

# OTTAWA CITIZEN

## **We have a duty to defend our values**

By Brian Lee Crowley, The Ottawa Citizen, May 9, 2011

Even in death, mass murderer Osama bin Laden has the power to attract followers among the weak-minded and morally naive.

While most of us are enjoying a moment of quiet satisfaction, the blogosphere and the media are alive with people writhing in self-righteous indignation at the U.S. military operation to take down one of their country's sworn enemies and the mastermind of repeated attacks on U.S. citizens and interests. On Facebook, for example, much is being made of a quotation attributed (wrongly) to Martin Luther King: "I mourn the loss of thousands of precious lives, but I will not rejoice in the death of one."

Apparently it is wrong for western democracies to take action to defend their interests and values, while attacks on us must not be condemned but rather excused because of some crackpot analysis of the "root causes" of our attackers' dissatisfactions. Poppycock.

Defending our most cherished values — democracy, individual freedom, personal responsibility, tolerance of difference, the rule of law, the sovereignty of individual conscience — is not merely necessary, but a noble and entirely defensible cause.

Contrary to the fantasies of numerous bloggers ("The Americans still don't get that it was all their fault in the first place"), it is precisely the appeal of the universal values that we struggle to embody (however imperfectly) that makes us objects of hatred by the world's zealots, and the reason why our existence threatens their plans.

The fact is, when given a chance, the world's poor and dispossessed flock to western societies. If Canada and the United States were to open our borders to the world, our countries would look like Wal-Mart on a Saturday morning. We are the great alternative to the totalitarian and authoritarian enthusiasms to which much of the world is prey. And that means that the light we shine on the world is a threat to those dark designs, a constant reminder that freedom and human dignity are the alternative to George Orwell's boot stamping on the face of humanity.

We see the appeal of our values in the Arab Spring unfolding throughout the Middle East. No matter how events there evolve, it is clear that what brought hundreds of thousands of people into Tahrir Square and other places like it was chiefly our values, the universal yearning to live one's life according to one's lights, to choose one's rulers rather than to be intimidated or threatened by them, to bring everyone under the rule of law, so that no one makes the rules while escaping their reach.

But here's the challenge: as Osama bin Laden himself observed when justifying his attacks on America, "When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature they will like the strong horse." He meant, of course, that weak and decadent America would be overcome by the onslaught of the strong horse of radical Islam.

It was Osama who turned out to be on the broken-down nag. But he still had to be dispatched to the knacker's yard. Because the very worst thing you can do with a bully is to let him think he's got you on the run.

If you don't confront your tormentor, not only will he return again and again to humiliate and extort you, but others will observe your weakness and vulnerability and will soon be bullying you too. Like Gulliver, you end up in thrall to the Lilliputians, your strength dissipated by a thousand threads.

One of our great conundrums is that we prize freedom and tolerance, but constantly face people who would turn our values into weapons to be used against us. We saw it in the Second World War and in the Cold War, and we see it in the struggle with bin Laden and his ilk. To protect the values that animate western society, we must see off these threats, and never leave the impression that we are too weak to respond to provocation, or so tolerant that we cannot recognize a mortal threat when it looks us in the eyes.

Bin Laden threw down the gauntlet. He used the institutions of freedom to attack freedom, murdered thousands in a military operation, took full responsibility for his actions and dared America to respond. The right response was the methodical search for the author of this outrage and his deliberate elimination.

Will his death rally others to his cause? Perhaps. But letting the world's thugs believe that they can attack western societies with impunity is far worse.

As a wise man once remarked, democracy is not a mutual suicide pact. We have a duty to protect our values and our institutions from their enemies. Those who would follow in Osama's footsteps are on notice: No matter how long it takes, there will be consequences.

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