

America's Killing Sprees Define Who We Are As A People

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When President Barack Obama announced the death of Osama bin Laden, his demeanor was properly restrained. It is hard to imagine George W. Bush issuing a similar pronouncement without cracking a grin and making a disparaging remark. The killing of bin Laden, Obama reflected, said much about America: "We will be true to the values that make us who we are."

Sadly, the media showed too many Americans greeting the news of bin Laden's death with fist-pumping elation. Raucous, shouting mobs gathered outside the White House and at New York's "Ground Zero" to wave US flags and chant "USA! USA!" — as if the cold-blooded execution of an unarmed man in a Pakistan suburb was somehow on par with winning the Superbowl.

These public demonstrations also served to tell the world something about "who we are as a people." (Note: The assault was carried out by highly trained Navy SEALs. Had Hellfire missiles been used, the attack on bin Laden's compound would likely have killed many of the women and 23 children reportedly living inside.)

Bin Laden's demise is clearly one of the biggest news stories of the year. But as it continues to play out over the next few weeks — dominating the print media and broadcast news — there are other stories that will be ignored. Here are a few stories the White House will be happy to see lost in the "Fog of Media."

Another US War Crime Caught on Film

In the second week of April 11, the Iranian news network, PressTV, aired amateur video footage that showed American troops in Iraq firing live ammunition at unarmed prisoners during a riot in a US detention facility in January 2005. The footage (shows US forces using "disproportionate force" against prisoners at the US detention facility at Camp Bucca. (According to Pentagon estimates, the US military held around 20,000 Iraqis in detention in 2008 — some 17,000 at Camp Bucca near Basra in southern Iraq and more than 3,000 at Camp Cropper in Baghdad.)

The Pentagon reportedly tried to cover up the bloodshed, saying the riot happened after the prisoners rebelled during a search for contraband. The American Civil Liberties Union later revealed that the riot was actually sparked after US troops desecrated a copy of the Holy Qur'an. Four prisoners were shot dead and five others wounded during the violence.

The video shows heavily armed US soldiers gathered in a protected roadway with fenced-off barracks on either side. The soldiers are seen firing live rounds at prisoners confined in

wooden barracks set off behind tall chain-link fences. Some of the soldiers appear to toss grenades into the compound. The soldiers are relaxed and casual. They can be heard laughing as prisoners are hit. One supervising officer is filmed as he pauses to advise the soldiers that the prisoners are armed with nothing more than “dirt balls” but the officer does nothing to stop the men from attacking the unarmed detainees. Here is the video:

Congress and the Pentagon should be investigating this incident. But, because the media is lost in the Rapture of the “Osama Is Dead” newscycle, this is unlikely to happen.

NATO Has Become a Terrorist Organization

On May 1, 2011, NATO bombs fell on Libyan leader Muammar el-Gaddafi’s Tripoli headquarters. A Libyan government spokesman denounced the attack as a failed assassination attempt and the charge was echoed by [Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin](#) who accused the West of plotting to “execute” Gaddafi. US Defense Secretary Robert Gates denied the charge, saying the US considered Gaddafi’s offices “legitimate targets.” Gates told the media. “We are not targeting [Gaddafi] specifically, but we do consider command-and-control targets to be legitimate targets wherever we find them.”

Up to that point, the only “legitimate” targets of the NATO-led air campaign had been Libyan government air defenses, supply depots and ground forces. This “mission creep” about what constituted “command-and-control” assets might explain NATO’s air strike on the Tripoli headquarters of Libyan TV. The assault temporarily knocked the country’s main TV station off the air but how this helped promote NATO’s mission of “protecting the civilian population” was not made clear.

Three days later, NATO upped the ante by dropping bombs on the home of one of Gaddafi’s sons, killing 29-year-old Saif al-Arab Gaddafi and three of his children. The Libyan leader, who was in the building on a family visit with his wife, was considered the actual target of the attack. It was difficult to see how the building, a one-story villa in a residential section of Tripoli, could have qualified as a “command-and-control” center.

Washington’s Assassination Rap-Sheet

One of the reasons the US is a target of hatred in many countries is that Washington has racked up a long history of political assassinations around the world. What seems to have changed, with the attacks in Tripoli and Abbottabad is that the US is now conducting these formerly covert operations in public.

On December 22, 1974, Seymour Hersh became the first mainstream journalist to pry open the vault that hid America’s history of assassinations. Hersh’s exposé in *The New York Times* described the government’s “family jewels” — a trove of secret assassination operations conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency over several decades. Some of the more notable victims included Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, the Diem brothers of Vietnam and General Rene Schneider of Chile. Under President John F. Kennedy, the CIA made numerous attempts on the life of Cuba’s Fidel Castro — even working with the Mafia at one point.

