

SEYMOUR M. HERSH

THE KILLING
OF OSAMA
BIN LADEN



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Electrifying investigation of White House lies about the assassination of Osama bin Laden

In 2011, an elite group of US Navy SEALS stormed an enclosure in the Pakistani city of Abbottabad and killed Osama bin Laden, the man the United States had begun chasing before the devastating attacks of 9/11. The news did much to boost President Obama's first term and played a major part in his reelection victory of the following year. But much of the story of that night, as presented to the world, was incomplete, or a lie. The evidence of what actually went on remains hidden.

At the same time, the full story of the United States' involvement in the Syrian civil war has been kept behind a diplomatic curtain, concealed by doublespeak. It is a policy of obfuscation that has compelled the White House to turn a blind eye to Turkey's involvement in supporting ISIS and its predecessors in Syria.

This investigation, which began as a series of essays in the *London Review of Books*, has ignited a firestorm of controversy in the world media. In his introduction, Hersh asks what will be the legacy of Obama's time in office. Was it an era of "change we can believe in" or a season of lies and compromises that continued George W. Bush's misconceived War on Terror? How did he lose the confidence of the general in charge of America's forces who acted in direct contradiction to the White House? What else do we not know?

The Killing of Osama bin Laden Details

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From Reader Review The Killing of Osama bin Laden for online ebook

Alec Gray says

Seymour Hersch, a veteran investigative reporter (the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam war) did not get enough attention for his report on the killing of Bin Laden, which is put in book form here, along with accounts of the US involvement in Syria. A must read for all, whether you accept his reporting or not. What really happens in government is not simple, not easy, and perhaps nothing like the "story" we are told. Yet we seem less interested and less concerned with what's really going on.

Keen says

3.5 Stars!

"High-level lying nevertheless remains the modus operandi of US policy, along with secret prisons, drone attacks, Special Forces night raids, bypassing the chain of command, and cutting out those who might say no."

Hersh certainly doesn't pull his punches and if he has much love for Obama then he does a good job of keeping it well hidden in here. As ever he does an admirable job of unveiling the facts beneath the filthy layers of spin, blowback, cover stories, alternative facts and military to military relationships and other political machinations concerning the usual cast of cynical suspects.

The main focus of this short offering is the government sanctioned murder of bin Laden. In spite of their constant public feuding, the American and Pakistani military intelligence services actually have enjoyed an intimate and enduring relationship that has lasted decades, but have to manufacture the odd public feud in order "to cover their asses" as one insider phrased it.

We see that the version of events surrounding bin Laden's killing, have been somewhat romanticised and dramatized for the usual purposes of American propaganda. Pakistan had been keeping bin Laden's capture a secret and according to Hersh's sources,

"We needed a hostage to keep tabs on al-Qaida and the Taliban. The ISI (Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence) was using bin Laden as leverage against Taliban and al-Qaida leadership know that if they ran operations that clashed with the interests of the ISI, they would turn bin Laden over to us. So if it became known that the Pakistanis had worked with us to get bin Laden at Abbottabad, there would be hell to pay."

This version of events is certainly far more coherent and convincing than the ones told by Obama and his minions. The US and Pakistani governments have both denied these allegations (insert canned laughter), but of course they are hardly going to come out and say shucks we admit it. You only have to look at the bizarre and puzzling circumstances surrounding that mysterious sea burial without any evidence shown to the public, to realise that the events presented by the US are probably a lot closer to fantasy than fact.

Elsewhere in this short compilation, Hersh focuses on Syria and the on-going political and murderous chaos

that continues to drag on there, again he raises some serious questions over Obama and his men's motives and actions in relation to the Assad regime and their killing of civilians. The short summary is that it is a total mess. This is another vital piece of reporting from one of the US's most distinguished and important journalists.

Philip Girvan says

Hersh has been exposing the lies and misrepresentations made by those in power for decades. This book demonstrates that he continues to be one the best, if not the best, investigative journalist working today.

Those unacquainted with Hersh's recent work and the revelations contained in this short volume should read this comprehensive review by Goodreads user Alex.

The only quibble I would have is with the editing. The book is a collection of articles that originally appeared during 2013 and 2016 in the *London Review of Books*, and some of the references to time "last November", "earlier this year" can be confusing.

Rebecca McNutt says

An interesting read but it felt rather biased to me, and often took the road of sensationalism and conspiracy theories.

