

CANSOFCOM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

SLAYING THE DRAGON

THE KILLING OF BIN LADEN

COLONEL BERND HORN AND MAJOR TONY BALASEVICIUS



THE CANSOFCOM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

MISSION

The mission of the Canadian Forces Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) Professional Development Centre (PDC) is to enable professional development within the Command in order to continually develop and enhance the cognitive capacity of CANSOFCOM personnel.

VISION

The vision of the CANSOFCOM PDC is to be a key enabler to CANSOFCOM headquarters, units and Special Operations Task Forces (SOTFs) as an intellectual centre of excellence for special operations forces (SOF) professional development (PD).

ROLE

The CANSOFCOM PDC is designed to provide additional capacity to:

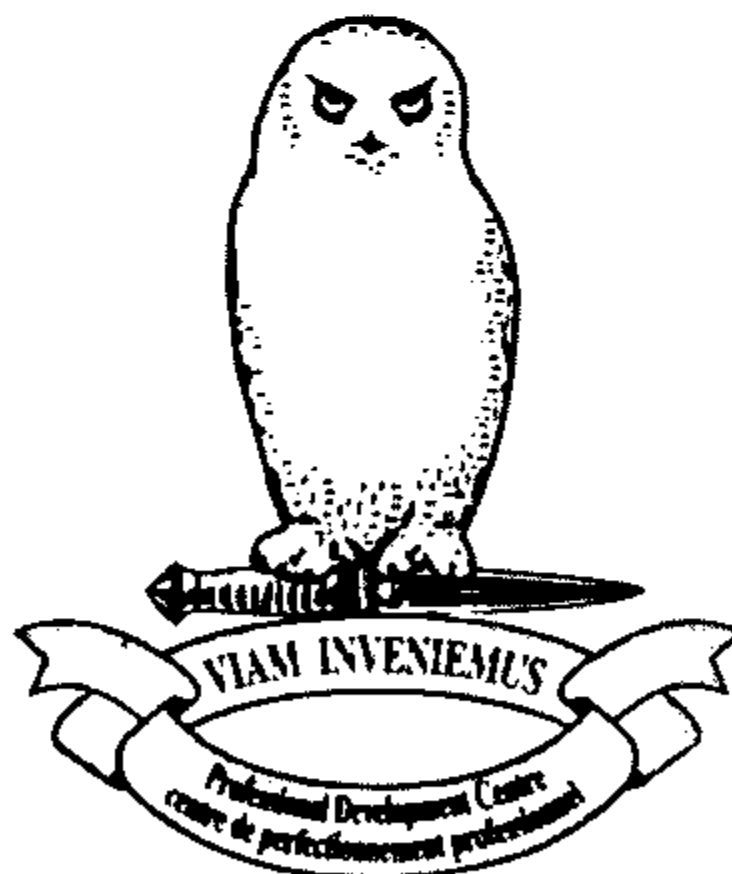
1. develop the cognitive capacity of CANSOFCOM personnel;
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3. provide additional research capacity;
4. develop educational opportunities and SOF specific courses and professional development materials;
5. record the classified history of CANSOFCOM;
6. develop CANSOFCOM publications that provide both PD and educational materials to CANSOFCOM personnel and external audiences;
7. maintain a website that provides up-to-date information on PD opportunities and research materials; and
8. assist with the research of SOF best practices and concepts to ensure that CANSOFCOM remains relevant and progressive so that it maintains its position as the domestic force of last resort and the international force of choice for the Government of Canada.

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Colonel Bernd Horn and Major Tony Balasevicius



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FOREWORD

I am delighted to introduce the fourth monograph produced by the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) Professional Development Centre (PDC). As the editor of the series, I am pleased to be a part of a growing body of literature on Special Operations Forces (SOF) in general and Canadian Special Operations Forces (CANSOF) in particular.

We are currently in the midst of creating a series that provides quality articles that address topics pertinent to CANSOFCOM personnel and that are of general interest to a wider audience, including the wider military community, the Canadian public, military and civilian decision-makers, as well as international allies. As such, it is imminently appropriate to explore the role of SOF in the 1 May 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden.

It is thus my pleasure to introduce *Slaying the Dragon: The Killing of Bin Laden*. In this volume, Colonel Bernd Horn, PhD and Major Tony Balasevicius do a masterful job of outlining the role of SEAL Team Six in the death of the most wanted man in America. Not only do they do a commendable job of exploring the 1 May 2011 operation, they also provide the context to understanding the rise of Bin Laden as a terrorist overlord and then the approximately decade-long struggle between the notorious insurgent and the United States and its Allies after 9/11 in tracking him down.

Of particular interest to SOF personnel is perhaps Part Two of this monograph, which focuses on the theoretical construct of author and current commander of Special Operations Command, Admiral Bill McRaven's, SOF Principles as outlined in his seminal book *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*. The authors examine the principles to determine whether the theory was applied on this particular mission. This

analysis underscores that all too important nexus between theory and practice that is far too often ignored, albeit for different reasons, by both theorists and practitioners.

Overall, this volume is simultaneously topical and timeless as it sheds light on what will no doubt become a gold standard for SOF for direct action missions. It is well balanced in the theoretical and the practical and, most importantly, draws the connection between each.

Dr. Emily Spencer

Monograph Series Editor

CANSOFCOM Professional Development Centre

PART I

SLAYING THE DRAGON: THE KILLING OF BIN LADEN

The two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters cut through the thick hot moonless night, flying low to avoid Pakistani radar. As they flew in tight formation well on their way to their objective about a 145 kilometres away, four MH-47 Chinooks took off from the same airfield. Two of the aircraft flew out as far as the border but stayed on the Afghan side, while the other two proceeded across the border to a pre-designated point on a dry riverbed in a wide, unpopulated valley in northwest Pakistan. As the Chinooks were moving into position the two Black Hawk helicopters, which had been heavily modified for the mission, particularly the design of their tail rotors, as well as a special rotor hub cowling designed to muffle the tail rotor and engine noises to cut down on their acoustic signature, continued to rapidly close the distance to their target.¹

As the lead Black Hawk approached its objective, the pilot provided a quick warning over the intercom, “four minutes out!” In the back, members from the U.S. Navy’s elite Special Warfare Development Group (DevGru), also commonly referred to as SEAL Team 6, made their final equipment checks.²

The lead aircraft banked sharply and began its final approach. It flared as it closed in on the objective, but as it reached and then cleared the high compound walls it immediately ran into problems. Unable to maintain control of the aircraft the pilot had no choice but to exercise a controlled crash landing. The helicopter hit hard as the nose dug into the earth, its tail crashing into the high wall and shearing off. The main body of the Black Hawk shuddered violently as the life ebbed from its frame. The SEALs, veterans of

many such operations, immediately spilled out of the damaged helicopter and started adapting their plan to their new reality on the ground.

Meanwhile the second assaulting helicopter abandoned its intended approach and landed its lethal cargo of SEALs just outside the compound. They too rapidly readjusted their plan and began to breach the targeted compound.

The few with knowledge of the operation realized that it would only be a matter of minutes before all the preparations of the last months would be realized. It would not be long before they determined if they had finally found their long sought after target, Osama bin Laden.

Background

The Americans had a long history with Bin Laden. Since the early 1990s they had been aware of him although they were initially slow to fully appreciate the threat he posed. Although he had become a person of interest early on there was neither sufficient evidence nor the political resolve to prompt a presidential order to detain or kill him.³ This should not be surprising as Bin Laden's clash with the Americans actually took some time to surface.

Osama bin Mohammed bin Awad bin Laden was born in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 1957. He was the son of Mohammed bin Awad bin Laden, a wealthy building contractor who had close ties to the Saudi Royal Family.⁴ It is generally believed that from an early age, he was involved in militant activities and that during the mid-1970s he worked with a Saudi-funded group that was attempting to overthrow the Communist government in Yemen.⁵ In 1979, Bin Laden joined the *jihad* against the Soviet invaders in Afghanistan.

Although he saw limited fighting in the region, Bin Laden was instrumental in raising money, recruiting fighters and developing the pipeline that brought them into Afghanistan to fight. By 1988, this organization had evolved into what the international community would come to know as Al-Qaeda (AQ).⁶ After the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, AQ used the infrastructure and operational experience it had developed during the war to broaden its campaign of eliminating western influence in the Muslim world. Meanwhile, in 1990, Bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia a hero for his role as an Islamic warrior in the *jihad* against the Soviets.

