

Experts Explore Ripple Effect of Bin Laden's Death

✖ There are many questions left unanswered in the wake of Osama bin Laden's death.

Beyond the particulars of bin Laden's burial—the White House could release photos today—how will the demise of this terrorist mastermind impact the Middle East revolution, if at all? What does this mean for human rights? Is Pakistan really an ally or has the Muslim nation been playing both sides?

Charisma News turned to university thought leaders to get some answers to these and other lingering questions.

Thomas Gibson, professor of anthropology at the University of Rochester, has taught on Islam and global politics for the past decade in response to Sept. 11. He calls al-Qaida a decentralized network of “religiously inspired revolutionaries” who failed to achieve their objectives in their home countries. This network, he says, was kept alive by the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq because it made the U.S. appear as the greatest threat to ordinary Muslims rather than their own corrupt governments.

“Recent pro-democracy uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria have made both ‘U.S. imperialism’ and radical Islamic revolutionaries seem less relevant to ordinary people. It is now clear to most observers that Arab dictators have been using the threat of Islamic extremism as an excuse to extract resources from the U.S. to maintain their power,” Gibson says. “So-called terrorist groups in South Asia are a different matter, and many of them are, in fact, tactical fronts for the Pakistani military's struggle with India.”

Gibson says there is good evidence that the Pakistani military

has deliberately played both sides in the Afghan civil war to extract military resources from Washington. The fact that bin Laden's villa in Abbotabad was just two miles from the Pakistani Military Academy and just 30 miles from the capital of Pakistan, he says, indicates that they have probably been using him as a bargaining chip for the past 10 years.

"The Obama administration may well use this as an opportunity to decrease its profile in the region, and Pakistan may turn to China, its other traditional ally in its confrontation with India," Gibson says. "The Bush administration's attempt to cast foreign policy as driven by a 'Global War on Terror' can perhaps be finally laid to rest along with Osama bin Laden."

Mark Ensalaco, director of the Human Rights Studies Program at the University of Dayton, doesn't expect bin Laden's death to be the end—until senior clerics preach that blowing yourselves up in the name of martyrdom and Islam isn't acceptable.

"Bin Laden is dead, but his movement is dying as well. Everywhere he preached his message has turned into a disaster for him," says Ensalaco, author of "Middle Eastern Terrorism: From Black September to September 11." "You see that in the pro-democracy movements in the Middle East. I would advise President Obama not to show the photos. That's beneath us."

Pete W. Moore, associate professor of political science at Case Western Reserve University, has a different take: The bin Laden killing is more important for politics in Washington, D.C., than events in the Middle East and wider Muslim world.

"Bin Laden and his organization were never a serious political or social force in the region, as assumed by leaders in Washington and the dwindling number of Arab autocrats and monarchs who today cling to power," Moore says. "What gave his organization prominence was the claim by Washington and its allies that al-Qaida was behind so many threats to the U.S., the majority of which turned out not to be so. Sadly, that

hype was used to justify deadly decisions to invade and bomb numerous countries, imprison and torture people and curb the rights of American citizens.”