

By Kevin Gosztola

A media backlash against investigative journalist Seymour Hersh for his report on the raid that killed Osama bin Laden has fueled a perception that it has been wholly discredited. Yet, a key part of Hersh's report has been corroborated by the New York Times' Carlotta Gall, a Pakistan newspaper, and partly by NBC News.

Hersh [reported](#) a former senior Pakistani intelligence officer approached Jonathan Bank, who was the CIA station chief in the US embassy, and offered to provide information on where bin Laden was located in return for reward money offered in 2001. The CIA did not find bin Laden by spying on his couriers but uncovered his whereabouts because Pakistan's intelligence agency, the ISI, had him essentially on house arrest since 2006.

Gall writes, "Hersh appears to have succeeded in getting both American and Pakistani sources to corroborate it. His sources remain anonymous, but other outlets such as [NBC News](#) have since come forward with similar accounts. Finally, the Pakistani daily newspaper The News [reported](#) Tuesday that Pakistani intelligence officials have conceded that it was indeed a walk-in who provided the information on Bin Laden. The newspaper names the officer as Brigadier Usman Khalid; the reporter is sufficiently well connected that he should be taken seriously." Khalid was promised reward money as well as "US citizenship with a new identity."

"It is the strongest indication to date that the Pakistani military knew of bin Laden's whereabouts and that it was complicit in hiding a man charged with international terrorism and on the United Nations sanctions list," Gall concludes.

Gall, whose previous reporting on bin Laden is referenced in the beginning of Hersh's story, shares, "When I was researching my book, I learned from a high-level member of the Pakistani intelligence service that the ISI had been hiding bin Laden and ran a desk specifically to handle him as an intelligence asset. After the book came out, I learned more: that it was indeed

a Pakistani Army brigadier — all the senior officers of the ISI are in the military — who told the CIA where bin Laden was hiding, and that bin Laden was living there with the knowledge and protection of the ISI.”

CNN chief national security correspondent Jim Sciutto followed up after NBC News published their report. He asked sources if the US ever paid out a \$25 million reward for bin Laden's capture. Sciutto's sources told him that some “small payments” were made to Pakistanis, “who helped track the SUV to bin Laden's courier.” No source told Sciutto that anyone received a \$25 million reward.

This does not disprove the main aspects of the story. It is possible he never was paid \$25 million and received a smaller reward. Hersh says he was paid in “various chunks.” And, significantly, NBC News' sources [said](#) an asset was paid reward money by the CIA.

Keep in mind: Whoever Hersh talked to with connections to the Pakistan government and the US government did not have to worry about the world's attention being focused upon whether Obama lied or not, as is the case now. Anyone doing investigative reporting currently has to confront this additional hurdle when speaking to sources, who have to worry about an Obama administration that might zealously prosecute them for confirming any details.

Frances Townsend, former Homeland Security advisor for President George W. Bush, said on CNN, “It was well-known that the Pakistanis were watching our facilities. Somebody with that sort of information would most certainly not have ever walked into one of our facilities,” to dismiss the report of a “walk-in.” But that is why the US government would offer him a plane ride to the US, a new identity and an arrangement that amounts to political asylum. It does not prove that someone from Pakistan's ISI would never share such sensitive information by going to meet with the CIA station chief, which for someone in the ISI would probably not be all that suspicious.

Of course, now that this “walk-in” has been confirmed, that part of the report will suddenly no longer a “[baseless assertion](#).”

For example, from James Kirchick, who [wrote](#) a column for Slate aimed at convincing people Hersh is some kind of “crank”:

...[I]t is not exactly news that officials within Pakistan's "deep state" might have known of Bin Laden's location; such reports surfaced almost immediately after the killing took place.

Yes, but the Obama administration's narrative of events has never incorporated these reports.

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More generally, a common refrain from those dismissing Hersh's report is that it does not make any sense. It is "[illogical](#)." CNN national security analyst Peter Bergen [called](#) it a "farrago of nonsense."

