

Found in Abbottabad: 5 Year Anniversary of the UBL Raid

In the early morning hours of May 2, 2011, a US military raid on an al-Qa`ida compound killed Usama Bin Ladin, America's most wanted terrorist. The mission's success was the culmination of many years of complex, thorough, and highly advanced intelligence operations and analyses led by the CIA with support from partners across the Intelligence Community (IC).

Shortly after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, the CIA began collecting information on key individuals connected to or providing support to Bin Ladin. Reporting made clear early on that he communicated via a network of couriers. It was years later, however, before more was known about one key courier than simply his *kunya*, or operational pseudonym. Analysts then worked several more years before identifying the area in Pakistan where the courier was believed to be located.

By late 2010, further intelligence enabled the identification of the courier's compound in Abbottabad, a town in Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province (formerly the Northwest Frontier Province), about 35 miles north of Islamabad. The compound and its main residence had extensive security features unusual for the area: high walls topped with barbed wire, double entry gates, opaque windows, no apparent internet or telephone connections, and all trash burned rather than collected. Moreover, the two registered owners did not appear to work or have an income that would allow them to afford such a large residence. This led the IC to assess that the compound was probably being used to hide Bin Ladin, as well as the courier.

Intense training for the raid began, including the building of an exact life-size replica of the compound with movable interior walls to prepare the assault teams for any internal layout they might encounter.

The operation on May 2nd, authorized by the President on April 29th, was a surgical raid by a small team of special operations forces designed to minimize collateral damage and to pose as little risk as possible to noncombatants on the compound or to Pakistani civilians in the neighborhood.

The helicopters arrived at the Abbottabad compound at 0030 local on May 2; one crashed, but the assault continued without delay. Bin Ladin was found and killed within 9 minutes. In the aftermath, Bin Ladin was positively identified via several independent means.

Timeline of the Raid

April 29

8:20 a.m. EDT — President Obama meets with national security advisers and give the go-ahead for the mission.

3:00 p.m. EDT — National security adviser Tom Donilon convenes meeting to complete planning.

May 1

1:22 p.m. EDT — DCIA Panetta, acting on president's orders, directs ADM McRaven to move forward with the operation

2:00 p.m EDT — President Obama reviews final preparations with principals in the White House Situation Room.

3:30 p.m. EDT — 2 helicopters descend on compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, N of Islamabad. 1 crashes, but assault continued without delay.

3:32 p.m. EDT — President Obama, in the Situation Room, receives up to the minute reports on the situation on the ground in Abbottabad.

3:39 p.m. EDT — Bin Ladin found on 3rd floor and killed.

3:39 p.m. – 4:10 p.m. EDT – Assault Team retrieves large quantity of materials from compound for intelligence analysis

3:50 p.m. EDT — President Obama receives confirmation of tentative positive ID of Bin Ladin

4:10 p.m. EDT —Crashed helicopter is un-flyable and is destroyed. Assault Team leaves compound with Bin Ladin's body and gathered intel.

7:01 p.m. EDT — President Obama receives confirmation of "high probability" positive ID of Bin Ladin

8:30 p.m. EDT — President Obama receives further briefings.

11:35 p.m. EDT — President Obama speaks to the nation from the East Room.

May 2

1:10 a.m. EDT — Burial ceremony for Bin Ladin begins on the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson in the north Arabian Sea.

Approx. 11 a.m. EDT — DNA evidence confirms that the dead body is that of Bin Laden.

Materials Recovered:

The large quantity of materials collected from the compound required time for a thorough review. The CIA led a multi-agency task force to prioritize, catalogue, and analyze them for intelligence about al-Qa`ida's affiliates, plans and intentions, and current threats. The collected materials indicated that Bin Ladin remained an active leader in al-Qa`ida, providing strategic, operational, and tactical instructions to the organization. Though separated from many al-Qa`ida members in remote areas of the region, he was far from a figurehead. Bin Ladin remained in charge while in hiding.

The Director of National Intelligence recently **posted on the DNI public website** the second tranche of released Usama Bin Ladin documents that were captured during the raid. From the documents, analysts learned that Bin Ladin had been planning to leave his Abbottabad abode.

On January 14, 2011—three and a half months before the raid that killed him—Bin Ladin wrote a formal letter to the two brothers who had been hiding him for eight years. Apparently, the pressures of hiding Bin Ladin and his family had led the brothers to use harsh words in open argument days before with the al-Qa`ida leader, who in his written response expressed profound gratitude to the brothers, acknowledging the “heavy burden” of their “huge responsibility” for his safety.

In other letters to relatives and friends, Bin Ladin confirmed that the brothers sheltering him were “exhausted” from the effort. On February 2, 2011, Bin Ladin wrote to an al-Qa`ida confidante that the brothers had “for a long time demanded separation from us,” that Bin Ladin had agreed in writing that they would retire and hand over to others the duty of hiding him and his family, and that this would involve moving to another location. The target date for the move and changeover was September 2011.

Of course, Bin Ladin’s plans to move from the Abbottabad compound were not known to CIA when the IC and our military partners discovered his hiding place in August 2010; nor were President Obama, other top US policymakers, and the leaders of the IC aware of these plans as they studied the intelligence on the compound during the many months leading up to the raid. Had the decision to conduct the raid been delayed, this story might have had a very different ending.

The Death of Bin Ladin

The death of Usama Bin Ladin marked a significant victory in the US-led campaign to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qa`ida. He was al-Qa`ida’s founder and only *amir*, or commander, in its history until his death. He was largely responsible for the organization’s mystique, its ability to raise money and attract new recruits, and its focus on the United States as a target for terrorist attacks.

The daring raid that ensured Bin Ladin would never kill again was a team effort, the product of increased integration within the IC and of close collaboration with our military partners. The CIA was at the center of it all, driving the collection of vital information, assessing each piece of data, and analyzing all sources to produce the compelling intelligence case that led US forces to Abbottabad.