

# The Killing of Osama bin Laden

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Region: [Asia](#)

Global Research, May 12, 2015

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

[The London Review of Books](#) 21 May 2015

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It's been four years since a group of US Navy Seals assassinated Osama bin Laden in a night raid on a high-walled compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The killing was the high point of Obama's first term, and a major factor in his re-election. The White House still maintains that the mission was an all-American affair, and that the senior generals of Pakistan's army and Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) were not told of the raid in advance. This is false, as are many other elements of the Obama administration's account. 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 forty miles from Islamabad would be the safest place to live and command al-Qaida's operations? He was hiding in the open. So America said.

The most blatant lie was that Pakistan's two most senior military leaders – General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, chief of the army staff, and General Ahmed Shuja Pasha, director general of the ISI – were never informed of the US mission. This remains the White House position despite an array of reports that have raised questions, including one by Carlotta Gall in the *New York Times Magazine* of 19 March 2014. Gall, who spent 12 years as the *Times* correspondent in Afghanistan, wrote that she'd been told by a 'Pakistani official' that Pasha had known before the raid that bin Laden was in Abbottabad. The story was denied by US and Pakistani officials, and went no further. In his book *Pakistan: Before and after Osama* (2012), Imtiaz Gul, executive director of the Centre for Research and Security Studies, a think tank in Islamabad, wrote that he'd spoken to four undercover intelligence officers who – reflecting a widely held local view – asserted that the Pakistani military must have had knowledge of the operation. The issue was raised again in February, when a retired general, Asad Durrani, who was head of the ISI in the early 1990s, told an al-Jazeera interviewer that it was 'quite possible' that the senior officers of the ISI did not know where bin Laden had been hiding, 'but it was more probable that they did [know]. And the idea was that, at the right time, his location would be revealed. And the right time would have been when you can get the necessary quid pro quo – if you have someone like Osama bin Laden, you are not going to simply hand him over to the United States.'

This spring I contacted Durrani and told him in detail what I had learned about the bin Laden assault from American sources: that bin Laden had been a prisoner of the ISI at the Abbottabad compound since 2006; that Kayani and Pasha knew of the raid in advance and had made sure that the two helicopters delivering the Seals to Abbottabad could cross Pakistani airspace without triggering any alarms; that the CIA did not learn of bin Laden's whereabouts by tracking his couriers, as the White House has claimed since May 2011, but from a former senior Pakistani intelligence officer who betrayed the secret in return for

much of the \$25 million reward offered by the US, and that, while Obama did order the raid and the Seal team did carry it out, many other aspects of the administration's account were false.

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