

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Says Benefits Outweighed Risks in Getting bin Laden

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama said he ordered the commando raid that ended with the death of al-Qaida terrorist leader and mass murderer Osama bin Laden knowing that deadly force might be necessary for the man who had eluded justice for a decade after the September 11, 2001, attack on the United States that killed nearly 3,000 people from almost 90 nations.

In a May 8 interview on CBS News' 60 Minutes, Obama said he knew the risks of sending in a U.S. Navy special operations team on evidence that "was not absolutely conclusive," but it was the best way to be certain of finding bin Laden.

"I felt that the risks were outweighed by the potential benefit of us finally getting our man," Obama told CBS.

"The fact of the matter is this was somebody who was deserving of the justice that he received," the president said. "Bin Laden had been not only a symbol of terrorism, but a mass murderer who had eluded justice for so long."

While the risks associated with a raid of this kind would be enormous under most conditions, Obama said he had confidence in the abilities of the special operations team.

The Navy commando team, commonly known as SEALs for "Sea, Air and Land," was flown by helicopter to the walled compound in Abbottabad, a small town near Islamabad, Pakistan. In the fight to take the house and its occupants, bin Laden was shot and killed by the commandos.

White House press secretary Jay Carney told reporters at a May 3 press briefing that bin Laden and his family were found on the second and third floors of the building. "There was concern that bin Laden would oppose the ... operation ... and, indeed, he did resist," Carney said. "The resistance was throughout."

The commando team had the authority from the president to kill bin Laden unless he surrendered, Carney said, and they were required to accept his surrender if they could do so safely.

Obama said in the 60 Minutes interview that he and members of his Cabinet, national security staff and senior U.S. military officers monitored the entire 40-minute commando raid from the White House Situation Room, hearing much of what was said during the operation. The commando team used photographs of bin Laden and

facial analysis to confirm that it was the terrorist, but scientific DNA testing afterward absolutely confirmed that it was bin Laden, the president said.

"There's no doubt that bin Laden is dead," Obama said. "Certainly, there's no doubt among al-Qaida members that he is dead." The terrorist group confirmed May 6 on its websites that their leader was killed by the United States in the May 1 raid.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said May 2 that "even as we mark this milestone, we should not forget that the battle to stop al-Qaida and its syndicate of terror will not end with the death of bin Laden."

Clinton said the United States will continue to boost its counterterrorism efforts and cooperation with other nations, including Pakistan. The United States is committed to supporting the people and government of Pakistan, and defending its people and democracy from violent extremism, she added.

Vice President Biden: U.S., China Relationship Will Shape 21st Century

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — As U.S. and Chinese leaders meet in Washington for the third U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, Vice President Biden said that given the importance of the world's two largest economies' cooperation on trade issues, climate change, security and other challenges, their relationship will help shape the 21st century.

Speaking May 9 in Washington with Chinese Vice Premier Wang Qishan, Chinese State Counselor Dai Bingguo, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, Biden said the annual dialogues, begun in 2009, are held to "build a relationship across the entire spectrum of our governments" and address "some of the defining problems of our time."

"How we cooperate will define in significant part how we deal with the challenges the world faces in the beginning of the 21st century," Biden said.

The vice president noted that the United States and China are the world's largest producers and consumers of energy, a fact that poses a common challenge as well as a "great opportunity for common efforts to find clean-energy solutions."

Biden said both sides need to work together to find where their mutual interests converge, but will also need to

discuss areas of “vigorous disagreement,” such as human rights.

The Obama administration strongly believes that the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms — as defined in China’s international commitments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and specified in China’s own constitution — is “the best way to promote long-term stability and prosperity of any society,” he said.

In her remarks, Clinton said the United States will continue to discuss its differences with China over human rights “honestly and forthrightly,” as friends do.

She expressed concern over reports that public interest lawyers, writers, artists and others have disappeared or been detained by Chinese authorities, and said U.S. officials worry about the impact of China’s human rights practices “on our domestic politics and on the politics and the stability in China and the region.”

