



## "Any President Would Have Done" the Same as Obama?

Tuesday 24 January 2012

by: *Robert Weiner and Richard Mann, Naples News | Op-ed*

During recent interviews, presidential hopeful **Mitt Romney** said "any president" would have given the order that launched the raid that killed **Osama bin Laden** last year.

Republican candidates know they cannot be opposed to something as popular as the capture and killing of bin Laden. Instead, Romney tried to make President **Barack Obama's** decision seem routine.

The problem is that it is simply not true. When placed in a similar situation with parallel choices, George W. Bush, Obama's predecessor, failed to succeed because he made the opposite decision. In December 2001, Bush had the chance to capture bin Laden in Tora Bora, Afghanistan. He was faced with the choice of doing it ourselves or involving a foreign government, and blew it by asking the Afghans to do it. Whether by ineptness or intent, the Afghani troops allowed bin Laden to escape.

When Obama was questioned as to why he did not inform the Pakistanis about the Abbottabad raid, he said, "I didn't tell most people here in the White House. I didn't tell my own family. It was that important for us to maintain operational security." When asked during the 2008 campaign debates what he would do with "actionable intelligence," he said he would have the United States "act unilaterally" rather than in consort with foreign agencies if necessary to capture bin Laden. That's precisely what he did.

The Bush decisions causing the Tora Bora misfire against bin Laden are documented. According to a 2009 Senate Foreign Relations Committee report with no dissenting views, "Tora Bora Revisited: How We Failed To Get Bin Laden and Why It Matters Today," "The U.S. command chose to rely on airstrikes and untrained Afghan militias." The committee says its review "removes any lingering doubts and makes it clear that Osama bin Laden was within our grasp at Tora Bora." The committee chairman expressed the "hope that we can learn from the mistakes of the past." Obama did.

When Bush administration officials had actionable intelligence to get bin Laden, they made the wrong choice — letting the Afghans take charge. It was a night-and-day difference from what Obama did with the Pakistanis in Abbottabad.

Obama recognized that bin Laden's compound could not exist without local and likely some kind of government cooperation.

During the years after the Tora Bora debacle, the Bush administration went even further in the opposite direction from Obama's later actions. Bush closed the CIA's unit on bin Laden. In contrast, the Obama administration reprioritized the search for bin Laden. Bush said, "I truly am not that concerned about him. I am deeply concerned about Iraq ... . I really don't spend that much time on him, to be honest with you."

The notion recently raised by Karl Rove, Condoleezza Rice and Dick Cheney that Bush deserves a share of the credit for Obama's bin Laden operation is ridiculous and should be recognized as sour grapes.

Obama's team had as key players Vice President Joe Biden, a former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Secretary of

State Hillary Clinton, a former Armed Services Committee member as senator, and their emphasis on using intelligence and special operations over a large military footprint ultimately proved successful. Despite 100,000 troops and another 100,000 contractors, the Taliban actually grew stronger. It was the surgical raid by a small team that defeated the man behind the 9/11 attacks.

Biden and Clinton's influence is obvious in the now-famous White House photos and video of the White House "watch party." They are close to the screen in the video monitor of real-time action in Abbottabad during the takedown. Biden stands up, makes a phone call and says, "We got him. We killed him."

Obama made what former Defense Secretary Robert Gates called "one of the most courageous calls, decisions, that I think I've ever seen." The operation succeeded because Obama did not do it the way "other presidents would have" and Bush had done in the past.

The debate moderators and news media as a whole have only allowed the Republicans to differentiate from each other and not from the president's successes when it comes to foreign policy. With the primary field coming to Florida on Jan. 31, it is time for the moderators to ask the Republicans if they have any real alternative that would have succeeded as Obama did in taking down bin Laden, Anwar al-Awlaki or Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, or, for that matter, on domestic policy, where Obama reversed the Bush bleeding of 750,000 jobs per month, rescued the auto industry and the nation's financial institutions, and put the country back to 22 straight months of increased jobs and improved gross domestic product.

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