

Osama bin Laden is dead - but US imperialism's worldwide war lives on

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The US has proclaimed its success in its decade-long hunt for Osama bin Laden, culminating in the killing of bin Laden by US military operatives in a house in Abbotabad in Pakistan. As the televised triumphalism and images of hyper-nationalist celebrations in the US fade, however, Washington's heroic narrative is being subjected to uncomfortable questions.

Ironically, Osama bin Laden's death has come, not in the wake of 9/11 when he was at the peak of his strength, but at a time when bin Laden and his al Qaeda were effectively sidelined in an Arab world that is witnessing a democratic awakening and upsurge. This fact too robs the US narrative of some of its sheen.

The US itself has put forward conflicting versions of the night-time raid by its military team. The initial US claim of an intense firefight has now been discarded, with the US admitting that in fact, only one man opened fire on the US operatives. The claim that bin Laden himself opened fire too has been withdrawn, and the US has admitted that he was in fact unarmed. Osama bin Laden's killing is said to have been witnessed by his 12-year-old daughter. Apart from Osama and his son (whose bodies were speedily disposed off in the sea), at least three other men and one woman were killed, while many have been injured.

Why was it necessary to kill an unarmed Osama bin Laden rather than arrest him and bring him to justice? Why has his body been hurriedly disposed off in a way designed to prevent the possibility of any closer scrutiny of the manner and circumstances of his death? The US has yet to answer these questions convincingly. Moreover, an armed attack on a sleeping household including several children, the killing of an unarmed terrorist in the presence of his child, and the killing of other unarmed men and a woman - these are not the stuff of a heroic encounter with a dreaded terrorist.

US President Barack Obama has claimed the killing of bin Laden to be the crowning achievement in the war on terror. Some have even tried to glorify it with comparisons to the end of Hitler and the defeat of fascism. Such inflated claims are quite baseless. The end of Hitler did mark the end of WWII and a world historic defeat and decline of fascism. The killing of Osama bin Laden, in contrast, spells neither the end of terrorism as a phenomenon nor the end of the US imperialist "war on terror".

By-product of anti-Sovietism

Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda are known to be the most dangerous by-products of the anti-Soviet strategy pursued by the US in the 1980s using the popular resentment in Afghanistan and the Islamic world against the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Modern-day terrorism is largely a US strategy that has backfired, and this cannot be contained or ended by the end of Osama bin Laden. Rather, continuing US occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and wars on Libya are likely to keep

spawning more terrorism.

The most immediate political effect achieved by the Osama killing is the sharp rise in popularity ratings of Obama, who is soon to face elections. The Osama coup has effectively taken the wind out of the sails of the aggressive Republican/Tea Party campaign that had been gathering momentum in the backdrop of growing unemployment and continuing economic crisis in the US and the huge politico-economic costs of the US misadventure in Iraq and Afghanistan. Now, Obama's claim to have avenged 9/11 may well outweigh the propaganda of his rivals.

There are indications that the despotic Saudi rulers, threatened by the Arab uprising and seeking a convergence of Arab ruling interests and those of US imperialism and Obama in particular, helped deliver Osama to the US.

Pakistan's military establishment is facing tough questions within its own country about how much it knew and concealed of Osama bin Laden's hideout, which was a stone's throw away from a military academy. The Raymond Davis episode, Wikileaks revelations of Pakistan's rulers' doublespeak on US drone attacks, and now the Osama episode, have created some ferment in Pakistani society about the nexus between the Pakistan ruling class, the military establishment, terrorism and US imperialism.

The Pakistan rulers and military as well as the US are wary of possible reverberations of the "Arab spring" in Pakistan. Whether Pakistan will indeed witness some version of an "Arab spring" remains to be seen, but it must be stressed that only a democratic and anti-imperialist awakening of the people can be an effective answer to both imperialism and terrorism (which, after all, is nothing but an imperialist ploy gone berserk).

India

In India, we are witnessing some hawkish clamour to use the US Osama operation as a precedent for unilateral action to hunt down the masterminds of 26/11 [the November 26, 2008, Mumbai terrorist attack] inside Pakistan. The Indian army and air force chiefs have indulged in irresponsible statements about India's preparedness for a similar operation against terrorists in Pakistan. Instead of indulging in such misplaced jingoism, India should re-examine its own relationship with the US in the light of the US treatment of Pakistan.

The Osama operation, like the Raymond Davis episode, has underscored the sheer contempt the US has for the sovereignty and independence of its so-called allies and partners. All US "partners", including new members of the club like India, should be warned. Terrorism and imperialism pose similar threats to both Pakistan and India. With the increased US presence in South Asia, with its accompanying spiral of terrorism, people of both countries need to recognise the need to come closer to tackle these twin challenges of terrorism and imperialism effectively.

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