

ZEITGEIST

THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES
BIN LADEN AFTERMATH • FRACKING AND SOUTH SUDAN



NEWS: AL QAEDA'S OSAMA BIN LADEN IS DEAD



Leaders of the Political Awareness Club

President: Quinn Myers '12

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About the Club

Ever feel like your Thursday afternoons are missing something? Perhaps your family has stopped listening to your rants about Ronald Reagan, or your dog is just not having a very good discussion with you whenever you complain about Hillary Clinton? Well, for all of you lonely politicians out there, you're in luck!

Every Thursday, club members - conservative, liberal, and moderate alike - chew over the week's political events, often with the aid of SNL, the Daily Show, the Colbert Report, or some viral video smack off of YouTube.

Over the years the club has sponsored many guest speakers from the world of politics. It has also organized debates involving representatives from various political parties and it has conducted mock elections involving the entire student body.

We meet on Thursday afternoons in Mr. Szabs's room (B407). All are welcome to attend.

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Letter from the President

Last week, I turned on CNN to check the headlines. I was looking for updates on the revolutions in Syria and Libya, and also possible coverage on the new protests in Spain. Instead, I received an earful about Donald Trump and his most recent publicity stunt. Frustrated, I flipped to MSNBC, searching for more substantial reporting. After six minutes of ads, I watched the beginning of a story about a high school kid in Shelton being banned from his senior prom. Reluctantly, I finally turned to Fox News, hoping against hope for at least a shred of significant journalism. Unsurprisingly, I was disappointed. Instead, I watched a primetime news anchor interview a country singer promoting his new album. Needless to say, I was frustrated. All I was looking for was basic reporting, with facts and interviews, minus the spin and fluff. I guess that's too much to ask for in the 24-hour news cycle.

This highlights a major problem in our society: without accurate or informative reporting, the recipients of the news become disconnected from the world. Those recipients are us; the American people. This has led to ignorance, which has created widespread apathy and xenophobia. Just look at the Tea Party, or the celebrations after the death of Osama Bin Laden. As a society, we've been pushed to the extreme, to a place where morality only has a place for an hour every Sunday morning; to a place where our celebrity culture makes our decisions for us. That is why it has never been more important to be politically aware, to be engaged in civil discourse, and to keep our elected officials accountable. This is why the Political Awareness Society is not only the best club at Fairfield Prep, it's the most important.

If you had told me when I joined Political Awareness two years ago that it would change my life, I would have laughed. But today, after seven *Zeitgeist* articles, three guest speakers, and close to 100 meetings, I am indeed a changed person. Through politics, I have found a passion, an opportunity to be heard, and some amazing people. I owe this all to the Political Awareness Society, which has given me a base for my future. I hope all of our members get to experience this in some way, even the ones that show up once a month to build up their college resumes. It's truly unique, especially at Fairfield Prep. Moving on, I want to reflect on the year we've had as a club. In the fall, we found ourselves right in the middle of the buzz surrounding the Midterm Elections. We were fortunate enough to have representatives from several different campaigns, both Democratic and Republican. We even hosted Congressman Jim Himes, who was generous enough to speak to us for over an hour in the middle of an extremely close Congressional race. On top of that, six members of our club, including myself, worked on political campaigns, gaining firsthand experience into the political process. Our weekly meetings gained a new intensity, sometimes resulting in minor shouting matches between our more liberal members and our small but incredibly vocal group of conservatives. And of course, there is the *Zeitgeist*. The *Zeitgeist*, "The Spirit of the Times," is something that everyone in the Political Awareness Society cherishes, because it lets us speak our minds and explore exciting and controversial topics. In my extraordinarily biased opinion, it's the best publication at Fairfield Prep. I strongly encourage everyone to submit an article. It doesn't have to be a huge profile on a President or a controversial subject. Just pick something you care about, and the rest will follow.

To conclude, I want to thank every member of the club this year. You're all extremely smart and cool people, and I hope you'll be back next year. I also want to thank everyone who wrote for the *Zeitgeist*, which I think was very successful. And finally, I want to thank our moderator, Mr. Szablewicz, for putting up with us for the past year. Without your presence and insightful comments, we couldn't be what we are today. So, if you're not a member of the Political Awareness Society and reading this, please consider stopping by next fall, on Thursday afternoons in B403. We'd love to have you.

