“Justice has been done.” With these words Barack Obama, President of the United States and Nobel Peace Prize winner, announced to the world the killing of Osama bin Laden during an operation guided by U.S. special forces in Pakistan.

As it is well known, bin Laden was considered the mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attack to the Twin Towers, as well as the head of the terrorist organization known as Al Qaeda, and therefore “responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent men, women and children”.

The death of bin Laden is raising a long series of questions, probably doomed to remain unanswered. But this is not our point of interest. The only data that seems undisputable, is that starting from the September 11, 2001, the United States started a “war against terror” which, before leading to the physical elimination of the Al Qaeda leader, involved the military intervention of Western countries in Afghanistan (considered a “rogue state” supporting terrorism) and in Iraq (where Saddam Hussein’s regime was accused of having developed weapons of mass destruction and of having provided military support to Al Qaeda). On the other hand, no intervention was directed against Pakistan, where bin Laden found
refuge, as the military regime of Pervez Musharraf was supported by the United States.

As Barack Obama remembered, in the Twin Towers attack, approximately 3,000 civilians lost their lives. In the military operations undertaken to combat terrorism, about 6,000 U.S. military personnel were killed (almost 1,500 in Operation Enduring Freedom and more than 4,400 in Operation Iraqi Freedom). To these figures, at least 1,200 casualties from other countries embedded in military operations must be added. Considering the deaths of the “adverse party”, a definite estimate is impossible. For Afghanistan, the amount fluctuates between 10,960 and 49,600 deaths. Among these, at least 4,000 are civilians killed by aerial bombardments.

For Iraq, the body count assumes very different proportions. The estimations range from a minimum of 62,000 to a maximum of one and a half million dead. In particular, according to a report of the prestigious medical magazine “Lancet” published in 2006, the war caused the death of more than 600,000 Iraqis. Nowadays this sum would result in over one million deaths, among civilians and fighters.

This macabre count of deaths seems to me perfectly clarifying the proportions of the Global War on Terror started by George W. Bush and continued by Barack Obama. It is clear from Obama’s speech that this enormous waste of lives and resources caused by the military interventions is officially justified as the tribute that humanity must pay to win the War on Terror.

However, in comparison to his predecessor in the White House, Obama has adopted a partially different justifying strategy, at least in the case of the killing of bin Laden. As it is well known, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been
described on several occasions by the US government as legitimate military operations under international law because they were motivated by the “legitimate defence” needs of the United States. In the Obama's speech, perspective is changing.

If “justice has been done”, for once the President of the United States has pointed out that this justice has nothing to do with law, but is declined in an eminently ethical and political sense. Until now, no one has raised the question of the legitimacy and legality of the killing of bin Laden. The radical nature of the evil personified by bin Laden went beyond any legal argument, and therefore there was no need for any trial, any judgment, any execution. As an enemy of humanity, Osama bin Laden had no rights. Ultimately, he did not belong to mankind.

Obama spoke as the spiritual leader of the American people, using repeatedly the term 'God', and declaring that the War on Terror was driven by the need to protect the United States from those who made a cowardly attack on justice. In perfect continuity with the doctrine of “manifest destiny” developed in the nineteenth century by John L. O'Sullivan (an influential supporter of the Democratic Party), Obama stressed that America must not forget “the story of our history, whether it's the pursuit of prosperity for our people, or the struggle for equality for all our citizens; our commitment to stand up for our values abroad, and our sacrifices to make the world a safer place”.

The establishment of a safer world is the spiritual mission of the United States, not based on economic needs or power strategies, “but because of who we are: one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all”.

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The primary goal of the U.S. War on Terror was the death of bin Laden. His killing must be greeted with joy “by all who believe in peace and human dignity”.

In this perspective, it is clear that the War on Terror is interpreted by the US government as the necessary response of a nation reluctant to tolerate any threat to its security. No matter the cost that this involves. The price of revenge always deserves to be paid. *Fiat justitia, pereat mundus.*