Rodger says

This is a thin books that reads like 4 magazine articles. I read the 4 over the course of a month. The longest one concerns the killing of OBL and it takes up about 1/3 of the book. If you read Hersh's magazine piece on the subject, then you already know much of his argument. All of the pieces are dependent upon unnamed sources, which means many people said to be from from the intelligence and national security communities. One of the named sources towards the end is now-disgraced former DIA director Michael Flynn. Flynn proved himself to be something of an opportunist when he joined the Trump team and someone with conflicting interests given his paid gigs for Russia and Turkey even as he worked as an advisor to Trump. Hersh's book is fairly critical of Turkey and sympathetic to Russia, so I'm not sure how much he relied upon Flynn for various elements of the tale. Is Flynn sometimes one of the unnamed intelligence sources? Who knows? In any event, the other 3 pieces concern the Obama administration's accusation that Assad's regime in Syria used chemical weapons (Hersh says it may have been rebels), the back channel arms path from Libya through Turkey to Syria, and the US failure to cooperate with Russia and China to fight ISIS and other extremists in Syria. I found the book frustrating given the lack of sourcing and the insider sniping that seems obviously to have been at least partial motivation for some of the intelligence sources. Hersh is fairly critical of Obama for non-standard reasons.

Kriegslok says

Extraordinary claims usually require extraordinary evidence. If anything detracts from this work - challenging as it does commonly received opinion - it is the lack of verifiable extraordinary evidence. However, coming from the pen of Seymour M. Hersh I am inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt in many of the claims he makes. His sources have historically been pretty reliable, people speak to him in the knowledge that they do so off the record and with anonymity. This does of course also potentially make Hersh a potential means for disgruntled officials to bad mouth their bosses or for the secret state to perhaps seek to spread a version of events it wishes to be swallowed or to muddy the waters of what is commonly known. However, Hersh is an old hand in this game and pretty savvy when it comes to sorting the wheat from the chaff.

American presidents tend to come in two flavours. Those who are liberal heroes and those who are not. However, liberal heroes historically tend to be just better at spin and PR and playing to liberal opinion than the others. As writers such as Chomsky have noted the likes of Kennedy and Carter were no saints and so the same for Obama the black liberal hero. Presidents and policies come and go, the permanent state is just that and has to try to keep running the country whatever and despite the flavour of politics momentarily in vogue. That is not to say the policy makers are devoid of political persuasion but experts in policy and security tend to be that and know what is so and what is possible or advisable within their discipline. Often this conflicts with the needs of the politician with a short shelflife and a need to make their mark and make it in the public ratings league table. It is basically Obama's time in office and his relationship with the policy makers and his security staff that form the basis for this short but gripping read.

The book is essentially in two parts. The first part deals with the killing of Osama bin Laden. The second with the war in Syria. That bin Laden was executed is I think uncontroversial, if the way in which he was has been deliberately confused and subject to revision. How he came to be discovered living in plain sight has been less open to discussion or challenge. The account given here is the most plausible, if perhaps to many shocking, I have read. It involves nominally friendly allied powers keeping secrets from each other and doing deals with officially proscribed organisations and individuals. Not surprisingly the Saudis and their Wahhabi allies are in it up to their necks but as usual they suffer no comeback. As long as his location remained officially secret there were good reasons for keeping bin Laden alive, once his official residence became common knowledge his death became inevitable. The most interesting thing about the whole episode perhaps though is the way Obama used and abused his officials and hung out his allies in the interest of personal political expediency.

The second part of the book looks at the shambolic approach to Syria. Having been burnt in Iraq and Afghanistan and following the debacle in Libya, the US military were understandably reluctant to follow those fiascos with an even more shaky intervention in Syria. While Obama pursued a policy of covert regime change in Syria - via the usual CIA organised funneling of weapons from Libya to various unsavoury parties in Syria (as if they had learned nothing from four decades of Afghan linked Islamist blowback) - the military and their intelligence were worrying about who was getting the weapons and which side they really wanted to be fighting on. Throw into this mess an unstable and increasingly megalomaniac Turkish premier intent on unleashing an Islamist army beyond his control to rebuild a hellish incarnation of an Ottoman Empire and Hersh's sources did not need to be clairvoyant to see Obama's course of action leading to the Middle East going up in smoke en-mass. The claims and counter claims about the use of WMD in the Syrian civil war have been as much about black propaganda as about actual usage. However, what is clear from the record is that the use of WMD by Assad was to be Obama's "red line" therefore anyone wanting to ensure US support for an insurgency against Assad needed a WMD attack that could be linked to him. In such a situation

(especially before Russian involvement in supporting its strategic allie and turning the war on the ground around through concerted support) staging a WMD incident was a risk worth taking and certainly one Turkey could support. The argument made here concerning false-flag WMD useage is especially strong. Also interesting is the suggestion that US military and security figures may have recognised that in an imperfect world Assad was the lesser of evils where US interests were concerned, he was at least fighting the same Islamists who were the offspring of those responsible for the 9/11 terror attacks.... whereas the "moderate" Syrians were now essentially al-Qaida linked Al-Nusra fighters supported by Erdogan's Turkey (a NATO allie no less). Given this situation the suggestion that US sources passed intelligence support to Syrian military via third parties to assist in destroying a common enemy makes sense. So to does the opposition to Obama's demonisation of Russia. From a Russian perspective to see the USA supporting Islamists against a strategic allie was nothing new and would no doubt be seen by Moscow as a roundabout attack on Russia and her interests. Militaries are perhaps better at understanding and accepting the real concepts of threat and spheres of influence then politicians to whom such concepts are primarily propaganda tools.