What We Did

Dan Welch, Class of 2012

I think the fact that so many people were taken in by the “Osama Execution Video” hoax says something. E-mails exploded across the internet in the days following President Obama’s announcement, promising their recipients visual proof of the World’s Most Wanted Man’s bloody demise. Of course they were laden with malware; anyone who is at all familiar with the internet would easily be able to deduce that at first glance. It was as thinly veiled as thinly veiled scams get. But as more and more corrupted Facebook accounts spread the link to their friends list, whose accounts were, in turn, hacked, it became clear that rational thought was not in play at the time. People were abandoning reason to be a part of the death-spectacle.

Mere minutes after the announcement, my news feed was inundated with the highest concentration of boorish jingoism that I have seen in my (admittedly short) life. Yes, the “America, F*** Yeah’s” were tempered slightly by quotes from Mark Twain or Dr. King, which called for a more level-headed attitude toward the death of another human being, as little as this one deserved that title. But, as always, the less reasonable were less quiet. And really, it’s hard to blame the people who got caught up in the hype. The story (or *stories*; there were several wildly varying accounts) of a crack squad of Navy Seals shooting their way into a secret terrorist compound to kill an evil mastermind ... that has a certain “awesomeness” to it. That is exactly the kind of thing that happens in movies. The Walt Disney Company obviously thought so: they submitted (and later withdrew) a trademark application for the phrase “Seal Team Six”.

The most moustache-twirlingly insane villain modern news media had ever witnessed (or at

least been right in calling so) was dead. He had become more than a man, not only to his followers, but to *us*. For the past decade, he was the embodiment of evil for America. A poster boy for terrorism. He transcended flesh and blood, and through his actions, became more than a man. He became a legend. He was the dragon that slaughtered thousands without a thought. He was Sasquatch, showing up everywhere from the mountains of Pakistan, to under your bed, to nowhere at all. He was our destroyer God, laying waste to our shining metropolis with pillars of flame. Osama giveth and Osama taketh away. At least until he got taken out like a chump.



The surrealism of it all, I would wager, is the main reason so many people felt like they could act inhuman during those days after the announcement. And I’m not excluding myself, either: I went along with it too. Everybody did. Perhaps I didn’t go as far with it as some of my peers, but we were certainly moving in the

same direction. How couldn’t I have? I am a card-carrying member of a generation who only understands the difference between the pre- and post-9/11 worlds in an academic sense. I had barely learned about the Big Bad Wolf before I was faced with this new boogeyman. How could my young mind have been expected to distinguish between the two? How can I do that *now*? For a few days in May, a country of young people desperately seeking definition had free reign to be cartoon characters, and we took full advantage of it. If you weren’t drunk on alcohol, you were at least high on emotion.

And it’s not like we didn’t realize it. Everybody I know recognized that the massive partying on the White House lawn and at Ground Zero probably wasn’t the most humane way to react to the situation (especially seeing as, not eight

months ago, Ground Zero was considered too hallowed a place for an Islamic community center to be built two blocks away from). But that was after the fact. Honestly, until I began to compose this article in my mind, I had seriously forgotten all about bin Laden's death. Really, it's changed nothing. If anything, I figured that at least President Obama had the next election in the bag, but his approval rating is exactly where it was before May 2nd. The post-bin Laden world looks an awful lot like the one that came before it. Except now there are photos like this one:



If Osama bin Laden's death was not a substantial military victory, then what exactly were we celebrating? A symbolic one? An exorcism of an American demon from our consciousness? An unchaining of all the ghosts forced to haunt Ground Zero, who for a decade roamed the streets of New York and the avenues of their families' minds? Was it a true catharsis? Or was it just a celebration of inebriation, with no other purpose than itself? Was a signal zapped to all of our brains that night, commanding those within the vicinity to report to their assigned location and party? Are we programmed that way, culturally... to respond to death with jubilation, as long as we recognize the caricature of the deceased, and not his shred of humanity? Are we blood-lusting, booze-swilling, sociopathic androids?

Once the novelty had worn off, I suppose we felt something not too dissimilar to a hangover, minus the physical symptoms. We surveyed the night's events and the decisions we made as a nation, and we regretted some of them.

And then we vomited. Of *course* there would be global ramifications! How could we have not *thought* of that? How could terrorist cells like Al Qaeda would inevitably use images of Americans parading through the streets after their hero's death as recruitment propaganda. How justified they were in doing so. How obvious it was now that we held ourselves to a double-standard when faced with similar celebrations held after 9/11. I get the feeling that bin Laden was given such a respectful (or at least meticulous) burial not to prevent backlash entirely, but in the hopes that it would limit some of the blowback. Rather than have Al Qaeda and all of the people under their influence calling for our heads, maybe they would settle for an arm instead. But something would have to go. We got so wasted last night, man. We weren't thinking straight. Here comes the vomit again.

