

# COMMENTARY

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## **Osama's Death: From India, with Mixed Emotions**

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**T**he death of Osama bin Laden, the founder of Al Qaida and the prime accused of the September 11, 2001 attacks, at the hands of the US Navy SEALs in the early hours of 2 May in Abbottabad provided a sense of relief to the countries combating terrorism. For the US it is more significant because it took them more than a decade and trillions of dollars to get hold of a 6-feet tall personification of terror—dead or alive. The extent of excitement in the US administration's top brass headed by President Barack Obama can be gauged by the fact that most of them, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, listened the 40-minute-long operation live. After congratulating his officials President Obama went on live, in the middle of the night, to announce that the killing of Osama. It has been estimated that at least 56 million people watched that announcement live.

The initial reactions were mixed. As Osama was reportedly 'dead or killed' several times in the past decade not many wanted to jump onto the bandwagon of this time. But as time passed by, emotions of joy and celebration started to spread across the world—the most dreaded terrorist in the world was killed by 25 commandoes in less than three quarters of an hour. The American youth thronged the White House singing and dancing songs of praises for the US forces and President Obama.

Thousands of miles away, in India, most of the people who were preparing to leave for their offices got glued to television news channels where, in an effort to be the first, the anchors were consistently fumbling between two proper nouns- Obama and Osama. Social networking sites became a source for news. Some messages were simple, others expressed a sense of relief, some congratulating, some very cautious and while some asked the US: After Osama's death, will it pull back its forces and stop further killings in the region?

In his statement the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh refrained from any thumping praise and said, 'I welcome it as a significant step forward and hope that it will deal a decisive blow to Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. The international community and Pakistan in particular must work comprehensively to end the activities of all such groups who threaten civilized behaviour and kill innocent men, women and children.'

However, the Ministry of Home Affairs was quick to pounce on the opportunity to underline the fact the Osama was killed 'deep inside Pakistan,' and reminding their Pakistani counterparts of their duty regarding the perpetrators of the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai in 2008. 'We take note with grave concern that part of the statement in which President Obama said that the fire fight in which Osama Bin Laden was killed took place in Abbottabad "deep inside Pakistan". This fact underlines our concern that terrorists belonging to different organizations find sanctuary in Pakistan. We believe that the perpetrators of the Mumbai terror attack, including the controllers and handlers of the terrorists who actually carried out the attack, continue to be sheltered in Pakistan. We once again call upon the Government of Pakistan to arrest the persons whose names have been handed over to the Interior Minister of Pakistan as well as provide voice samples of certain persons who are suspected to be among the controllers and handlers of the terrorists,' said Home Minister P. Chidambaram.

The aggressive stance taken by the Home Ministry shifted focus of the entire event, for India at least, sharply on the November 2008 terror strike on Mumbai. Assuming Osama's killing as a decisive blow to Al Qaeda and other terror outfits including Lashkar-e-Toiba, New Delhi expressed concerns over terrorists finding safe haven inside neighbouring Pakistan.

At the same time, sensing the possibility of a retaliatory attack, the government alerted all the states to beef-up security especially where American or Jewish facilities are located. The Home Ministry asked the authorities in Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kolkata to stay alert with special emphasis on Chabad houses, considered to be hub of Jewish travellers.

While Sushma Swaraj, leader of the Opposition in the Parliament, depicted bin-Laden as 'humanity's enemy number one', the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) reiterated its earlier criticisms over the government's handling the situation of post-Mumbai attacks with Pakistan. The party said that Osama's elimination near Islamabad was the 'final confirmation' that Pakistan continues to be 'the epicentre of terrorism.' Terming it to be the litmus test for Pakistan, the party also took the event as an opportunity to 'demand that all the terrorists from across the border must be handed over to India.'

While the entire world was relieved over Osama's killing the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was not impressed with the way the elimination was done. The CPI (M) criticized the US administration for the methods used to deal with terrorism. 'The killing of Al Qaeda chief would not end terrorism as the methods used by the US to fight terror have only worsened the situation,' the CPM Politburo said. Reminding the US of its involvement in the region, the party said, 'The Pentagon and CIA had equipped and financed, through the ISI, people like Osama thus fuelling the later day Taliban and Jihadi fundamentalists. Now in the name of fighting the Al Qaeda, the US has devastated Afghanistan and Iraq. Tens of thousands of people lost their lives in these wars of aggression.'

The Indian media was in a mad race for sensationalism. Reaffirming the claims that Pakistan supports terror outfits, most of the media organizations had a delightful time in targeting Pakistani leaders as if all of them were associated with one or the other terrorist group. Majority of the channels ran programs discussing the possibilities of India carrying out a similar 'surgical strike' against the accused for 26/11 and 1993 Mumbai bomb last.

Irrespective of how the events would unfold in Pakistan, the Indian government has decided to continue talks with the neighbour. The decision is significant especially when Pakistan is facing international isolation. The move should be seen positively as India has not given up hopes that the international community will pressurize Pakistan to dismantle its sanctuaries for terror; at the same time India also would have to accept the geographical destiny and seeks peace with the neighbour.

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