On the 66th anniversary of the announcement of the death of Adolf Hitler, President Obama told the world that an elite team of CIA officers and Navy SEALs put a bullet in the head of Osama bin Laden.

Hitler, recognized as the most heinous villain of the 20th Century, committed suicide as Allied troops advanced on his bunker in Berlin, and Germany announced his death on May 1, 1945. Bin Laden, seen as the most heinous villain of our young 21st Century, was killed May 1, 2011, in his fortified complex in Abbottabad, Pakistan, and President Obama announced the death that same night.

Hitler and bin Laden are synonymous with evil, but there is one huge difference in their deaths. When Hitler died, Germany surrendered within the week. Bin Laden's death, while certainly weakening al-Qaida, has raised our expectations of a retaliatory attack in the short term.

The killing of bin Laden resulted in the appearance of the word “deceased” under the “Usama Bin Laden” photograph on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted List. While most people considered him Public Enemy No. 1, the FBI doesn't rank the 10 fugitives on their list. The al-Qaida leader (whom the poster told us was “left-handed and walks with a cane,” so that we'd be able to recognize him if we spotted him) had been on this list since the Aug. 7, 1998, bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Tanzania and Kenya that killed more than 200 people. In the wake of bin Laden's death, there is no immediate addition to the Most Wanted list of murderers, drug dealers and financial crooks.

Some Americans and others around the world are celebrating bin Laden's death in a party atmosphere with the same “USA! USA!” chant originally used to cheer on our plucky national hockey team during the 1980 Winter Olympics. Websites show everything from Illinois State University students crowd surfing as if they were at a concert, to celebrants musically bidding bin Laden “na, na, na, na goodbye!” outside the White House, to a wild scene at ground zero that looks like a New Year's Eve party.

As a 9-year-old in 1945, law professor Michael I. Spak says he remembers his family crying over President Roosevelt's death on April 12 and soon celebrating the victory in Europe and later over Japan, but he doesn't remember anyone partying about Hitler's suicide.

“'I'm sure nobody cried,’” quips Spak, 75, a professor at Chicago-Kent College of Law and an Army colonel who has written books about military justice. “'But they realized there were bigger fish to fry (the end of the war) and it would be soon.’
Acknowledging that some people find celebrating a death to be a “sickness people have,” Spak says the “impressive” military mission that killed bin Laden, took care to avoid civilian deaths and didn't result in any deaths of U.S. troops is worth taking to the street in celebrating.

“Not only do I think there's nothing wrong with it, I think it's wonderful,” Spak says.

“If people want to be happy this guy is dead, more power to them,” says John Allen Williams, a political science professor at Loyola University, military author and editor of The National Strategy Forum Review, a Chicago-based, not-for-profit, nonpartisan research group that studies national security. But he says displays such as the burning of bin Laden's photo or raucous partying are “not helpful.”

“I find the chanting of ‘USA! USA!’ offensive, even in the Olympics,” Williams says.

A dignified appreciation for the people who put their lives on the line to successfully kill bin Laden is different from whooping it up after winning the big game. Treating war as sport, calling athletes warriors or using military terms to describe games is wrong because a sport and a war are “not a moral equivalent,” says Williams. That phenomenon didn't start in this age of “Call of Duty” video games, however.

“This is not new,” Williams says, recalling how spectators, in the days before we had football on Sunday afternoons, took to a hillside on a Sunday in 1861 to watch the First Battle of Bull Run, one of the early deadly skirmishes of the Civil War. “It seems like a game, unless it's you or somebody you know.”

Pope Benedict XVI issued a statement advising that a person “never rejoices” in the death of a man, even if that man committed unthinkable evils. Instead, the pope's statement concluded, we should commit ourselves to that concept “that no event be an opportunity for further growth of hatred, but for peace.”

In the wake of bin Laden's long-awaited death, peace is a goal worth celebrating.