalize being complicit in the crimes of the state.

Thus, in the compulsion to see ourselves as good and decent folk, we mistake the involuted course of our own dim and brutal thoughts for the darkness and evil of others.

Therefore: This is why self-knowledge is crucial: "When an inner situation is not made conscious, it appears outside as fate." – Carl Jung.

Over the last few days, witnessing the blood-dimmed spectacle of witless celebrants frothing in glee at the news of the revenge killing of Osama bin Laden, I feel as though I'm having the dubious privilege of peering into an alternative universe where annoyances such as common decency whither into extinction, as all the while, vile, lurid delusions bloom like hot house flowers.

The noxious redolence of these fleur du mal can have an enervating effect on one's will to resist and fight back.

But resist one must. And remember to savor the glorious failure of even a hopeless cause.

The most naive and banal response would be to propagate the tired canard of the vacuous, crackpot realist mindset that: "That's just the way it is that's just how things work that's the way it is, always was, and always will be."

Dead-ass wrong: That is the way a particular system is being operated at a particular time. Moreover, no system operates in stasis therefore are open to systemic change and random fluxes, by a host of variables, known and unknown.

Although outcomes, for better or worse, and all combinations therein, are uncertain, thus the world before us remains an extraordinary thing to behold.

"Resistance to the organized mass can be effected only by the man who is as well organized in his individuality as the mass itself." – Carl Jung

Even though the earthly remains of Osama bin Laden are now entombed in the sea,

the U.S. empire will continue to founder, its people have been made no safer nor have we been placed in an enhanced position to prosper.

What would prove helpful would be to cease engaging in this constant, tedious dance with our homicidal shadow self, because every written-in-blood name, listed on every dance card at the Empire's Ball, bears one's own name.

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What Has Bin Laden's Killing Wrought?

Exclusive: The U.S. killing of Osama bin Laden has created a new world of risks – and opportunities – observes Ray McGovern. May 5, 2011

By Ray McGovern

As America's morbid celebrations over the killing of Osama bin Laden begin to fade, we are left with a new landscape of risks and opportunities created by his slaying at the hands of a U.S. Special Forces team at a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

The range of those future prospects could be found in Wednesday's Washington Post. On the hopeful side, [a front-page article](#) reported that the Obama administration was following up bin Laden's death with accelerated peace talks in Afghanistan. On a darker note, [a Post editorial](#) hailed bin Laden's slaying as a model for "targeting" Libya's Muammar Gaddafi and his sons.

So, while there is the possibility that the United States might finally begin to wind down a near-decade-long war in Afghanistan, there is the countervailing prospect of the United States consolidating an official policy of assassination and violence as the way to impose Washington's will on the Muslim world.

If the Post's neoconservative editors get their way and the U.S. military is officially transformed into a roving assassination squad a global "Murder, Inc." that could be viewed as bin Laden's final victory.

Having already helped create the climate for George W. Bush's administration to

overturn longstanding American principles regarding civil liberties, aggressive war and torture bin Laden could go to his watery grave with the satisfaction of officially branding the United States as a nation of assassins.

If assassination becomes the preferred calling card of U.S. foreign policy, it also is a safe bet that the lines at al-Qaeda recruiting stations will grow longer, rather than shrink, and that more rounds of retaliatory violence will follow.

However, if the Post's news article by Rajiv Chandrasekaran is correct that bin Laden's death may clear the way for negotiations with the Taliban and a peace settlement in Afghanistan then something truly positive from this grisly episode might be salvaged.

Not only might the 100,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan start coming home but the United States might finally begin to repair its badly stained reputation as a "beacon" of liberty and the rule of law.

Targeted Killings

The circumstances surrounding the targeted killing of bin Laden remind us how far the United States has strayed from its principles.

Though clearly bin Laden represented an extreme case as the leader of an international terrorist organization that has slaughtered thousands of innocent people his killing was not unique. Over the past decade, U.S. Special Forces and sniper teams have been authorized to kill significant numbers of suspected militants on sight.

For instance, in 2007, a case surfaced regarding two U.S. Special Forces soldiers who took part in the execution of an Afghan man who was a suspected leader of an insurgent group. Special Forces Capt. Dave Staffel and Sgt. Troy Anderson were leading a team of Afghan soldiers when an informant told them where the suspected insurgent leader was hiding. The U.S.-led contingent found a man believed to be Nawab Buntangyar walking outside his compound near the village of Hasan Kheyl.