The hero's welcome would be short lived, however. In the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990, Bin Laden offered the services of his Arab Legion to defend the border of the Saudi Kingdom. King Fahd declined his offer in favour of assistance from the Americans. To Bin Laden, the idea of non-Muslims protecting the holy land was unacceptable and shortly thereafter he began to publicly denounce the Saudi Kingdom. When the Americans were allowed to remain in the country, after the war, Bin Laden felt that Islam had been betrayed and declared a holy war on the United States (U.S.), and its allies.⁷

Osama bin Laden and AQ's *jihad* against the U.S. was based on the belief that American foreign policy was responsible for the oppression, death and subordination of Muslims in the Middle East. He was also convinced that the restoration of Sharia Law was the only means to correct the faults existing in the Muslim world.⁸

Bin Laden briefly returned to Afghanistan where much of Al-Qaeda's infrastructure remained but shortly thereafter moved the organization's apparatus to the Sudan, where a newly installed and sympathetic Islamist government was in place. Once in Khartoum, he and his AQ network began to plot attacks against

the West and quickly established the necessary infrastructure and terrorist training facilities to achieve this vision.⁹

Despite these activities, he was still not considered a real threat by the Americans. Billy Waugh, a former Special Forces (SF) soldier who became a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) contractor, while working in the al-Riyadh section of Khartoum, Sudan, in February 1992, was given the mission of keeping Bin Laden under surveillance. Waugh was informed by his CIA chief of station, "We don't know what he's up to, but we know he's a wealthy financier and we think he is harbouring some of these outfits called al Qaeda." As such, Waugh was told to "See what you can find out."¹⁰ According to Waugh, "Bin Laden was not considered an especially high assignment."¹¹ Waugh remembered, "The CIA noted his arrival in Sudan, and we targeted this soft-spoken Arab as a potential threat to our interests." Waugh acknowledged, however, "His [Bin Laden] war declaration was not treated with a great deal of seriousness."¹²

In the interim, Bin Laden's continued criticism of the Saudi Royal Family and promotion of violent *jihād* resulted in the loss of his Saudi citizenship thereby causing his wealthy family to disown him. By 1995 he was increasingly being linked to terrorist attacks around the world, particularly as a financier. For instance, Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda were connected to the attack on the Gold Mihor Hotel in Aden on 29 December 1992, along with several bombing of U.S. installations in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, eventually they were connected to Ramsi Yousef and his 26 February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in which six people died and 1,042 were injured. In fact, it was the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center that finally moved the Americans to focus more intently on Bin Laden. During their investigations CIA operatives discovered that Bin Laden had hired a physicist to work on chemical and nuclear projects in Sudan.¹³

Under pressure from the international community, particularly Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United States, Sudan initiated efforts to expel Bin Laden and his organization.¹⁴ Realizing Sudan would no longer be able to protect him; he left the country in May 1996 and fled to Jalalabad, Afghanistan.¹⁵

In Afghanistan, Bin Laden was able to raise money, open a number of terrorist training camps and continue his *jihad* against the West, particularly the United States.¹⁶ In August 1996, he declared war on the United States by publishing his first *fatwā*.¹⁷ The CIA later acknowledged, “what Bin Laden created in Afghanistan after he relocated there in 1996 was a sophisticated adversary – as good as any the CIA ever operated against.”¹⁸ However, other than intelligence collection, they did not push for covert action against Bin Laden.¹⁹

The full threat that Bin Laden and AQ represented finally hit home on 7 August 1998, when a series of attacks utilizing truck bombs hit U.S. embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya, killing hundreds of people. These events pushed the Americans to action. Within days of the embassy bombings, President Bill Clinton signed a top secret “Memorandum of Notification” that authorized the CIA or its agents to use lethal force if necessary in an attempt to capture Osama bin Laden.²⁰

Military action quickly followed. After tracking the satellite phone of one of Bin Laden’s associates, on 20 August 1998, the U.S. Navy launched 75 Tomahawk cruise missiles at a suspected Al-Qaeda training camp at Zawhar Kili, in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, Bin Laden did not appear at the designated time. More importantly, after that strike, he no longer used satellite or cell phones.²¹ Eight days later, on 28 August 1998, American diplomats were able to mobilize international support and convince the United Nations (UN) Security Council to pass UN Security Council Resolution

(UNSCR) 1193 that demanded that “Afghan factions ... refrain from harbouring and training terrorists and their organizations.” More specifically UNSCR 214, passed on 8 December 1998, affirmed that the Security Council was “deeply disturbed by the continuing use of Afghan territory, especially areas controlled by the Taliban, for the sheltering and training of terrorists and the planning of terrorist acts” and reiterated that “the suppression of international terrorism is essential for the maintenance of international peace and security.”²²

The Americans continued their UN offensive as they sought to set the necessary political conditions to deal with this new international terrorist threat. On 15 October 1999, the U.S. secured the adoption of UNSCR 1267, which expressed concerns about the “continuing violations of international humanitarian law and of human rights [in Afghanistan], particularly discrimination against women and girls,” as well as “the significant rise in the illicit production of opium.” Importantly, the Resolution specifically criticized the Taliban for offering “safe haven to Osama bin Laden and to allow him and others associated with him to operate a network of terrorist training camps ... and to use Afghanistan as a base from which to sponsor international terrorist operations.” Subsequently, the Security Council demanded “that the Taliban turn over Osama Bin Laden without further delay” so that he could be “effectively brought to justice.” The Council also instituted the same economic and financial sanctions on the Taliban regime that had been recently imposed by the United States.

The Taliban failed to comply with any of the demands and on 12 October 2000, AQ attacked the USS *Cole* in the harbour at Aden, Yemen, killing 17 U.S. sailors and wounding 39. To exacerbate the looming showdown Bin Laden took full credit for the operation, prompting the Security Council to pass UNSCR 1333 on 19 December 2000. This resolution reaffirmed the charges made

the previous year and added the stipulation that the Taliban were to ensure the closing “of all camps where terrorists are trained.” In addition, economic sanctions were strengthened, Taliban offices were to be closed in the territory of member states, landing rights for Afghan national airways were revoked and all assets linked to Osama bin Laden and AQ were frozen. Once again the Taliban regime did nothing to address international concerns.

This inaction resulted in yet another UNSCR being passed on 30 July 2001, which described “the situation in Afghanistan ... as a threat to international peace and security in the region.”²³ The Resolution would prove prophetic. Events would quickly change. In the early hours of the morning on 11 September 2001 (9/11), any hesitation in capturing or killing Bin Laden came to an end. The brazen AQ-planned attack, conducted by AQ operatives who, armed solely with cheap 99 cent box cutters, hijacked fully fuelled commercial airliners and used them as precision munitions to strike not only the two separate towers of the World Trade Center in New York, but also the Pentagon in Washington D.C. changed everything. Luckily, due to the bravery of its passengers the fourth hijacked jetliner heading for Washington D.C., slammed into the ground in Pennsylvania short of its objective. In total, almost 3,000 people were killed in the first attack on the American homeland since the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941.

Not surprisingly, Washington responded quickly to the 9/11 attacks as they attempted to protect the American homeland and U.S. facilities and installations abroad. The Americans suspected Osama bin Laden and his AQ terrorist network immediately. They also realized that they would need to strike their antagonists in his safe haven in Afghanistan with something more than missiles. To set the necessary conditions for fighting AQ, on 14 September, the American Congress authorized President George W. Bush to “use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations,

organizations, or persons [who] planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attack on 11 September or harboured such organizations or persons.”²⁴

The Americans also called on their NATO allies for help. As a result, NATO’s North Atlantic Council met on 12 September to discuss the US request to invoke Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty that defines “an armed attack against one or more of the Allies in Europe or North America” as “an attack against them all” and thereby, requiring each ally to “assist the Party that has been attacked by taking such action as it deems necessary.”²⁵ This would be the first time that the Article 5 clause was invoked.

By 2 October the Americans provided their allies with “clear and compelling evidence” that AQ had in fact been behind the 9/11 attacks. Two days later NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson announced that the Alliance would indeed take collective actions to assist the United States.²⁶ NATO, in accordance with Treaty requirements, also notified the UN that it intended to invoke Article 5 under the framework of the United Nations Charter provision affirming the inherent right of member states to individual and collective defence.

The UN Security Council had come to a similar conclusion, having also met to address the 9/11 attacks on 12 September. They subsequently urged all states to work together “to bring to justice the perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of the attacks.”²⁷ Then, on 7 October 2001, the United States and the United Kingdom informed the UN Security Council that they were undertaking operations to strike at AQ and Taliban terrorist camps and training and military installations in Afghanistan.

The code name for those operations was Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) and it commenced with the heavy bombing of Taliban bases and infrastructure throughout the country. The

Coalition also targeted the 50,000 Taliban troops outside of Kabul who were manning the frontlines against the Northern Alliance (NA), which was a loose coalition of Afghan forces who opposed the Taliban.

Approximately four weeks of bombing finally created the necessary effect. On 9 November 2001, the NA, who were now supported by U.S. Special Forces and CIA operatives, as well as American air support, launched an assault that broke through the Taliban lines at Mazar-e-Sharif. Taliban resistance quickly collapsed and their forces were routed. Over the next three days all of northern, western and eastern Afghanistan fell to the NA. The remaining Taliban forces fled south to Kandahar, the birth place and headquarters of the movement. Throughout their retreat they were harassed and pounded by U.S. air power.²⁸ On 5 December, Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, surrendered Kandahar and fled to Pakistan.

Despite this spectacular collapse of Taliban and AQ resistance there were some hold-outs. Specifically, the Americans believed that Bin Laden and a number of his senior AQ leadership along with a large contingent of his forces were entrenched in the Tora Bora Mountains in eastern Afghanistan. In fact, intelligence analysts were convinced that for a time they actually had Bin Laden trapped in the mountain complex at Tora Bora. Unfortunately, the failure to ensure that the cordon that was developed around Tora Bora was properly closed during Operation ANACONDA prevented the capture of the terrorist leader. The Americans had depended on their NA allies and the Pakistani military to shut off the escape routes. However, in this instance both were found wanting. As a result, hundreds of AQ fighters, including Bin Laden, were either allowed to escape or paid money for unhindered passage into Pakistan.²⁹

Despite the failure to capture Bin Laden, by early 2002, the Taliban and AQ in Afghanistan were largely defeated. Military estimates

put the Taliban losses at 8,000-12,000 men, which represented 20 percent of their total force. In addition, the number of wounded were estimated to be twice as much, with a further 7,000 taken prisoner.³⁰ In the end, it is believed that the Taliban lost over 70 percent of their strength.

Having lost their quarry at Tora Bora the Americans continued their pursuit of Bin Laden, but often appeared to be chasing ghosts in the hinterlands of Afghanistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) in Pakistan. Despite the \$25 million bounty the FBI placed on Bin Laden's head, nothing was forthcoming. The trail had dried up. But finally, from the bowels of secret CIA prisons in Eastern Europe and the depths of Guantanamo Bay, leads that would reward American persistence surfaced.

