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Afghans fear Bin Laden's death won't end war

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The Taliban's war was not Osama bin Laden's war.

And that, analysts say, is why the killing of the Al Qaeda leader is unlikely to prove a death knell for Afghanistan's resilient homegrown Islamist movement.

The methodical tracking of Bin Laden to the Pakistani city of Abbottabad provides an enormous morale boost to the U.S. military and its allies in neighboring Afghanistan. It also points up the strengths of an intelligence-driven strategy of pinpoint raids — methods that also have been successfully employed for much of the last year against the Afghan Taliban's midlevel leadership tier.

But whether Bin Laden's death represents a body blow to the Taliban remains doubtful.

Al Qaeda and the Taliban have been inextricably linked in the minds of most Americans since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. However, the groups' outlooks and agendas differ in fundamental ways, and Taliban goals have always been far more localized than Bin Laden's call to worldwide jihad.

Although Al Qaeda is thought to be intertwined with insurgent groups such as the Pakistan-based Haqqani network, which mainly operates in Afghanistan's rugged east, links between it and the Taliban are considered relatively loose in crucial parts of the country, including the key battleground provinces of Helmand and Kandahar.

"The death of such a prominent leader certainly has a psychological effect," said Waheed

Muzhda, a onetime Taliban foreign ministry official who remains familiar with the thinking of the movement's leadership. "But keep in mind, he was not a prominent personality in terms of operational activities. Those who have the ability to plan and launch attacks are still alive."

Ordinary Afghans for the most part expressed relief over Bin Laden's death, but also said they doubted it would slow the tempo of violence.

"Here in the south especially, it won't affect operations by the Taliban," said Mohammad Omari, a Kandahar man in his 30s. "Just look what is happening here every day."

Kandahar, the Taliban's spiritual home, has been rocked in recent weeks by violence and a surge of rebel activity, including the assassination of the provincial police chief and a [prison break in Kandahar city](#) that freed hundreds of Taliban inmates.

President Hamid Karzai, addressing a rural development conference in Kabul, used Bin Laden's killing to repeat his longstanding appeals to the Taliban to come to the negotiating table. But he also took a veiled swipe at the Western military, saying many innocent Afghans had died in their pursuit of Bin Laden.

"They found Osama in Pakistan — not in Lowgar, in Kandahar, in Mazar," he said, listing the names of Afghan provinces and cities. "I want the safety of our homes and the lives of people in Afghanistan. I tell NATO once again that the war against terrorism is not in the villages and homes of Afghans."

At coalition military bases across Afghanistan, there was fist-pumping satisfaction and a swell of pride among U.S. troops — some of whom were still in elementary school when the Sept. 11 attacks took place. News of Bin Laden's death, however, provided little respite from the day-to-day prosecution of a war that has grown markedly bloodier in recent weeks.

Last month, 52 NATO troops were killed, compared with 34 in April 2010, according to the independent website [icasualties.org](#). As has long been the battlefield trend, the majority of April's military deaths — 45 — were Americans.

A Taliban spokesman refused to comment on Bin Laden's death, saying the movement did not know whether the American account was true. A Taliban field commander in southern Afghanistan, reached through intermediaries, said his fighters would redouble their efforts to kill coalition troops.

"Why would this make us stop?" he said.

There were signs, too, that the Taliban would seek to portray the killing as an attack on all Muslims — despite President Obama's explicit declaration that the act of hunting down and killing Bin Laden did not represent a war against Islam.

"It's a big, big loss for all good Muslims," said Abdul Hai, a Kandahari who looked grimly furious when asked about the death.

Senior U.S. officials challenged the folk-hero status that Bin Laden had enjoyed in some quarters here.

"Afghans have suffered as much as any other nation from the campaign of terror that [Bin Laden] and his extremist followers undertook," the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Karl W. Eikenberry, said in a statement. "His victims — Afghan, American and from many other nations — will never be forgotten."

Many feared retribution, at a time when insurgent attacks are already maiming and killing unprecedented numbers of Afghan civilians. "They will try to retaliate, probably more aggressively," said Noor-ul Haq Ulomi, a military analyst and former parliamentarian from Kandahar.

Afghanistan's relationship with Pakistan has long been fraught by its neighbor's sheltering of insurgent figures. Ulomi, like many others, said the circumstances of Bin Laden's death pointed up the need to clear militant havens on the Pakistani side of the border.

"Osama bin Laden is dead, but terrorist forces, terrorist infrastructure and terrorist setups still exist in Pakistan," he said.

It was Monday morning in Afghanistan when the news broke, with many people on their way to work or school when Obama's announcement was made. The news spread less quickly here than elsewhere, because Internet access is not widespread, particularly in the countryside. But by midmorning, many passersby were wearing broad grins.

"The people of Afghanistan are very happy today," said Rahim Sardar, a 26-year-old physician. "They're thinking that this might help Afghanistan become a better and more peaceful country."