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Killing Evil Doesn't Make Us Evil

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WASHINGTON

I don't want closure. There is no closure after tragedy.

I want memory, and justice, and revenge.

When you're dealing with a mass murderer who bragged about incinerating thousands of Americans and planned to kill countless more, that seems like the only civilized and morally sound response.

We briefly celebrated one of the few clear-cut military victories we've had in a long time, a win that made us feel like Americans again — smart and strong and capable of finding our enemies and striking back at them without getting trapped in multitrillion-dollar Groundhog Day occupations.

But within days, Naval Seal-gazing shifted to navel-gazing.

There was the bad comedy of solipsistic Republicans with wounded egos trying to make it about how right they were and whinging that George W. Bush was due more credit. Their attempt to renew the debate about torture is itself torture.

W. preferred to sulk in his Dallas tent rather than join President Obama at ground zero in a duet that

would have certainly united the country.

Whereas the intelligence work that led to the destruction of Bin Laden was begun in the Bush administration, the cache of schemes taken from Osama's Pakistan house debunked the fanciful narrative that the Bush crew pushed: that Osama was stuck in a cave unable to communicate, increasingly irrelevant and a mere symbol, rather than operational. Osama, in fact, was at the helm, spending his days whipping up bloody schemes to kill more Americans.

In another inane debate last week, many voices suggested that decapitating the head of a deadly terrorist network was some sort of injustice.

Taking offense after Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations secretary general, said he was "much relieved" at the news of Bin Laden's death, Kenneth Roth, the executive director of Human Rights Watch, posted the Twitter message: "Ban Ki-moon wrong on Osama bin Laden: It's not justice for him to be killed even if justified; no trial, conviction."

I leave it to subtler minds to parse the distinction between what is just and what is justified.

When Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, said she was "glad" Bin Laden had been killed, a colleague called such talk "medieval."

Christophe Barbier, editor of the centrist French weekly L'Express, warned: "To cry one's joy in the streets of our cities is to ape the turbaned barbarians who danced the night of Sept. 11."

Those who celebrated on Sept. 11 were applauding the slaughter of American innocents. When college kids spontaneously streamed out Sunday night to the White House, ground zero and elsewhere, they were the opposite of bloodthirsty: they were happy that one of the most certifiably evil figures of our time was no more.

The confused image of Bin Laden as a victim was exacerbated by John Brennan, the Obama national security aide who intemperately presented an inaccurate portrait of what had happened on the third

floor in Abbottabad.

Unlike the president and the Navy Seals, who performed with steely finesse, Brennan was overwrought, exaggerating the narrative to demonize the demon.

The White House had to backtrack from Brennan's contentions that Osama was "hiding behind women who were put in front of him as a shield" and that he died after resisting in a firefight.

It may be that some administration officials have taken Dick Cheney's belittling so much to heart that they are still reluctant to display effortless macho. Liberal guilt may have its uses, but it should not be wasted on this kill-mission.

The really insane assumption behind some of the second-guessing is that killing Osama somehow makes us like Osama, as if all killing is the same.

Only fools or knaves would argue that we could fight Al Qaeda's violence non-violently.

President Obama was prepared to take a life not only to avenge American lives already taken but to deter the same killer from taking any more. Aside from Bin Laden's plotting, his survival and his legend were inspirations for more murder.

If stealth bombers had dropped dozens of 2,000-pound bombs and wiped out everyone, no one would have been debating whether Osama was armed. The president chose the riskiest option presented to him, but one that spared nearly all the women and children at the compound, and anyone in the vicinity.

Unlike Osama, the Navy Seals took great care not to harm civilians — they shot Bin Laden's youngest wife in the leg and carried two young girls out of harm's way before killing Osama.

Morally and operationally, this was counterterrorism at its finest.

We have nothing to apologize for.



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