The Intelligence Nexus

The trail that eventually led to the locating and killing of Bin Laden on 2 May 2011 is a case study in how intelligence should work. The process that led to the discovery of the AQ leader started several years earlier when the Americans seized Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the self-confessed mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.³¹ Taken to CIA prisons in Poland and Romania, Khalid was water-boarded and his subsequent confessions revealed the identity of Bin Laden's most trusted courier, namely Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti (also known as Sheikh Abu Ahmed and Arshad Khan). The courier's name came up again when Abu Faraj al-Libi, another AQ operative was captured in Mardan, Pakistan approximately two years later. The CIA realized that their best opportunity to discover the whereabouts of Bin Laden was to find and track his elusive courier.³²

This lead finally bore fruit in the spring of 2010, when al-Kuwaiti made a phone call to someone who was being monitored by U.S.

intelligence. Although he was not at Bin Laden's compound at the time of the call, al-Kuwaiti had now been found and could be put under surveillance.³³

CIA analysts had discovered that al-Kuwaiti drove a white Suburban sport utility vehicle (SUV) that had a spare tire on the back with an image of a white rhino printed on the cover. This allowed the CIA to begin tracking the vehicle. In August 2010, a satellite captured images of al-Kuwaiti's SUV pulling into a large compound in Abbottabad.³⁴ Once agents determined that al-Kuwaiti was actually living there, they used aerial surveillance to keep watch on the compound.³⁵



The compound was largely self-sufficient and contained a large three-storey villa, a guest house and some smaller out-buildings. The outer compound walls were high and varied from 3.7 to 5.5 metres in height and were topped with wire. There were only two gates that permitted entry into the complex and by all appearances no-one was ever permitted inside. Neighbours reported they only ever saw two people, al-Kuwaiti and his brother.³⁶ They

also disclosed that the building had been constructed in 2005 and the local rumour was that it belonged to smugglers.

The CIA's initial examination of the compound generated a number of suspicions. For example, the compound, which was eight times larger than its surrounding neighbours, was valued at about \$1-million (US). Yet, the owner, Bin Laden's courier and his brother, had no explainable source of income or wealth. Moreover, CIA surveillance of the compound revealed that the occupants burned their garbage inside rather than place it on the street for collection and they had no telephone or internet hook-ups.

The CIA quickly followed up this lead by establishing a safe house in Abbottabad in a building adjacent to Bin Laden's compound. Surveillance had revealed that al-Kuwaiti and his brother had a normal routine of entering and leaving the compound, but indicated that there was another man living in the building and he never left the compound. The agency dubbed him the Pacer and some analysts believed he was Bin Laden.³⁷ Thermal imagery and listening devices were used in an attempt to confirm whether or not the compound was holding the terrorist chieftain. In fact, the CIA were certain that the third male occupant of the compound was a high-value target but they were not sure if it was the most wanted man in the U.S.

Although by mid-February 2011, the CIA believed they had found their man, they still did not have a positive identification. On 14 March, the President held the first of a series of national security meetings that would be held over the next six weeks with his innermost cabinet to formulate the necessary plans to conduct an operation. Although there was a great deal of circumstantial evidence to suggest Bin Laden had been found, the President wanted more information before he was prepared to act.

Nonetheless, planning for an attack began. President Obama ordered the military to draw up options for a military strike on the compound. This task was given to the commander of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), then Vice-Admiral Bill McRaven. On 29 March 2011, McRaven presented three different courses of action to the president. They included:

- a. Bomb the compound;
- b. Carry out a drone strike with missiles; or
- c. Carry out a direct action raid.

Obama's military advisers were divided on how to proceed. Some supported the concept of a raid; some preferred an airstrike, while others wanted to get more detailed information before moving forward with the options. In the end, the third course of action (to carry out a direct action raid) was utilized since Obama believed that the first two could produce an unacceptable level of collateral damage and may not be able to yield evidence of actual success.³⁸ Obama directed McRaven to start moving forward with a raid option.³⁹

McRaven was a good choice for this mission. Just prior to the operation he had been nominated by President Barack Obama to become Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). More importantly, much of McRaven's career had been spent within the special operations community and among other things his résumé included the deputy commanding general for operations at JSOC, Commodore of Naval Special Warfare Group 1, Commander of SEAL Team 3, and squadron commander at Naval Special Warfare Development Group.⁴⁰

In addition to his extensive practical experience, he had authored *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*. In his book, McRaven analyzed eight special operations direct action missions and developed six essential principles for

mission success. These include simplicity, security, repetition, surprise, speed and purpose. In the end, each of these principles would be well imbedded into the final plan against the compound.

By mid-April, JSOC was well advanced in its planning for the operation. The organization selected to execute the raid was SEAL Team Six, officially designated The Naval Special Warfare Development Group (DevGru), based in Dam Neck, Virginia.⁴¹

The Naval Special Warfare Development Group (SEAL Team Six)

DevGru was first activated in 1980 under the name SEAL Team Six as the U.S. Navy's primary counter-terrorist unit. Its primary mission was to carry out maritime counter-terrorism operations. Typically its targets focused on such things as ships, oil rigs, naval bases, or other targets that were directly accessible from the sea or inland waterways. Other operations included carrying out special reconnaissance activities or developing security assessments for U.S. Navy installations and embassies in order to counter possible terrorist attacks.⁴²

Although initially created for maritime operations, the unit has evolved into a multi-functional special operations unit. In addition to counter-terrorist operations, missions include counter-proliferation operations, recovery of high-value targets (HVTs), reconnaissance and other security tasks that fit their unique capabilities.⁴³

Little is actually known about the organization of the unit. It is believed that its strength is somewhere between 200 and 400 operators and support personnel that are divided into four combat teams (approximately company size) and one training team.⁴⁴ Selection and training for the unit is intense. To become a member

operators are normally selected from other SEAL teams and the Navy's Explosive Ordnance Disposal units. After fitness testing and a pre-screening of their files they are interviewed to determine their suitability to undertake the selection process.⁴⁵ Those who pass the selection process are then allowed to attend the Operators Training Course. Candidates carry out their training and screening process with the unit's training wing known as "Green Team."

The training course is believed to be six to seven months long and the drop-out rate is extremely high. During training candidates are under constant scrutiny to determine whether they are suitable to join the individual squadrons. As candidates will have already completed their Basic Underwater Demolitions/SEAL training, much of the training is focused on testing the candidate's cognitive capacity and speed of reactions to complex situations within the close quarter battle environment rather than on physical condition.⁴⁶

Once they complete the Operators Training Course, it is believed that candidates further develop their skills through a variety of advanced training courses led by civilian or military instructors. These can include, among other things, free-climbing, advanced unarmed combat techniques, defensive and offensive driving, advanced diving, and Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) training.

The unit has extensive operational experience to back up its training plans and has been involved in operations in Grenada 1983, Somalia 1992-3, Bosnia, 1992-5, and Afghanistan. Over the years SEAL Team Six has also carried out a number of high profile SOF operations including the successful recovery of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his family during a coup that deposed him in 1991, and more recently the failed rescue of Linda Norgrove in pre-dawn raid on 8 October 2010.⁴⁷

During operations Navy SEALs often work with the CIA. In fact, such cooperation can be traced back to the Vietnam War. This CIA nexus is significant as the mission that killed Osama bin Laden was actually a CIA-led operation.⁴⁸

Planning And Preparations For The Mission

Based primarily on technical intelligence, by mid-April 2011, the CIA had come to believe that they had found Bin Laden, who they suspected was living in the compound of interest along with several family members, including his son Khaled and his most favoured wife. However, despite the strong hunch the CIA could not actually confirm Bin Laden's presence. "It was far from certain, and it took many months to run this thread to ground," conceded President Barack Obama.⁴⁹

Regardless, as mentioned, preparations for the raid moved forward. DevGru's Red Squadron had been given the task of carrying out the raid and the commander along with key members of his team started to confront the problem of getting into what was believed to be Bin Laden's house. According to journalist and author, Nicholas Schmidle, "One option entailed flying helicopters to a spot outside Abbottabad and letting the team sneak into the city on foot. The risk of detection was high, however, and the SEALs would be exhausted by a long infiltration to the compound. The planners had also contemplated tunnelling in—or, at least, the possibility that Bin Laden might tunnel out. But images provided by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency showed that there was standing water in the vicinity, suggesting that the compound sat in a flood basin. The water table was probably just below the surface, making tunnels highly unlikely. Eventually, the planners agreed that it made the most sense to simply fly directly into the compound at night."⁵⁰

In mid-April, members of the assault team were moved to Nevada for detailed rehearsals combining the air and assault components of the force on a model of the compound. As the operation was to take place 145 kilometres inside of Pakistan territory, at night, the rehearsal area and timings had to provide for these considerations. As part of the preparations the U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency assisted JSOC by creating mission simulators for the pilots. They also analyzed data that was gathered using drones. Moreover, they created three-dimensional models of the house, created schedules detailing the pattern of life within the compound and provided planners with an estimate of likely numbers and gender of the occupants.

On the night of 21 April 2011, the commander of DevGru along with the mission pilots presented a brief on the plan for the raid, which had been code-named Operation Neptune's Spear, to Admiral Mike Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a number of other people including CIA personnel.⁵¹ After the briefing there was a question period lasting approximately an hour before the delegation returned to Washington D.C.. On 26 April, the SEAL team from Red Squadron boarded a Boeing C-17 Globemaster to Bagram Airfield, north of Kabul and quickly moved on to their staging base in Jalalabad to await further instructions.⁵²

As they waited they continued refining the plan in a one-acre replica of the compound, going over every aspect of the operation day and night and carrying out clearance drills. The clearance drills were exactly that – drills – that had been executed in the Close Quarter Battle (CQB) ranges on bases and in the real two-way ranges in Afghanistan on numerous occasions. Few had concerns about the actual building clearance. Nonetheless, despite going over every aspect of the mission in detail there were still multiple unknowns – including whether Bin Laden was actually at the site and how the Pakistanis would react. All knew this was a “one-shot”

deal. If they failed, it would be impossible to try again, not least of which was because of the violation of Pakistan's sovereignty.

