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With bin Laden's Death, an Opportunity

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My colleagues Julie and Carrie have already broken the news about Osama bin Laden, and given (well-deserved) thanks to our men and women in uniform.

It's worth reflecting on how bin Laden was finally tracked down and taken out – as my former colleague Chris Preble of the Cato Institute noted, “The details should remind us that some of the most effective counterterrorism techniques do not rely on tens of thousands of troops stationed indefinitely in distant lands.” Operation Enduring Freedom has been the longest conflict our nation has ever been involved in – and as of yesterday, 2,441 coalition soldiers have died, while scores of others have been wounded in combat. Obviously, civilian casualties are substantial, as well.

(As a point of comparison, Operation Iraqi Freedom – which officially ended in August – led to the deaths of 4,770 military fatalities and even more wounded.)

Without a doubt, this is an important symbolic moment – but our work is not done yet, despite a pundit's bizarre statement on CNN around midnight that "the war on terror is over." I think, however, that it provides a clear moment to seriously evaluate what's worked over the past ten years – and what hasn't – so that we can best channel our limited resources to meet future threats.

Let's audit the policies that we implemented in the wake of 9/11, including the PATRIOT Act, the creation of the Transportation Security Administration's “security theater,” our use of Guantanamo Bay, and our deployment of hundreds of thousands of active-duty military personnel to police the globe. It's time for a serious conversation about what our national security goals are, and whether the methods we've been using are truly the most appropriate policies to achieve these desired outcomes.

And hey - in my opinion, the most appropriate way to mark the death of someone who hated America's freedoms would be to restore the ones that we were forced to give up in the wake of bin Laden's heinous actions.