

The Killing of Osama bin Laden: Behind the Media's Assault on Seymour Hersh

By [Shamus Cooke](#)

Global Research, May 20, 2015

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Terrorism](#)

He's the most respected journalist in U.S. history, and for decades Seymour Hersh has consistently broken major international stories, winning him the Pulitzer Prize among other prestigious awards of journalism.

But the media establishment that once idealized him now seeks his destruction. Hersh is facing a coordinated attack from his former colleagues, each scrambling to drive in the next knife.

Hersh's recent report on the killing of Osama Bin Laden and his prior investigation of Obama's aborted 2013 bombing of Syria have attracted a synchronized media smear campaign.

But Hersh's attackers are a clumsy bunch. The hysterics and uniformity of the attack says less about the victim than it does the perpetrators, who share a self interest in shredding Hersh's stellar reputation.

Hersh's last two investigations exposed major lies of the Obama administration; but they also exposed the complete failure of the U.S. media, who've been willing captives to the sloppy narratives spun by the Obama administration.

For example, Hersh's 2014 [articles on Syria](#) were a damning exposure of Obama's lies to the U.S. public in his attempt to start a fresh war. The media responded to Hersh's sensational Syria articles with collective silence. They simply ignored them and did no follow up, leaving the lies of the Obama administration unchallenged. The few bold enough to challenge Hersh mocked him as a "conspiracy theorist," never bothering to address Hersh's allegations.

One of the biggest "conspiracies" that Hersh uncovered in Syria was that the Turkish government was secretly working with the extremist group al-Nusra Front to topple the Syrian government; this at the same time as the Obama administration was coordinating with Turkey toward the same goal. This "conspiracy" is now [openly acknowledged](#), as Turkey and Saudi Arabia are publicly coordinating with the al Nusra Front and its sister extremist group, Ahrar al-Sham, under the umbrella group "Conquest Army."

The media's collective silence over Hersh's Syria articles has now turned into a coordinated attack, in response to Hersh's revelations about Obama's lie-ridden narrative of the death of Bin-Laden.

A pack mentality gripped the media, rabid and snarling; but the bites lacked teeth. They nipped at Hersh's ankles and he scattered them with a laugh. He's comfortable being in the cross-hairs of power, having always emerged vindicated.

The sharpest allegation launched against Hersh was itself dull. He was lambasted for using anonymous sources, while other sources just weren't good enough. Here's the Wall Street Journal's version of the most popular attack on Hersh:

"Mr. Hersh's 10,356-word account is based nearly exclusively on a handful of unnamed sources — which can't be fact-checked — and mainly one retired U.S. intelligence official. One of the only named sources is Asad Durrani, a former director of Pakistani intelligence..."

Ironically, this quote — which purposely waters down the extent of the sources — helps Hersh, since it shows that he used more sources than the vast majority of stories written by the U.S. media on matters of foreign policy.

Typically the U.S. media relies on a single source: the Obama administration.

And very often this single source is anonymous, referred to as a "senior government official." Facts aren't checked and tough questions are never asked. What Obama says becomes "fact," and if someone like Hersh challenges the narrative the media skewers the challenger.

Anonymous sources are acceptable when the reporter believes the person they are talking to has access to knowledge about the situation being reported. If the story is especially controversial several sources are helpful to corroborate the report, as Hersh used in his last two major investigations.

A New York Times reporter is allowed to use anonymous sources because the publication is known to have access to those in power. Hersh has likewise earned the benefit of doubt regarding sources. No one has doubted — until now suddenly — that Hersh has access to high-ranking government figures, thanks to his international celebrity and spotless reporting record.

It's unfortunate that many of Hersh's sources must remain anonymous, but this is due, in part, to the blanket of fear that Obama used to suffocate truth, having prosecuted more whistle-blowers than [all previous administrations combined](#). The Bin Laden raid remains highly classified, and those who go on record publicly can expect long prison sentences, or possibly worse.

The secondary media attacks used against Hersh were even shallower, amounting to dozens of pathetic attempts to poke holes in his logic.