While the Americans kept their distance out of fear the suspect might be wearing a suicide vest, the man was questioned about his name and the Americans checked his description against a list from the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Afghanistan, known as "the kill-or-capture list."

Concluding that the man was Nawab Buntangyar, Staffel gave the order to shoot, and Anderson from a distance of about 100 yards away fired a bullet through the man's head, killing him instantly.

The soldiers viewed the killing as “a textbook example of a classified mission completed in accordance with the American rules of engagement,” the New York Times reported. “The men said such rules allowed them to kill Buntangyar, whom the American military had designated a terrorist cell leader, once they positively identified him.”

Staffel’s civilian lawyer Mark Waple said the Army’s Criminal Investigation Command concluded that the shooting was “justifiable homicide,” but a two-star general in Afghanistan instigated a murder charge against the two men. That case, however, foundered over accusations that the charge was improperly filed. [NYT, Sept. 17, 2007]

According to evidence in a court martial at Fort Bragg, the earlier Army investigation cleared the two soldiers because they had been operating under rules of engagement that empowered them to kill individuals who have been designated “enemy combatants,” even if the targets were unarmed and presented no visible threat.

In September 2007, a U.S. military judge dismissed all charges against the two soldiers, ruling it was conceivable that the detained Afghan was wearing a suicide explosive belt, though there was no evidence that he was. [For more details, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Bush Turns US Soldiers into Murderers.”](#)]

In other words, the killing of Osama bin Laden was within well-established “rules of engagement” started under President Bush and continued by President Barack Obama. Obama’s proud announcement on Sunday evening that “a small team of Americans” had killed bin Laden reflected not an anomalous action but a pattern of behavior, made distinctive only by the prominence of the target.

“At my direction,” Obama said, “a small team of Americans carried out the operation with extraordinary courage and capability. After a firefight, they killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body.”

Revised Accounts

On Monday, John Brennan, Obama’s special assistant on terrorism, claimed that bin Laden either had a gun or was reaching for a gun when he was shot, but the White House on Tuesday amended that statement to say that bin Laden was unarmed when killed.

Further U.S. revisions of the official story followed on Wednesday, as U.S. officials acknowledged that the “firefight” in Abbottabad was extremely one-sided. They [told the New York Times](#) that only one of bin Laden’s “couriers,” Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti, fired at the U.S. team from a nearby guest house before he and a woman with him were slain.

After the U.S. troops entered the main building housing bin Laden, they assumed people they encountered might be armed, the U.S. officials said. According to this account, a second "courier" was killed inside the house as he was believed to be preparing to fire. One of bin Laden's sons who reportedly lunged toward the attackers was killed, too.

Upon reaching the third-floor room where bin Laden was, the U.S. team spotted him within reach of an AK-47 and a Makarov pistol, the U.S. officials said. The commandos then shot and killed him and wounded a woman, apparently one of his wives.

It is, of course, difficult to second-guess the split-second decisions of commandos on a dangerous nighttime mission as to whether there was a reasonable prospect of taking bin Laden alive or whether he did constitute a lethal threat.

But their rules of engagement clearly were to shoot first and ask questions later. As CIA Director Leon Panetta explained in TV interviews, the commandos were authorized to kill bin Laden on sight, although they were prepared to accept his surrender if there was no sign of resistance.

Put differently, the orders were to "kill or capture" rather than "capture or kill." And the "kill" option appeared to be the favored choice.

Obama himself suggested that priority in his Sunday address, disclosing that at the start of his presidency, he ordered Panetta "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."

Obama, a former professor of constitutional law, has come a long way in accepting the frame of reference created by his predecessor who smirked at the niceties of international law and whose White House counsel Alberto Gonzales mocked the Geneva Conventions as "quaint" and "obsolete."

Dangers Ahead

As details of the bin Laden raid and then the corrected details spill out over the next several days, it is hard to predict the reaction in the Muslim world, and particularly in nuclear-armed Pakistan, where the targeted killing took place.

Extremists of all stripes may be given extra incentive to upend governments that acquiesce to American violations of their sovereignty. There are also heightened dangers of anti-U.S. terrorist attacks.