In this book while the individual events recounted may come as a shock to some and so might the behaviour of Obama, however, there is nothing really new here from the point of US politics or the way the system works. There have always been dirty tricks both domestic and international. Lying to the electorate as a matter of course in the pursuit of policy goals has always been the way politics has been done. So to the blackmailing and bribery of supposed allies and the routine breaking of international law (which the US does not recognise as applying to itself anyway). It would be wrong to try to imply that Obama has acted any differently from his predecessors (and arguably he has was probably a better President for the "ordinary" American than some), its just that he was no hero, no new brush. It is important that people like Hersh do their best to reveal to the people what is actually happening in their name and the fact that some people like him can still do that in the USA has to be one of the things the country could be proud of. Sadly few are interested and it makes little difference, if any, to the way the game is played.

There are no doubt mountains of competing works from many angles which fundamentally challenge and disagree with this book by Hersh. However, given his pedigree I'd give him the benefit of the doubt for much of the content even if it is just taken as a starting point for more detailed and empirical research over coming decades as secrets cease to be and evidence perhaps becomes available to support, or otherwise, the extraordinary claims in this thin but heavy tome.

★ says

Compilation of four lengthy articles [only one of which relates to the title; the other are about Syria] plus an introduction.

Usual caveats for Hersh's work apply: Specifically, as most people complain about throughout much of his work, he endlessly cites unnamed sources which, as trustworthy as he may insist they are to him, is not so convincing to the reader. Perhaps even more importantly, while he gives very good indicators of certain general frameworks and can help poke holes in CIA propaganda, his analysis is always ultimately limited by his blatantly liberal point of view, and one has to wade through a lot of classic memes, like officials being "misguided," "ignorant," "incompetent," their actions being "ill-conceived," etc., which grates, to say the

least.

I was struck by something he's told by one of his "retired official" sources [pg. 50]:

[They] told me that the CIA leadership had become experts in derailing serious threats from Congress:

"They create something that is horrible but not that bad. Give them something that sounds terrible. 'Oh my God, we were shoving food up a prisoner's ass!' Meanwhile, they're not telling the committee about murders, other war crimes, and secret prisons like we still have in Diego Garcia . . . "

It's an interesting and important insight, not merely because one could argue that a lot of Hersh's work and other works of investigative journalism have served a similar function historically: e.g. in emphasizing the My Lai Massacre, we're propagandized into thinking it's actually something unique which should be soberly "remembered" and hand-wrung over once-a-year-or-so [in reality, it's not unique in the least: there were hundreds of equal and far more horrifying u.s. crimes committed, -just during the Vietnam War-]. Many popular narratives regarding the MK-Ultra program are -classic- propaganda misdirection [Errol Morris outlines in his excellent movie/series "Wormwood" (2017) how one particular MK-Ultra narrative thread was seemingly concocted to launder the mass-murder of Koreans with u.s. bioterrorism in the early '50s].

Other important points are how the Amerikan post-Gaddafi Benghazi consulate [famously targeted by "terrorists" in 2012] functioned solely to secretly move weapons from Libya through Turkey to the Syrian opposition. Hersh also refers to the fact that the empire, in order to deliberately maintain the liberal legal framework upon which it operates, outsources many of its crimes to Mossad, MI6, ISI, and Bahraini, Qatari, and KSA intelligence, etc.-- the Shah's SAVAK, one the most blatantly brutal secret police apparatuses in history, largely was an extension [or outsourced version] of the CIA and Mossad. The u.s. and the Britain are currently doing this outsourcing with their genocide of Yemen via the KSA, among other things.

Also found it very eye-opening how he mentions that the CIA idea of using Kurdish dissidents to undermine a post-colonial/anti-imperialist country [viz. Syria] is actually a relatively old one, and is not something limited to the last few years.

If none of the above is new to you, you can easily skip this, but I think a lot of audiences would find it useful.

Kristina says

Seymour M. Hersh is a well-respected investigative journalist who has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times* and the *London Review of Books*. This book, *The Killing of Osama Bin Laden*, was originally published in several issues of the *London Review of Books*. I highly recommend reading it for those who wish to stay informed of American foreign policy.

