



## Why Are We Celebrating Osama bin Laden's Death?

If so, then why the great effort to “get” bin Laden and the celebration of his death at the hands of U.S. Navy Seals? Has our objective all along been to give greater motivation to the al-Qaeda terrorists and their allies to redouble their efforts to kill Americans? Or did we somehow believe that killing bin Laden would cause his bloodthirsty disciples to fold their tents, mount their camels, and ride off into the sunset, to live out their lives as the peace-loving Muslims President George W. Bush liked to praise in contrast with the terrorists who are not “with us”? Strange if anyone would have thought so. Did the hanging of John Brown, the terrorist at Harper’s Ferry, abate abolitionist sentiment in pre-Civil War America? No doubt it was a lesson to John Brown, but the like-minded went on singing his praises. No doubt there is an Arabic version of “John Brown’s Body” being sung in memory of Osama bin Laden today.



Perhaps there will be no fallout from the killing. If the repeated killing of non-combatants by American forces, and particularly by unmanned bombers aptly named Predator drones, has not furnished sufficient motivation for our enemies to continue their fight against us, it’s hard to imagine what would. Who needs the death of Osama? They need only replay the video of the 1996 *60 Minutes* interview with then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, in which the Secretary justified the death of more than half a million Arab children by our years-long embargo against Iraq as a means of forcing “regime change,” or at least forcing Saddam Hussein to comply with UN resolutions concerning those yet-undiscovered “weapons of mass destruction.” Or they could republish photos of the Abu Ghraib obscenities. The one with a uniformed American female leading a naked Iraqi man on a leash comes to mind. If that sort of thing does not, as the late Joe Sobran stated with obvious irony, destroy “all the good will built up through years of bombing Arab cities and starving Arab children,” then nothing can or will.

Or they might, those tricky terrorists, dig up statements like the one made by Lieutenant General Thomas Kelly, operations director for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in 1991 after two laser-guided U.S. missiles tore into a bomb shelter in Iraq and incinerated 400 people who were there seeking refuge from another American bombing raid. “We are chagrined if people were hurt,” Kelly told reporters in a classic “Oops, doggone it!” moment. (Read: “The Running Euphemisms of War.”) Chagrined, are we? Chagrined, you say? Chagrin must be closely akin to charity, for it “covereth a multitude of sins.”

Well, “Stuff happens” as former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld sagely observed. “Rummy,” the Pericles of the Potomac, publicly lamented those “incidents of death” (let’s not call them killings) that,



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he noted, “tend to encourage a depressing view of war.”

Not necessarily, Mr. Secretary. For some — like the friends, relatives, and countrymen of those, shall we say, recently deceased in collateral damage — those “incidents of death” inspire an enraged view of the wars the United States and others in President Bush’s “Coalition of the Willing” have been waging in the Middle East for so many years. Anger and depression may in some sense be related, but they are not the same thing. And, let’s face it, killing, even the killing of innocent civilians, does not necessarily depress or otherwise sadden the killers.

That is not a knock on our military personnel. They are carrying out what they are told is a defense of our nation and its freedoms against armed and dangerous enemies. But we as a people have been conditioned from grade school, perhaps even nursery school, to view wars and the “incidents of death” therein as cause for celebration. At least one major league baseball game Monday evening, the one at Boston’s Fenway Park between the Red Sox and the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, was preceded by a ballpark celebration of the death of bin Laden and of the valor of our men and women in uniform who are, as always, “defending our freedom and keeping us safe.”

I shed no tears at bin Laden’s demise, but I wonder: Should we take a depressing or celebratory view of the killing by NATO air strike of the son and grandchildren of Libyan dictator Moammar Ghadaffi. What would be our reaction if, God forbid, Barrack Obama’s children were killed in an attack on America over our President’s violations of human rights and international law? Call them “Legion,” for they are many.

Or have we already forgotten the killing of the Libyan ruler’s son and grandchildren by what was surely not a bombing? It was “air support” for the Libyan rebels whom we are aiding in our “humanitarian intervention.” Yes, I think we have pretty well forgotten that “collateral damage.” Forgetting is one of our best skills. We have been blessed with what author James Bovard has called [Attention Deficit Democracy](#). But not to worry. Chances are no one at the White House, Pentagon, State Department, or even the U.S. Department of Education is likely to order Ritalin for all the “informed” viewers of Fox, CNN, or broadcast network news.

**Author’s addendum:** Mr. De Caro’s comments (below) shed considerably more heat than light. In the first place I did not put the “terrorist” label on John Brown, though anyone would be justified in doing so. My point, which I believe I made clearly enough, is that just as John Brown’s followers would not be deterred from supporting his actions, however they might be labeled, by Brown’s execution, neither will Osama’s disciples be dissuaded by his execution.

Being no expert on the subject of John Brown, I would usually be reluctant to enter a dispute with one who claims to be his biographer. But Mr. De Caro’s claim that John Brown “never had his hand in the death of peaceful, non-aggressive people” is easily refuted. According to *The United States: The History of a Republic* by Richard Hofstadter, William Miller, and Daniel Aaron (Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1967), “John Brown of Osawatomie, Kansas, a fanatical abolitionist, who was soon to become better known, gathered six followers, rode into the pro-slavery settlement at Pottawatomie Creek, and wantonly hacked five men to death.” The men killed were pro-slavery but were not themselves slave owners. The West Virginia Division of Culture and History notes on its website that the first victim of Brown’s raid on the Harper’s Ferry arsenal was “an African-American railroad baggage handler named Hayward Shepherd, who was shot and killed after confronting the raiders.” Lincoln, Douglas, and men of all parties condemned the raid.



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To call Brown a terrorist would not carry the implication that the political and social institutions of the antebellum South were “just and fair,” any more than calling bin Laden a terrorist implies that conditions in the Middle East are just and fair or that the United States has had no role in imposing harsh and often deadly conditions on people in Arab lands.

Finally, Mr. De Caro’s claim concerning Bown’s “humane treatment” of those whom he kidnapped and held in captivity should remind him of the praises spoken of many a “Mr. Charlie” who was said to have treated his slaves “real good.”

The gentleman accuses me and other typical white males (I’m glad he’s not prejudiced) of ignorance, which is his prerogative. He has demonstrated his own ability to “know” and state a great many things that are not so.



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