

# The Bin Laden Assassination and the Limits of U.S. Power

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President Barack Obama has praised the targeted assassination of Osama bin Laden as a turning point and “one of the greatest military and intelligence operations in U.S. history.”

However, events in the week running up to the [alleged] execution exposed the limits of U.S. imperialist power and showed why the imperialists are so desperate to project an all-powerful image.

Obama’s message was that the Pentagon can do anything, go anywhere, kill anyone, bomb any country. Sovereignty is now irrelevant. The compliant media are glorifying Navy SEALs, Army Special Forces and Airborne Night Stalkers as “America’s quiet professionals.” We are told they have recently carried out 50 operations in a dozen countries. International lawlessness — the use of torture, kidnapping, secret rendition, extrajudicial killings and targeted assassinations — is justified and defended.

It is clear that this summary execution will be used to justify further expansion of the military budget, new weapons systems and a stepped-up level of domestic repression.

But all this has been unable to reverse U.S. imperialism’s steadily eroding position in the region. Consider a few events that took place in the two weeks before and after the bin Laden assassination. Clearly events are spinning out of their control.

## Prison break in Kandahar

All their night-vision goggles, electronic listening gear and special ops units couldn’t prevent the escape on April 24 in Kandahar of 541 prisoners labeled as Taliban, including 104 commanders described as the very backbone of the insurgency.

The tunnel they had dug for months stretched half a mile and had electricity and air holes. Keys they had obtained to the cells allowed organizers to open cellblocks and escort prisoners to the escape route.

The facility had undergone security upgrades and tightened procedures since a Taliban attack in 2008 had freed 900 prisoners. In that assault, an explosives-laden tanker truck at the prison gate diverted attention while an explosion at a back wall opened an escape route. Dozens of militants on motorbikes aided the escapes.

Afghan government officials and their NATO backers had repeatedly asserted that the prison now had vastly improved security since that attack with new guard towers, night illumination, a ring of concrete barriers topped with razor wire and an entrance reached by

passing through multiple checkpoints and gates.

Turn the guns around

On April 27 nine U.S. officers — two lieutenant colonels, one of whom had retired and become a contractor, two majors, four captains and one master sergeant, all of them armed — were killed in a meeting room at Kabul airport. The shooter was not with al-Qaida or the Taliban but was a trusted Afghan Air Force pilot with 20 years' seniority.

This is the seventh time this year that a trusted Afghan officer has turned his gun around and killed U.S. military officials.

The same week also saw attacks inside the Afghan Defense Ministry, at a Kandahar city police station and at a shared Afghan/U.S. military base in the east. In neighboring Helmand province on April 29, the top civilian chief of Marjah district was assassinated.

On the same day, April 27, the Wall Street Journal ran a front-page article headlined, "Karzai told to dump U.S." The article explained that "Pakistan is lobbying Afghanistan's president against building a long-term strategic partnership with the U.S., urging him instead to look to Pakistan — and its Chinese ally — for help in striking a peace deal with the Taliban and rebuilding the economy, Afghan officials say." The article described the tensions between the U.S. and Pakistan and the deep hostility to U.S. domination throughout the region. Even the forces U.S. imperialism has created, armed and financed are increasingly wary of their alliances.

Cutting supply lines

Meanwhile, there were mass sit-ins and rallies near Peshawar, Pakistan, involving thousands of people who blocked the main supply roads used by the U.S. and NATO to resupply their forces in Afghanistan via the Khyber Pass.

The organizers threatened that if drone strikes inside Pakistan did not stop within 30 days, they would block all NATO supply routes across Pakistan and march to the capital, Islamabad, to force the government to take a stand on the issue. U.S. drones have killed more than 1,000 people in Pakistan alone

The execution of bin Laden came just one day after U.S. bombs meant for Moammar Gadhafi, the Libyan head of state, killed his son and three young grandchildren. The U.S./NATO war on Libya, once considered an easy "regime change," continues without even a pro-forma congressional discussion or vote.