In Pakistan, where U.S. drone strikes against Taliban and al-Qaeda militants,

have been a major bone of contention, the bin Laden assault has already increased the turbulence in U.S.-Pakistani relations.

According to both governments, Obama chose not to inform President Asif Ali Zardari until the nighttime raid was finished, apparently fearing that Pakistani authorities might tip off the bin Laden compound. Only after the fact did Obama reach Zardari by telephone to let him know what had just gone down.

The Pakistani government responded with a stern official statement of the obvious, that the "unilateral" attack had violated Pakistan's "sovereignty." But there was embarrassment, too, that the world's most hunted terrorist had been found living in a million-dollar compound just down the road from Pakistan's top military academia and a military base.

That fact set and the history of Pakistan's chief intelligence agency, the ISI, playing double games regarding Islamic extremism were factors in Obama's decision to go it alone, Panetta suggested in an interview with Time magazine.

"It was decided that any effort to work with the Pakistanis could jeopardize the mission," the CIA director said. "They might alert the targets."

Still, the impression of the U.S. running roughshod over the Pakistani government will make it more difficult for senior Pakistani military and government officials to cooperate or even pretend to cooperate with the U.S. war across the border in Afghanistan.

Zardari is already in a peck of trouble. His very position as president is in jeopardy.

That means Zardari will be under still more pressure to demonstrate his independence of Washington at a time when Pakistanis perceive they have been subjected to a string of indignities, even preceding the high-profile controversy over the bin Laden raid.

Whether or not the Pakistani military decides to allow President Zardari to remain in office, many Pakistanis are likely to react strongly against the U.S. at a time when bilateral relations are already at their nadir.

Since Sunday, many U.S. officials have harshly criticized Pakistan for harboring bin Laden, with some suggesting major cuts in U.S. aid which has totaled about \$20 billion over the past decade.

For its part, Pakistan can retaliate by blocking the resupply of U.S. and NATO forces along roads to the Khyber Pass and into Afghanistan. This extremely long logistics line may well prove the Achilles heel of the entire U.S. war effort.

No one knows this better than the Pakistanis who have already shown themselves ready to use the leverage afforded by NATO's dependence on the difficult supply line.

Ignoring Other Options

In favoring killing over capture, it also appears that the United States passed up the prospects of questioning bin Laden about al-Qaeda in favor of killing him, all the better to avoid the messy legal complications of how to proceed against him.

Yet, there are commonly accepted legal ways to capture and bring such people to a court of law, yes, even violent "bad guys" like Osama bin Laden. It is difficult especially given the complexities with Pakistani authorities and the risks involved in grabbing a dangerous target but it can be done.

That bin Laden might have had extremely valuable information to impart to interrogators is a no-brainer. But some of that information also might have been embarrassing to important elements of the U.S. government, especially considering his longstanding relationship with the CIA going back to the 1980s and the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan.

Much as some prominent U.S. officials breathed a sigh of relief when Iraq's deposed dictator Saddam Hussein was hanged in 2006 avoiding a thorough investigation that might have exposed unwelcome secrets dating back to the 1980s some operatives from the same period probably are glad that bin Laden's secrets are now buried at sea.

Yet, despite the future risks for the United States and the Muslim world and the fact that the U.S. assault was a fairly clear violation of international law the killing of bin Laden paradoxically does offer a possible route back from the institutionalization of American lawlessness.

Since bin Laden and his actions on 9/11 created the shock that allowed the Bush administration to lead the United States into the "dark side" of "enhanced interrogations," "preemptive wars" and a wholesale assault on civil liberties, it could follow that the death of bin Laden will permit a retracing of those steps.

The first step in that journey would be a serious attempt to negotiate a political settlement in Afghanistan and the withdrawal of American and NATO troops. If enough public pressure is brought to bear, there could even be a full-scale reassessment of U.S. priorities, pulling back from the expensive garrison state that bin Laden helped create.

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From 'Birtherism' to Bin Laden

The 9/11 attacks deepened America's distrust of outsiders and spurred a lust for revenge, both in the news, says Michael Winship. May 4, 2011

By Michael Winship

Editor's Note: The past week of news lurched from the silliness of the "birther" controversy to the high drama around the killing of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, but both stories in a way reflected the distorted passions stirred up since 9/11, one the fear of outsiders and the other the hunger for revenge.

