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## Bin Laden dead, but could al-Qaida still strike?

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by Matthew Rusling

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Xinhua) -- With the death of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden announced on Sunday night, the question remains whether the terror organization is finished or whether it is a wounded tiger still poised to strike.

The world's top terrorist was killed during a nighttime raid at a compound outside of Islamabad by a group of U.S. Navy SEALs who sneaked in only minutes before, according to the White House.

Bin Laden, who topped America's most wanted list for leading the organization that killed nearly 3,000 people during the Sept. 11 attacks in New York and Washington in 2001, was buried at sea in strict accordance with Islamic law.

In a White House press briefing on Monday, John Brennan, assistant to the president for homeland security and counter-terrorism, said this was a blow to al-Qaida, albeit not a deadly one.

"It may be a mortally wounded tiger that still has some life in it, and it's dangerous and we need to keep up the pressure," he said. "We cannot relent, because there are individuals in that organization that are determined to try to carry out attacks and murder innocent men, women and children."

Richard Barrett, coordinator of the United Nations al-Qaida/Taliban Monitoring Team, said the terrorist's demise is a significant blow to al-Qaida, which has already become weaker over the last two years due to the death of some senior members and its increasing irrelevance to movements for change in the Middle East and North Africa.

Al-Qaida is also becoming marginalized in Afghanistan, where the Taliban is increasingly likely to cut connections as a way to enter political dialogue. And the death of bin Laden will make it easier for the Afghan Taliban to do so, he said.

U.S. pressure has been a factor in al-Qaida's decline, but so too has its loss of popular support, he said.

Bin Laden's death is also a psychological blow to the movement. Part of his mystique was his ability to evade the massive manhunt that has sought to track him down since the end of 2001, he said.

Although many of his extremist supporters may claim that they will follow him in death just as they followed him in life, Barrett said that is unlikely.

"Being dead, he will not be able to inspire the movement and keep the flame alive. He will not be able to bring the movement up to date with current developments," he said. "And he will inevitably be replaced by a leader who cannot live up to his image and will therefore undermine his legacy, albeit unintentionally."

For now, Aiman al Zawahiri is likely to take over, at least until a more attractive leader is found, although Zawahiri has none of the broad appeal of bin Laden, he said.

"He is a fighter more than a philosopher and his vision is far narrower," he said. "His main concern is

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Egypt and it is unlikely that al-Qaida will be able to make much progress there unless there is a sharp crackdown on the revolutionary Tahrir square movement."

There are other possible leadership candidates, but no one with real world stature or good name and face recognition, he said.

"Because bin Laden had been al-Qaida's leader from the beginning, there was not much experience of or thought about preparing a successor."

### **A U.S. VICTORY, BUT NO GAME CHANGER**

The operation that led to bin Laden's death is among the most significant successes for U.S. intelligence in the past decade, according to global intelligence company Stratfor.

But while it represents an emotional victory for Washington and one that could have consequences both for the U.S. role in Afghanistan and for relations with Pakistan, bin Laden's elimination will have very little impact on al-Qaida as a whole and the wider jihadist movement, the company said on its website.

Because of bin Laden's high profile, any communications he carried out with other known al Qaeda operatives risked interception, and thus risked revealing his location. That factor forced him to be wary of communications for operational security and required him to give up an active role in command-and-control in order to remain alive. He reportedly used a handful of highly trusted personal couriers to maintain communication and had no telephone or Internet connection at his compound in Pakistan, Stratfor said.

Bin Laden was more of a chairman-of-the-board type figure, and not really a CEO or a COO, said Scott Stewart, vice president of tactical intelligence at Stratfor, adding that much of the terror group's organizational matters were handled by subordinates. "He was more of a figurehead," he said.

Still, al-Qaida is not the only terrorist organization around.

"It's very important for us to remember that the jihadist movement is far wider than just al-Qaida the core organization, (which is) just a small vanguard," he warned.

### **REPRISAL ATTACKS?**

Bin Laden's death has also sparked fears of a reprisal attack from al-Qaida or its affiliates in a bid to prove they are still relevant.

Brennan said there is no "specific and credible threat," right now.

"Like any incident like this, what we do is take the prudent steps afterward to make sure that we have our vigilance up, that we are taking the appropriate measures so that our security posture is strong, both overseas and here," Brennan said.

Meanwhile, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said Monday that the agency would not put out an alert at this time.

The incident also gives rise to the question of what bin Laden's death means for the projection of U.S. global power.

While the operation was a U.S. tactical and intelligence victory, Stewart said it was limited in scope, and the United States is still tied down in Afghanistan and Iraq, and lacks the capability to respond to other countries that it may consider threats, such as Iran.

Malou Innocent, foreign policy analyst at the Cato Institute, said bin Laden's killing shows that the United States needs to rely on Pakistan for counter-terrorism cooperation.

Still, the past several years have seen that, despite all the talks about partnership and cooperation, the two countries are far from being allies.

Editor: yan

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