

The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

After Osama bin Laden...

NICHOLAS KRISTOF

RESIDENT Obama announced on Sunday that the United States had killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, and recovered his body. It has been nine years and seven months since Osama orchestrated 9/11, but an American team finally killed him. His body is in American hands. This is revenge, but it's also deterrence and also means that bin Laden won't kill any more Americans. This is the single most important success the United States has had in its war against al-Qaeda. So what does this mean? First, it is good for the United States's reputation, power and influence that we finally got bin Laden. Bin Laden's ability to escape from the US, and his apparent impunity, fed an image in some Islamist quarters of America as a paper tiger -- and that encouraged extremists. Bin Laden himself once said that people bet on the strong horse, the horse that will win, and the killing underscores that it's the United States that is the horse to bet on. Moreover, this sends a message that you mess with America at your peril, and that there will be consequences for a terror attack on the United States. That said, killing bin Laden does not end al-Qaeda. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian No. 2, has long played a crucial role as al-Qaeda's COO. And al-Qaeda is more

of a loose network than a tightly structured organisation, and that has become even more true in recent years. AQIM, the version of al-Qaeda in North Africa, is a real threat in countries like Mali and Mauritania, and killing bin Laden will probably have negligible consequences there. The AQIM terrorists may admire Osama and be inspired by him, but they also are believed to be largely independent of him. And Anwar al-Awlaki, the Qaeda-linked terrorist in Yemen, likewise won't be deterred by bin Laden's killing -- Awlaki's ability to engage in terrorism will be affected more by the upheavals now taking place in Yemen and whether that country has a strong and legitimate government that takes counter-terrorism seriously. It's also true that bin Laden's killing might have mattered more in 2002 or 2003. At that time in countries like Pakistan, many ordinary people had a very high regard for bin Laden and doubted that he was centrally involved in the 9/11 attacks. Over time that view has changed: popular opinion has moved more against him, and you no longer see Osama t-shirts for sale in the markets. Some people still feel a bit of respect for his ability to outwit the United States, or they are so anti-American that they embrace anybody we don't like, but bin Laden has been marginalised over time.

Osama's declining image also means that he won't be a martyr in many circles (although if Americans appear too celebratory and triumphant, dancing on his grave, that may create a sympathetic backlash for Osama). Many ordinary Pakistanis, Yemenis and Afghans will simply shrug and move on. His death won't inspire people, the way

military operation. President Obama said that he had word last August that Osama might be in a compound in Abbottabad. It took a long time to evaluate that information, and last week it was confirmed enough to order a strike. Then today there was an assault by American forces (perhaps a CIA team or special forces?) and after a firefight bin Laden was killed and his body recovered. I can't help wondering if Raymond Davis, the American who was arrested by Pakistanis after shooting people in Lahore while apparently on a CIA operation, was somehow involved in this operation to confirm bin Laden's presence, and if that wasn't a reason for the hush-hush nature of his work. And of course this also raises questions about how Osama got to Abbottabad from Afghanistan and what if anything the Pakistanis knew. President Musharraf and others always told me and others that Osama was in Afghanistan, not

Pakistan, and even suggested that he might have died. So much for Musharraf. One question is whether the Osama killing will lead to intelligence that will help track down Zawahiri and other al-Qaeda leaders or operatives, whether in Pakistan or elsewhere in the world. It might also help work out terror financing networks. Imagine the effort to go through Osama's laptop. Will there be a reprisal attack by al-Qaeda? Maybe. But after all al-Qaeda has already been trying to hit us. It's not as if it has shown any restraint. The larger challenge is whether we can press this gain and further dismantle al-Qaeda in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. If so, it may be easier to end the Afghan war by working out a deal in Afghanistan between the Karzai government and the Taliban. For while they are noxious in a thousand ways, the Taliban themselves are inward looking and not linked to foreign terrorism except through their hosting of al-Qaeda; if foreign fighters like bin Laden are out of the picture, an agreement becomes more feasible. The United States and Afghan governments alike pretty much believe that the only way out of the problems in Afghanistan is some kind of a political deal, in which the Taliban stops fighting and joins the government, and in turn is allowed

a measure of influence in Pashtun areas. That will be more feasible if bin Laden is gone -- and if other foreign fighters also fade from the scene. Of course, allowing the Taliban a role in southern Afghanistan raises all kinds of questions, not least the impact on Afghan women. The Taliban would be a catastrophe for Afghan women. On the other hand, the war is also a catastrophe for Afghan women. And there are some indications that the Taliban are willing to compromise on some elements of policy toward women, such as girls' schooling. That would all have to be negotiated. Finally, what does this mean for President Obama's political prospects? I don't think very much. November 2012 is a long way away, and the main political issue is likely to be the economy. After all, George H.W. Bush was a hero after the Gulf War victory in early 1991, and by November 1992 was defeated by Bill Clinton because of the economic slowdown. These are my quick thoughts, rushed together as President Obama speaks. So what do you think this means? Your thoughts most welcome.

