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Afghans: Bin Laden raid shows Pakistan should be war's focus

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KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghans used the death of Osama bin Laden to plead for the end of the war in their country, saying the killing of the al Qaida leader in Pakistan proves that Pakistan, not Afghanistan, is where the war needs to be fought.

"Afghanistan was proved right," President Hamid Karzai told a gathering in the capital Monday, a day after the U.S. military raid that killed bin Laden. "After the death of bin Laden in Pakistan, it is proved that the war against terrorism should not be in the villages and houses of Afghans and cannot be won here."

Karzai hailed the commando operation against bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, a military garrison town northeast of Pakistan's capital and home to Pakistan's national military academy.

Bin Laden "faced the punishment he deserved," Karzai said.

Karzai's government has blamed Pakistan, especially its army and powerful Inter-Services Intelligence spy agency, for supporting the Taliban militants and their al Qaida associates, a charge Pakistan denies.

A Saudi national, bin Laden first came to Afghanistan in the 1980s to support Islamist groups fighting against the Soviet occupation. He remained there for many years, using his camps to plot the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, releasing a statement from the Western military alliance's Kabul offices, said the U.S. raid marked a "significant success" for all nations engaged in "efforts to combat the scourge of global terrorism."

While Afghans offered mixed reactions to news of bin Laden's death, most of those interviewed in the capital said they believed that Pakistan is the main safe haven for Islamic terrorists.

Bin Laden, who turned 54 in March, is believed to have remained at large and alive for so long because he'd given up operational control of al Qaida and abandoned any electronic communication with his followers. Even so, analysts said his death would be a severe blow to the terrorist organization.

"It will hurt terrorist morale, and it is good news for the people and those who work for peace," said Noorulhaq Ulomi, an Afghan military analyst.

Sanjar Sohail, the editor in chief of the 8 Sobh newspapers predicted "serious psychological impact" on bin Laden's followers.

"He was the spiritual leader and the founder of the organization, and his absence will create a crisis within the organization," he said.

But for many average Afghans, the result bolstered their belief that the war on terror should be focused on Pakistan.

Pakistan, said Farid Begzad, a 20-year-old university economics student, "was supporting bin Laden, and he was in that country."

"Around 8 a.m., I got a text message from a friend saying that the al Qaida leader bin Laden has been killed. I felt happy when I heard that, because many Afghans were killed in suicide attacks carried out by al Qaida," Begzad said.

Habibullah, a cassette seller sitting in a small shop near an old movie theater, asserted that bin Laden had been in Pakistan from the beginning.

"Pakistan is the center for all terrorism, and bin Laden's death (is) in the interest of many countries," Habibullah said, adding that he believes the news may be a harbinger of peace for Afghanistan.

But Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai, a former Afghan interior minister, said bin Laden's death wouldn't affect the holy war bin Laden launched.

"There will be no change in the holy war. It will be strengthened. There will be no change in the al Qaida movement; it will be more organized," Ahmadzai said.

At the time of the Sept. 11 terror attacks, bin Laden lived freely under the Taliban government that ruled Afghanistan. That government refused to extradite bin Laden, paving the way for the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and ouster of the Taliban in late 2001.