

OPINION

Osama's death and terror war

Pakistan will suffer backlash, more extremists will rise, war will go on in Afghanistan, says Ralph Mathekga

OSAMA bin Laden is reportedly dead, killed by US special forces in Pakistan. Footage of celebrations and rejoicing across America have flashed around television screens worldwide, along with somewhat guarded comments by experts and diplomats.

The US's number one fugitive had been on the run for at least 10 years, since the bombing of the twin towers and the Pentagon – events that sparked the multibillion dollar campaign that came to be known as the war against terror.

It is important to ask what the significance of Bin Laden's death is and most importantly, why it happened now?

A key question would be whether the Pakistani intelligence services gave Bin Laden away.

It has been rumoured, and substantiated through Wikileaks, that American intelligence services and the broader diplomatic corps working in the region have been frustrated with the apparent active abetting of Bin Laden by Pakistani intelligence services.

Agents within the intelligence services were known to be providing him with fresh intelligence, hence he managed to stay a step ahead for the last 10 years. The Bush administration had for example, missed the opportunity to smoke Bin Laden out of the Tora Bora mountains in Afghanistan, where US intelligence services last located him.

What followed was Bin Laden reportedly moving between Pakistan and Afghanistan for years with the alleged assistance of the Pakistani intelligence service, believed to be indifferent to the US war on terror. This was despite Pakistan officially supporting the war.

The US meanwhile continually applied pressure on Pakistan to play a meaningful role in fighting terror and not to abet known terror suspects and other extremist elements.

While the Pakistani regime suffered a crisis of legitimacy regarding its stance on the war against terror, the blatant operation of US intelligence service agents inside the country strengthened anti-American sentiments, providing a breeding ground for the Taliban to harvest recruits in Pakistan. The persistent use of US unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), known as drones, to bomb suspected terrorist cells and individuals, for example, was seen as undermining the Pakistani government.

The US's apparent blank cheque for carrying out such missions was demonstrated in January when the CIA "contractor", Raymond Davis, fatally shot two Pakistani intelligence operatives in Islamabad. The New York Times reported that Davis, who was



RISING ANGER: Osama bin Laden supporters burn a US flag replica in Pakistan. Picture: Reuters

subsequently arrested and detained by Pakistani authorities, had been carrying out a mission on behalf of the CIA. A diplomatic row ensued, with the Pakistani authorities coming to the realisation that Americans were operating with virtual impunity within Pakistani territory.

At that same time pressure from Pakistani nationals mounted on the government to consider, and probably renegotiate, its position regarding the activities of US intelligence services and also the unlimited fly-zone the US drones seemingly enjoyed.

I am no war correspondent, but from where I sit, it would seem the Pakistani authorities had come to regard Bin Laden as a liability.

The Americans wanted him and offering him up could serve as a means to simultaneously dealing with US pressure and getting the US to scale down their unpopular drone strikes.

The clearly calculated no show by the Pakistani authorities in Bin Laden's killing, clearly points to Pakistani intelligence forces having given up the al-Qaeda leader.

It is simply unimaginable that the US forces carried out a ground operation of the magnitude of the one in which Bin Laden was killed without the knowledge and assistance of the Pakistani authorities.

But to minimise any political backlash that would inevitably engulf the Pakistani regime following the al-Qaeda leader's death, the US authorities decided to keep Pakistan out of official active participation in the attack on Bin Laden's compound.

The question then that emerges is whether it should be reasonably expected that Bin Laden's death would justify the scaling down of US operations in Pakistan, or Afghanistan for that matter?

Pakistan is one of the most unstable regimes in that region. It has suffered a string of attacks by suicide bombers, in which officials have been killed.

Since the end of General Pervez Musharraf's regime in 2008 – a trusted partner and perhaps a stakeholder in the US war against terror – Pakistan has been reduced to a playground for the Taliban. The country has been

a conveyor belt for the flow of fighters to neighbouring Afghanistan. Destabilising Pakistan has been a symbolic gesture demonstrating the strength of the Taliban.

The reality is that scaling down US operations in the wake of Bin Laden's death will not stabilise Pakistan or save the Afghan regime from the flood of Taliban fighters flowing in from Pakistan.

In fact, possible Pakistani gains from Bin Laden's death – such as the reduction of the US drone attacks – would most likely be outweighed by the Pakistani citizen's continued lack of trust for their own government because of its relationship with the US.