This is a slim book (124 pages), but it is packed with information regarding the complex nature of American foreign policy, primarily American dealings with the Middle East. Much of what Hersh reports in this book has been covered by other journalists in other media outlets (radio, tv, paper, internet). However, if you're not a political junkie with the time to process all the foreign news coverage paired with the ability (and knowledge) to know what's fact-based and reliably sourced and what's just rumors or propaganda or outright crap, then this book helpfully presents a detailed account of the killing of Osama bin Laden, the sarin gas attack in Syria, and how the attack on Benghazi was in part a result of CIA's secret "ratline" of weapons to Syrian rebels.

What I find so absolutely fascinating (and horrifying) is how complex relationships with other countries are.

Our allies aren't really our allies. Our enemies are sometimes our allies. Islamic terrorism is a concern for governments everywhere, and specifically in the Middle East. While reading this, I was completely dumbfounded by how incredibly wrong the Obama administration's policy is regarding Syria, Turkey and Russia. The familiar saying of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" clearly applies here. All of these countries have their own self-interests. America also has its own concerns. What is interesting is how stubborn Obama is regarding his policies in dealing these countries. He seems to be (well, he is) ignoring intelligence reports and the advice of the military and continues to treat Turkey as an ally, even though Turkey is supporting Islamic terrorists.

In its attempt to weaken and overthrow the government of Bashar al-Assad by arming so-called "moderate rebels," the United States is once again ignoring history. We did the same thing in Afghanistan and those rebels became al-Qaeda. Removing Assad will cause a power vacuum, and who will fill it? Islamic terrorists (identified in the book as Islamic State). A consultant to the Joint Special Operations Command told Hersh that America's primary threat is ISIS and that the United States, Russia and China all need to work together. Once the country is stabilized, an election can be held that hopefully removes Assad from office. The attack on Benghazi in 2012 in which Christopher Stevens, the US ambassador to Libya, was killed is discussed by Hersh. Benghazi was a CIA outpost used by the CIA to move weapons from Libya to Syrian rebels via Turkey. This operation was done with the approval of the State Department. Ambassador Stevens was aware of this CIA operation and just before he died, he met with the shipping company that handled the movement of the weapons. A Senate Intelligence Committee report about the attack on Benghazi criticized the State Department for not providing adequate security and the intelligence community for not alerting US military to the presence of a CIA outpost. This is the report that Republicans seized on to accuse President Obama and then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton of a cover-up. Lately, the blame has been placed squarely on Hillary Clinton, most noticeably in the slogan (found on bumper stickers): "Hillary lied, 4 died." While this is an easy and simple version of events (which plays well in today's hyper-divisive political climate) it certainly doesn't address the larger problem of US policy in the Middle East and what, specifically, the CIA was doing in Benghazi: essentially illegal gun-running.

Reading this book highlights for me one of the biggest problems facing America: an uninformed and politically divided public. Nothing is ever as simple as it is reported on the 24 hour cable networks. Foreign policy is extremely complex and the same countries and leaders who may be our allies can also be our enemies. To expect our government to always act honorably is naïve and completely ignorant of American history. America, like other governments, has its own interests at heart and doesn't always do things for the best of motives. Political machinations by both *Republicans* and *Democrats* often distort events to present them in ways that serve their political goals. Obama did that when he held his press conference regarding the killing of Osama bin Laden. What you saw on CNN or MSNBC or Fox was not the real story. *Zero Dark Thirty* is based on politically-expedient lies told by the Obama administration. The same is true for Benghazi. Republicans, thinking ahead to the 2016 presidential race, have distorted the events of Benghazi to demonize Hillary Clinton. To blame one person for an event that was a result of a CIA intelligence operation (which was detailed in a report to top Democratic and Republican leaders) is pure political grandstanding. When events such as this are distorted through a political lens, it's the American people who suffer. The divisiveness in American government makes progress on anything difficult. Politics and governing should be about negotiating outcomes so that both parties get something they want. This atmosphere of hatred for and demonizing of political opponents does not allow for the reality (and necessity) of common goals. We need a strong, two party (or more) system to balance each other. Neither party consistently has the best ideas, best policies, or best ideas regarding foreign policy. This is where being a more aware and educated consumer of information is important. And by "educated," I do not mean "possessing a college degree." Some of the stupidest people I have ever had the misfortune to meet (and work with) had graduate degrees. Some of the smartest people, people who question news reports and the accepted wisdom and can think outside their echo

chamber, have never been to college. Keeping ourselves informed is the most important task Americans have; stepping outside your own bubble of is vital.