Arab spring

All these immediate setbacks for imperialism reflect also the millions in the streets in Egypt and Tunisia who totally overwhelmed those U.S.-government-supported, long-term dictatorships that Washington had relied on in the region.

The April 27 announcement by Fatah and Hamas of a historic agreement of Palestinian unity, reached in Cairo with the assistance of Egyptian officials, led to immediate U.S. threats to cut off all aid to Fatah and to outraged denunciations by Israel. For decades U.S./Israeli policy has been to keep the Palestinian movement divided and the

democratically elected government of Hamas isolated.

On that same day, the station that pumped natural gas from al-Sabil terminal near El Arish, Egypt, into Israel was blown up. This third attack in three months will close the pipeline for weeks. Egyptian officials have also announced they are reviewing the below-market contract for natural gas that Egypt had formerly granted to Israel. Recent polls show the majority of Egyptians want to end the “peace treaty’ with Israel.

On April 30 Egypt announced it was opening the Rafah border crossing into Gaza and ending the blockade of Gaza on a permanent basis. The U.S. and Israel had imposed a strict blockade on Gaza since 2007 with Hosni Mubarak’s full compliance. Mubarak’s overturn in Egypt has meant an end to many reactionary policies. The people are in motion, asserting their rights and making new demands.

Meanwhile thousands of Iraqis continue to take to the streets and demonstrate in front of U.S. bases protesting shortages of electricity, food and jobs and calling on all U.S. troops to leave. U.S. officials are having a difficult time negotiating an agreement for continued bases in Iraq, even with a compliant and corrupt government of their own making.

#### Execution fuels outrage

The U.S. position in Pakistan was further eroded after the killing of bin Laden. Resolutions by the Lahore High Court Bar Association, not considered sympathetic to al-Qaida, speak volumes about the mass mood. One resolution, which passed unanimously, demanded the resignations of the president, the prime minister, the interior minister, the chief of army staff, the director general of Inter-Services Intelligence and the director of military intelligence for their failure to protect the sovereignty of Pakistan when the U.S. conducted its operation against bin Laden.

The U.S. operation in Abbottabad, close to the Pakistan Military Academy and the restricted site of the Kahuta nuclear plant, sparked deep apprehension.

Pumped up by the bin Laden execution, the Pentagon launched another drone attack on Pakistan on May 6, killing 17 people.

In Yemen that same day a drone attack failed to kill Anwar al Awlaki, a U.S. citizen and radical cleric who has never been charged with any crime but is now on a U.S. international hit list. The announcement said the drone attack “may have killed some members of al-Qaida in Yemen.” The attack is a disaster for the U.S.-supported military dictatorship in Yemen, which is on the brink of collapse. For three months millions of people have courageously demonstrated in the streets against the government. The Pentagon had stopped drone attacks, fearing they would further undermine the military dictatorship. Last year after a U.S. drone mistakenly killed the leaders of a Yemeni province, even the government expressed great anger.

On May 8, the [Taliban](#) allegedly launched a multipronged attack on the offices of the governor, the national security directorate, police headquarters and a U.S. Special Forces base in Kandahar, Afghanistan. It created chaos in the capital of a province that NATO has spent the past year trying to pacify. The May 8 Guardian of Britain explained, “The dream of turning the city into a bulwark of security was badly tarnished.”

U.S. media polls have measured a temporary “bump” in President Obama’s ratings. But U.S.

imperialism's own standing is in continuing decline. It has economic problems it can't solve and terrifyingly destructive weapons that are increasingly raising more anger and organized resistance than fear.

After promises of an economic rebound, U.S. unemployment in April climbed to 9 percent. Wholesale attacks on Medicare and Social Security are proposed as solutions to the budget deficit. The capitalist economy can no longer afford guns and butter. Now the ruling class is pinning its hopes on the superprofits of military contracts and conquest.

While it is true that the Pentagon has weapons enough to destroy the world, it is increasingly coming up against the limits of the capitalist system it serves.

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