Bin Laden’s death likely won’t abbreviate war, experts say
By Jake Griffin
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If you’re expecting the death of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden to abbreviate ongoing U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, don’t hold your breath.

That’s the consensus among local counterterrorism experts and military scholars.

“The guy deserved to die,” said John Lynn, a military history professor at Northwestern University in Evanston who is also the former Oppenheimer chair of Warfighting Strategy at the Marine Corps University in Quantico, Va. “But if people believe this is going to end the war they are mistaken.”

The terrorist leader’s death at the hands of a U.S. Special Forces team Sunday in Pakistan might actually incite insurgents to carry out retaliatory attacks, experts said. Chicago was among several major U.S. cities that heightened security efforts in the wake of bin Laden’s death.

“We may have people striking out in revenge,” said John Allen Williams, a Loyola University political science professor and editor of the National Strategy Forum Review. “We poked the hornet’s nest, so something will fly out. But make no mistake, this is a very serious loss to his followers even though he wasn’t directing things for years.”

Experts say that bin Laden’s death is more of a moral victory for the U.S. and its allies than an event that will lead to much change in the war efforts.

“Bin Laden was very important because of his personal contacts,” said Marvin Weinbaum, a scholar-in-residence at the Middle East Institute and a professor emeritus at the University of Illinois. “He hasn’t been able to make those contacts in recent years. The escape last week of those 500 (insurgent) prisoners is without a doubt a bigger blow as far Afghanistan is concerned.”

There’s really no way to predict what will happen as a result of bin Laden’s demise, others said.

“If his followers and extremists view this as a slap in their face, they could retaliate,” said Bill Matens, a former FBI special agent who led the investigation into the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and currently is a vice president at the Oak Brook-based security firm Quest Consultants International. “We’re not dealing with people you and I would have a beer with every day. These are people of an entirely different breed and psyche. I really think they would like to retaliate.”

Bin Laden gained infamy in 1998 when his al-Qaida organization took credit for the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that killed nearly a dozen American troops and diplomats as well as hundreds of others who worked at the buildings. The terrorist group carried out several other attacks on Western targets throughout the world before his most brazen attack on Sept. 11,
2001. That day, four commercial airliners filled with passengers were hijacked by terrorists funded and trained by bin Laden’s organization and crashed into the World Trade Center towers in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. and a field in Pennsylvania.

Even survivors of that attack fear the organization won’t stop simply because its leader is no longer alive.

“I think there’s a lot of people that are afraid of what’s going to happen now,” said Joseph Dittmar, an Aurora resident who was on the 105th floor of the World Trade Center when the plane struck the tower. “The first thing that went through my mind is, ‘OK, how are the crazies going to react at this particular point?’ They will be looking for vengeance. They will be looking for revenge. I don’t think there is any doubt about it.”