

[By Michael McAuliff](#)

A bipartisan group of eight lawmakers is the latest to demand the United States leave Afghanistan, raising the pressure on President Barack Obama to speed up his withdrawal timeline now that Osama bin Laden is dead. "The success of this mission does not change the reality that America still faces a determined and violent adversary," the congressmen, led by Reps. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) and Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah), wrote in a letter sent to Obama today. "It does, however, require us to reexamine our policy of nation building in Afghanistan."

"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," they argued.

Reps. John Garamendi (D-Calif.), Walter Jones (R-N.C.), Rush Holt (D-N.J.), John Campbell (R-Calif.), John Tierney (D-Mass.) and John Duncan (R-Tenn.) also added their signatures.

Letters seeking a speedy withdrawal aren't new. And such calls revved up almost immediately after the news of bin Laden's death. But the organized nature of this letter and the equal bipartisan makeup of its signatories reflect a rising sense in Congress that it's time end America's longest war.

War critics still remain in the minority, but Welch noted that Chaffetz and Tierney are the chairman and ranking member, respectively, on the House Oversight Committee's subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense and Foreign Operations. He told The Huffington Post that other representatives are considering those leaders' opinions in the wake of the al Qaeda leader's killing in Pakistan last week.

"The Osama bin Laden event is creating space for many more members who were being quiet to start asking questions," Welch said.

And that in turn may put pressure on Obama as the White House holds its internal debates on withdrawal timetables, he said.

"I think that the more of us in Congress who voice their skepticism about the nation-building and our support for the counterterrorism strategy, the more space it gives the president to move in that direction," Welch said.

The public, which has been divided over how it sees progress in Afghanistan, has also grown increasingly discontented with the war.

In a March ABC News/Washington Post poll, 64 percent of Americans said they felt the war was not worth its cost, a fact the eight lawmakers picked up in their letter.

"The cost to taxpayers of this war is immense -- \$2 billion weekly and \$386 billion already spent, while billions more in legacy costs await us. Every dollar spent is added to America's deficit," they wrote.

"The burden on our overstretched military is likewise immense. There are 99,800 American troops on the ground as we write this letter engaged in this nearly 10-year-old war," they noted, arguing that a focused force makes no sense when "the terror threat is dispersed and decentralized."

The lawmakers signaled intelligence and covert operations such as the raid that nailed bin Laden as more cost-effective strategies to pursue.

The White House, however, has shown no inclination to change its plans to begin what it calls a conditions-based withdrawal in July, likely lasting into 2014.

Other proponents of the administration's plan think a hasty exit would be downright daft, and suggest a power vacuum would be an invitation for Afghanistan to revert to the sort of terrorist haven it became before 2001.

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) recently hammered suggestions of leaving soon, calling the prospect of doing so a "catastrophic blunder."

But more and more lawmakers are examining the costs, the deficit and the need to address issues on the homefront.

"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," the eight representatives wrote. "The time has come to acknowledge that the threat posed by Afghanistan no longer justifies 100,000-plus troops on the ground."