Everybody recognized that there would be consequences for our actions. What they refused to recognize was that it could be any other way, and that's the disappointing part. In my classes, the collective response I saw to all this was a shrug and a, "What're you gonna do?" I swear it was the same tone I've heard accompanying such platitudes as the always-irritating, "Boys will be boys." The thing is, we, as a nation, *are not boys*. We can't hold ourselves to such low standards. This isn't Cowboys and Indians, where death is impermanent and the people aren't real. This is the game of global terrorism, where *nobody* wins. Why, then, were the drunken masses chanting "USA, USA" and singing "We Are the Champions" like they were at a soccer match?

The definitive problem I see with America, more than anything, is that we accept limits too easily. For Christ's sake, we walked on the *Moon* before homosexuality was declassified as a mental disorder. How giant a leap could that have *been* for the nation? We are behind the curve in many respects because we doubt our ability to sacrifice. If politicians aren't willing to give up funding or voters they disagree with in order to do the right thing, and the people are too inert to better society by surrendering certain conveniences, then what's the point? What's the point of democracy, then? If we all just want to be fed whatever slop we're told to, then put me in a pen already and give up the

pretense. Swine is swine; it isn't expected to be anything more than that. So here is the question: when it comes to things like social reform and maybe just being a decent, independent, *thinking* human being, do you want to be a swine or do you want to stand up and walk around like a man? Orwell has nothing to do with this. Forget him, he isn't here right now.

We tell ourselves that we are the greatest nation in the world. So why don't we try to *live up* to that? It's an ideal, not a slogan. It's something we should focus less on letting other people know, and more on proving to ourselves. We preach freedom and democracy, yet consistently support regimes that crush them when it benefits us. Our major thesis in 1776 was that all men are created equal, yet it took a century for human slavery to be abolished, and then another for civil rights

to be fully recognized. We have killed countless civilians all over the Middle East, far more than bin Laden did in the U.S., yet we see his death as a major accomplishment. A step in the right direction. *Why is there such a disparity between what we say and what we do?*

In honor of all those who have fallen in war, all those who haven't, all those who lost somebody in 9/11, all those who, like me, can't even begin to understand what happened that day, all those who remembered Twain and King on the night of May 2nd, and even bin Laden himself, as despicable a person as he is, I have this humble offering:

Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.

-Proverbs 24: 17-18

U.S. Terrorism Policy in a post-bin Laden World

Henry Burbank, Class of 2012

On May 2, 2011, President Obama had the privilege of announcing to the world that after ten years, 1.2 trillion dollars, and nearly 6,000 U.S. military personnel dead, Osama bin Laden had been killed. In the U.S., the news was met with incredible, almost eerie expressions of joy. People gathered in front of the White House, Ground Zero, and at Penn State; over 30,000 took to the streets in celebration. What occurred on May 2nd was the death of one of the world's most evil human beings, a man who glorified the killing of innocents in the name of God. Many have said that the death of bin Laden marks a turning point for the United States, but I'm not so sure.

The only way bin Laden's death will have an impact on the world is if the United States recognizes that it happened. Now this may sound silly, but policy-wise, the United States has yet to acknowledge the death of the most wanted man in the world: We still have a large presence in Afghanistan; our troops on the ground in Iraq and are due to be phased out

with private security contractors (read: Mercenaries); The Patriot Act has been renewed; Israel continues to have our unwavering support; we refused to take action in places like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, or Syria, yet we still maintain the mentality that, at least in the case of Libya, the United States can do whatever it wants.

In the past, we had justified these decisions (i.e. the Iraq invasion) by saying that they were linked to al-Qaeda. We backed various Arab dictatorships, regimes that fundamentally disagreed with our principles of liberty and freedom, solely because they stopped the growth of terrorism. This is most evident in our support for Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak and the Abdullah family in Saudi Arabia. We have also stood behind Israel in its extremely controversial and, as defined by the United Nations, *illegal* occupation of the West Bank, because they too were preventing terrorists from growing more powerful. If bin Laden's death meant something, then would these policies not be reversed? We are still set to

withdraw from Afghanistan in July, and we continue to do nothing to help the people of the Arab dictatorships that we supported.

