

MATT BISSONNETTE'S INFORMATION OPERATION AGAINST A BROKEN SYSTEM OF SECRECY

"We all knew the deal. We were tools in the toolbox, and when things go well they promote it. They inflate their roles." —Mark Bissonnette

HuffPo and AP/CBS have an initial description of how Matt Bissonnette's story of the Osama bin Laden killing differs from the story the Administration has told. While the details are interesting, I expect we can learn as much about how a well-trained SEAL manages InfoOps as we learn about the events of Bissonnette's life from the book.

As I pointed out yesterday, once DOD got a copy of the book, the publisher announced it would almost double the initial print run and advance the publication date by a week—making it much harder for DOD to pre-empt the unredacted publication by buying up the copies. Bissonnette has also already planned to give at least some of the proceeds of the book to the families of SEALs who have died (something that former CIA officer Ishmael Jones also did), meaning DOD can't punish him by seizing his earnings.

And now, with just the bits of information already public about the book, Bissonnette has made it very difficult for the government to prosecute him—and certainly not before the election.

The most interesting detail that both HuffPo and AP report is that Osama bin Laden never put up a fight.

"We were less than five steps from getting to the top when I heard

suppressed shots. BOP. BOP," writes Owen. "I couldn't tell from my position if the rounds hit the target or not. The man disappeared into the dark room."

Team members took their time entering the room, where they saw the women wailing over Bin Laden, who wore a white sleeveless T-shirt, loose tan pants and a tan tunic, according to the book.

Despite numerous reports that bin Laden had a weapon and resisted when Navy SEALs entered the room, he was unarmed, writes Owen. He had been fatally wounded before they had entered the room.

"Blood and brains spilled out of the side of his skull" and he was still twitching and convulsing, Owen writes. While bin Laden was in his death throes, Owen writes that he and another SEAL "trained our lasers on his chest and fired several rounds. The bullets tore into him, slamming his body into the floor until he was motionless."

While I'm sure there are many details that are of greater tactical sensitivity, this one differs just enough from the previously official version that it makes it toxic to pursue. After all, prosecuting Bissonnette would require acknowledging that Bissonnette violated his non-disclosure agreement, which would in turn requiring **admitting to the truth** of what he presents in his book. (I'm also wondering whether the convenient legal fiction the government used for this op—making it a CIA op to make the violation of Pakistani sovereignty more acceptable—adds a wrinkle to his NDA.) So it would require admitting that the Administration told lies—for legal reasons, strategic ones (the book reveals that OBL's body wasn't treated with the respect the Administration claimed), and most of all, political ones.

Prosecuting Bissonnette would require admitting that the government used its unilateral authority over the nation's secrets to tell a fiction—not an egregious one, but still one that served a significant political objective.

Now there are probably legal ways around that problem (they could prosecute Bissonnette for revealing obscure details that no one really cares about, for example). But probably not political ways around it, because at best, it would seem like retaliation for exposing the Administration's fluffing of the facts.

It appears that Bissonnette has shown that the Administration used its control over secrecy as a political tool, not just an operational one, and to prosecute him, they'd have to make that point even more clear.

The government spends a lot of money to make sure its special operations warriors know how to operate—alone or with just a few others—in terribly unfriendly environments, relying on their wits, their experience, and tremendous amounts of skill. It was inevitable that one of those warriors would one day use those skills to win this particular battle.