When I bought *The Killing of Osama Bin Laden*, I didn't expect it to reinforce my good opinion of Obama and his presidency. What I wanted to learn was the truth of the event, or as close to the truth as possible. I learned a lot in this book (information I also researched just to see who else had been reporting the same information) and *none* of it was flattering to Obama, a president I happen to respect and overall approve of (despite many of his policies that I dislike). While it is comforting to surround yourself with information and opinions that echo your own and make you feel pleased about your own superiority in holding these ideas and opinions, it's really a terrible way to be an informed citizen. I learned long ago that no politician is ever as good or as trustworthy as s/he is presented. Nor will this person carry out all the promises s/he makes on the campaign trail. Nor is this person usually (I say usually due to this year's candidates) as awful as portrayed. *Do your research.* It's absolutely necessary to get your information from a variety of sources and to stay away from extreme views on both sides of the political spectrum. While it's impossible to avoid all bias in journalism, the idea that all (or most) media is "liberal-based" is ridiculous. We should be more concerned with the fact that most major news networks are owned by giant corporations who have a very definite impact on what news is reported and how it is reported. If the facts of a news report do not agree with my political leanings, I do not immediately suspect that the reporter or the news organization is biased. Unfortunately, too many of us do have this knee-jerk reaction to any information that is less than supportive of our political views and candidates. The solution to this: step outside your bubble. Not just once, but often.

Hersh's investigative reporting in this book is rather complex and difficult to summarize other than: things are rarely what they seem and facile explanations are almost always misleading (and politically convenient for someone). This book isn't light reading and assumes that you are familiar with relatively recent international events. I'm glad I read it because it's helped me understand several events that seemed to have too many contradictory explanations. It's also clarified the complicated and often adversarial relationship the United States has with Russia, Turkey and Syria. I have a deeper understanding of recent events, such as Russia's bombing of Syrian rebels and the ISIS bombing of a Russian Metrojet and definitely feel much more "in the know" when I watch/read/hear about fighting in Syria. I highly recommend this book. You may still be able to read the reports (for free!) on the *London Review of Books* website. They were (at one point) available to print as a pdf.

Tariq Mahmood says

The plot is simple enough. The government will release its in-corroborative version of events, most main stream media will dutifully sex up the story for the general consumption, and both will stick to this story as now their credibility depends on it. Years down the line, after much hours of painstaking effort some eccentric writer like Seymour Hersh will eventually challenge this version, but few people will believe him as for most people old news is water under the bridge, who by now are completely engrossed in the current bit of exciting news. Also people will find it tough to change their established views.

As a Pakistani, brought up in its Army culture, the version of events presented by Seymour leading to the murder of Osama are very believable. ISI paid money to tribes to buy off Osama and were holding him as an asset to constantly bargain with the Americans till one of their own betrayed their secret out of sheer greed, which I found very natural when I consider most of the Army personal I have come across over the years. Once alerted the American squeeze Pakistani army to hand over Osama with a bit of carrot and some stick.

The Pakistanis do their bit as scripted but the American government cannot contain it's gloating and spill the beans fabricating a story good enough for any great Hollywood movie. Alright not a full fledged movie but a documentary at the least.

The second part of the book detailing the involvement of America partnership with Turkey in Syrian civil war has reminiscences of the good old Afghan, the much vaunted Russia's Vietnam. It's clear to me that America does not care about the people of Syria or aftermath of this repeat performance on Turkish stability. Already the intensity of terrorism has increased dramatically in Turkey. I guess the rest of the world are at the dependent on the mood of the mighty Americans as it uses its power wherever it chooses with impunity.

Again the powerful will assert their power as they have always done since time immemorial.

Vishal Misra says

This is a very short book, which, if you have stayed abreast of most current affairs, will not teach you much new. However, it is a great introduction for why the Middle East remains a hotbed of instability. It may be old fry to point out that the Taliban in Afghanistan were armed and lionised by the CIA, after the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan. However, this book shows that the lessons of history just simply haven't been used.

Although it is titled "The Killing of Osama Bin Laden", only the 1st chapter has any real bearing to the death of bin Laden. The opening chapter documents how the Pakistani intelligence services ("ISI") had traded bin Laden from the Taliban in Afghanistan to retain a bargaining chip with their American "allies". However, this chip was sold out by Pakistani intelligence offers for aid money and part of the \$25m reward attendant to identifying the whereabouts of bin Laden. Hersh shows how the US initially agreed to help Pakistan out by downplaying Pakistani involvement (which would cause internal backlash). However, unable to contain his delight, and no doubt seeking stronger footing for re-election, Obama began to crow about the SEAL mission. Therefore, it became necessary to create a new story on the hoof, in which the ill and aged bin Laden wasn't unarmed, but rather had taken human shields and was brandishing an AK-47 in a firefight.