While SEAL Team Six continued with its preparations in Jalalabad events at the national level began to spool up. At 0820 hours, on 29 April, President Obama convened his National Security team in the Diplomatic Room at the White House and issued the formal order to execute the raid. Although Bin Laden was never sighted with 100 percent fidelity, Obama took the executive decision to launch the raid, fearing that if they hesitated, the best opportunity they had in almost a decade would be lost. CIA Director Leon Panetta revealed, "we were never certain; we were never able to verify it was him [Bin Laden]." ⁵³ He added, however, "this is the best chance we have." ⁵⁴ Insiders felt the odds were no better than 50/50 that they had located America's most wanted criminal, but the President felt they had to try.

Adding to the complexities of the situation was the fact that the Pakistanis were not told of the impending mission. Panetta, responsible for the operation, stated pointedly, "It was decided that any effort to work with the Pakistanis could jeopardize the mission." He explained, "They might alert the target." ⁵⁵ He was not alone in his concern. That Bin Laden could be in Abbottabad unknown to authorities "is a bit amazing" stated Hamid Gul, a former Pakistani intelligence chief fiercely critical of America's presence in the region. He noted, aside from the military "there is the local police, the Intelligence Bureau, Military Intelligence, the ISI [Inter-Service Intelligence], they all had a presence there." ⁵⁶ There were huge risks involved with sending in a team without knowing what was actually there. However, Obama's biggest concern, was "if I send them in can I get them out?" ⁵⁷

The Concept Of Operations

Once the decision was made the plan could be fixed based on the most up to date information. In the end, it was actually relatively simple and based on a quick in and out operation using six aircraft – four Chinook MC-47 helicopters and two modified Black Hawk UH-60s that would all depart from Jalalabad, Afghanistan and fly nap-of-the-earth through the hilly terrain to exploit known gaps in the Pakistan radar system. The two Black Hawk helicopter carrying 23 SEALs, an interpreter and a tracking dog named Cairo were to depart first and head directly to the objective. The Chinooks would depart shortly afterwards and include a small reserve force of approximately two dozen SEALs from DevGru in case something went wrong. Two of the helicopters would stay along the border area and two were to land in a deserted area approximately two thirds of the way to the objective.

The two Black Hawks were to drop the assault force off in less than two minutes and then depart to a pre-designated waiting area. The hope was that locals would assume the helicopters arriving in the dead of night were actually Pakistani aircraft visiting the Military Academy that was nearby.

The plan on the objective called for one Black Hawk to hover over the compound to fast rope the SEALs into the open courtyard. Meanwhile, the second Black Hawk would hover over the main building to allow the SEALs to fast rope onto the roof, thus allowing the assault teams to clear the building simultaneously from both the top and bottom. After dropping the SEALs onto the roof the second Black Hawk was to land in the courtyard to unload additional SEALs, the tracking dog and the interpreter so that they could quickly track anyone who tried to escape the compound. As mentioned, in order to maintain security not even the Pakistani Government was let in on the operation.⁵⁸ In the event Pakistani

troops arrived on scene, the plan was to hunker down in the compound and avoid armed confrontation so that officials in Washington D.C. could negotiate their passage out.⁵⁹

Execution

The first phase of the operation went without a hitch and the assault force made the trip from their base in Afghanistan to their designated holding sectors and the target area without incident. However, once on the target Clausewitzian friction took hold almost immediately. As the first Black Hawk of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment attempted to hover over the compound at approximately 0030 hours, on 1 May 2011, in the process of disgorging its load, it began to flail around uncontrollably. The high 3.6m compound walls and warmer than expected temperatures conspired to create an air vortex.⁶⁰ The pilot fought a losing battle to control his aircraft. The fight ended when the tail and rotor of the aircraft hit the wall and the pilot quickly buried its nose into the dirt to prevent it from pitching to one side.

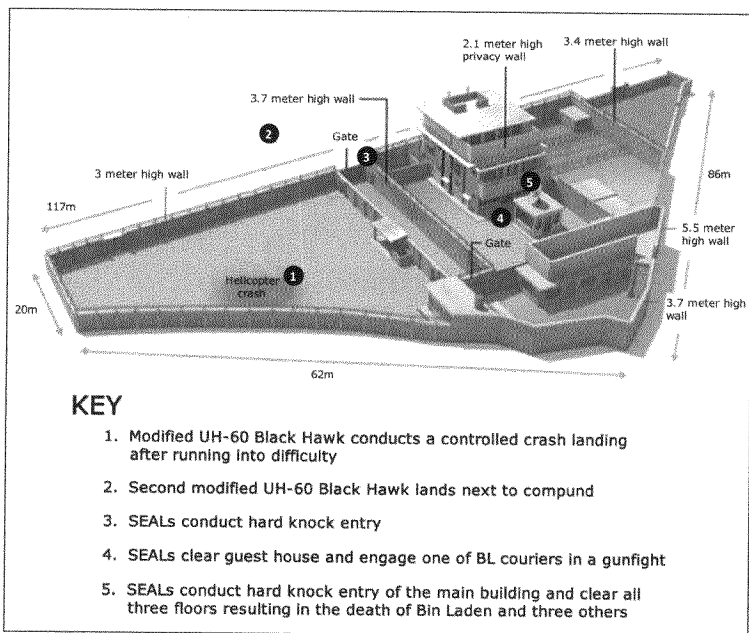
Once on the ground the SEALs quickly clambered out of the destroyed aircraft into an outer courtyard. Meanwhile, the second helicopter reacted immediately. The pilot decided not to even attempt to hover over the compound, rather, he landed his aircraft outside of the objective and unloaded its lethal cargo. With the element of surprise apparently lost both assault groups quickly began to break the mud and concrete-like walls with explosives, blowing holes in the wall and disintegrating doors to reach their target. Panetta acknowledged the SEALs, “had to breach about three to four walls in order to get in” to the compound.⁶¹ Cell service and power to the compound were quickly cut.⁶²

When the assault forces were established inside the compound one group assaulted the main building while a second SEAL team

cleared the guesthouse, where Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti, Bin Laden's courier, lived with his wife and four children. Al-Kuwaiti was killed as he attempted to fire at the assaulting troops. To gain access to the three-storey main house the attackers had to blow their way in through walls and doors and work their way through the iron barriers that had been positioned at each stair landing. On the first floor, they were engaged once again by another of Bin Laden's couriers who fired at them shortly after the first assaulters entered the building. In the exchange of gunfire, the shooter, al-Kuwaiti's brother, was killed along with a woman who was caught in the cross-fire. As the SEALs worked their way up to the second floor they shot another man, who turned out to be one of Bin Laden's sons. On each level of the house they encountered small groups of children, which added to the complexity to the assault.

As the SEALs were working their way towards the top floor they saw Bin Laden standing at the end of the hall on the landing looking down at them. They fired but missed. As they rushed up the stairs, Bin Laden ducked into one of the rooms. The SEALs assumed Bin Laden was going for a weapon and quickly rushed after him.

As they entered the room two women ran towards the SEALs. Amal Ahmed al-Sadah, one of Bin Laden's wives, was shot in the calf and both women were shoved away by the lead SEAL. Fearing that they could be wearing suicide jackets he stepped forward, wrapped them in a bear hug, and drove them aside. As the lead SEAL cleared the women out of the way, the next SEAL through the door fired two shots, hitting Bin Laden, once in the chest and once in the head above the eye.⁶³ With those shots the hunt was finally over.⁶⁴ When Bin Laden was killed the SEAL team relayed the code word all were waiting for "Geronimo – EKIA."⁶⁵



While the SEALs were clearing the compound and the main house, Ahmed, the translator, along with other elements of the assault force, patrolled the dirt road in front of Bin Laden's house. Looking the part of a plainclothes Pakistani police officer he and the others were responsible for closing off the perimeter of the house, which they did.⁶⁶ The noise and commotion attracted local Pakistanis, who came to investigate. Playing the part of a Pakistani security officer, Ahmed simply told them that a security operation was underway and that they were to go home and turn off their lights.

The direct action component of the raid took only approximately 15 minutes from landing to killing Bin Laden. The next 23 minutes were spent photographing the bodies, confirming identification, blowing up the downed helicopters and collecting documents, computers, disc drives and any other material that were thought

to be able to provide intelligence. In the compound were a total of nine women, five of them Bin Laden's wives, and 18 children. Among the items found were a number of weapons, notably an AK-47 and a Russian-made Makarov pistol that was on a shelf by the door through which Bin Laden had run.

Next, the SEALs needed to destroy the damaged Black Hawk. The pilot, armed with a hammer that he kept for such situations, smashed the instrument panel, the radio, and the other classified fixtures inside the cockpit. Then the demolition unit took over. They placed explosives near the avionics system, the communications gear, the engine, and the rotor head.

Once the SEALs had gathered all the material, including the body of Bin Laden, a Chinook helicopter was called forward to remove the material and the SEALs from the objective. Throughout, the raid was being watched in real time back in Washington D.C..⁶⁷ White House counter-terrorism adviser John Brennan noted, "The minutes passed like days." He revealed that the raid was "probably one of the most anxiety-filled periods" in the lives of the president and his national security team.⁶⁸ The President had received an update of the mission at 1532 hours local time in Washington D.C.. Eighteen minutes later he was informed that Bin Laden was "tentatively identified" as among those killed in the operation. At 1900 hours, it was confirmed, following a series of DNA tests, that he was dead.⁶⁹

The helicopter then flew to Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan and Bin Laden's body was flown to the aircraft carrier *USS Carl Vinson* where it was prepared in accordance with Islamic custom for burial. According to White House Press Secretary Jay Carney, "His [Bin Laden] body was washed, wrapped in a white sheet and placed in a weighted bag. A military officer read prepared religious remarks, which were translated into Arabic by a native speaker.

