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## Osama bin Laden's killing puts Taliban leadership on edge

By Tom A. Peter

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Kabul - Osama bin Laden's killing in Pakistan appears to be having a chilling effect among the Afghan Taliban's leadership, say many Taliban observers. Many of its key figures are believed to be hiding in Pakistan and are wanted by the United States.

While the US drone strikes have killed scores of militants in Pakistan (most of them Al Qaeda or Pakistani Taliban, a different organization than the Afghan Taliban), the success of the US operation against Mr. bin Laden may renew concerns among senior Afghan Taliban leaders that they are next on America's hit list.

“After Osama bin Laden, they will definitely change their methods,” says Muhammad Hassan Haqyar, an independent political analyst based in Kabul. “Pakistan was never safe for Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders and they never trusted the Pakistani government.... But still they were trying to be in an area or in a condition where the Pakistani government couldn't find them.”

Since 2003, only two members of the Afghan Taliban's senior leadership council have been killed by foreign forces. The council usually has about a dozen members, and nearly 50 people have served on the leadership council over the course of the war with NATO.

Prior to his assassination, bin Laden managed to keep his location a tightly guarded secret, whereas Taliban leaders have stayed slightly more open. Bin Laden communicated only with written notes delivered by trusted couriers and lived in a compound that reportedly had no

Internet and only one satellite telephone. Comparatively, the Taliban's senior leadership occasionally speaks to journalists and has been in contact with Afghan government officials.

"If the CIA can catch bin Laden, it's surely not too hard to find the senior Taliban leadership, especially if journalists can find them," says Alex Strick van Linschoten, an independent researcher based in Kandahar.

Speaking to the Monitor over the telephone just one day after the US Navy SEAL team killed bin Laden, a mid-level Taliban commander based in Pakistan broke off mid-sentence moments into the call. He said that he should no longer speak on the phone because foreign forces might be able to trace his location with it.

Still, Taliban officials contend that the threat of assassination for their leaders, especially for those inside Afghanistan, has been an ongoing concern. While top leaders have escaped assassination, a number of low and mid-level commanders have been killed in recent NATO and Afghan military campaigns.

"This is not a new thing that Osama was targeted, and now other leaders will be targeted. Since last year, our leaders have been targeted. We have developed our own rules about how to avoid being traced and continue fighting," says Zabiullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman.

Three years ago, Mullah Kasimi, a prominent Taliban commander in Kunar Province, says he traveled to Pakistan to meet with bin Laden. The Al Qaeda leader was unable to meet due to an illness, but Mr. Kasimi says bin Laden sent word advising him to be careful in his travels and communications to avoid detection.

"We have been using the regulations, rules, and techniques for the last 10 years to stay hidden," says Kasimi.