

## **Taleban Bruised by Bin Laden Killing**

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Despite fears of revenge attacks, analysts predict insurgents' morale and funding will be sapped.

Afghan analysts say the death of Osama Bin Laden may lead to a break between al-Qaeda and the Taleban and put more pressure on the insurgents to join the government's peace process.

Despite warnings that Bin Laden's death in a United States raid in Pakistan on May 1 could lead to an immediate spike in attacks, the Kabul government believes that longer term, the effects will be positive.

"There is no doubt that the attacks and the war will intensify for a while, because al-Qaeda and the Taleban will want revenge," defence ministry spokesman Zaher Azimi said. "But this situation will improve in the long term, to the benefit of peace in Afghanistan."

Azimi warned, however, that al-Qaida's influence would remain strong for the foreseeable future.

"One must not assume that it has been entirely eliminated by Bin Laden's death," he added.

Interior Minister Bismillah Mohammadi said that the fact Bin Laden had been hiding in Pakistan for so long threw serious doubt on the extent of Pakistan's co-operation with the war against terror.

This in turn left Islamabad's involvement in Afghanistan's affairs in question, he added. Afghans have long believed that Islamabad allows insurgents to base themselves in Pakistan, or does not do enough to combat them.

"Maintaining security is going to be very difficult unless the equipping, financing and training of terrorist centres outside the country are stopped," he said.

Some experts think that if Islamabad comes under pressure to explain how Bin Laden was able to find refuge there for so long, this could reduce what many see as covert backing from within the Pakistani establishment for insurgent activities in Afghanistan. (For more on this, see **[Bin Laden Death Confirms Afghans' Mistrust of Pakistan](#)**.)

Retired general Hadi Khaled said the removal of Bin Laden meant the Taleban would have little choice but to engage in dialogue with the Kabul government.

"On the one hand, Pakistan will be unable to support them because it will be under pressure from the international community. On the other, al-Qaida's funders may not be willing to finance the organisation now Bin Laden is dead, because they may not trust others the way they trusted him. So al-Qaeda will be no longer able to assist the Taleban," he said.

The Taleban have avoided commenting on the killing, although spokesman Zabiullah Mojahed said the US had not produced concrete evidence to prove that Bin Laden was dead.

A Taleban commander in Herat province, who asked to remain anonymous, said, "If Bin Laden is alive, I am happy he is at war; but if he has been martyred, I congratulate him on that privilege."

The commander told IWPR that if Bin Laden was dead, this would not force the insurgents to change direction.

"We believe and trust in God, and we will continue our war with His support," he said. "Our biggest weapon... is our belief in the next life and in God's assistance."

He the Taleban had the resources to carry on.

"We spend 2,000 afghani [46 US dollars] on making a bomb, which we use to destroy an enemy tank worth several hundred thousand dollars, along with its crew. We don't even get wages," he said. "We aren't fighting for Bin Laden or [Taleban leader] Mullah Omar, but for God and our country."

Some experts argue that while al-Qaeda may have funded some Taleban operations, the two organisations had pursued increasingly divergent aims, so Bin Laden's death will not necessarily weaken the insurgents.

Political scientist Ahmad Ghani Khosrawi said the Taleban had never been completely reliant on al-Qaeda for direction or funding.

At the same time, he said, the elimination of Bin Laden would have an enormous impact on Taleban morale.

“The Taleban are in a very bad state of mind at the moment,” he said. “They are very well aware that the Americans were after Bin Laden, dead or alive, and now that he’s been found, it’s the turn of Mullah Omar and the rest of the Taleban leadership.

“Right now, they’re thinking more about how to protect themselves than about how to fight.”

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