In 1976, following the revelations of the Senate’s Church Committee hearings, President Gerald Ford issued Executive Order 11905, which was designed to put an end to US-sanctioned assassinations of foreign leaders. In 1981, President Reagan replaced Ford’s ban

with his own Executive Order 12333, which began to move the bar on what was banned.

In 1986, Reagan ordered air strikes on Gaddafi's tent-home in Libya. This assault — which could honestly be described as a terrorist attack — missed Gaddafi but US bombs did succeed in killing Gaddafi's adopted daughter and, according to some reports, 40 other children.

Shifting Definitions of 'Permissible Assassination'

Two years after Reagan's attack, George H.W. Bush "reinterpreted" the law banning politicide in order to target Panamanian leader (and former CIA asset) Manuel Noriega. The new understanding was that the assassination prohibition did not apply if a foreign leader were killed as an "unintended consequence" of US military action.

When it became the younger Bush's turn to control the weapons of the assassin's trade, the rationale for taking out a fellow foreign leader shifted once again. George W.'s team of White House lawyers conveniently concluded that America's decision to directly target Saddam Hussein for death was "legal" — despite the long-standing rules of the Geneva Convention and the existing presidential ban on assassinating foreign leaders. Bush's lawyers chose to rely on an interpretation of international human rights law that permits the targeting of "military commanders" in a "time of war."

Under this ruling, if President Saddam Hussein were to surrender in return for an end to military action, it would then be illegal to kill him. This could explain why the Bush White House refused to negotiate with Saddam and why the Obama White House has ignored Gaddafi's repeated offers of a cease-fire and a negotiated end to the conflict.

Blowback from the New Assassination Protocol

When President Gerald Ford declared his ban on further assassinations of heads of state, he did so largely out of fear that any continuation of US assassination plans might trigger retaliatory attacks directed at an American president. It was a reasonable fear.

But now, NATO's wanton breach of international law has blown that locked door wide open. Under the Geneva Convention, armies are supposed to make every effort to minimize civilian casualties when in pursuit of military victory. But NATO's attempts to kill Gaddafi by attacking buildings occupied by scores of employees and innocent bystanders — and destroying the homes and lives of his children — has set a dangerous new standard.

Thanks to NATO's Libyan air strikes, the current US president — and other leaders of the NATO coalition — must now consider themselves legitimate targets for similar, retaliatory attacks. The bombing the Libyan leader's official residence was the equivalent of attacking the White House.

An equal application of the "Saddam Hussein Exemption" means that Barack Obama now has become a legitimate target for foreign military assassins. Following NATO's lead, Libyan forces (or sympathetic foreign intelligence agents or freelance terrorists) now can claim justification for killing members of Obama's family — including, God forbid, Michelle, Sasha and Malia.

Applying America's shifting definition of what constitutes a "justifiable assassination" also

means that 10 Downing Street — the residence of British Prime Minister David Cameron, his wife, Samantha and their three children — also becomes a legitimate target. Similarly, the Elysee Palace — the command center for French President Nicholas Sarkozy as well as the official residence he shares with his wife Carla Bruni — now stands as a legitimate target for retaliation — by Libyan government forces, their proxies, or sympathetic agents.

This leaves raises a portentous judicial challenge: Is it possible to hold NATO and its leaders accountable, under the auspices of the International Criminal Court, for the commission of war crimes and the violation of international law?

The Secret US/UK/French Plot Targeting Libya

Another story that risks being left behind in the dust of history involves a little-known military exercise called Southern Mistral. This “war game” mobilized strategists and troops from France, Britain and the US for a joint assault on an unnamed country labeled “Southland.” The outline of the attack plan suggests that the NATO attack on Libya was initially mapped out on November 2 — more than four months before the launch of Operation Odyssey Dawn — and was not a response to Libya’s brutal suppression of a spontaneous civilian uprising.

After reviewing the planning documents on a French military Website, Michel Chossudovsky, director of Canadian media organization, Global Research, concluded: “The war on Libya, as well as the armed insurrection, were planned months prior to the Arab protest movement.”

“Military operations of this size and magnitude are never improvised,” Chossudovsky wrote on April 23, 2011. “The war on Libya as well as the armed insurrection were planned months prior to the Arab protest movement. We were led to believe that the protest movement in Egypt and Tunisia had spread to Libya. The insurrection in Libya was presented as a spontaneous response to a wave of pro-democracy activism which had swept the Arab World. In turn, we were led to believe that ‘the international community’ decided in response to these unfolding events, to ‘protect the lives of civilians’ and refer the matter to the United Nations Security Council. The media then reported that it was only once the UN Security Council had adopted Resolution 1973, that the US and NATO member countries took the decision to intervene militarily in Libya under the ‘No-Fly Zone.’”

