With Osama Bin Laden Gone, Can AIDS Be Public Enemy #1?

May 2, 2011 By Regan Hofmann

Osama Bin Laden is reported dead. His body buried at sea. Al Qaeda has been dealt a walloping blow.

A world without Bin Laden is better than a world with him here. But still, we should not gloat over any death, no matter how arguably necessary.

And let us not delude ourselves that Bin Laden's death makes us any safer. We have kicked a giant hornet nest and may need to face the aftermath of swarming, stinging creatures. What we don't know (and what I deeply hope our government's intelligence community *does* know), is the extent to which Bin Laden's network of terror is capable of functioning without him.

As we approach the 10th anniversary of 9/11, we are bound to see what Al Qaeda plans for Act II. Are they more or less likely to act? More or less capable of doing so? If they plan to attack again on American soil in this anniversary year, when will it happen? Can it be prevented?

I, for one, started my day in Manhattan calling my mom and giving her some key information that she'll need if I'm dead. I did this after walking by my local police precinct in Manhattan and noticing that ALL of the squad cars (usually lining the street along half E-W city block) were gone...out on patrol. I asked an officer standing on the steps if I should be worried. Yes, he said. We should all be worried.

While I feel a great deal of pride in the American military, and am allowing myself the irrational, non-specific feeling that somehow, things just got a whole lot better, I also know intuitively that this is a moment to up the ante of a guard, not drop it.

It's often when we feel safest that the worst stuff happens to us.
I contracted HIV in a moment like that. I was so sure I didn't need to worry any more about getting AIDS. And that's when the virus surprise attacked me.

Vigilance is the way to steel against future problems.

And so, while we celebrate a moment that clearly is a step forward in the United States' effort to fight terror around the world, we should also not relax into a false state of security.

That said, hopefully, we will now be able to breathe a little easier and redirect some resources to the front lines of others battles.

It is my job to advocate for the fight against HIV/AIDS. And so with that in mind, I offer this suggestion:

Why not make AIDS public enemy #1 now that Osama Bin Laden's death has freed up that slot?

President Obama has just orchestrated the death of one of the world's most deadly terrorists. Perhaps his next move should be to orchestrate the death of one of the world's most deadly viruses.

AIDS qualifies on every level as an adequate replacement for Bin Laden. And, as we head towards the 30th anniversary of the first reported cases of what we now know to be AIDS (June 5, 2011), it is high time we put AIDS back in the spotlight so we can wipe it off the planet.

Bin Laden was a dangerous man, responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent people, many of whom were American.

HIV has killed 25 million and currently resides within the bodies of 33.3 million more. Only six million of the 33.3 million people can get their hands on lifesaving medical care. Which means the lives of 27.3 million people (and counting as new infections occur daily) are at risk. Without antiretroviral medication, most of the 27.3 million will die.

HIV is a helluva terrorist.

Bin Laden's death proves that when the United States of America puts their best minds, strongest people and biggest resources behind a problem, we get it done.

Let's set our sites on AIDS next.

Can you imagine if Obama started his next presidential campaign being able to claim he eliminated the most dangerous terrorist on earth--and funded the discovery for the cure for AIDS?

And talk about a way to reduce the budget. AIDS cured would save America at least $19 billion dollars a year. I think even the GOP could get behind that.

Today, the National Institutes of Health announced a new $10 million dollar grant for cure research. Here's hoping that's the beginning of a much larger and ongoing commitment to hunting down a killer as effective as HIV.

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