With a regime whose forces and national interest are considered to be severely subjugated to US interests, more extremists willing to take up arms to fight against US collaborators – real or perceived – may emerge. Suicide bombings in Islamabad and across the country may increase. The number of Taliban sympathisers is already known to be growing in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

From the US point of view the American public may view Bin Laden's killing as a victory. But, like the British PR victory achieved through the Royal wedding last week, it will provide only short-lived relief for the psyche of a nation faced with dwindling international moral influence.

The cold reality is that yes, Bin Laden has been killed, but that will actually have no real effect on the war on terror and in no way reduce the US's budget for that war.

Bin Laden had no practical effect on al-Qaeda's operations or those of the Taliban for some time. The terrorist cells had evolved in a way that no longer required central coordination.

Americans will have to stay in Pakistan and continue the drone bombings, while the Pakistani regime will have to deal with the political backlash. Across the border in Afghanistan, the campaign against the Taliban will have to continue, maybe indefinitely.

While closure is closure and is priceless, all that Bin Laden's killing will have effectively done is impose a burden on the US to justify why their campaign should continue at the scale it does now.

Perhaps what the US needs to do is step back and let the Pakistani intelligence rehabilitate itself by spearheading the war on terror on its own soil. But holding back and leading from behind has never been a strong point of the US.

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Violence against women entrenched in SA

BY THE time I was in matric, I had three friends who were rape survivors. All three had been raped by people they knew and I never pressed them about whether they had laid charges or not.

The reality is that many women are not raped by strangers waiting in dark alleys ready to pounce on their vulnerability. Women are sexually assaulted and raped by people they know: partners, cousins, colleagues. This is not surprising considering that rape statistics in South Africa indicate a woman is raped every 17 seconds.

There are certain places I know I should not go after dark; I have to be even more careful if I am out drinking with friends because I am aware that in South Africa, a woman's body is not her own. Not only is my movement curtailed, but my body can be used as provocation for a violent crime.

But even though I am a student at a relatively safe university campus, one is still not 100 percent



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secure. There have been instances of rape and sexual violence. Some have been reported and many probably not.

Trying to raise concern about the silence around sexual violence, I recently participated in the "1 in 9 Campaign" which seeks to raise awareness not only about the shocking rape statistics, but about the State's silence in dealing with many cases.

Research conducted by the Medical Research Council in 2005 focused on the reporting and non-reporting of rape, and revealed that only one in nine survivors reported the crime to the police. The 1 in 9 campaign (based on this statistic) encourages women and men to speak up against this physical violation and stand in solidarity with women who have been silenced by sexual violence for any reason.

This year over 1 000 students took part in the campaign, wearing purple T-shirts and taping their mouths shut to symbolise the silence that prevails, sadly, in South Africa – one of the most violent societies for women to live in.

Despite what is tantamount to a war against women, the national discourse and political agenda – or lack of it – around issues affecting women remains very worrying.

Who can forget ANC Youth League leader, Julius Malema, publicly stating that the woman

who accused President Jacob Zuma of rape had a "nice time".

Recently in KwaThema township, Gauteng, a 24-year-old lesbian, Noxolo Nogwaza, was raped and brutally murdered; another statistic of the corrective rape scourge that takes place in South Africa, prominently since 2006, when the case of corrective rape against a lesbian, Zoliswa Nkonyana, happened.

When there is no outcry about such actions or protests from our country's leaders, violence against women is not seen as abhorrent, but entrenched. Chauvinism is held aloft and the national crisis of violence against women is not even seen to be an issue of national importance.

The judicial system too, has also failed women as many cases are delayed in court for various reasons. A rape case can be postponed up to 32 times without any explanation in our courts.

The responsibility needs to shift from rape and any kind of sexual

violence being a woman's issue, one in which we are expected to bear sole responsibility for what we wear and what time we are in public in certain areas. Rather, rape and sexual abuse needs to be everybody's issue.

We all need to agree that men will no longer be demonised as violent people who cannot control their urges and women will not be treated as second class citizens where violence against them in any form is treated with indifference.

If women in this country are never able to fully claim their freedom of movement, our reality is that we are not yet free – a shame given our Constitution that recognises the dignity of every person. It is also a shame that several years after I matriculated, I no longer have three friends who are rape survivors, I have many more.

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