The writer is a columnist for The Times since 2001, is a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner who writes op-ed columns that appear twice a week. © New York Times. Distributed by The New York Times Syndicate.

Will there be a reprisal attack by al-Qaeda? Maybe. But after all al-Qaeda has already been trying to hit us. It's not as if it has shown any restraint. The larger challenge is whether we can press this gain and further dismantle al-Qaeda in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

it might have in 2002. And al-Qaeda is already going through a difficult time because it has been sidelined by the Arab Spring protests; on top of that, losing its top leader will be a major blow. It will be fascinating to see what the Pakistani reaction is to a US military operation on their soil. It seemed to me that President Obama was going out of his way to sound deferential to Pakistan -- and to emphasise that Osama was an enemy of Pakistan as well as of America -- precisely because he was concerned that Pakistanis might react with outrage at an American

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BIN LADEN PROFILE

In his death on May 2, 2011, Osama bin Laden kept a promise made in a 2006 audio message.

Alluding to the United States' hunt for him, the al-Qaeda leader stated his determination to avoid capture: "I swear not to die but a free man."

His death ends the largest manhunt in history that began a decade ago involving thousands of US troops in Afghanistan and tens of thousands of Pakistani soldiers in the rugged mountains along the border.

Whether reviled as a terrorist and mass murderer or hailed as the champion of oppressed Muslims fighting injustice and humiliation, Laden changed the course of history.

Challenging the might of the US, he masterminded a string of attacks against it and then built a global network of allies to wage a war intended to outlive him.

The man allegedly behind the suicide hijack attacks of September 11, 2001, was the nemesis of former US President George Bush, who pledged to take him "dead or alive" and whose two terms were dominated by a "war on terror" against al-Qaeda network founded in 1988.

With his long grey beard and wistful expression, Laden became one of the most instantly recognisable people on the planet. His gaunt face stared out from propaganda videos and framed a US website offering a \$25 million bounty. In 2007, that bounty was doubled.

Born in Saudi Arabia in 1957, one of more than 50 children of millionaire businessman Mohamed bin Laden, he lost his father while still a boy.

Osama's first marriage, to a Syrian cousin, came at the age of 17, and he is reported to have 23 children from five wives. Part of a family that made its fortune in the Saudi construction boom, Laden was a shy boy and an average student, who took a degree in civil engineering.

A book by US writer Steve Coll, *The Bin Ladens*, suggested the death of his extrovert half-brother Salem in 1988 was an important factor in Osama's radicalisation.

A key influence on Osama was Dr Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian professor and member of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood.

It is believed that Azzam encouraged Laden to solicit funds and recruit Arab fighters for the Afghan war against Russians.

The US' Central Intelligence Agency provided a conduit for him to join the fight in Afghanistan.

Osama's slide away from the US was first observed when he raised objection to US military presence in Saudi Arabia during the first Gulf war against Iraq.

The Saudi monarch smelled rebellion in Laden and expelled him in 1991. He was stripped of Saudi citizenship in 1994 and his assets were frozen.

He declared war against the very United States which had spent billions of dollars bankrolling the Afghan resistance in which he had fought.

Al-Qaeda embarked on a trail of attacks, beginning with the 1993 World Trade Center bombing that killed six and first raised the spectre of Islamist extremism spreading to the United States.

Disowned by his family and stripped of Saudi citizenship, Laden had moved first to Sudan in 1992 and later resurfaced in Afghanistan before the Taliban seized Kabul in 1996.

With his wealth, largesse and shared radical Muslim ideology, Laden soon eased his way into inner Taliban circles.

After the 1998 attacks on two of its African embassies, the United States fired dozens of cruise missiles at Afghanistan, targeting al-Qaeda training camps. Laden escaped unscathed.

The Taliban paid a heavy price for sheltering Laden and his fighters, suffering a humiliating defeat after a US-led invasion in the weeks after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Al-Qaeda was badly weakened, with many fighters killed or captured. Laden vanished -- some reports say US bombs narrowly missed him in late 2001 as he and his forces slipped out of Afghanistan's Tora Bora mountains and into Pakistan.