Asking probing questions is of course a key part of journalism. If only the media had been so eager to ask similar questions of the Obama administration's version of Bin-Laden's death.

Even after the Obama administration admitted that its initial versions of the Bin Laden assassination were false, the media immediately settled comfortably into the new version, not wondering about the motive behind the previous false story, nor curious about the flaws of logic in the new version.

Hersh's version of Bin-Laden's death is logically superior to that of the Obama administration's. And it's this logic that Hersh's article is grounded in. For example Hersh's [opening paragraph](#):

“The White House’s story might have been written by Lewis Carroll: would bin Laden, target of a massive international manhunt, really decide that a resort town [with a large military facility] forty miles from Islamabad would be the safest place to live and command al-Qaida’s operations?”

The gaping holes of logic in the official story were there from the beginning. Hersh actually asked questions and explored them while the rest of the media were content with regurgitating White House press releases.

And when the White House’s narrative became an Oscar winning movie — [made with help from the CIA](#) — the myth was cemented in popular culture. Until Hersh shattered it.

Interestingly, a longtime Middle East correspondent, Carlotta Gall, said publicly that “my own reporting [on the death of Bin Laden] tracks with Hersh’s.” Reporters from NBC [made similar statements](#). But individuals who spoke up were immediately shouted down by the choir.

The media has a self-interest in maintaining the Bin Laden fiction because they’ve been an important cog in the lie machine. Additionally, the media has a huge stake in maintaining cozy relations with the Obama administration, since the White House rewards the “good media” by leaking selective stories to “good reporters” via anonymous “senior government officials.”

Obama’s motive for lying about the death of Bin Laden is the real story here, hidden under the piles of slander against Hersh. Why would Obama lie about Bin Laden’s assassination?

The motive is obvious: the Bin Laden death narrative protects the tortures of the Bush administration while giving spectacular PR to the lynch pin of U.S. foreign policy — the so-called “war on terror.”

For example, the film Zero Dark Thirty is based on the White House’s narrative. The outcome of the film is essentially an Oscar winning state-sponsored propaganda film: the fictional drama showing how the CIA successfully hunted down Bin Laden with a combination of cunning, technology and torture.

Hersh’s article exploded this lie, humiliating everyone who took part in it.

After Hersh uncovered the tip of the torture iceberg with his Abu Ghraib reporting in 2004, people around the world howled for justice and demanded the torturers be prosecuted. Obama took no action, and the Bin Laden assassination lie has been used to protect the criminals.

More importantly, the White House-Zero Dark Thirty narrative gave a mighty PR boost to the “war on terror,” where the U.S. throws hundreds of billions of dollars into bombs, warplanes, and mass surveillance that has proved to be a miraculous failure. The war on terror has “succeeded” only in further destabilizing the Middle East that then fertilizes the ground for extremist groups like ISIS.

Ultimately, the bi-partisan attack on Hersh shows the complete media conformity on U.S. foreign policy, where Republicans, Democrats, and even “progressive” media have come to accept a governmental policy of never-ending war and mass surveillance. No questions asked.

When Bush was president, there were divisions in the establishment over the Iraq war, and the liberal media were given freedom to attack. But the liberal media have been co-opted under Obama.

And the right-wing media share Obama's foreign policy vision too. Hersh opened a door for Fox News to attack Obama on Syria and Bin Laden, but Fox slammed it shut and instead attacked Hersh. Yes, the right wing media hates Obama, but they can't attack him on foreign policy because they agree with him, aside from the occasional quip about Obama not being aggressive enough. This bipartisan agreement on foreign policy has given Obama tremendous freedom to launch drone wars in [six countries](#) and lead a proxy war in Syria that Hersh helped expose last year.

When combined with the NSA spying program, Obama's lies make previous presidential scandals — such as Watergate and Iran-Contra — look incredibly tame, while making the U.S. media look like accomplices instead of news reporters.

Shamus Cooke is a social service worker, trade unionist, and writer for Workers Action (www.workerscompass.org). He can be reached at shamuscooke@gmail.com

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