In fact, UN Security Council Resolution 1973 (authorizing military action against Libya’s government) was already “on the drawing board,” months before there was any evidence of a “pro-democracy” uprising in eastern Libya.

According to the official *Southern Mistral 2011 War Games Scenario*, a “Franco-British (humanitarian) air operation against SOUTHLAND was to be carried out pursuant to ... UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION NO: 3003.” The war games were scheduled to start on March 21, 2011. But the war games never took place because the assembled military forces “went live” with the actual attack on Libya on March 19 — two days prior to the scheduled date in the “imaginary” war game.

The Southern Mistral planning documents outlined the following scenario:

FRANCE: Makes the decision to show its determination to SOUTHLAND (under United Nations Security Council resolution no. 3003).

UNITED-KINGDOM: Allied country as determined in the bilateral agreement. The United

Kingdom supports France through the deployment of its air assets.

Six Royal Air Force Tornado GR4s, one tanker Vickers VC-10 and one Boeing E3D will be deployed together with French Air force Mirage 2000Ds, 2000Ns and 2000Cs operating with a fleet of around thirty aircraft including helicopters, Boeing tankers and AWACs radar aircraft.... An Air Operations Cell deployed at Nancy air base (BA 133) will follow in real time all the air missions and reproduce the air raids. (www.southern-mistral.cdaoa.fr/GB/)

Under the war games scenario, Security Council Resolution 3003 was proposed by France, whereas “the real life” UN Security Council Resolution 1973 was proposed by France, the UK and Lebanon.

Operation Southern Mistral has also drawn the attention of Congressman Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio). “While war games are not uncommon,” Kucinich has written, “the similarities between ‘Southern Mistral’ and ‘Operation Odyssey Dawn’ highlight just how many unanswered questions remain regarding our own military planning for Libya. We don’t know how long the attack on Libya has been in preparation, but Congress must find out.”

On March 29, 2011, Kucinich circulated a Dear Colleague letter related to an amendment calling for a congressional cut-off of funds for the war in Libya. “I want to call to your attention to the stark lack of information provided to Congress and the American people about the war,” Kucinich wrote. “Last night the President said it took one month to put together a response to the situation in Libya. During that time, the President consulted with 28 member nations of NATO, 22 member nations of the Arab League and 15 members of the UN Security Council, ten of whom approved the resolution. There was also time for extensive coordination with France and Great Britain. The President had time to consult with the international community, but had no time to come to the United States Congress?”

“There is no question that the Administration should have followed the Constitution and received the approval of Congress before starting a war. Consulting with a few members is not the same thing as following the Constitutional requirements of Article 1, Section 8. Further complicating the Administration’s failure to come to Congress prior to ordering an attack is the fact that our primary partners in the war against Libya — France and Great Britain — had, according to a French military website, planned certain war games which now may have significance.

“On November 2, 2010 France and Great Britain signed a mutual defense treaty, which paved the way for joint participation in a military exercise called ‘Southern Mistral’. The ‘Southern Mistral’ war games called for Great Britain-French air strikes against an unnamed dictator of a fictional country, Southland.... On March 19, 2011, the United States joined France and Great Britain in an air attack against Muammar Gaddafi’s Libya pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1973. Scheduling a joint military exercise that ends up resembling real military action could be seen as remarkable planning by the French and British, but it also highlights questions regarding the United States’ role in planning for the war....

“We don’t know who the rebels really represent and how they became armed, but Congress must find out. With so many unknowns, Congress’ only path to protect both the Constitution and the institution of government of the people is to cut off funds for the war in Libya. A cutoff of funds would require the President to follow the Constitutional process with respect to going to war.... Otherwise, we will have given our tacit consent to a policy that undercuts

Congress' constitutionally-mandated role as a coequal branch of government. Moreover, since the Founders established Congress under Article 1 and the Executive under Article 2, Congress is first among equals, unless we refuse to be."

So the question returns to the definition of "who we are as a people."

Are we citizens of a country that acts under Constitutional law or are we a nation that glories in our ability to invade any country that our leaders choose and gathers to cheer as our leaders send armadas to cross sovereign territories half-a-world away to openly murder foreign leaders we have targeted for death?

Are we a nation that celebrates the Pentagon's ability to steer drone aircraft from the safety of control rooms in Nevada that rain Hellfire missiles on village homes in Pakistan? Do we cheer the NATO bombs that target despots and wind up killing their sons, brothers and grandchildren? Do we wave our flag in the face of the world and call it "victory" when we shoot our unarmed enemies in cold-blood, gun down their women and kill their sons?

Gar Smith is the co-founder of Environmentalists Against War and the winner of multiple Project Censored Awards. This article represents the author's opinions and does not necessarily reflect the positions of members of the EAW board.

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