This piece is not a recommendation to simply drop everything that we're doing in the "War on Terror." It is actually quite the opposite. Bin Laden's death was a loss for al-Qaeda, but not

a loss for terrorism. We still need to be on the lookout. But we also need to reevaluate what we have to do. The world was drastically changed by bin Laden's actions, and it will be changed with his death. The question is, is the United States prepared to change as well?

The Call for 1967 Borders- An Acceptable Solution

Jackson Roth, Class of 2012

On May 19, 2011, President Obama delivered a speech on Middle East relations that was meant to mark a radical shift in U.S. Policy in the region. A portion of the speech dealt with the ongoing Israeli-Palestine Conflict, with Obama ultimately remarking, "The borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, so that secure and recognized borders are established for both states." It is clear that this was the right position on the conflict. However, the issue of whether President Obama will have the courage to enforce his policy remains.

Since the inception of Israel in the late 1940's, the borders between this new Israeli state and the Palestinian one have been heavily disputed. In several cases, most notably in 1967, Israel has invaded and occupied territory in retaliation to acts of terrorism committed by Palestinian militants. In 2006 and 2008, Israel

engaged Hamas and Hezbollah due to rocket fire that was hitting civilian targets in Israel.

Although Israel often acts in self-defense, the way it has dealt with crises over the last 60 years has been heavily criticized internationally. For instance, organizations like Amnesty International and the U.N. Human Rights Council believe that the current blockade

imposes against the Gaza Strip, one of two areas of the so-called "Palestinian State", constitutes collective punishment and is therefore illegal under International Law. Others have seen Israel's reaction as a necessary measure to protect itself from the obviously hostile countries that surround it. Whatever your position on Israel's conduct, it is obvious that

neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis are going anywhere, and therefore a two-state solution is necessary.



The general international consensus sees the pre-1967 borders as a starting point for negotiations between the two countries. This was recognized at Camp David in 2000 by President Clinton and was repeated by President Obama again during his speech. Despite the large amount of negative reaction towards the speech, particularly from the right, President Obama was just reiterating an 11-year-old policy. Many commentators focused on return to the '67 borders despite the fact that Obama clearly advocated for "mutually agreed swaps". All parties recognize that the landscape has changed and that a return to those exact borders is not feasible.

Now that he has stated his policy, Obama has to enforce it. Predictably, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reacted

negatively to the speech. Netanyahu has a history of defying international opinion, most famously when Israel announced new settlements in East Jerusalem on the day of Secretary of State Clinton's address, which specifically condemned the settlements. In order to get his way, Obama must make it abundantly clear that if Israel is to enjoy the special relationship that it does with the U.S., it cannot repeatedly defy our will.

In all, President Obama's speech was the correct way to handle the Israeli-Palestinian situation. We will now see if he has the guts to put his money where his mouth is. Hopefully, his policies will provide the framework so that a lasting peace can finally be found between the Israelis and Palestinians.

South Sudan Follow-Up

Michael Whelan, Class of 2012

Earlier this year, I wrote an article lauding the separation process of Southern Sudan. In it, I discussed the peaceful nature of the referendum whereby 99% of Southern Sudanese voiced their desire for independence. I mentioned there would be some minor complications to independence, but I didn't believe that they were instrumental factors. I was dead wrong.

As the prescribed date of Southern Sudanese independence draws closer, the Sudanese government in Khartoum has begun to disrupt the peaceful separation process. They recently moved troops into the border region of Abyei, forcing out 40,000 members of the Ngok Dinga tribe. Abyei was supposed to have a referendum to decide whether or not to join the new nation. The possibility of that happening has all but vanished with this occupation. Even if the referendum is held, it

would be a sham: the ousted Ngok Dinga generally support joining the South.

This aggression from the North may just be President Omar al-Bashir's way of bolstering his credentials. His popularity has taken a hit with the "loss" of the South. Bashir is also afraid that giving Abyei to the South would set a dangerous precedent of defection for other abused areas like Darfur. And finally, Abyei is rich in oil. (This is the Middle East after all.)

None of these are good reasons to escalate the conflict between North and South, but that is what Bashir is doing. By sending the Army into Abyei, he is seriously threatening the peaceful separation process. The South will still become independent (Bashir can't change that at this point), but there may still be war.

Southerners don't want more violence when they are so close to independence (July 9th), but if the aggression in Abyei continues, war may begin again.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Miles Steinert, Class of 2012



I originally heard about this problem through the 2010 documentary *Gasland*, which I found to be extremely informative, so I will be taking a lot of information

from it.