The book then moves on to analyse Obama's foreign policy as president. Demonstrating his inability or unwillingness to listen to military intelligence, Hersh demonstrates how often Obama misled the US public to warmonger. Despite his expressed resolve to close Guantanamo, instead, he pushed for intervention in Russia and Libya. The intervention in Libya would lead to the attack on the US embassy (having been armed by the US, Islamist militants again took on their erstwhile "liberators" with gusto). This in turn has had knock-on effects in Syria. This has meant that Obama manifestly lied about Assad's chemical capability in Syria. Indeed, evidence suggests that it was rebels who discharged these weapons. However, this allowed Obama to give the "red line" speech, and in turn arm the Free Syrian Army. This unit of people have sold many US weapons to ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra. Indeed, the book demonstrates just how foolish foreign policy and a desire to appear both strong and principled has led to doctored evidence, ignorance of facts and a state of perpetual war in the Middle East.

This book is worth the read, and is a great companion to Patrick Cockburn's majestic "The Age of Jihad". Read together, any reader will gain a great understanding of exactly what the perpetual civil wars of the Middle East means for America and the West, and just how much economic resource has been wasted on this fool's errand.

James says

Seymour Hersh is an outstanding reporter, probably one of America's preeminent journalists of the late 20th/early 21st century. This is the man who broke the story of the Mai Lai massacre in Vietnam, did much to break the story of Israel's nascent nuclear weapons programme in the 1980's, and then struck again during the 2003 Iraq war when he revealed the scandal that was Abu Ghraib. But perhaps his most controversial story has been his claims regarding the bin Laden raid. Whereas the narrative spun by the Pentagon and those members of DEVGRU (better known as SEAL Team 6) who have chosen to speak out differs in some respects, the basic points remain the same: that it was a daring raid into Pakistan without the knowledge of that country's authorities, that they had to fight their way into the compound having taken fire from bin Laden's bodyguards, and that the body of America's most wanted man was treated with respect and buried at sea.

Hersh says all that is a lie. His sources tell him that in actual fact bin Laden was under virtual house arrest, the Pakistani's having known about him for years; that after confronting the Pakistani's with evidence from a source inside that country's security establishment, the Pakistani's agreed to let the American's enter their country unopposed; that there was no firefight, in effect the Americans being allowed to just walk in; most sensationally of all, that the SEAL's hacked at the body of bin Laden on the flight out, throwing body parts out of the helicopter as they flew over the Hindu Kush.

These are stark claims and if it wasn't for Hersh's pedigree and the fact that some bloggers with links to the intelligence community had previously reported something similar with regards to bin Laden being under house arrest, they would easily be dismissed as conspiracy theory. As it is I read the New Yorker article in which Hersh laid out his claims with ardent interest. When I saw that he had penned a book on the subject I couldn't wait to get hold of it, wondering what further revelations he could reveal. And therein lies the problem.

The Killing of Osama bin Laden adds nothing new to the story. In fact, it's simply a collection of Hersh's New Yorker essays published in book form, only one of which, the title essay, actually deals with the bin Laden raid. And as I say, if you've read the original New Yorker piece, you've read it already. The other essays are those he has penned on the war in Syria. To be fair these are revelatory in themselves, dealing as they do with the Obama Administration's duplicitous dealing with the Assad regime and disastrous attempts to find and arm a body of "moderate" rebels. But again, if you follow Hersh's work and read his writings you have probably read these already.

I'm sure that the publisher Verso would argue that there is merit in this project, that by publishing these essays together in book form they both complement each other and hopefully reach people who haven't read the New Yorker. If that is their intention then fair enough, as long as they make this clear in the pre-publication publicity. For anybody who has not read Hersh's essays then I recommend this book wholeheartedly, you really will learn something new about Syria, Iraq, ISIS, al Qaeda and bin Laden. But the publisher really does need to make it clearer that what this book contains has already been published elsewhere, or risk people like myself feeling cheated.

Alex says

Seymour Hersh's "The Killing of Osama bin Laden" goes beyond talking about bin Laden, digging further into the war against ISIS, Benghazi and concerns with Iraq, Turkey, Russia, China, and Syria. For readers of the London Review of Books, much of this small book is from Hersh's articles spanning May 21, 2015 to January 7, 2016. Though I'd read them as they were published, it was helpful to read them together in this 124 page brief on the current state of the War in the Middle East.

A quote from a consultant to the special operation community sums up the US's (West's) "strategy" for the War on Terror. "It's all about tactics and nobody, Republican or Democrat, has advanced a strategic vision...We've had an abject failure of military and political leadership." (page 11). This quote from the intro sets up Hersh's narrative, which shows a web of incompetence, rash decisions, shortsightedness, and bad bedfellows.