But the start of the Iraq war in 2003 produced a fresh surge of recruits for al-Qaeda due to opposition to the US invasion.

SOURCE: ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Who protected Laden?

A.H. JAFFOR ULLAH

WE just learned at 11:30 pm EDT on Sunday (May 1) in America via Internet and TV that a special American team had gone to Abbottabad, which is located in the Hazara district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly known as Northwest Frontier Province) in Pakistan, to execute a daring mission. The city of Abbottabad is located about 90 miles to the north from Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. The intelligence officials now say that Osama bin Laden was living in a mansion in Abbottabad for months; therefore, the al-Qaeda chief chose to live in a crowded city in Pakistan. Now it appears that Osama bin Laden lived in a city rather than in an obscure place perhaps for medical reason. The American intelligence knew all along that the al-Qaeda chief was living inside Pakistan. The US intelligence knew that bin Laden had been living in a mansion in Abbottabad since August 2010. A careful military plan was drawn and finally on May 1, 2011 a special military team executed a mission to capture or kill bin Laden. No mention of Pakistani military assisting the US team was made by President Obama who addressed the nation at about 11:45 EDT. Therefore, it appears that the entire operation was planned and executed by American military with no assistance from the Pakistan's military. It was mentioned in the media that not a single person from the American team was killed in the operation. The purpose of this article is not to

give a glowing encomium to American team that killed al-Qaeda chief but to raise the point -- who really protected Osama bin Laden in Pakistan all these years? The US intelligence had the information that in the aftermath of 9/11, particularly in December 2001, Osama bin Laden and his entourage moved to Pakistan by crossing the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This information was also known to many in the intelligence communities throughout Europe and North America. During the presidential election contest in US in 2008, Obama made a pledge to US voters that if he were elected to the highest office in the land, he would hunt Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. It seems as if his prediction came true. The Pakistani authorities played a vicious game in the aftermath of al-Qaeda led attack in New York in September 2001. General Pervez Musharraf was the military president of Pakistan at the time. He was able to convince Bush that America needs Pakistan to hunt down Mr. Osama bin Laden. However, there was a catch. America had to shell out billions of dollars to Pakistan for hunting Osama bin Laden and Taliban

leaders who were ensconced in the NWFP area. Pakistani military and intelligence would catch lower-level al-Qaeda operatives from time to time and also hand over lower-ranking Taliban leaders to show that they mean business. A regime change took place in Pakistan in August 2008 with the removal of Gen. Musharraf from power but that hardly changed the tactics of Pakistani military. They claimed that the Pakistani military were hunting down al-Qaeda leaders in such oddball place as Gilgit and Waziristan. There was no hope of catching Osama bin Laden or Ayman al-Zawahiri, the second man in command, anytime soon. Life was going as usual in Pakistan where a weak civilian government was running the show outwardly but the real power belonged to Pakistan's military. US authorities finally realised that Pakistani government was playing a vicious game in Afghanistan. They extracted billions of aid money since 2001 all in the name of catching the masterminds of 9/11 terror attack. Finally, US took the charge of hunting al-Qaeda top bosses inside Pakistan. As per President Obama, US authorities in recent days knew where Mr.

Osama bin Laden took refuge inside Pakistan. They finally moved on May 1, 2011 and killed the al-Qaeda chief after a gun battle. In Pakistan the military and its intelligence branch, ISI, know everything. Therefore, they must have had real time intelligence on Osama bin Laden. Moreover, the al-Qaeda chief chose to live in a mansion in a crowded city whose population is about 100,000. Since Mr. bin Laden holed up in this mansion for at least six months, would anyone believe that Pakistani police, ISI, and the military not know who lived in that mansion? Furthermore, the al-Qaeda chief maintained his own security force inside the mansion. The mere human activities inside the compound should give enough hints that a powerful person was residing in the big house. Still then, the Pakistani authorities were not perturbed about the occupants of this mansion. In conclusion, the Pakistani authorities, in particular ISI and the military, had the full knowledge of Osama bin Laden's whereabouts all these years. It is an open question whether they have protected Mr. Laden and his bodyguards or not. They say that in Pakistan not a single leaf moves without being watched by the military intelligence. Therefore, Mr. Laden's itinerant journey inside Pakistan was closely monitored by Pakistani military. Now that Osama bin Laden is dead, the inside story should come out.

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