


## [Bin Laden's death a revival for Obama](#)

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In this image released by the White House, President Barack Obama listens during one in a series of meetings discussing the mission against Osama bin Laden, in the Situation Room of the White House, Sunday, in Washington. — AP PHOTO/THE WHITE HOUSE, PETE SOUZA

WASHINGTON — Even a week after rubbing crusty morning eyes in disbelief at the news about Osama bin Laden's much desired demise, that unmistakable jingle from the HBCU sitcom "A Different World" keeps ringing in the ear. And President Barack Obama is the bandleader.

Almost 10 years to the very day nearly 3,000 Americans lost their lives in the horrific event hauntingly known as "9/11," it feels like the dawn of a new era — especially after one filled with graphic war and uncertainty. What is clear, however, is that the political and economic pendulums, at least in the short term, are swinging in a radically different direction. What a hawkish Republican President who launched World War on Terror could not do in two full terms, a dovish, first Black Democratic president with a Muslim name did in half a first term.

Timing is everything. Obama, in wand-waving Wizard of Oz-like acts of political magic, dropped a massive bomb on several different competing constituencies within a span of several days. On the previous Wednesday, the President rolled out a ceremonious pimp slapping of his insubordinate generals by putting CIA Director and former Clinton White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta in the position of Secretary of Defense and replacing him with General David Petraeus — just to keep the wartime “Golden Boy” under control. The following Thursday, he unveils his long-form birth certificate and followed up with a public beat down of Donald Trump at the White House Correspondents’ Dinner this past weekend. And by the top of the next week, he swings it like Joe Clark in the movie “Lean on Me” with the announcement that Osama bin Laden just *got* got.

Several different competing constituencies, within the span of a week, found their collective political worlds rocked by careful planning and hush hush at the White House. No longer can irate red state demagogues paint the President as illegitimate, foreign closet Muslim who stole the White House and is soft on defense.

But, a key question arising is just how much bin Laden’s death changes the game on Capitol Hill. The political paradigm shift is obvious, particularly as Grand Old Party hacks and strategists — with their eyes on 2012 — find themselves in a bit of an electoral funk as the President will definitely leverage the most momentous event in the “War on Terrorism” in a decade. With the ultimate slam-dunk of national security objectives now “Mission Complete[d]” what can you say? Key Republicans, eternally snarky, couldn’t help but put a spin on President Bush’s role — albeit a reach since Bush has been out of office for three years.

But, in the immediate aftermath, how is that shaping policy? Will the Obama administration, while acknowledging the “unifying” effect it could have on the partisan tenor inside the Beltway, also use it as a way to shift the debate on the budget and the debt ceiling? And, with more eyes — even on the hawkish right — accepting the reality of deep defense cuts, how does the bin Laden death impact conversation on exactly what to cut, particularly as the President begins moving forward with promised withdrawals out of Afghanistan.

It depends on whom you ask as The Philadelphia Tribune made its round in and about Capitol Hill.

“While you have two things that are not really connected,” argues Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-Pa.) out of Philly, “obviously, one does impact everything happening at the moment.”

Fattah, noticing the tectonic shifts occurring in the wake of the late Sunday night announcement, sees movement towards a “grand bargain” in the debt ceiling debate as Members get rough and tumble on the uncomfortable task of raising the current \$14 trillion limit on the national debt.

“Clearly, we have to raise the debt limit. But, it’s on condition that you’re setting spending constraints and raising revenue while eliminating some tax breaks or cuts,” adds Fattah.

First term Congressman and Western Pennsylvania car dealer turned GOP 2010 tsunami politician Rep. Mike Kelly (R-Pa.) seems to be on the same page, but dismisses the notion of a bin Laden factor molding fiscal policy.

“I don’t think so,” Kelly sniffs. “I think there are two different battles. I don’t see either party using this event as a plus or minus.”

But, Kelly definitely seizes on the moment for some consensus on the deficit, adding a particular wind of passion to the argument. “My concern is that we demonstrate to the American people that both parties have spent irresponsibly,” hammers a convivial Kelly, man-with-singular-mission on what ails Washington these days. “And because of entitlements, we are on a trajectory to financial disaster.”

“I could in no way run my small business the way we run our government,” argues Kelly.

Bucks County Congressman Mike Fitzpatrick (R-Pa.), settling back into his old seat, is hoping that the debate continues for a way to fundamentally alter the budget conversation in a way where it “needs to be balanced.”

But, Fitzpatrick also compares bin Laden’s death to the “peace dividend” of the ‘90s after the Cold War, expecting that the investments made in defense by President Reagan throughout the ‘80s resulted in a period of growth and prosperity. “I would hope the President would see the strong benefit in projecting American strength abroad,” contends Fitzpatrick, non-committal on the defense-cut question but admitting that the terrorist mastermind’s death definitely changes the game.

When asked about whether the bin Laden event is a new, radical twist in the tone on Capitol Hill, Rep. Alyson Schwartz (D-Pa.), another suburban Philadelphia Member of Congress, is certain “everybody agrees on the President’s decisive leadership.”

But, in the budget and debt ceiling debates, she wants defense “on the table” as far as cuts. “No one is happy to vote on an increase in the debt ceiling,” she says. “We need to look at every part of the budget ... and that includes defense.”

The other big, niggling and elephant-size question on the Hill: What to do about Pakistan? Members on both sides of the aisle were hot and bothered once it was revealed bin Laden was living it up only an hour outside the Pakistani capital of Islamabad, within spitting distance of a national military academy. With consensus established that Pakistani intelligence must have known what was up, the next question is whether or not the United States should continue assisting the “untrustworthy Pakistani regime” (as on aide put it) to the tune of \$1.5 billion a year in military assistance. If that’s the case, Congress and the Obama Administration want better cooperation and conditions.

Always wired, Black Republican Rep. Allen West (R-Fla.) was among the first to call it like it was.

“What strongly concerns me is that bin Laden was not found hiding in a remote cave, but in an urban area of Pakistan where the Pakistan Army’s premier training institution operates,” blasted West. “This is a war that is nowhere close to being over.”

And with it being “nowhere close to ... over” that still begs the issue of the defense budget. Will bin Laden’s demise quicken the pace of both cuts and withdrawal from Afghanistan?

“I’d say on balance it helps a little, but not much,” argues Benjamin Friedman, a defense analyst at the Cato Institute. “Bin Laden was a symbol, and so his death, while not really relevant to the war in Afghanistan as it is now justified or defense spending in general, may encourage people to think that we’ve won some kind of important victory that allows us to come home from the wars and spend less.”