

## **OPERATION BIN LADEN: A TACTICAL SUCCESS, BUT A STRATEGIC DEFEAT**

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The elimination of Osama Bin Laden (OBL) is obviously good news and has even been **welcomed as such by the majority of Arab governments and by numerous Arab media networks.**

To be sure, some voices have already emerged, here and there, expressing regret that he was 'executed' and suggesting that 'it would have been better if he had been taken alive and tried in good and due form' instead of 'assassinating him.' This is pure nonsense: **can you imagine the security and political nightmare which the detention of Bin Laden on American soil would have represented for years to come? His trial would likely have lasted months, even years. He inevitably would be sentenced to death, and then his execution would follow.** All the Jihadists of the entire world would have found in this a new motivation to attack American and Western interests, while the *human rights* crowd would preach to us as usual about the death penalty.

So from this standpoint, there is nothing to regret. And certainly there is no reason for ethical concerns: **the death of Bin Laden is an act of war in the framework of a war which we have not declared but which was imposed on us by Salafist terrorism. OBL made his own choice, took responsibility for his actions and paid the price. Justice has been done. Full stop!**

The Abbottabad affair constituted **a magnificent intelligence operation crowned with success through the superb action of Special Forces carried out with brio** (if one chooses to ignore the loss of a helicopter due to mechanical problems).

For the past ten years, OBL was sought by all the world's special services and especially by the CIA. Some 'experts' have rambled on about the fact that until this past Monday he was beyond reach. Some of these commentators see in this the proof that he was already dead. Others say that the Americans did not really wish to capture him. Still others maintain that Washington's secret service is truly worthless.

However, these ten years of hunting down OBL ended in success. Some intelligence obtained from two *High Value Targets* in Guantanamo made it possible to determine a likely perimeter in which he was doubtlessly located, not far from Islamabad. The same sources identified a 'human courier' in whom the boss of al-Qaeda had full trust. Nine months of difficult surveillance in a particularly hostile milieu ended by leading to the target and, last Friday, the degree of certainty was such at the very top level of the State that President Obama was able to give the order to move into action. A team of twenty *Navy Seals*, the

crème de la crème of American Special Forces, supported by a second team in two other transports launched the assault in a very sensitive context. Their boldness was crowned with success.

And so, as regards tactics, there is nothing to say except to **applaud their know-how, which shows that the CIA is not yet the toothless lion which it is often said to be.**

The situation looks different, however, from the strategic viewpoint. First, the terrorist threat is not going to disappear even if the death of OBL and **the anxiety which will spread in Jihadist milieux** – ‘if he was located, why not me?’ – will probably momentarily disorganise the chains of communication and of command. But apart from the fact that reprisal attacks are extremely likely, **what will necessarily follow is a regrouping of the Jihadist scene which may point to new threats.**

Then, the unclear attitude – to be polite and speak in euphemisms – of the Pakistani security authorities’ proves that Washington’s ‘best ally’ in the region is anything but reliable. Given the weight of Pakistan and its importance in regional geopolitics, this is obviously a major source of anxiety. At the same time, it explains why it was not possible to locate the main terrorist earlier: the evidence indicates that he enjoyed high-level protection.

But it is above all **the communication which surrounds the operation which is a veritable disaster.** The message delivered by the American President was simple, dignified and clear. **Barack Obama has proven to those who had doubts that he is a ‘true American’ and a genuine wartime leader.** But some of those who advise him should re-examine their Classics and those who feed rumors and leaks of all sorts to the press must understand the harm they are doing to their country and to the fight against terror.

There was straightaway this **idiotic statement about how the body was ‘disposed of at sea with due respect to Islamic laws’** which could only make any good Muslim fume with anger, even if he detested Bin Laden, as do the majority. **Then they told us that he resisted with weapons at the ready, hiding behind his wife** at the moment of the assault and that there was no other choice than to kill him; next we were told that he was not armed and that he did not hide behind a woman, who was almost certainly not his wife (**in our view, all of this strictly has no bearing on the need to kill him**). A few days more and surely a ‘generally well informed’ source will tell us that he was watching cartoons and offered popcorn to the Special Forces...

Next there arose the question of the photos. Fortunately, President Obama put a stop to this, saying they would not be published. We hope that no one in Washington will violate this order.

It is time for the cacophony to cease.

**The war on terror is also a war ‘for hearts and minds.’ That is to say, a psychological war which can be won only when use of force, at times extreme force, is combined with a clear and firm message (supported by positive acts) which shows empathy for those who may have been duped by the adversary. This is quite the opposite of the contradictory, disjointed and harmful statements which the media have been disseminating for the past four days.**

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<sup>1</sup> See the ‘briefings’ that we published at the beginning of the week dealing with this question, in particular « *Bin Laden and the Pakistani Double Game* » : [http://www.esisc.net/en/p.asp?TYP=TEWN&LV=187&see=y&t=68&PG=TEWN/EN/detail\\_os&l=16&AI=2337](http://www.esisc.net/en/p.asp?TYP=TEWN&LV=187&see=y&t=68&PG=TEWN/EN/detail_os&l=16&AI=2337)