The bag was then placed on a flat board that was tipped up, and the corpse was eased into the North Arabian Sea.”⁷⁰

Aftermath

American officials revealed that the contents of Bin Laden’s residence represented the “largest intelligence find from a terrorist leader in U.S. history. It was a veritable treasure trove of material including documents and videos.”⁷¹ An entire task force was assigned to mining the windfall.

While the second and third orders of effects are still not entirely clear, the consequences of the intelligence bonanza could be substantial. For instance, even though following 9/11 the U.S. has made it a priority to go after terrorist financing and had determined up until that point that Al-Qaeda was reaping up to \$30 million a year in donations to finance their operations, they had not been able to totally shut off the valve. Importantly, the files captured at Bin Laden’s residence could reveal key donors, particularly Persian Gulf financiers. U.S. counter-terrorist agents are hoping the captured material will contain bank accounts, credit cards and ledgers that expose the financial underpinnings of Bin Laden’s terrorist network and its supporters.⁷² This could yet become another great victory for the war against international terrorists.

Another immediate outcome of the DA raid was the confirmation that Bin Laden was still a key player in AQ operations. A peripheral scan of the captured material, according to one U.S. intelligence official, revealed that Bin Laden continued to provide strategic guidance and direction to Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. As such, Bin Laden’s death is quite arguably a huge set-back for the terrorist network.⁷³ Although new leadership will undoubtedly rise up, the immediate confusion and damage control will likely have a significant impact on AQ’s ability to mount new complex operations in

the near future. Moreover, their ability to replace Bin Laden with an equally enigmatic, charismatic and widely accepted leader that would hold the same credibility and respect by Muslim people will be difficult.

Summary

Former President George Bush captured the essence of the U.S. sentiment when he remarked, “America has sent an unmistakable message: no matter how long it takes, justice will be done.”⁷⁴ In the end, SOF played a critical role in this outcome. Once again a small team, empowered by intelligence, conducted a tactical action that delivered strategic effect.

The Bin Laden DA raid once again underlined the reality of SOF’s powerful impact in the contemporary operating environment. Enabled by precise intelligence and the latest technology, a small team of highly trained SOF operators can deploy into hostile or politically sensitive environments and conduct with surgical precision actions that achieve strategic results with minimal collateral damage, either physical or political. And, in this case the strategic results were significant. The 40 minute raid brought closure to a nation. From a Western perspective, the most wanted terrorist leader in the world, seen by Americans as responsible for the atrocity on 9/11, was brought to justice. Moreover, as former President Bush articulated, this action sent a message to the rest of the world. Aside from the important victory to the American psyche, the small team action also dealt a severe blow to AQ and its terrorist network. Regardless of whether Bin Laden was still an influential leader in the planning and conduct of terrorist operations or not, he was an important spiritual and symbolic leader to Islamic radical fundamentalists. As such, his death at the hands of the Americans dealt a blow to the stature and image of Al-Qaeda.

Finally, the bonanza of information recovered in the sensitive site exploitation has yet to reveal its value but is likely significant. There is little doubt that the vast amount of data kept by Bin Laden will reveal further information that will assist in the struggle against the network of international terrorists.

Once again, SOF punched above its weight and proved itself an economy of force resource. By deploying a small, highly trained team, enabled by intelligence and technology, it was able to turn a high-risk tactical action into a high-value strategic success. The speed and agility of employment, coupled with the adaptability and skill sets of SOF, made it the force choice for this no-fail mission.

PART II

THE INFLUENCE OF BILL MCRAVEN'S SEMINAL BOOK – *SPEC OPS: CASE STUDIES IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS WARFARE: THEORY AND PRACTICE* – ON THE BIN LADEN RAID

A common complaint often heard is that theory and practice rarely connect. This is not entirely surprising. Lofty ideas developed in the sterile intellectual environment can easily surmount the difficulties of Clausewitzian “friction” found in the real world. The impact of cold, hunger, fatigue, fear, panic, ambiguity and dramatic differences between what is expected and what is actually encountered is often forgotten or not even considered when developing theoretical concepts, particularly when being done so by those with no experience in operations. In this light, the ability to actually analyze a theoretical concept developed by an individual who is later required to put the concept to the acid test of reality is a great opportunity. The search for, and subsequent raid to capture or kill, the Al-Qaeda terrorist leader Osama bin Laden provides such an opportunity.

By late 2010, the Americans had assembled a great deal of circumstantial evidence that indicated Bin Laden had been located in Abbottabad, Pakistan. As a result, President Barack Obama ordered the military to draw up options for a strike on the suspected Bin Laden compound. Predictably, the job was given to the commander of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) commander, Vice-Admiral Bill McRaven.⁷⁵

McRaven was a good choice for this task. Just prior to the operation he had been nominated by the President to become Commander,

U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). More importantly, much of McRaven's career had been spent within the special operations community and among other things his résumé included holding positions such as the deputy commanding general for operations at JSOC, Commodore of Naval Special Warfare Group 1, Commander of SEAL Team 3, and squadron commander at Naval Special Warfare Development Group.⁷⁶

In addition to his extensive practical experience McRaven had developed a theoretical concept for Special Operations Forces (SOF) direct action (DA) raids. In his 1995 book, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*, McRaven analyzed a number of direct action missions and in the process developed what he called the concept of relative superiority. He argued that relative superiority was critical to mission accomplishment and that assaulting forces were required to adhere to six essential principles if they were to achieve success. Sixteen years after the publication of that book, as the JSOC commander, McRaven had the opportunity to put his theory into practice in a very public way as he had significant influence over the final details of arguably one of America's most important special operations.

For this reason, it is interesting to examine how influential the essential principles that McRaven had developed so many years ago were to the final plan and execution of the raid. Were they in fact, timeless principles that could withstand the ultimate challenge of the real world or just lofty ideas developed in the sterile intellectual environment that had little chance of success? Moreover, had McRaven dropped any of his initial principles? Before any examination of the raid or McRaven's impact on it can be undertaken, one must first understand the concept of relative superiority, and the six essential principles that he developed to support that concept in his seminal work.

SPEC OPS – An Examination Of The Theory

McRaven begins *Spec Ops* by establishing a definition of Special Operations which he describes as operations “conducted by forces specially trained, equipped, and supported for a specific target whose destruction, elimination, or rescue (in the case of hostages), is a political or military imperative.”⁷⁷ It is important to note that McRaven’s work focused exclusively on DA missions, as he puts it on “breaking-in” to an objective. That being said, his theory fits the circumstances for evaluating the Bin Laden raid quite well as it was a DA mission on a well-secured compound.

After analyzing a number of case studies McRaven came to the conclusion that the success of SOF assaults depended on achieving what he termed relative superiority, which he defined as, “a condition that exists when an attacking force, generally smaller, gains a decisive advantage over a larger or well-defended enemy.”⁷⁸ McRaven explains that relative superiority must be achieved at a pivotal moment early in an engagement. To reinforce this point he uses the example of the German attack on the Belgian fort at Eben Emael during the opening stages of the Second World War. During that battle the Germans “achieved a decisive advantage-relative superiority-over the enemy, who outnumbered them almost 10 to one, within five minutes of the initial engagement.” This advantage allowed them to put the vastly superior force on the defensive and eventually defeat them even though the Belgians fought on for another twenty-four hours.⁷⁹ In short, McRaven describes relative superiority as the advantage that a small attacking force has on a larger defensive force when the attackers have the element of surprise on their side and execute the operation with speed, precision and ferocity.

Nonetheless, McRaven added a proviso to his theory suggesting, “The point at which relative superiority is achieved is also

frequently the point of greatest risk.” Moreover, once it has been achieved it must be sustained if victory is to be ensured. McRaven believes that the ability to sustain relative superiority “frequently requires the intervention of courage, intellect, boldness, and perseverance.”⁸⁰

Closely linked to the idea of relative superiority is the notion of Area of Vulnerability (AV). According to McRaven, the AV is a function of mission completion over time. This means that the longer it takes to gain relative superiority, the larger the AV, and hence the greater the likelihood that the frictions of war will intervene. In order to keep AV and low McRaven contends that SOF must integrate six principles into the planning, preparation, and execution of each mission. These principles include simplicity, security, repetition, surprise, speed, and purpose.⁸¹ In order to understand how they relate to the idea of relative superiority it is important to look at each in detail.

