

[By Mike Lillis](#)

Congressional calls for a quick end to military operations in Afghanistan grew louder Monday when a bipartisan group in the House urged President Obama to immediately withdraw U.S. troops.

Lawmakers said the raid in Pakistan that netted Osama bin Laden proves that a focused approach to rooting out terrorists is more effective than a large military presence, and they urged Obama to shift the mission in Afghanistan from nation-building to counterintelligence.

They said the U.S. can't justify the extensive cost of maintaining tens of thousands of troops in Afghanistan given the death of the al Qaeda leader.

"The success of this mission does not change the reality that America still faces a determined and violent adversary. It does, however, require us to re-examine our policy of nation-building in Afghanistan," the lawmakers wrote to Obama in a Monday letter spearheaded by Reps. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) and Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah).

"We believe it is no longer the best way to defend America against terror attacks, and we urge you to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan that are not crucial to the immediate national-security objective of combating al Qaeda."

Also endorsing the letter were GOP Reps. Walter Jones (N.C.), John Campbell (Calif.) and John Duncan Jr. (Tenn.), and Democratic Reps. John Garamendi (Calif.), Rush Holt (N.J.) and John Tierney (Mass.).

The push is the latest salvo from an unusual alliance of anti-war Democrats and fiscally conservative Republicans who have united behind an expedited withdrawal from Afghanistan following bin Laden's death. After a global manhunt spanning more than a decade, the infamous 9/11 mastermind was killed last week by U.S. special forces in a covert raid north of the

Pakistani capital of Islamabad.

In a telephone interview Monday, Welch said bin Laden's demise has allowed lawmakers skeptical of the nation-building approach "some space ... to step back and be more open to a change in direction."

No one had to convince Rep. Lynn Woolsey. The California Democrat said last week that the war in Afghanistan is "an epic failure" that's only "emboldened those who hate America, instead of defeating them."

"Now that the 9/11 mastermind is gone, it is time to turn a new page," Woolsey said. "It has to begin with a swift move toward military redeployment out of Afghanistan. We cannot continue down this road of permanent warfare."

Obama has laid out a plan to begin pulling troops from Afghanistan in July — a timeline the White House has said remains in place following bin Laden's death. But the time frame for a full redeployment remains uncertain.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment Monday.

During an interview with CBS's "60 Minutes" that aired Sunday, Obama stuck with his timeline for a gradual drawdown of forces in Afghanistan beginning in July.

"We've gotta make sure that we leave an Afghanistan that can secure itself, that does not, again, become a safe haven for terrorist activity. But I think that that can be accomplished on the timeline that I've already set out," Obama said.

Last week, Rep. James McGovern (D-Mass.) introduced legislation that would force the Pentagon to provide a concrete timeline for completing the Afghanistan redeployment. Fifteen lawmakers have endorsed the bill, including Chaffetz, Welch, Duncan and Garamendi.

Still, Welch said the issue would more likely be resolved during the upcoming appropriations process, when Congress must decide how much funding the Afghan war merits. The bipartisan group of lawmakers argued Monday that U.S. resources could be more effective elsewhere.

"As our national debt grows, the borrowing and importing from our competitors continues and the drug-related violence on our borders increases, we must evaluate the best use of our resources," they wrote. "The time has come to acknowledge that the threat posed by Afghanistan no longer justifies 100,000-plus troops on the ground."

House leaders have so far declined to advocate for a new Afghanistan strategy following bin Laden's death, with some hinting that it would be a bad idea considering that the demise of the al Qaeda leader doesn't mark the end of the battle against Islamic terrorism.

House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), for instance, said bin Laden's demise doesn't automatically create conditions "where the Afghans can maintain their own security" and "provide for a Taliban-free environment."

"I don't see that the administration is going to change its stated policy of reducing very substantially our presence in Afghanistan in the near term," Hoyer told reporters last week.

Still, Welch said, the current high-profile debate over deficit spending would only help those calling for a shift in America's anti-terror policy.

"If we spend one dollar in Afghanistan, it's a dollar we don't spend over here," he said. "We've been pretending that's not the case, but it is."