

By Khalid Aziz | [From the Dawn Newspaper](#) 6th May 2011

OSAMA bin Laden's epochal journey to awaken the Muslim world came to an end in the town of Abbottabad and practically next door to the military academy that trains officers to defend the state created in the name of Islam in 1947.

The presence of Bin Laden in Abbottabad has raised embarrassing questions about the military's role in helping him evade arrest. Shortly after the operation, John Brennan, a counter-terrorism adviser to President Obama, told journalists at the White House that "people have been referring to this as hiding in plain sight. We are looking at how he was able to hide out there for so long". He thought it was "inconceivable" that Bin Laden did not enjoy a "support system" in Pakistan.

In May last year, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton accused Pakistan officials of harbouring Bin Laden and Mullah Omar. "I am not saying they are at the highest level ... but I believe somewhere in this government are people who know where Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda and Mullah Omar and the leadership of the Taliban are. [The US] expect[s] more cooperation [from Pakistan]," she said.

What benefit would Pakistan get in protecting the Taliban or in providing a safe haven to Bin Laden and others? Why does Pakistan follow such a suicidal set of policies? Has recourse to such flawed policies put the country in danger? That we have survived so far is perhaps due to American recognition that Pakistani intelligence links to Al Qaeda and the Taliban provide it with a window of opportunity to achieve success in the war. In return, Pakistan uses those links as critical leverage in its relationship with Washington.

If this is correct, then it is a bizarre transactional model. During the last 10 years, Pakistan has been severely destabilised by the war in Afghanistan. It faces a local insurgency that has links with the Afghan Taliban as well as Al Qaeda. At the same time, Pakistan needs a strong patron to survive in its battle against its more powerful neighbour, India, with whom the US maintains a strategic partnership.

On the other hand, the US needs Pakistan's knowledge and influence in resolving the war in Afghanistan. The US and Pakistan need each other. Thus, however equivocal Pakistan's role in the Bin Laden episode, the need to successfully exit from Afghanistan forces the US to depend on the former and to that extent delays the essential transformation of Pakistan.

Pakistan feels isolated and vulnerable and does not want this war to end without gaining certain advantages. It appears that Pakistan wants the US to recognise its sphere of influence in Afghanistan and also provide long-term strategic support.

Whether the US is willing to provide those comforts is another matter altogether. After the discovery of Bin Laden in Abbottabad, one thing is certain: the US will now be planning other unilateral acts against targets such as the Haqqani group, the Quetta Shura, the Lashkar-i-Taiba and others, wherever the opportunity occurs.

In short, US counter-terrorism rules have changed. We in Pakistan may shed tears of indignation but they will mean nothing; we are suffering for our skewed security policies that now endanger our very survival.

How have we reached this lamentable stage? The problem lies in our narrative of statehood. We take pride in considering Pakistan as an Islamic state.

Clearly, religious right and wrong cannot be made the basis of state management for that is best run on the principles of expediency and political purpose. Sultan Alauddin Khilji understood this 700 years ago when he declared that he did not know whether or not what he commanded was permitted under Sharia law. Thus, he gave commands that he considered were of benefit to the country and appeared opportune under the circumstances. He did not know whether that pleased God or not.

By declaring Pakistan an Islamic state, we have exposed ourselves to huge risks to the state. When we mix our national narrative with religion, we permit international issues to enter our political sphere — if any problem of an Islamic dimension arises anywhere in the world, it automatically becomes Pakistan's problem. This also allows others to indulge in proxy wars of a sectarian nature within Pakistan.

Bin Laden said that he was creating an Islamic caliphate and was fighting the US since it subverted Muslim countries and guided their policies. He hoped that what he set in motion on 9/11 would start an Islamic revolution, resulting in the establishment of a caliphate.

That did not happen. He must have been quite dejected when he saw the motivating force of the recent uprisings in the Middle East. The mass revolutions in the Arab world over the past four months showed that Al Qaeda was politically inconsequential.

As Robert Fisk noted, "During the past few months, millions of Arab Muslims rose up and were prepared for their own martyrdom — not for Islam but for freedom and liberty and democracy. Bin Laden didn't get rid of the tyrants. The people did."

And they didn't want a caliph." This sums up the tragedy of Bin Laden. He had become irrelevant for a large majority of Muslims since many of them chose secular values of freedom and liberty, not an Islamic caliphate.

Pakistan and its leaders must learn from Bin Laden's failure and understand that the future lies in dealing with problems related to freedom and liberty, rather than jihad and coercion. If we refuse to transform, we will not be a viable nation — we will rapidly descend into dysfunction and chaos. The choice is clear.

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