“We know over the long arch of history that societies that work toward respecting human rights are going to be more prosperous, stable and successful,” she said.

The secretary said both countries must work to better understand each other and build trust in order to avoid fears and misperceptions that some of their citizens have of each other.

“Some in our country see China’s progress as a threat to the United States. Some in China worry that America seeks to constrain China’s growth. We reject both those views. We both have much more to gain from cooperation than from conflict,” Clinton said.

“A thriving America is good for China and a thriving China is good for America. But to work together, we need to be able to understand each other’s intentions and interests. And we must demystify long-term plans and aspirations,” she said.

Blogging’s Impact on Media and Change in Arab Countries

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — Award-winning Egyptian cyberjournalist Wael Abbas says Arab regimes are fighting a losing battle when it comes to stopping activists from expressing themselves online.

“Any regime, no matter where it is, is made up of people. It is impossible that the number of its people any time exceeds the number of the masses,” Abbas said, commenting on attempts to stifle pro-democracy efforts.

“Government employees work for money, but the people use their ingenuity.”

On May 5, Egyptians, Jordanians, Palestinians and Iraqis chatted from their homelands with Abbas in a U.S. State Department-sponsored webcast to discuss the role of social media in recent events in the Arab world.

Honored for his cyberjournalism by CNN, BBC and Human Rights Watch, Abbas runs the blog Egyptian Consciousness. In 2007, he posted videos showing Egyptian police officers engaged in torture, and the videos led to the officers’ trial. This year, he has posted videos of violence against Egyptian demonstrators.

“Throughout our history, many massacres and carnage happened without any mention of it ... simply because there wasn’t media to cover it,” Abbas said. “But now it is possible for you to cover any incident merely by using a mobile phone in the street and be connected to the Internet.”

Abbas draws a distinction between bloggers and traditional media in the Arab world. Traditional media outlets, state-owned or private, face censorship and restrict coverage of certain topics for fear of losing advertising revenue. This is not the case with what he calls “alternative media,” where a blogger’s success is based on integrity.

“The Internet is distinguished by a high level of democracy. If I lied, no one will listen to me, no one will come to me,” Abbas said. “If I say things that are truthful and say things that touch the people, the people will come. I have no connection other than with them.”

Social media are playing a major role in political events across the Arab world, Abbas said. However, he is clear that social media are not the cause for change, but the catalyst.

“I don’t like to give too much weight to social media, but at the same time I don’t like to diminish its role,” Abbas said. “The revolution wouldn’t have started unless the people took the decision to revolt for change.”

Restrictions on press freedoms in the Arab world, Abbas said, make it essential for social media to report news. Despite government attempts to stymie expression and reporting in cyberspace, bloggers are finding ways around them.

“A lot of countries are now trying to place restrictions on alternative media, but technology allows for getting around this censorship or these filters or restrictions,” Abbas said.

In keeping with his blog's slogan — "A blog at the will of the owner, who works for no one" — Abbas is fiercely independent and at times draws criticism for expressing his viewpoints.

"My paper is not sold for money, and I don't take a salary in exchange. I am a person who expresses his opinion," Abbas said. "If a man visits me, welcome. But if what I write bothers you, you don't have to visit my blog. Don't read what is written, and go relax."

Blogging will continue to grow as technology becomes more affordable and more people learn how to use it, Abbas said. He recalled that only the wealthy went online in Egypt during the early days of the Internet, but now its reach is much broader. Some influential bloggers cannot afford computers and rely on cybercafes, he said.

Abbas, who supports himself through freelance journalism and translation projects, said that running a blog costs little.

"No one can make an excuse that to do journalism, to practice blogging, that they need money, employees and [costly] equipment," Abbas said. "I have a camera and a computer. I go online and photograph things in the street and upload it online, and that's it."

Going forward, Abbas said he might work with traditional media, especially when trying to reach people unable to go online. But that doesn't mean it won't be on his terms.

"The conditions have to be right in terms of freedoms and civil society freedoms and freedom of the press for this merger to take place in an effective manner," he said.

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