

This paper is for Government departments and statutory organisations dealing with counter-terrorism. It is intended to inform you about CT issues that have been covered in the media and to help you to respond to any concerns generated as a result. It is not intended to provide detailed briefing about Government policies, and explaining these issues to the media is the role of relevant departmental press offices.

The Death of Usama Bin Laden

During the early hours of May 2nd US President Barack Obama delivered a speech confirming that Al Qa'ida founder and leader Usama Bin Laden had been killed in a targeted operation by US forces at a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. A US defence official stated that a small team conducted a helicopter raid on the compound. During the 40-minute raid Bin Laden was fatally shot.

Is he really dead?

Yes. Following the raid, CIA specialists performed a DNA analysis which confirmed that DNA from the body matched that of Bin Laden family members. The decision not to release photos of the body was explained by US President Barack Obama who said "It is important for us to make sure that very graphic photos of somebody who was shot in the head are not floating around as an incitement to additional violence, as a propaganda tool."

Pakistani intelligence services have stated that they are holding 12 survivors from the raid, including Bin Laden's 12 year old daughter who has spoken about the sequence of events and confirmed that she witnessed Bin Laden being shot.

Why was he not captured and put on trial?

US President Barack Obama's counter-terrorism adviser, John Brennan, told media on May 4th that the US Navy Seal team that carried out the raid was "able and prepared" to take Bin Laden alive "if we had the opportunity", though he has also said that surrender was only an option if Bin Laden "did not pose any type of threat whatsoever" and if the Seals "were confident of that in terms of his not having an improvised explosive device on his body, his not having some type of hidden weapon or whatever". White House spokesman Jay Carney said Bin Laden was unarmed but "resisting" - although it is unclear exactly how he did so.

The key fact is that Bin Laden no longer poses a threat to the UK and its allies. It must be remembered that Bin Laden was a dangerous terrorist responsible for the deaths of thousands of people of all faiths.

Why was he buried at sea?

US officials have given two reasons as to why a sea burial was chosen. Firstly, that they did not want his grave to become a shrine. Secondly, that there was no time to negotiate with other countries to arrange a possible burial on land. White House spokesman Jay Carney has said that traditional procedures for Islamic burial were followed and that the burial took place within 24 hours of death.

He also added that "The respect that was shown to him and his body were far greater than the respect Usama Bin Laden showed to any of the victims of 9/11."

Did the Pakistani authorities know of his whereabouts?

There is no evidence of this. An ISI official has spoken to the media and advised that the compound had been raided when the house was under construction in 2005, because the authorities believed that an Al Qa'ida operative was hiding there. However, since then, the house has not been on the ISI's radar and the agency has said that it is "extremely embarrassed" by its intelligence failure.

How will this affect our relationship with Pakistan?

The UK Government remains fully committed to working with Pakistan to tackle terrorism and violent extremism which threaten both our interests. As Prime Minister David Cameron stated on May 3rd "We know that Pakistan's political leadership are staunch in the fight against extremism and terror, and they've done huge amounts in their own country to try and combat it. We know that Pakistan has suffered more at the hands of terrorism than virtually any other country on earth"

Consistent with this, Pakistani President Zardari stated on May 3rd that "This is a shared fight, in which Pakistan is on the front line. The government of Pakistan have formally welcomed this news....Pakistan had as much reason to despise Al Qa'ida as any nation. The war on terrorism is as much Pakistan's war as it is America's."

Does this mean the end for Al Qa'ida?

Bin Laden's death is a severe blow to Al Qa'ida, but it doesn't mark the end of the organisation. Whilst Bin Laden was the leader and inspirational figurehead, there are a number of Al Qa'ida affiliates and individuals who espouse its ideology of violence who remain active across the world. His death does not represent the end of the movement, nor does it represent the end of the terrorism.

That said, support for Al Qa'ida and its violent ideology has been dropping sharply in Muslim-majority countries for some time [see 'Other News' link below]. This is unsurprising, given that around 85% of the thousands of people killed by Al Qa'ida were from Muslim-majority countries – and most in terrorist attacks in Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. As Pakistani President Zardari has pointed out, in Pakistan alone terrorism has claimed the lives of up to 30,000 civilians and 2,000 police officers.

In addition, recent events in North Africa and the Middle East – 'The Arab Spring' – have shown that Al Qa'ida and its ideology are increasingly irrelevant to the real concerns of the majority of people in the wider region. It had no role in bringing the popular changes demanded by the people of these countries – they found a different voice and an effective way to bring about the political change they desired.

How does this affect the threat against the UK?

The threat from Al Qa'ida itself and Al Qa'ida-inspired groups and individuals remains high. The Al Qa'ida movement is diffuse (with the growth of affiliates such as Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula) and increasingly focused on encouraging individuals to carry out atrocities alone and with no central support ('lone wolf' attacks) - potentially making the threat to the UK and the international community harder to tackle.

The possibility that Al Qa'ida – or those motivated by them – will attempt to commit reprisal attacks cannot be ruled out. The Foreign Secretary has asked all British Embassies and High Commissions overseas to review their security. British nationals overseas are advised to monitor the media carefully for local reactions, remain vigilant, exercise caution in all public places and avoid demonstrations, large crowds of people and public events.

The overall threat level to the UK from international terrorism remains at 'Severe', which means that an attack is highly likely. The threat level is constantly under review and will be updated as necessary.

[Does this affect the timetable for withdrawal from Afghanistan?](#)

No. The death of Bin Laden, although a positive development in terms of our counter-terrorism effort, does not change our strategy in Afghanistan. We have a clear strategy in place for building up the Afghan security forces to take responsibility for their country's security. The transition of provinces and districts to Afghan security control has already begun and will continue.

[Other News](#)

Please also see the following interesting news items from the past week, commenting more generally on the nature of terrorism and terrorist organisations, which you may want to circulate more widely:

[Usama's Islam-violence link weighs heavy on Muslims](#)

The attached article details how Bin Laden's radical Islamism had a devastating impact on Muslims around the world by linking their faith with violence and using religious texts to justify mass killings.

[Usama Bin Laden Largely Discredited Among Muslim Publics in Recent Years](#)

The attached article details the findings of research undertaken by the Pew Research Centre in the months leading up to Osama bin Laden's death. A survey of Muslim citizens around the world found little support for the Al Qa'ida leader.