Understanding McRaven’s principles of Special Operations

Simplicity

The first of McRaven’s principles is Simplicity. He believes that the idea of simplicity is the most crucial of the principles but that it is also the most difficult to achieve. This challenge is because there are three elements of simplicity that must be considered. These include: limiting the number of objectives, having good intelligence, and being innovative.⁸²

In limiting the number of objectives, McRaven recognizes that the political or military situation will likely dictate the strategic or operational objectives of the mission. Planners will have to balance these with the realities of actually undertaking the mission and

any additional objectives that will have to be secured to ensure tactical success. Planners will have some latitude to determine the tactical objectives as long as the two coincide. However, they must be focused on limiting the number of objectives to only those that are vital to achieving the mission.⁸³

The second element of simplicity is good intelligence. As McRaven notes, “Intelligence simplifies a plan by reducing the unknown factors and the number of variables that must be considered.”⁸⁴

The third element that contributes to the idea of simplicity is innovation. McRaven believes that innovation simplifies a plan by helping to avoid or eliminate obstacles that would otherwise compromise surprise and/or complicate the rapid execution of the mission. McRaven points out that innovation is normally manifested in the use of new technology, but it can also include the application of unconventional tactics.⁸⁵

Security

The next principle is Security. McRaven argues that tight security is important to prevent the enemy from gaining an advantage through foreknowledge of the impending attack.⁸⁶ He accepts the fact that this may not always be possible because the nature of special operations is to attack fortified positions and therefore the enemy is likely to be prepared for any attack. In such situations he recommends that “it is not so much the impending mission that must be concealed as the timing, [and method of attack] and, to a lesser degree, the means of insertion.”⁸⁷ McRaven points out that the historical analysis revealed the enemy were usually adequately prepared to defend themselves against just the type of attack that occurred. Nevertheless, special operation assaults were successful because the enemy had to compromise between securing the target and not unduly impeding other ongoing

operations. These compromises created vulnerabilities that could be exploited.⁸⁸

Repetition

The third of McRaven's principles is Repetition. He believes that like routine, repetition in the preparation phase of the operation is indispensable in eliminating the barriers to success. He states that most SOF units perform standard mission profiles based on training that hones those tactical skills to a degree that allows quick reaction to almost any threat. However, those drills only work if the specific threat fits within the standard scenario for which the unit has been practicing.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, most special operation missions "vary enough from the standard scenario that new equipment and tactics must be brought to bear onto the problem." As a result, "constant repetition, as manifested in the form of training and pre-mission rehearsals, and is the link between the principle of simplicity in the planning phase and the principles of surprise and speed in the execution phase."⁹⁰

McRaven argues that repetition, by its very nature, improves speed on target and that it is essential to conduct at least one, and preferably two, full-dress rehearsals prior to the mission. He concludes that the need for a full-dress rehearsal is borne out time and again. His research shows that regardless of how good a plan looked on paper it always had to be put to the test to see if it could actually be carried out.⁹¹ Moreover, "when a certain aspect of an operation was not rehearsed, it failed during the actual mission." As such, he concludes that constant, realistic rehearsals will improve the attacking force's ability to quickly execute the mission, particularly under combat conditions.⁹²

Surprise

The fourth principle is the element of Surprise. According to McRaven, surprise simply means catching the enemy off guard. He suggests that in special operations surprise is gained through deception, timing, and taking advantage of the enemy's known vulnerabilities.⁹³ Deception is designed to redirect the enemy's attention away from the attacking force, or in some way delay his response long enough to overcome a crucial moment.⁹⁴ McRaven also believes that the timing of attack can be a critical factor in gaining surprise. "Most attacking forces prefer to assault a target at night, primarily because darkness provides cover, but also because at night-time the enemy is presumed to be tired, less vigilant, and more susceptible to surprise."⁹⁵

Despite its importance, McRaven cautions against an overreliance on surprise. He warns that tacticians sometimes believe that it is "surprise that gives them the decisive advantage over the enemy, as if merely catching the enemy unprepared would assure the attacking force of victory." McRaven goes on to say, "This is not the case. Surprise is useless and indeed unachievable without the other principles."⁹⁶

Speed

The fifth principle is Speed. McRaven writes that "In special operations missions, the concept of speed is simple. Get to your objective as fast as possible." He argues that any delay in achieving this principle will expand the assaulting force's area of vulnerability and decrease its opportunity to achieve Relative Superiority because over time the frictions of war work against the assaulting forces. He makes the point that in most of the successful cases he researched relative superiority was achieved within five minutes of the commencement of the assault and missions were completed within thirty minutes.⁹⁷

Purpose

The final principle is Purpose. Simply put, purpose is “understanding and then executing the prime objective of the mission regardless of emerging obstacles or opportunities.” McRaven asserts that there are two aspects of this principle. “First, the purpose [of the mission] must be clearly defined by the mission statement: rescue the POWs, [prisoners of war] destroy the dry dock, sink the battleship, etc.”⁹⁸ He emphasizes that “This mission statement should be crafted to ensure that in the heat of battle, no matter what else happens, the individual soldier understands the primary objective.”⁹⁹

The second aspect of the principle of purpose is personal commitment. In this respect, McRaven believes that a sense of purpose, namely the understanding of the mission’s objectives and a personal commitment to see those objectives achieved, is vital to achieving Relative Superiority. He concludes that although the principle of purpose is most apparent in the execution phase, all phases must focus on the purpose of the mission. Understanding the purpose will reduce the extraneous objectives, isolate the intelligence required, tailor operation security (OPSEC) requirements, focus the rehearsals, and in combat, ensure the efforts of the commander and the individual soldiers are centred on what is important, the mission.¹⁰⁰

In summary, McRaven believes that the principles of special operations outlined above are ones that SOF should employ in all direct action missions. To test this hypothesis an examination of how the principles applied in the raid that killed Bin Laden will be explored.

Comparing McRaven's Theoretical Construct to the Raid

There can be little question that the actual planning and mission execution of the 1 May 2011 Bin Laden raid by the SEALs was an outstanding success. But how did McRaven's theoretical construct for DA raids fit into the various aspects of the mission, if at all? In order to find the answer to this question we will now review each principle against the known events of the raid.

Simplicity

McRaven's principle of Simplicity consists of three elements including limited objectives, good intelligence and innovation. With regards to limited objectives, it is clear that at all levels of the American command structure there was only one objective: getting Bin Laden. The tactical level planning and preparations for the raid were also centred on that single problem of getting into Bin Laden's house and finding him as quickly as possible. As far as the actual plan was concerned, although, planners looked at a number of options including flying helicopters to a spot outside Abbottabad and letting the team sneak into the city on foot, eventually they all agreed that it made the most sense to simply fly directly into the compound at night.¹⁰¹

From an Intelligence perspective, the planners had access to a significant amount of detailed information including reports from "eyes on the objective" almost from the very beginning of preparations. This advantage was able to eliminate many unknowns for the assaulting force. For example, when planners contemplated tunnelling in or, at least, the possibility that Bin Laden might be able to use a tunnel to get out, they were able to access images provided to them by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency that showed that the compound sat in a flood basin, making tunnels highly unlikely. Although this finding eliminated a

possible, albeit unlikely, option for the assault force, it also ruled out an escape route for anyone in the compound.

As part of the preparations the U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency also created three-dimensional models of the house, and developed schedules detailing likely numbers and the gender of the occupants, as well as a pattern of life within the compound.

A key innovation of the mission dealt with the fact that the assault force would have to travel through 145 km of Pakistani airspace to and from the objective area all the time avoiding Pakistani radar. To overcome this problem a route was selected that took advantages of Pakistani vulnerabilities and mission simulators were created for JSOC pilots to train on so that they would be comfortable with the requirement. In addition, modified Black Hawk helicopters were used to dampen the aircraft signature and noise.

In all, simplicity was sought, maintained and achieved.

Security

McRaven argues that tight security is important to prevent the enemy from gaining an advantage through foreknowledge of the impending attack. In this case, tight security was important to prevent Bin Laden from gaining information about the impending attack and fleeing. Had he done so, it is unlikely the Americans would have been given another opportunity anytime soon. For this reason, knowledge of the surveillance mission and subsequent assault of the compound was confined to a select few individuals within the government and military. In order to maintain operational security initial planning and rehearsals were carried out in the United States and the team was not moved to its staging base in Afghanistan until it was necessary to do so.

Moreover, because of concerns that informants within the Pakistani Government might leak knowledge of the attack, the Americans decided not to tell any Pakistan officials of the impending mission.¹⁰² These measures proved effective as it was almost a year between the time that the Americans found and started tracking Bin Laden's courier al-Kuwaiti in the spring of 2010, and the May 2011 attack on the compound. The fact that no one discovered the preparations during this period is a testament to the people and organizations that were involved in the mission. In all, security was nurtured, maintained and achieved.

Repetition

According to McRaven, constant repetition, as manifested in training and pre-mission rehearsals, is the link between the principle of simplicity in the planning phase and the principles of surprise and speed in the execution phase. To achieve these linkages members of the assault team were moved to Nevada for detailed rehearsals combining the air and assault components of the force on a model of the compound weeks before the actual mission occurred. As the operation was to take place 145 kilometres inside of Pakistan's territory, at night, the rehearsal sequence, area and timings also provided for these considerations.

On the night of 21 April 2011, the commander of DevGru along with the mission pilots presented a brief on the raid to senior leadership.¹⁰³ After the briefing the SEAL team from Red Squadron boarded a Boeing C-17 Globemaster to Bagram Airfield, north of Kabul and quickly moved on to their staging base in Jalalabad to await further instructions.¹⁰⁴ As they waited they continued refining the plan in a one-acre replica of the compound going over every aspect of the operation day and night and continued this routine until they were given the order to carry out the mission.

Clearly, repetition was taken to heart and achieved.

Surprise

McRaven asserted that surprise simply means catching the enemy off guard and is gained through deception, timing, and taking advantage of the enemy's vulnerabilities. For this mission operational security was critical to achieving surprise. To maintain the element of surprise during the operation the Americans took advantage of vulnerabilities in Pakistan's air defence radar system to move 145 kilometres inside of Pakistan territory, at night, without being detected. They also used new stealth rotor technology for the helicopters to mask their presence. In keeping with McRaven's theory, the attack was carried out at night to take advantage of darkness as this provided cover and also presumed that people in the compound would be tired, and less vigilant.

In addition, from a deception perspective, the planners considered that because Abbottabad had military facilities in the area locals would assume the helicopters arriving in the dead of night were actually Pakistan aircraft visiting the Military Academy that was nearby. Finally, the Americans brought along an interpreter that remained outside the compound and kept curiosity seekers away. This allowed the element of surprise to be extended.

In the final analysis, methods to achieve surprise were actively sought and achieved.

Speed

In such operations it is important for the assaulting forces to get to their objective and complete the mission as quickly as possible because any delay will expand their AV and allow the frictions of war to work against the assaulting forces. McRaven points out that in the case studies where the attacking force was successful, relative superiority was achieved within the first five minutes

and the missions were completed within thirty minutes. By comparison, the direct action component of the Bin Laden raid took only approximately 15 minutes from landing to achieving the primary mission of killing Bin Laden. The next 23 minutes on the objective were spent photographing the bodies, confirming identification, blowing up the downed helicopter and collecting documents, computers, disc drives and any other material that could provide intelligence. Regardless of the timings, surprise was so complete that the assault force was able to complete the mission and withdraw with no response from Pakistani security forces

Undeniably, speed was a key planning component and it was achieved in execution.

