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It goes without saying that Osama bin Laden's death is welcome news. But more than that, it is a teachable moment for how the U.S. ought to be carrying out its counter-terrorism policy moving forward.

Targeted killing is an essential component of the fight against al Qaeda. Much of the public debate has focused on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles to carry out targeted killings--a misplaced emphasis on means rather than ends. International counterterrorism is primarily an intelligence campaign, and the select application of lethal force is more effective than the deployment of large military units to Muslim nations. A scalpel, not a sledgehammer, should be our primary counterterrorism tool.

Bin Laden's demise is in some ways not news, but an event that confirms many things we have known for years. Bin Laden's hideout was not a cave, but an expansive compound in a community of well-to-do Pakistani military retirees--confirmation that Pakistan is a conflicted ally and that elements of her intelligence services are working for the other side.

The nomination of General David Petraeus to take the helm at the CIA signaled an ongoing military-intelligence campaign against international terrorists. The raid that killed bin Laden exemplifies this new emphasis by the Obama administration. The brilliant success of this operation demonstrates the marked improvement in our human intelligence capabilities over the last decade.

Bin Laden's death underscores the failure of al Qaeda to achieve its impossible goal: establishing a global caliphate living under his nihilistic worldview. As soon as al Qaeda establishes a return address for American special operations personnel to raid or bomb, they will be pummeled into irrelevance. Al Qaeda itself does not present an existential threat--but they can provoke us into sacrificing our blood, treasure and liberties to the point that we no longer recognize the society we set out to defend.

Now is the time to reappraise our counterterrorism policy. Terrorists are not superhuman. We must prioritize spending on national security toward cost-effective measures, just as we do in any other field. Terrorism is a tactic employed by weak actors meant to induce hysteria and overreaction in its victims.

Bin Laden described his strategy in exactly those terms: "All that we have to do is to send two mujahideen to the furthest point east to raise a piece of cloth on which is written 'al Qaeda,' in order to make generals race there to cause America to suffer human, economic, and political losses." It is time to stop playing this game the way al Qaeda wants us to, and transition our forces down as soon as possible in Iraq and Afghanistan. The sustainable counterterrorism path is a mix of intelligence cooperation, direct action, and training regional allies, not using our line troops as a third-world constabulary in perpetuity.

America needs this moment. With three wars, a sluggish economy, and continued partisan rearranging of the budgetary deck chairs, a bit of good news may give the country a renewed sense of focus. It is also fitting that the president ordered the strike between playing a round of golf and attending the White House correspondents' dinner: Contrary to al Qaeda's best efforts, life goes on, nations heal, and America will persevere and thrive.

Celebrating V-OBL day is not the end of the road, but a significant milestone nonetheless. Hopefully this moment will provide closure for those who lost loved ones on September 11, 2001 and in the decade of war we have experienced since. Bin Laden's death represents a stake through the heart of an enemy inimical to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

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