

PR and propaganda: the Killing of Osama bin Laden versus the Wills and Kate Wedding

So, was he cowardly hiding behind his wife as a human shield or did he frantically fire back, was he living ignominiously in a large but dirty compound, sadly viewing himself on a small TV in a dirty room or was he running Al Qaeda with pinpoint accuracy through an undetectable network of human messengers, was he shot lethally in the head, then in the chest to make certain or did they miss first time?

And were the President and team watching the killing live on TV or was there a blackout and were they watching a replay, will we, won't we, will we... see the pictures?.....and of course, was it Obama's 1st of May 'at my direction' speech that got up the nose of the brave Navy Seals that forced the White House five days later (6th May) to offer profuse thanks and decorate the support teams for their courage and send the First Lady to say the same?

It could have been a major international coup. [Did Obama just win the 2012 election](#) was the buzz from the Hill. But as events unfolded, it all became much messier.

The military operation was obviously meticulously planned and executed - no off the cuff ... hey chaps, let's go in tonight and see if that's where bin Laden is in hiding. President Obama and his White House team must have had a heads up, so why the PR gaffes, lack of news agenda management, own goals and missed opportunities?

Gaffe Number One: To say that bin Laden was armed and hiding behind a wife being used as a human shield was unforgivable, but more importantly, completely unnecessary to the White House agenda.

The White House first seemed to want to make bin Laden appear as being unmanly and cowardly in order to justify their actions. It turned out to be incorrect if we can believe later reports. They then seem to have decided it was a mistake to paint him as cowardly and needed to paint him a powerful leader.

It was obviously a kill mission and no one should have been afraid to admit that. The Obama administration should have been straightforward rather than spinning tales about bin Laden having a gun, reaching for a gun (the latest) and resisting (without saying how he resisted). The World's Number One International Terrorist was dead. No-one was going to cry unfair.

Gaffe number two: Obama tried to claim too much credit - don't be too desperate to claim credit if it is coming your way anyway in spades - be generous, it gives you stature.

Yes it was at his 'direction' - I would have thought that went without saying from the Commander In Chief of the world's most powerful nation. We didn't need the head of the CIA to say how "gutsy" Obama was - the facts spoke for themselves. Far

better to have heaped praise on the seriously brave US Navy SEALs. But that didn't happen until five days later when the White House began to realize their omission.

Failing of News Agenda Management Number One: It took nearly three days to decide to release and then not to release the photographs

Letting the media, bloggers and twitterers debate the issue for so long and then say no, made the administration look indecisive, appear to have something to hide, and it also fueled conspiracy theories.

But what they didn't do quickly and *what* the world wanted, was proof of death. The administration had DNA evidence, facial recognition evidence and photographic evidence (released or not). Some combination of that evidence should have been collated and released swiftly.

Failing of News Agenda Management Number Two: Too much information released, and a lot of it was wrong

I quote from journalist [Toby Harnden's blog](#) "When it made the administration look good, the information flowed freely. When the tide turned, Jay Carney, Obama's spokesman, clammed up completely. I'm a journalist; I like it when people talk about things. But from the administration's perspective, it would have been much better to have given a very sparse, accurate description of what happened without going into too much detail, especially about the intelligence that led to the compound (an account which is necessarily suspect)".

Own Goal: Triggering a torture debate was an avoidable own goal

By discussing the intelligence, the administration walked into the issue of whether enhanced interrogation techniques epitomized by waterboarding, yielded important information. Republicans were delighted.

Missed Opportunity on the international stage

The word on the street is that Pakistan had to have given the green light for the raid in some form - after all it all took place just down the road from the Pakistani military academy who did nothing as helicopters circled overhead. But diplomacy would dictate that Pakistan, for good reasons, would not want this made public. The White House, however, felt on the defensive and chose to encourage criticism of Pakistan. As a result all we saw were the contradictions between the US and Pakistani accounts.

PR and Propaganda

I know the Royal Wedding in the UK was not a patch on the killing of bin Laden in significance, but it was a total PR success, executed with enough pomp not to get up the nose of anti-royalists and royalists alike, showed the UK as not stuffy but with

an enviable tradition, epitomized by Wills and Kate as two really nice people – modern but respectful of their elders, respectful of the tradition that they were a part of, and ready to take on duties in the 20th century. Even a change in honeymoon plans for security concerns was handled, not dramatized. But I suppose they had learned the hard way - remember Diana Princess of Wales!