Purpose

Purpose is defined by McRaven as understanding and then executing the prime objective of the mission regardless of emerging obstacles or opportunities. Although, much went right during the operation, things started to go very wrong once the force was over the target. The first Black Hawk was forced to conduct a controlled crash landing but was able to bury its nose into the dirt to prevent it from pitching to one side. Although shaken, once on the ground the SEALs onboard quickly clambered out of the destroyed aircraft into an outer courtyard. Meanwhile, the second helicopter reacted to the changing situation immediately and the pilot decided to land his aircraft outside of the objective to unload his cargo. What could have been a mission ending incident became little more than a minor adjustment to the plan and the mission continued. In this case the idea of purpose was maintained and combined with repetition to overcome an obstacle.

Conclusion

So what can we take away from this analysis of the operation? Whether actually influenced by McRaven's theories, or not, it is clear that the SEAL Team's successful assault on the Bin Laden compound adhered to McRaven's principles throughout the planning, preparation and execution phases of the raid. Moreover, an analysis of the raid appears to validate the notion of Relative Superiority laid out by McRaven and clearly supports his contention that each of the principles is interlinked over the three phases of the operation.

Due to the limited resistance encountered on the objective, combined with the assaulting force's ability to gain complete surprise, there was insufficient evidence to comment on the idea of area of vulnerability. Although it could be argued that had they stayed on the objective for an extended period of time and that the Pakistani military might have been able to prevent the team from leaving, in the end, whether by chance or planning, this outcome was avoided.

In the end, it is clear that the raid was a classic use of Special Operation Forces in the DA role and it does in fact validate McRaven's theory. Undoubtedly, the raid will likely become the model used to teach future generations of SOF commanders on how things are done right. Although, not applicable to all SOF operations, McRaven has provided the SOF community with the intellectual underpinnings to DA missions. As such, serious consideration should be given to institutionalizing these underpinnings. McRaven's theory has done more than stand the test of time, it has also withstood first contact with the enemy.

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Major Tony Balasevicius is an experienced infantry officer who has served in numerous operational and staff positions throughout his career. He recently completed postings as a member of the faculty (DS) within the Department of Applied Military Science at The Royal Military College (RMC) in Kingston and with the Director of Future Security Analysis at NDHQ, where he was the lead author for the Arctic Integrating Concept. Major Balasevicius is currently the Team Leader of the Concept Group within Chief of Force Development. Major Balasevicius is a graduate of the Canadian Forces Staff School, Canadian Land Forces Command and Staff College, the Canadian Forces Command and Staff College, as well as the Army Technical Staff Officers Programme. He also holds a MA in War Studies from RMC.

ENDNOTES

1 Gareth Jennings, "Classified Helicopter Probably Used," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 11 May 2011, 5.

2 DevGru was established in 1987 as the successor to SEAL Team Six, although it is still commonly referred to as SEAL Team Six, as the Navy's dedicated counter-terrorist unit. It recruits its approximately 200 personnel from the existing eight SEAL (Sea Air Land) teams. Alexander von Rosenbach, "DevGru: Bin Laden's Ultimate Nemesis," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 11 May 2011, 5.

3 For a detailed history of Bin Laden, the AQ and the American nexus, see Steve Coll, *Ghost Force. The Secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004); Jane Corban, *Al-Qaeda* (New York: Thunder Mouth's Press, 2003) ; and Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda. Global Network of Terror* (New York: Berkley Books, 2003).

4 Gunaratna, 21-23. Purportedly, the Bin Laden family made as much as \$5 billion dollars in the construction industry in 1967, when Osama bin Laden's father died, he inherited an estimated \$25-30 million.

5 Gunaratna, 16.

6 Coll, 204; Gunaratna, 21-31; and Corban, 19. Al-Qaeda translates to "the base" in Arabic.

7 According to Gunaratna, "after being warned that the government was planning to arrest him, Osama left Saudi Arabia for Pakistan in April 1991, where he launched a campaign against the land of his birth. Gunaratna, 29.

8 In his fight to right the wrongs in the world, Bin Laden came to the conclusion that innocent civilians, including women and children were legitimate targets of *jihad*.

9 Gunaratna, 44-47.

10 Ibid., 193.

11 Billy Waugh with Tim Keown, *Hunting the Jackal* (New York: Avon Books, 2004), 178.

12 Ibid., 184. Waugh asserted that “You have to remember, Bin Laden was next to nothing at this time. We didn’t have any reason to believe he was capable of mass destruction against the United States. We knew he was angry, we knew he hated us, and we knew he was moving a lot of money around. Those facts were enough for the CIA to find out what he was all about.” Ibid., 203.

13 Corbin, 45-49, 59, 86-89.

14 Corbin, 60-63.

15 Ibid., 66; and Gunaratna, 9. Once he had settled in he quickly came to the conclusion that he had found his real home. He believed that Afghanistan under the rule of Mullah Omar and the Taliban was the only true Islamic country in the Muslim world.

16 Bin Laden and his Arab fighters also assisted the Taliban in killing thousands of Hazaras who threatened to overrun Mazar-e-Sharif during the civil war between the Taliban and what would become known as the Northern Alliance – a loose collection of warlords opposed to Taliban rule.

17 Corbin, 66.

18 Cited in Corbin, 70.

19 Coll, 343.

20 Ibid., 403-405, 423. The FBI placed him on their Ten Most Wanted list on 7 June 1999.

21 At the same time the Americans also launched 13 cruise missiles into a chemical factory in Khartoum, Sudan suspected of developing chemical weapons. Two years later CIA contracted foreign fighters attempted an ambush on a Bin Laden convoy also in Afghanistan but failed to hit the vehicle in which Bin Laden was riding. *Ibid.*, 411.

22 See *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1193*, 28 August 1998; *Resolution 1214*, 8 December 1998; *Resolution 1267*, 15 October 1999; *Resolution 1333*, 19 December 2000; *Resolution 1363*, 30 July 2001; Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 80; and Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002), xiii and 289.

23 See *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1193*, 28 August 1998; *Resolution 1214*, 8 December 1998; *Resolution 1267*, 15 October 1999; *Resolution 1333*, 19 December 2000; and *Resolution 1363*, 30 July 2001.

24 Cited in United Kingdom, Parliament, House of Commons Library, International Affairs & Defence Section, Research Paper 01/72, 11 September 2001; the response, 31 October 2002, 17, <<http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/re-search/rp2001/rp01-112.pdf>>, accessed 7 March 2007.

25 North Atlantic Council Statement, 12 September 2001, Press Release (2001) 124, <<http://www.nat.int/docu/pr/2001/p01-124e.htm>>, accessed 7 March 2007; and NATO, *NATO Handbook* (Brussels: NATO Office of Information and Press, 1995), 232.

26 Statement by NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson, 4 October 2001, <<http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2001/s011004a.htm>>, accessed 7 March 2007. See also Tom Lansford, *All for One: Terrorism, NATO, and the United State* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 126.

27 See *United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1368*, 12 September 2001 and *UNSCR 1373*, 28 September 2001. Interestingly, the UN

had already in essence given its approval to NATO on 28 September when they invoked Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, which authorized the use of military force.

28 Maulvi Mohammad Haqqani, a Taliban fighter at the time conceded, "I never thought the Taliban would collapse so quickly and cruelly under U.S. bombs." He lamented, "The bombs cut down our men like a reaper harvesting wheat." Maulvi Abdul Rehman Akhundzada cited in Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau, "The Taliban in their Own Words," *Newsweek.com*, 5 October 2009, 36.

29 Corbin, 269-273.

30 Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban. Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 220.

31 Anderson Cooper 360, CNN, 6 May 2011. See Corbin, 362-367 for information on the capture of Khalid.

32 Sonia Verma, "The intelligence trail that led to the killing of the al-Qaeda kingpin," *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 2011. The same year al-Libi was captured, 2005, was the same year construction on Bin Laden's compound began. <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/americas/the-intelligence-trail-that-led-to-the-killing-of-the-al-qaeda-kingpin/article2007202/>>, accessed 5 May 2011.

33 Adam Goldman and Matt Apuzzo, "One unwary phone call led US to bin Laden doorstep," *Associated Press*, 2 May 2011. <http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110502/ap_on_re_us/us_bin_laden_hunt_for_bin_laden;_ylt=AhGOTXditSwDIrwYZH7rZzQUewgF;_ylu=X3oDMTNoOWs1ZTFhBGFzc2V0A2FwLzlwMTEwNTAyL3VzX2JpbI9sYWRIblI9odW50X2ZvcI9iaW5fbGFkZW4EY2NvZGUDb2ZmcHpmMzAEY3BvcwM1BH-BvcwM1BHNIYwN5blI90b3Bfc3RvcmlIcwRzbGsDb25ldW53YXJ5cGhv>, accessed 5 May 2011. Apparently, al-Kuwaiti would travel 90 minutes from the Bin Laden compound before he would put a battery into his cell phone or make a call. Anderson Cooper 360, *CNN*, 6 May 2011.

34 Ibid.

35 Nicholas Schmidle. *Getting Bin Laden: What happened that night in Abbottabad* <http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/08/08/110808fa_fact_schmidle?currentPage=1>, accessed 3 August 2011.

36 "The Death of Bin Laden," *CBC Passionate Eye*, 14 May 2011.

37 Schmidle, *Getting Bin Laden*.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 <http://www.whorunsgov.com/Profiles/Adm._William_McRaven>, accessed 1 August 2011.