As Michael Winship notes in this guest essay, the question now is whether the death of bin Laden can move the United States past those sentiments to a place of greater peace and tolerance than the one that al-Qaeda helped create:

This has been the kind of week that makes news junkies wig out in a frenzy of adrenalin and information overload while driving to distraction people who try to write weekly pieces like this one.

Just when you think you've got a topic nailed down and sit down at the keyboard to sweat it out – bam! – along comes another headline that diverts your attention and dropkicks all your plans out the window.

One thought had been to go the semi-frivolous route and write something about the Royal Wedding – all that costly pomp and circumstance signifying nothing, the anachronistic irrelevance of monarchy in a 21st century democracy – or maybe my search for the hollow tree where elves make those Whoville hats worn by some of the guests.

I might even have confessed that my former wife and I, married the same summer as Prince Charles and Princess Diana, spent part of our London honeymoon standing in line to see their wedding gifts on display at St. James Palace, an

array of conspicuous consumption that ranged from priceless china, crystal and silver to a Megamix food processor, two hand-knit ski caps and an assortment of tea cozies.

But then there was President Barack Obama's release of his "long-form" birth certificate, confronting those who insist he was born in Africa and confirming what most of us have suspected all along. Dear God, he's an American!

While to some a Honolulu hospital may seem as foreign and faraway as the moons of Jupiter – remember, this remains a country where less than a third of the population has a passport – Hawaii is indeed one of these United States, even if they do sell exotic delicacies like Spam with rice and eggs at the local McDonald's.

In fact, as reported by *The New York Times*, Hawaiians consume more Spam than any other Americans, a habit that dates back to World War II.

If I were to write a whole piece about this I'd note that there are more varieties of Spam sold in Hawaii than anywhere else, including Spam Garlic, Spam Bacon, Spam with Cheese, Spam with Tabasco, Spam Turkey and Spam Lite (Monty Python fans: insert gratuitous Spam joke here).

But I digress. You have to observe with some bemusement that not so long ago, there were Republicans campaigning for a change in the Constitution that instead of denying access would have *allowed* foreign-born citizens – Henry Kissinger or Arnold Schwarzenegger, to be precise – to become president.

But of course, those two are white Europeans (and it's a little known fact that Kissinger, like Arnold, has won the Mr. Olympia bodybuilding title an incredible seven times all right, just kidding).

I'm guessing that none of those same Republicans would have challenged whether Henry K. had grades good enough to get into Harvard, where he received his BA, MA and Ph.D.

Which brings us to Donald Trump, who not only embraced the racism of the birther movement but also sought to rouse the prejudices of affirmative action haters by demanding to see Obama's academic records, implying that the President did not have the grades for Columbia and Harvard Law School but was admitted solely because of his skin color.

("I heard he was a terrible student, terrible. How does a bad student go to Columbia and then to Harvard?," said Trump. "I have friends who have smart sons with great marks, great boards, great everything and they can't get into Harvard.")

All of this was ample fodder for a column, too, but President Obama and *Saturday Night Live*'s Seth Meyers so deftly and surgically skewered Trump at Saturday night's White House Correspondents' Dinner that a piece devoted to the Trumpster suddenly seemed superfluous.

Meyers especially lobbed zinger after zinger while The Donald silently sat there at *The Washington Post*'s table as grumpy-looking as Sam the Eagle on the old Muppets show. (Ever the class act, Trump told Fox News afterwards that Meyer's delivery "frankly was not good. He's a stutterer.")

By Monday, though, Trump was suggesting a moratorium of several days on "debating party politics," using a call for patriotism as a diversion, diving for cover behind the successful killing of Osama bin Laden, memories of 9/11 and the women and men of the military – trying to avoid for a while at least the media attention he usually covets.

Suddenly, comparisons are odious, especially to one whose vitriol and bullying, "You're fired!" management style stack up so unfavorably when held up against what White House counterterrorism advisor Jack Brennan described as "one of the most gutsiest calls of any president in recent memory."

For in the end, the story of the week was those Navy SEALs on the ground in Pakistan whose forty-minute operation in Abbottabad, Pakistan, eliminated the man who epitomized the horror of worldwide terrorism.

In the weeks and months to come, whether his death changes anything, whether it shortens war or makes America safer or eases the anti-Islam xenophobia that so diminishes us that will be something to write about.

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