

OPINION

Well Done

fair & balanced



PAUL TONG / OP ART

Nagging questions about the mission to get bin Laden

David Sirota

Syndicated columnist



If the mission to

neutralize Osama

bin Laden were a

blockbuster movie,

the screen would

have almost cer-

tainly faded to

black as soon as

the accused terror-

ists' death was announced. No

doubt, the credits would roll to

Queen's "We Will Rock You" and

then "The End" would appear.

Alas, real life is not one of Hol-

lywood's many Pentagon-spon-

sored flicks — and as hard as Presi-

dent Obama tried to portray last

week's events as proof "that

America can do whatever we set

our mind to," the mission and its

cloudy aftermath have raised trou-

bling questions about the "what-

ever" part. Among the most impor-

tant of those queries are:

• Is it legal for a president to is-

sue extrajudicial "kill only" orders

— that is, orders to kill but not cap-

British press reported on bin Lad-

en's 12-year-old daughter alleging

that her father was first captured

alive and then summarily ex-

ecuted.

• Who is the president now pro-

hibited from executing sans due pro-

cess?

At first glance, the answer

might seem to be "anyone not

named Osama bin Laden." Except,

days after the bin Laden mission,

Obama ordered the assassination

of U.S. citizen Anwar al-Awlaki,

even though al-Awlaki hasn't been

charged with — much less convict-

ed of — a crime. If this is now ac-

ceptable, whom else can the presi-

dent order killed without judicial

review?

• Why were the Nazis entitled to

due process, but accused terrorists

aren't?

Nazis killed millions of inno-

cents and were convicted at the

much-celebrated Nuremberg

trials. Yet, many insist bin Laden

and other al-Qaida leaders must

be executed or detained without a

similar trial because a courtroom

especially in a nation that has so

radically changed over the last

century. Whereas World War II

America strove to embody Nor-

man Rockwell's "Four Freedoms"

painting of the patriot standing up

and asking questions, America cir-

ca 2011 is more a country of How-

ard Stern and "South Park" — a so-

ciet that implores fellow

countrymen to "shut up, sit

down!" and tells inquiring citizens

that "if you don't like America, you

can get out!"

But regardless of such ubiqui-

tous vitriol, we still need answers

— and not just because the inter-

national community wants them,

but because Americans have a

right to know what "America" is,

beyond just the "A" in a drunken

"USA!" chant.

Is America a nation "of laws,

not of men," as John Adams prom-

ised? Or has it become another

synonym for lawless tyranny?

Is "America" a place that obli-

gates its leaders to respect the

Constitution? Or is America gov-

erned by Richard Nixon's notion

that "if the president does it, that