41 Sonia Verma, "The intelligence trail that led to the killing of the al-Qaeda kingpin," *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 2011, <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/americas/the-intelligence-trail-that-led-to-the-killing-of-the-al-qaeda-kingpin/article2007202/>>, accessed 5 May 2011.

42 Department of Defense. *U.S. Special Operations Forces: 1992 Posture Statement*. (Darby, PA: Diane Publishing, 1963), 11.

43 Cindy C. Combs and Martin W. Slann. *Encyclopedia of Terrorism*. (New York: Facts On File, 2007), 288.

44 Fred J. Pushies, *Weapons of the Navy SEALs*. (St. Paul, MN: MBI Pub. Co, 2004), 25.

45 <<http://www.global-report.org/tv?video=9978>>, accessed 1 August 2011.

46 Ibid.

47 Combs and Slann, 288.

48 Ken Dilanian, "CIA led U.S. special forces mission against Osama bin Laden," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 May 2011, <<http://www.latimes.com/news/politics/la-pn-osama-bin-laden-cia-20110502,0,6466214.story?track=rss>>, accessed 19 May 2011.

49 Aleem Maqbool, "Osama Bin Laden, al-Qaeda leader, dead – Barack Obama," *BBC News*, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-13256676>>, accessed 6 May 2011.

50 Schmidle.

51 Ibid. Despite JSOC's lead role in Neptune's Spear, the mission officially remained a CIA covert operation. After describing the operation, the briefers fielded questions.

52 Schmidle.

53 "Inside the Mission – Getting Bin Laden," *CNN*, 14 May 2011.

54 Ibid.

55 James Hardy, "US, Pakistan Split Over Raid," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 11 May 2011, 5. This is not surprising since U.S. officials believe that Pakistan continues to support militants who attack U.S. troops in Afghanistan and actively undermine U.S. intelligence operations targeting Al-Qaeda inside Pakistan. The Pakistan Foreign Minister in turn condemned the U.S. raid on Abbotabad as an "unauthorized unilateral action" and expressed "its deep concerns and reservations on the manner in which the U.S. carried out this operation without prior information or authorization from the Government of Pakistan." Ibid. In the aftermath of the raid Pakistan came under immense criticism. Either their intelligence organ was incompetent or playing a "double game."

56 Paul Koring, "Clinton says Pakistani co-operation helped lead to bin Laden compound," <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/americas/clinton-says-pakistani-co-operation-helped-lead-to-bin-laden-compound/article2006541/page3/>>, accessed 5 May 2011. In fact, on 15 June 2011, *The New York Times* reported that Pakistan

arrested five people, including a serving Pakistani Army major, for assisting the CIA with the planning of the raid that killed Bin Laden. Farhan Bokhari, "Pakistan denies arresting CIA informers," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 22 June 2011, 6.

57 "Inside the Mission – Getting Bin Laden," *CNN*, 14 May 2011.

58 Aleem Maqbool, "Osama Bin Laden, al-Qaeda leader, dead – Barack Obama," *BBC News*, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-13256676>>, accessed 6 May 2011.

59 Media reported that "the SEALs were ready to shoot their way out of Pakistan." *CNN Live*, 9 May 11.

60 According to Schmidle, "The high walls of the compound and the warm temperatures had caused the Black Hawk to descend inside its own rotor wash—a hazardous aerodynamic situation known as 'settling with power.' In North Carolina, this potential problem had not become apparent, because the chain-link fencing used in rehearsals had allowed air to flow freely."

61 Daniel Wasserbly, "Uncovering the Mission," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 11 May 2011, 4.

62 *CTV Nightly News*, 4 May 2011.

63 The White House originally reported that the raid involved a 40 minute firefight and that Bin Laden had resisted. They corrected the story within 48 hours. Al-Qaeda's official magazine *Inspire* came out in mid-July with a new addition of its magazine that provided a completely different version of events. It insisted, "He [Bin Laden] confronted them [SEALs], his weapons against theirs with his, and his strength against theirs, and he accepted the challenge of those who came out with their fancy equipment, machinery, weapons, aircrafts and troops, all haughty and pompous." It continued, "His determination did not weaken in front of them, nor was he sapped of strength. Rather, he stood and confronted them face to face like a firm mountain, and continued to

engage them in a fierce battle... after which he excused himself and fulfilled the trust, receiving bullets of treachery and infidelity.” See Lee Ferran, “New Al Qaeda Magazine: Bin Laden ‘Confronted’ SEALs in ‘Fierce Battle,’” *ABC News - The Blotter*, 19 July 2011, <<http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/al-qaeda-inspire-magazine-pushes-personal-jihad-bomb/story?id=14105572>>, accessed 21 July 2011.

64 There has been some debate as to whether this was a clear “kill” mission. Most official spokesmen have stated the mission was a “kill or capture” mission. CIA Director Leon Panetta stated clearly during a PBS NewsHour interview, “The authority here was to kill bin Laden.” However, he did clarify, “Obviously under the rules of engagement, if he in fact had thrown up his hands, surrendered and didn’t appear to be representing any kind of threat then they were to capture him. But they had full authority to kill him.” Nonetheless, other U.S. officials who have remained anonymous have insisted that it was a kill mission with no desire to try and capture bin Laden. One senior U.S. official stated, “Unless he [Bin Laden] was naked with his hands up he was going to be taken out.” *CTV Nightly News*, 4 May 2011. This is actually not surprising as a captured Bin Laden provides the terrorist king-pin a stage to continue his attack against the West and would invite protests and attacks in his name. It was also reported that Bin Laden was ready to run. He had 500 Euros and two phone numbers sewn into his clothes. *CNN Live*, 4 May 2011.

65 Each phase of the operation was given an alphabetical descriptor so those monitoring the progress of the raid could determine its progress. The letter ‘G’ represented the phase that indicated the capture or killing of Bin Laden.

66 Schmidle.

67 CIA officials had turned a windowless seventh-floor conference room at Langley, Virginia, into a command centre for the operation, from where Leon Panetta passed on details to the President and his advisers.

68 Sonia Verma, "The intelligence trail that led to the killing of the al-Qaeda kingpin," *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 2011, <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/americas/the-intelligence-trail-that-led-to-the-killing-of-the-al-qaeda-kingpin/article2007202/>>, accessed 5 May 2011.

69 Ibid.

70 Alister Bull, "Factbox: Details of the Osama bin Laden raid," <http://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2011/05/13/Helmet-cams-reveal-bin-Laden-raid-details/UPI-74431305315597/>, accessed 28 May 2011.

71 Pornographic material was also discovered, but its presence was played down. American officials felt that there was nothing to be gained by trying to discredit Bin Laden in this manner. In fact, they believed it would back-fire as a large segment of the international audience would accuse the Americans of fabricating the story.

72 Stephen Braun, "Needy Al Qaeda turns to ransoms," *Toronto Star*, 21 June 2011, A16.

73 CTV News, 7 May 2011; and "The Death of Bin Laden," *CBC Passionate Eye*, 14 May 2011.

74 Aleem Maqbool, "Osama Bin Laden, al-Qaeda leader, dead – Barack Obama," *BBC News*, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-13256676>>, accessed 6 May 2011.

75 In August 2011, McRaven was promoted to full admiral and appointed commander of USSOFCOM.

76 <http://www.whorunsgov.com/Profiles/Adm._William_McRaven>, accessed 1 August 2011.

77 William H. McRaven. *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare : Theory and Practice*. (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1995), 2.

78 Ibid., 4. He suggests that the value of the concept lies in its ability to “illustrate which positive forces influence the success of a mission and to show how the frictions of war affect the achievement of the goal.”

79 Ibid., 4. The actual German assault force that made it to the objective was approximately 78 people strong. The Belgian fortress garrison, not including other troops available to reinforce the fortress within 24 hours, totalled 700 men. In the case of the Bin Laden raid, the threat was not of an exceptionally large personal protection force for Bin Laden, but rather the intervention of Pakistani security forces.

80 Ibid., 5. He concludes that “If relative superiority is lost, it is difficult to regain.”

81 Ibid.,6. McRaven feels that these principles are interconnected and rely on each other for support. For example, he suggest, “if a plan is not simple, it will be difficult to conceal the operation’s intent and even more difficult to rehearse the mission. And if the operation is difficult to conceal and rehearse, it will be nearly impossible to execute with surprise, speed, and purpose.”

82 Ibid., 11.

83 Ibid., 12-13

84 Ibid., 12.

85 Ibid., 13.

86 Ibid., 14

87 Ibid., 14.

88 Ibid., 15.

89 Ibid., 15.

90 Ibid., 15.

91 Ibid., 16.

92 Ibid., 16.

93 Ibid., 17.

94 Ibid., 17.

95 Ibid., 18.

96 Ibid., 19.

97 Ibid., 19.

98 Ibid., 21.

99 Ibid., 21.

100 Ibid., 22-23.

101 Schmidle.

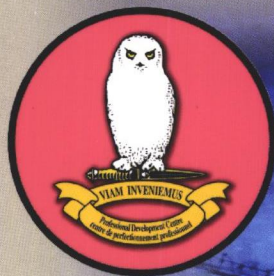
102 Paul Koring, "Clinton says Pakistani co-operation helped lead to bin Laden compound," <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/americas/clinton-says-pakistani-co-operation-helped-lead-to-bin-laden-compound/article2006541/page3/>>, accessed 5 May 2011. In fact, on 15 June 2011, *The New York Times* reported that Pakistan arrested five people, including a serving Pakistani Army major, for assisting the CIA with the planning of the raid that killed Bin Laden. Farhan Bokhari, "Pakistan denies arresting CIA informers," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 22 June 2011, 6.

103 Ibid. Despite JSOC's lead role in Neptune's Spear, the mission officially remained a CIA covert operation. After describing the operation, the briefers fielded questions.

104 Schmidle.

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