What do we learn from Hersh? The Pakistani military and government knew bin Laden's whereabouts, and even helped protect him. Later, the CIA used the Pakistani military to assist in the execution of bin Laden. "The Pakistanis agreed to permit a four-man American cell—a Nave SEAL, a CIA case officer and two communications specialists—to set up a liaison office at Tarbela Ghazi for the coming assault." (page 23). Later, we learn that the ISI guards (Pakistani guards) used to protect bin Laden's compound, left just prior to the SEALs arrival. In fact, "an ISI liaison officer flying with the SEALs guided them into the darkened house and up a staircase to bin Laden's quarters." (page 28) Hersh unravels more scandals and surprises, including the burial of bin Laden at sea...perhaps. I found Hersh's coverage of President Obama's reaction, and spin on the bin Laden assignation, to be most enlightening, particularly after reading Scott Taylor's, a former U.S. Navy SEAL's, "Trust Betrayed: Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and the Selling Out of American National Security."

Chapter 2 (page 53) shifts to Obama's current war against ISIS, including a careful tracking of the chemical weapons that caused Obama to put his "red line" to the test. In light of Putin's current actions in Syria, it's interesting to remember that in 2012 it was Putin's brokered deal with Assad that prevented Obama from having to make good on his "red line" promise. (page 64)

Perhaps most revealing is the uncovering of the "rat line, authorized in early 2012, used to funnel weapons and ammunition from Libya via southern Turkey and across the Syrian border to the opposition." (page 65). In fact, this elaborate scheme involved the CIA facility in Benghazi, and included the support the Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, CIA, and M16 (England). (page 65). Though Hersh is careful not to place all the blame on this operation, on the attacks on the consulate, his connections are well documented. (page 64-69)

In Chapter Three, "Whose Sarin?," the picture of Chemical Weapons in Syria becomes far more complicated. "Barack Obama did not tell the whole story, most significantly, he failed to acknowledge something known to the US intelligence community: that the Syrian army is not the only party in the country's civil war with access to sarin..." (page 77) After reading about the dubious origin of the chemical weapons used in Syria in 2012, one can't help but see Hersh's connections to the U.S. entry in the Iraqi War (Weapons of Mass Destruction) and the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964 (Vietnam). (page 82-89) With information from NSA studies, UN reports, and informants, Hersh's story of the sarin used in 2012, shows the Syrian civil war for what it is: a quagmire of dozens of factions with weapons supplied to them from countless governments and terrorist groups, including the CIA, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and even China.

“When it comes to tackling the Islamic State, Russia and the US have much to offer each other,” (page 111) Hersh writes, linking Russia’s ongoing confrontations with Chechen extremists, and Putin’s strong compulsion to protect his bases in Tartus (navy) and Latakia (air). (page 111-113) Yet, as Hersh writes, the US and other parties—notably Turkey—are uncooperative with Russia. In light of Putin’s pulling out of Syria, it will be interesting to see how this dynamic changes.

I am extremely appreciative of Hersh’s coverage of China, “an ally of Assad that has allegedly committed more than \$30 billion to postwar reconstruction in Syria.” (page 118). China’s Xinjiang state has long seen unrest among its Muslim population, who see themselves as more Central Asian/Middle Eastern than Chinese, particularly because of their religion. (China is at fault for some of this animosity, as is the former Soviet Union.) “Many Uighur [Chinese Muslim] fighters now in Syria are known to be members of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement—and often violent separatist organization that seeks to establish an Islamist Uighur state in Xingiang.” (page 119). China is particularly nervous with the “Turkish role of supporting the Uighur fighters in Syria [because it] may be extended in the future to support Turkey’s agenda in Xingiang.” (page 119) China’s concern with ISIS and Turkey has pushed it into the welcoming arms of Assad and Putin, who have similar enemies and a need for solid financial backing. Indeed, the Islamic extremists are building throughout Asia, including in Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand, many of whom end up with Turkish passports in the hope that they will fight Assad (despite their apparent allegiance with ISIS). (page 120)

Hersh’s “The Killing of Osama” makes the world all the more complicated: CIA backed arms smuggling connected to Benghazi, a US cover-up around the suspiciously clean killing of bin Laden—despite the unbelievably botched helicopter crash, and a spider web of deceit in Syria. I highly recommend Seymour Hersh’s newest book because—in its brevity—it clearly and compellingly alerts even the most uneducated reader to a world of double mirrors, political deceit, incompetence, and ultimately the perpetuation of Western involvement in a Middle Eastern war, which is quickly dragging in all of Asia, Europe, and Russia.