Vox's Max Fisher, in a [popular critique](#) of Hersh's story, suggested that Hersh's report accused "hundreds of people across three governments of staging a massive international hoax that has gone on for years," which is not believable. He was referring to the US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The New York Times even [suggested](#) in a report that multiple "claims by Mr. Hersh would have required a cover-up extending from top American, Pakistani and Saudi officials down to midlevel bureaucrats."

On "Democracy Now!" on May 12, Hersh squarely [addressed](#) this suggestion that he was alleging some kind of conspiracy involving hundreds of people across multiple governments:

...Where do you get the notion of hundred or thousand officials? It's, it's — we're talking about a closed society. The White House has a lot of control over the information. The senior Pakistani officials have control over the information. We are talking about a country that went, a dozen, ten years ago through a WMD sort of cover up. The notion that there is some major conspiracy I'm alleging is just sort of — that's over the top. There's no major conspiracy here.

It's very easy to control news. We all saw that when the whole thing about the Saddam Hussein and the alleged nuclear weapons. I should think that would be a model for why you might just not be so skeptical of the possibility of holding things...

In addition to the weapons of mass destruction coverup, the CIA has launched ridiculous operations. It conducted a botched operation called "Operation Merlin," where flawed blueprints of nuclear weapons (including an English list of parts) were provided to Iran by a Russian asset.

Mentioned in Hersh's report is the CIA's vaccine drive, which it engaged in to collect DNA that would hopefully prove bin Laden was in the Abbottabad compound. It doomed the agency's Lebanon spies by adopting the codeword "Pizza" when discussing where agents should meet. In the 1960s, it launched the "Bay of Pigs" operation. The CIA attempted to assassinate Congo Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba with poison toothpaste. The agency tried numerous harebrained schemes to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro. And the CIA had a program called Project MKULTRA, where they tested LSD and other mind-altering drugs on unwitting suspects.

How much sense do any of these operations make?

Fisher, Bergen, Dan Murphy of the [Christian Science Monitor](#) and others have dismissed the story because they do not understand why Pakistan military and intelligence officials would have allowed a raid that would humiliate their country.

Hersh's report offers an answer. It explains that Pakistan officials wanted shipments of military equipment and "under-the-table cash payments to senior leaders" to resume. It sought more freedom for operations in Afghanistan, as the US was withdrawing troops from the country.

US officials also allegedly engaged in "blackmail," suggesting they would leak the fact that bin Laden had been in their "backyard" to embarrass Pakistan. Hersh's sources claim the ISI was using bin Laden to keep tabs on al Qaeda and the Taliban. It would have been very humiliating to have this arrangement with the most wanted terrorist in the world exposed, potentially even more humiliating than having the US launch a unilateral raid in their country.

Yet, again, because these journalists have wholly accepted the Obama administration's narrative around the hunt for bin Laden, they reflexively dismiss Hersh's reporting.

Hersh's reporting shows there is a lot about what the Obama administration has claimed about the killing of bin Laden that may not be true.

Journalists with access to sources should be doing followup reporting like NBC News did. They should be examining key questions raised by Hersh's report. They should not be inviting former government officials on television to simply mock Hersh and say things like, "Let me break some news for you this morning: aliens abducted President Obama 15 minutes ago and Darth Vader is in the Oval Office making decisions for the United States," as former deputy director of CIA's counterterrorism center, Philip Mudd, did on CNN. Nor should they be helping the Obama administration salvage its official story because they enjoyed the Hollywood movie that brought it to life on the silver screen.

Finally, it should be recognized that the ["boiler plate" template](#) being used by critics to kill the messenger and cast Hersh as some kind of loon journalist in his twilight years only serves the interests of the deep state. Columns solely focused on Hersh should be regarded as attacks on an investigative journalist, who has dared to poke holes in myths surrounding the assassination operation that killed bin Laden.