

Bury These Things with Bin Laden

By Lieutenant Commander Harrison Schramm, U.S. Navy

On 2 May 2011, Navy SEALs arrived via helicopter at a remote district in Pakistan. After a short and intense firefight, Osama bin Laden was dead. Later that day, he was buried at sea from the

USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN-70). Bin Laden defined the back story for my generation of officers, and parts of his legacy will be important for us to remember. Others we would do well to bury with him.

The war against terrorism has changed our force in operations as well as institutions. One institutional legacy has been our dependence on supplemental or special funding. We had the former because this war was supposed to be fast and inex-

Laden. Even if they are effective, they do not represent who we are as a nation, and they act as a lightning rod of support for the other side.

In a larger sense, the United States can seek détente by adding any vengeance, real or perceived, to the things we bury with bin Laden. Those who supported him at low levels should be given the opportunity to bury that as well. Renouncing their support at this time amounts to

bin Laden proves to any future terrorists that the United States will go to the ends of the earth to get its man.

It remains to be seen whether al Qaeda is buried with its leader. To prove it is not, it must strike again, and soon. But its mandate for action could not come at a worse time: the trump card of intelligence obtained from bin Laden's compound can only incite fear. Thus, what this terrorist group is accustomed to imposing on others is now spreading among its surviving leaders. These two factors—the need to act coupled with increased risk—force remaining members to make a choice between doing and dying or not doing and dropping out.

The United States has a bad habit of planning to fight the last war. We need instead to bury any plans for a replay of the war against terrorism. Much has been made of the fact that the U.S. military changed from a force to fight competitors into one of nation-building and counterinsurgency. But we should prepare to fight peers, in which case we may find ourselves in a smaller conflict that it is easier for us to win. We must never lose sight of the fact that peer competitors have the ability to impose severe costs on the United States and its way of life, but terrorists have the ability only



U.S. NAVY (JAMES R. EWANS)

With al Qaeda's leader gone, the United States should return, the author maintains, to preparing for wars against peer competitors, not terrorists. Osama bin Laden was buried at sea on 2 May 2011 from the USS *Carl Vinson*, shown here two weeks later with ships from her strike group in Manila Bay.

pensive. Such notions should be the first thing we bury with bin Laden.

While the budget grave is open, let's bury the growth of contractors performing what used to be inherently military functions. We need to return to making the business of warfighting the sole domain of military services. Contractors may be budget-effective, but using them is bad for us as a nation.

Also unhealthy for us been the use of what until recently would have been considered un-American methods of intelligence-gathering and dealing with prisoners. Bury Guantanamo and other nebulous versions of purgatory with bin

only face-saving, but it's a dignity that we should allow.

We should also bury our fear that our deterrent is not credible. Our ability to impose penalties against nations that support terrorists or carry out other harmful actions was proven beyond a doubt after 9/11, and again in Operation Iraqi Freedom. These were deterrence successes and have a simple narrative: The United States is roused to action and arrives with overwhelming force. It embarks on a swift and devastating campaign that, while not securing victory, unquestionably results in the opposing nation's defeat. For our enemies, the fact that we found and killed

to make us impose costs on ourselves.

Future historians will, hopefully, bury bin Laden's legacy where it belongs: as a sideshow of this era. Most important of all the things we must bury with bin Laden, we must never resurrect him as a bogeyman, which would keep him alive as a symbol of fear. If we keep him buried, we have won. ❄

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