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## DEATH OF BIN LADEN AND DEATH THROES OF AL QAEDA

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The physical death of Osama bin Laden on May 2, 2011 was the icing on the cake of the end of the “Global War on Terror,” as conceived by the Bush administration and such neo-con strategists as Richard Perle and Donald Rumsfeld. The end of that war was announced by Obama soon after he arrived at the White House, and the stage was set in his June 2009 speech in Cairo, which posed reconciliation with Islam. This shift in the orientation of North American strategy was later reaffirmed in the National Security Strategy published last year by the White House, in which the fight against terrorism is expressly restricted to the Al Qaeda network, while Islam is exonerated of terrorist violence and the murder of innocents. “They are not religious leaders, they are killers; and neither Islam nor any other religion condones the slaughter of innocents.” The new strategy of the U.S. administration shifts its focus and clearly supports the aspirations of Muslim peoples to live with dignity and, in the shelter of the universal rights, seek opportunities for a better and freer life.

Osama bin Laden lived long enough to see the miserable failure of his strategy to impose by means of violent confrontation the Salafist utopia of a grand Caliphate under Koranic law. He also lived to see powerful popular movements in favor of greater liberty and future opportunity take to the Arab streets and knock out or throw against the ropes cruel longstanding dictators. He even had time to hear the lies of some who, like Gaddafi, attributed to an Al Qaeda conspiracy the popular revolts that are keeping them in check. The surprising thing is that any commentators should still give credence to such gross manipulations.

After almost a decade of stalking, the U.S. army has finally managed to deposit Bin Laden’s cadaver in the Arabian Sea, inhuming it before the following sunset. But the myth of this wild-eyed warrior and would-be savior of the hosts of Mohammed had crashed and burned long before, ever since, in the face of their golden opportunity in Iraq, Al Qaeda showed its true sectarian assassin’s face by blowing into the air not only a series of North American Humvees, but also pilgrims in mosques or markets full of vendors, women, and children. Incapable of carrying out a campaign of grand attacks in the West, it was finally in Iraq where waves of young people from all over the Islamic world, inspired by the jihadist ideal of the struggle against the imperialist infidel, became involved

in useless massacres of Muslim civilians whose only sin was to be Shiites. The Wahhabi Jihad narrative suffered a tremendous blow in Iraq, and even though the indiscriminate violence and Taliban radicalization continue in Afghanistan and Pakistan (where, as is well known, the price of a suicide bomber is no more than \$12,000), the heroic glamour of Bin Laden and his network had weakened.

Many youth in the Arab world, struggling for their future, have opted to risk their lives, peacefully, facing down the rifles and tanks of their own governments. The success of their valiant struggle would also come to justify a change in western strategy that went, not without difficulty, from implicitly associating Islam with terrorism and intolerance to recognizing that Islam is not incompatible with freedom, the ideal of progress, and the opportunity for a better future.

The struggle against international Islamist terrorism doesn't come to an end with the death of Bin Laden. But the same international terrorist that came to be an essential component of its symbolic force, the hero who was able to tear down, with the twin towers, the symbol of the sinful arrogance of the Great Satan, ended up shot down in his lair without provoking a single grand public demonstration of anger towards the West or, foreseeable, significant acts of vengeance. The myth of Bin Laden, the spiritual and mystical hermit, protected by the tribes on the snowy mountain tops, pulling the strings of a devoted worldwide network of jihadists, has also faded away. In the end, as it turned out, he was living behind the parapets of a magnificent fortified concrete residence, not many kilometers from Islamabad, protected, perhaps, by Pakistani intelligence, surrounded by barbed wire, and burning his own garbage.

As is always the case with terrorism, prudence is a must. His followers may issue a posthumous video, or set off a bomb, to boost their morale, but this blow may be mortal, definitive. The end of a terrorist campaign can come about for different reasons: by elimination of the top echelons, by negotiation, by the success of the objectives set for themselves by the terrorists, by political failure and the implosion of the movement, by the continuous pressure of police repression, or, ultimately, by reorientation or transition toward a different modus operandi. Normally it results from a combination of these factors. To have obtained such a symbolic head as Bin Laden's represents an important psychological and communications blow and surely brings a chapter of history to a close.

In the struggle against terrorism, the semiotics of symbols is key to the success or failure of a campaign. The death of Bin Laden was not at all heroic, and though the myth of Al Qaeda may survive him for a time, and many may continue to use the name as a cover for terrorist actions whose motivations will be diverse and very different, we must begin to take seriously the post-Al Qaeda world that is coming into focus. We will have to start by breaking the tendency of many political leaders, communications media, and some political analysts to attribute any bomb that goes off to the grand jihadist network. In this case the old saying, "Dead dogs don't bite" may only partially apply, but we would do well to begin to give the Bin Laden paradigm up for lost and concentrate our efforts on other fronts where certain dictators, who thrived under the alibi of being useful to the Global War on Terror, continue to open fire on their own people, causing more innocent deaths and considerably less alarm than the supposed great conspiracy of Al Qaeda, weaker today than ever.