First of all, what is hydraulic fracturing or fracking? According to hydraulicfracturing.com, a site run by Chesapeake Energy: "Hydraulic fracturing, commonly referred to as fracking, is a proven technological advancement which allows natural gas producers to safely recover natural gas from deep shale formations. This discovery has the potential to not only dramatically reduce our reliance on foreign fuel imports, but also to significantly reduce our national carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and accelerate our transition to a carbon-light environment. Simply put, deep shale gas formation development is critical to America's energy needs and economic renewal."

But the company that sells a service usually has a biased view of it, correct? The journalism company "Pro Publica" describes it this way: "Hydraulic fracturing involves the injection of more than a million gallons of water, sand and chemicals at high pressure down and across into horizontally drilled wells as far as 10,000 feet below the surface. The pressurized

mixture causes the rock layer to crack. These fissures are held open by the sand particles so that natural gas from the shale can flow up the well."

Many citizens have received letters in the mail from natural gas companies, asking to lease their land. Josh Fox, the man behind *Gasland*, received an offer of \$4,750 an acre. Because he had 19.5 acres, that was almost \$100,000. He lived on a natural gas reserve called the "Marcellus Shale", which companies were dying to get their hands on.

In the documentary, Fox mentioned many of the loopholes companies needed in order to legally be allowed to perform fracturing. This seemed suspicious, so I looked to the New York Times to clarify some facts about legislation. In 2009, the Times published an editorial called "The Halliburton Loophole", which said: "Among the many dubious provisions in the 2005 energy bill was one dubbed the Halliburton loophole,

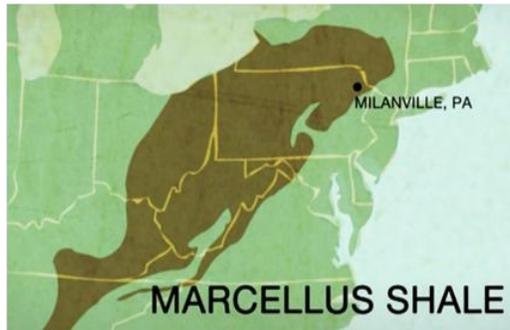
which was inserted at the behest of — you guessed it — then-Vice President Dick Cheney, a former chief executive of Halliburton. It stripped the Environmental Protection Agency of its authority to regulate a drilling process called hydraulic

fracturing. Invented by Halliburton in the 1940s, it involves injecting a mixture of water, sand and chemicals, some of them toxic, into underground rock formations to blast them open and release natural gas." After this bill was passed, the leading natural gas companies used Halliburton's technology to start the largest domestic gas drilling campaign in history, now occupying 34 states.



So forcing pollutants (fracking fluid has over 596 chemicals, including neurotoxin) into the ground without regulation sounds harmful, and there are indeed claims of pollution, but are these two things linked? The answer is yes. The same chemicals that are used in the fracking fluid are now being found in local citizens' tap water. The side-effects have been striking, among them being the ability to light this water on fire directly out of the faucet. Obviously, this is not beneficial to the people's health. For example, Glycol ethers are one of the many chemicals used in fracking that were found in major water supplies. A 1989 paper published by the California Department of Health Services states that, "Overexposure to glycol ethers can cause anemia (a shortage of red blood cells), intoxication similar to the effects of alcohol, and irritation of the eyes, nose, or skin. In laboratory animals, low-level exposure to certain glycol ethers can cause birth defects and can damage a male's sperm and testicles. There is some evidence that workplace exposure can reduce human sperm counts. Based on the animal tests and on studies of workers, you should treat certain glycol ethers... as hazards to your reproductive health."

Perhaps the most horrifying example of fracking's pollution is the "evaporation sprayers". About half of the fracking fluid pumped into the ground comes back up and must be moved to a pit. In order to avoid collecting all of that water and shipping it away, companies use a spraying system to shoot the fluid into the air so it can evaporate in the atmosphere. As a result, Sublette County, Wyoming, which is the size of Connecticut and has a population of 6,000, has worse air quality than all of Los Angeles.



Dr. Theo Colborn, winner of multiple awards, including the Time Magazine Environmentalist of the Year, is the only reason we know anything about the substances used in fracking. Because of her hard work chasing down trucks and going through data sheets she has identified the 596 chemicals in the fluid that we currently are aware of. She says, "Every environmental law that we wrote to protect public health is ignored. But the neurological effects are insidious." So what do we do? How do we stop the corporate the destruction of this beautiful country? We are going to have to put pressure on our leaders and raise awareness. That's the only solution I

can think of, and it starts with you.