

War against Islam? Bin Laden's documents show Obama was right, and Gingrich and Santorum were wrong.

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Torturing Bin Laden

Al-Qaida documents show Obama was right about targeting Islam, and Gingrich and Santorum were wrong.



Osama Bin Laden

Photo by CNN/AFP/Getty Images

On May 26, 2010, John Brennan, Obama's counterterrorism adviser, gave a speech outlining the new language:

Our enemy is not "terrorism" because terrorism is but a tactic. ... Nor do we describe our enemy as "jihadists" or "Islamists" because jihad is a holy struggle, a legitimate tenet of Islam,

meaning to purify oneself or one's community, and there is nothing holy or legitimate or Islamic about murdering innocent men, women and children. Indeed, characterizing our adversaries this way would actually be counterproductive. It would play into the false perception that they are religious leaders defending a holy cause, when in fact they are nothing more than murderers, including the murder of thousands upon thousands of Muslims.

The next day, the White House released its National Security Strategy. The document declared:

The United States is waging a global campaign against al-Qa'ida and its terrorist affiliates. To disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qa'ida and its affiliates, we are pursuing a strategy that ... denies al-Qa'ida safe haven, and builds positive partnerships with Muslim communities around the world. ... We will always seek to delegitimize the use of terrorism and to isolate those who carry it out. Yet this is not a global war against a tactic—terrorism—or a religion—Islam. We are at war with a specific network, al-Qa'ida, and its terrorist affiliates who support efforts to attack the United States, our allies, and partners.

Conservative pundits ridiculed the administration, arguing that we should define our enemies as soldiers of Allah because that was how they described themselves. Republican politicians agreed. "Radical Islam poses the single greatest threat to America today," said Lamar Smith, the ranking Republican on the House Judiciary Committee. Yet "the Obama administration refuses to acknowledge the link between Radical Islam and the terror attempts of the past nine months." Peter King, the ranking Republican on the House Homeland Security Committee, chimed in:

Even though we have been at war against radical Islamic jihadists since they killed almost 3,000 Americans on 9/11, the Obama Administration fails to even mention such terms. ... John Brennan and others in the Obama Administration ... have used this critically important National

Security Strategy as another opportunity to satisfy the politically correct left wing ...

Over the next several months, King and other Republicans escalated the assault on Islam, whipping up hysteria over the “Ground Zero mosque.” Soon, their cause was taken up by Republican presidential candidates. Newt Gingrich led the way, and Rick Santorum followed. “We’re fighting a war against radical Islam,” Santorum asserted in a debate on Nov. 22, 2011. In a debate on Jan. 7, 2012, Santorum complained: “This president has sanitized every defense document, everything. There’s no—the word ‘radical Islam’ doesn’t appear anywhere. Why? Because ... we’re trying to fight this politically correct war and not being honest with the American public as to who the enemy is.”

Usually, this kind of macho windbagery can’t be falsified. But this time, Allah was merciful. On May 2, 2011, Obama, in a fit of political correctness, sent a SEAL team to kill Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The SEALs, upon entering Bin Laden’s compound, inexcusably failed to call him a radical Islamist. They did, however, shoot him dead and make off with a haul of al-Qaida documents. Some of these documents have now been declassified, and David Ignatius of the Washington Post has just published the first eyewitness account of them. He writes:

Bin Laden’s biggest concern was al-Qaeda’s media image among Muslims. He worried that it was so tarnished that, in a draft letter ... he argued that the organization should find a new name. The al-Qaeda brand had become a problem, bin Laden explained, because Obama administration officials “have largely stopped using the phrase ‘the war on terror’ in the context of not wanting to provoke Muslims,” and instead promoted a war against al-Qaeda. The organization’s full name was “Qaeda al-Jihad,” bin Laden noted, but in its shorthand version, “this name reduces the feeling of Muslims that we belong to them.” ... Bin Laden ruminated about “mistakes” and “miscalculations” by affiliates in Iraq and elsewhere that had killed Muslims, even in mosques. He told Atiyah to warn every emir, or regional leader, to avoid these “unnecessary civilian casualties,” which were hurting the organization. “Making these mistakes is a great issue,” he stressed, arguing that spilling “Muslim blood” had resulted in “the alienation of most of the nation [of Islam] from the [Mujaheddin].”

There you have it. Gingrich, Santorum, and their pals were wrong. Obama and Brennan were right. So was George W. Bush in his steadfast refusal to blame Islam for 9/11. Bin Laden wanted a religious war. Bush and Obama refused to let him have it. At the end of his life, isolated by left-wing drone strikes and marked for death by PC commandos, this was Bin Laden’s chief lament. And that, Sen. Santorum, is why you don’t call it a war on radical Islam: because choosing your words carefully is part of winning the war.

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