Tags: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Osama bin Laden, Iraq War, President Bush, President Obama, War Against Terror, Military History

RB says

When it comes to investigative journalism, you'll be hard pressed to find someone more important than Seymour Hersh. From his reporting on Vietnam, to the Kennedy administration, to war crimes in Iraq, Hersh is always displaying to the world the worst of human nature with none of the cynicism or self-absorbed personality ticks so prevalent in modern journalism. Hersh writes the truth and then lets you digest it. And that's what he's done once again with "The Killing of Osama Bin Laden", and let's get this out of the way first: this book does not only include Hersh's article of Bin Laden's death, it also offers a critical look at the flawed narrative given by the Americans concerning Syrian sarin gas. What else is to be said? You simply need to read this and cut through the bullshit you hear on the news or read on the internet. And Hersh never sides with the left or right, to him the truth speaks the loudest. This is an important book to remember how truly terrible a president Obama was: all you leftists who think you're oh-so-brave to attack Trump on everything, where were you when Obama erased your right to due process? Where were your voices when he decided to destroy Libya? Where were these brave liberal voices who are so high on themselves they might as well be in a cult when Obama murdered children? When he murdered entire families and their friends in drone strikes on funerals and weddings? Where were your intelligent digs when Obama turned a war in two countries into a war in, what, seven? Droning: Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia and on and on? You left-wing activists that think you're so brave are a disgrace and exactly the reason Chris Hedges was correct in writing

Liberals no longer are what they claim to be. All these complaints against Obama are not just from me, Seymour Hersh writes far more clearly and elegantly than I can hope to here about the long list of crimes Obama committed and the absolute silence of these now brave warriors of the left who won't shut up about Trump - what heroes you are, have fun padding each other on the back while falling into collective amnesia over the fact the NDA passed under Obama and you, an American citizen, can be taken to an undisclosed prison for no reason with no lawyer just because under your lover Obama you were too in love with the way he spoke to speak up. Any thinking person can lobby an attack at Trump, a two-year-old can find most of what he does to be repulsive, but for supposed grown ups to be so silent while one of the most dangerous presidents was in office while amplifying their voices to grating-levels in the age of Trump to believe they are anything but extremely deluded is asinine and if they want to live in this bubble and ignore true liberal beliefs, fine, just don't expect me or someone like Seymour Hersh to take what you say as anything but self-promoting narcissism devoid of true thought. Enjoy another three years bitching about the obvious, you will be ignored, so if you do not fall into that camp, or especially if you do, read this book and maybe something will change in you, or perhaps like the far right, you're just gone for good. End of rant.

One more important thing: Seymour, I've been waiting a decade, when the hell is your book on Dick Cheney being released?

catechism says

This is a compilation of Hersh's articles published in the New Yorker and the London Review of Books -- the first one is about bin Laden, and the others are about American involvement in Syria. I'd hoped that the articles would be expanded and edited for a book version, but nope. They jump around, there's a fair amount of repetition, and they'd be easier to follow if you've got your hooks really firmly into what was happening in August of 2013. Which, I admit, I do not.

Anyway. The gist of the bin Laden article is that the Official Narrative (midnight raid on a Pakistani compound unbeknownst to Pakistan, firefight, burial at sea) is bullshit and that it was a hit job done with the full knowledge and cooperation of the Pakistanis. It was a fast read, and I found it pretty persuasive. The rest of the book, not so much. The subject was interesting and remains important, but there was a much more identifiable [anti-Obama] slant, nothing very cohesive was presented beyond Obama Is A Liar, and I feel like it should have been edited down into one longer piece with better flow and less repetition.

I was given a copy of this book in exchange for a review.

Soham Chakraborty says

Don't let the title of the book fool you, this book is more about the the political-bureaucratic-military labyrinth that clouds over Syria. It depicts how the United States Government, along with Turkish, Saudi and Qatari governments supplied money and weapons to the so called 'rebel' faction in war-torn Syria. Who are those 'rebel' groups?

Like Robert Fisk illustrates in this lecture (I highly recommend watching it from start to end), these rebel groups are Al-Nusra, Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI). These are violent, extremist, fundamentalist hardliners who are

the enemy of western world in Iraq but their friend in Syria. How much more hypocritical can you be?

Seymour Hersh has provided insights. Insights which most people will perhaps never know. If Bashar Al Assad regime is toppled in Syria, then what will happen next will not be much different from what had happened in Iraq after Saddam, in Libya after Gaddafi. Hersh notes how the best way to move forward might lie in strategic cooperation with Russia in Syria. However, as US foreign policy has always shown in middle east, it thrives on unrest.

Oh, about the bin Laden killing...as per Hersh, what you know from books like 'No Easy Day' or movies like 'Zero Dark Thirty' are false. Osama bin Laden was killed with cooperation from Pakistani military and ISI.

At times, it is good to know that nothing we hear in mainstream media is true. More so when it involves US foreign policy. So much for the Nobel peace prize winner.
