

## Five Security Lessons Africa May Take from 'The Mission that Killed Osama'

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*(No Easy Day, (The Autobiography of a Navy Seal), By Mark Owen: New American Library: New York, May 2014*

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This 'Mark Owen's' memoirs also promoted as "the firsthand account of the mission that killed Osama Bin Laden" is a peek into some riveting "military type literature;" (if ever such a genre exists). For Africa one can distil some five crucial themes and lessons, all relevant, even as the continent grapples with the contemporary security nightmare now popularised as, "terrorism:"

### **(1) SEAL Training and Overall Preparation**

To put it mildly, SEAL training is tough; excruciating and unrelentingly stressful. It is for a breed of selfless men who sacrifice everything and knowingly "put themselves in harm's way" in order to defend the motherland; especially after that infamous 9/11 in the US. You read this book and wonder how anyone took a bunch of inadequately prepared new police hires to their sure death in Baragoi—just the other day. On the other hand, the Bin Laden raid was meticulously rehearsed and kept under wraps for weeks. And it is the sheer arsenal of pre-mission training; soldierly commitment and the equipment, all fortified with advanced intelligence monitoring that stand out to behold. Those choice men must be able to think very quickly on their feet when any aspect of a mission goes wrong; such as when one of the helicopters developed a mechanical problem within the Osama target compound. Our lesson: merely hoisting some crude gun on the shoulders is not security! And let's just refrain from making security a service for hapless careerists who merely hope that the tenure ends without having to face the tough choices.

### **(2) SEAL Brotherhood and Team Spirit**

A SEAL's brotherhood is forged under "the command". It is evidently superior to families-including parents, any loved ones and certainly, not the ethnicity you hail from. It is a brotherhood built right from the rigorous recruitment process (not a corrupt and convoluted one); followed by painstaking training in order to qualify to be the very best; continuous team work and training in some of the most challenging environments and ultimately: teamwork forged through constant deployments in service to some of the most dangerous missions known in military history; including the one that exterminated Osama (acronymed as UBL) and the one that rescued captain Philip from the Somali pirates off the Indian Ocean.

### **(3) True Patriotism and the Role of the State**

Clearly, there is a level of patriotism that is possible, not just because it is the highest virtue, but also because the state and its leaders make it inevitable in all of us. You can easily see why the SEAL is prepared to forego everything and put his life in so much danger for the sake of country. In spite of much rhetoric, African governments routinely discriminate against whole communities (simply on account of where they come from), yet strangely, still expect similar levels of patriotism. The one thing to admire about America is the state's general attitude to all citizens; regardless of race or ethnicity. But above all, the men and women who bear a nation's uniform are not taken for granted. It is a fabric well-ingrained right up to the White House and as Mr Owen shows, it is no simple thing in the American military tradition, to even lose just one member. And if you care to know, most proceeds from this book will add to the many charitable veteran courses including life-long support and annual honours extended to families whose loved ones were fallen in the line of duty.

### **(4) Research and Development (R&D)**

There is no question that what propels the American military machine is its abiding faith in scientific progress, technological innovation and the ever-changing spheres of knowledge. America's super power status is in many ways oiled and nurtured by an unrelenting investment in research. At the Silicon Valley today, many young innovators could be experimenting with models that may fire-up technological advancement, including the enhancement of the nation's security. I do not know just how much our African governments are wedded into such thinking but with terrorism, perhaps any innovation that could enhance security deserves institutionalised and organised hearing. Take Mr Owen's description of the gear that ensures protective clothing; the assortment of portable little weapons that allows the SEAL to be on the move with greater assurance about personal safety; the helicopters; the bullet proofing helmets and vests; the

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night vision goggles, all the way to today's drones (among so much more)! And you realise it is an investment in science and technology; the vision of men and women who moil and toil in academia, many completely forgotten and underrated in our African way of doing things.

### **(5) Live for a Service, "Bigger than the Self"**

Mark Owen's parting words are powerful. He considers that not all men have the mien to be SEALs. The question then becomes; what is it that you can do to help? The answer is the call to live for a purpose bigger than yourself; "to be an asset to your family; your community and country", obviously in ways that supersede the parochialisms that have so completely convoluted patriotism in Africa. As Mr Owen (just his pseudonym) so humbly acknowledges, the mission to take out "UBL"-could not have been called a one man show; "no one man was more important than the other" he declares. He not only singles out the woman intelligence analyst who spent years of her life tracking the case, but also the crew and pilots on whom the SEALs verily depend for so many of those deadly missions across the globe in the effort to keep America safe. At a more practical level, the one thing to take away is that it is high time African governments reviewed what we really call our security systems; throw away some of its overbearing ethnic qualifications and perhaps just focus on making sure that the men and women who bear our uniforms do not have to live in such squalor and need which renders the work something to have so much second thoughts about. Without this superior level of national consciousness, no amount of money pumped into our proverbial security rat holes; not even CCV technology will fend off the current quagmire around terrorism.

**ENDS**