With the eradication of Osama bin Laden, political analysts say Republicans will have to eliminate at least one of their principal plans of attack against President Obama during next year's presidential campaign.

"It definitely takes away the argument that he's a wimp," said Russell Lucas, a Florida International University professor of political science.

Larry Sabato, a University of Virginia political commentator, not only sees the GOP contenders having to forgo that criticism, but said Obama and his supporters will be able to market him in a whole other light.

"The Republicans had planned to attack him as hesitant and unsteady on national security matters," Sabato said. "Not only is that argument gone now, but he can now say, 'I've had on-the-job training that you can only dream of.'"

Just how Obama has and will benefit politically from his decision to launch and oversee the raid in Pakistan against bin Laden is debatable. His popularity has received a positive jolt: A Washington Post/ABC News poll reported that his approval rating climbed from 47 percent to 56 percent in just two days after the Sunday assault. And in the Gallup Daily tracking, American's approval of Obama rose 6 points.

But how much will bagging bin Laden help him in the long run? Some poll watchers say the bump will be short-lived, as are many such presidential popularity blips that result from foreign policy wins.

'It's going to be a blip'

George Gonzalez, a University of Miami political analyst, said that as far as advancing U.S. goals in southern Asia, the bin Laden affair has little importance. The Al-Qaeda founder apparently had no day-to-day control of fighters in Afghanistan or Iraq.

"From a tactical point of view, I don't know how much is accomplished by this," Gonzalez said. "It doesn't change the facts on the ground. For that reason I think it's going to be a blip in his popularity and then disappear."

Nicol Rae, an FIU dean and expert on the U.S. presidency, said one only has to look back to Republican President George H.W. Bush to see how short-lived such an approval bump can be.
"Let's not forget that George Bush the first had approval ratings of 90 percent after the invasion of Kuwait in 1991 and then got only 38 percent of the vote and lost in the election of 1992," Rae said.

But Florida Atlantic University Professor Kevin Wagner sees it differently.

"The capture of bin Laden might stay with people a bit longer because 9/11 was such a large event in U.S. history," Wagner said. "Bin Laden killed thousands of Americans" and was the most hated of enemies, Wagner said.

And Obama has a chance to at least temporarily maintain that tide of popularity, hinged to his foreign policy, if his decision to join a coalition to oust Libyan strongman Moammar Gadhafi bears fruit, Rae said.

"He got rid of bin Laden and he looked very presidential doing it," he said. "You can't take that away from Obama. And if he can get Gadhafi out of the way, then he will look even better."

Economy remains factor

So as potential GOP candidates crank up their campaigns, they not only will have trouble attacking Obama effectively on the foreign affairs front, they also are confronting a president who suddenly has majority approval ratings. But political observers say Obama will continue to ride that wave of approval into the campaign season only for as long as the country's volatile economic front allows.

The longer people think about bin Laden and not about Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke or the unemployment rate, the better for Obama.

"If the economy stagnates or, God forbid, gets worse, none of this will matter," said another University Miami political scientist, Christopher Mann. "For the bin Laden killing to have an impact next November, you have to make the assumption that the economy gets somewhat better. Then you will have voters who will have the same concerns they had in 2006, before the economic downturn hit them.

"They will focus to a greater degree on concerns about homeland security. And there is no one running against Obama, at least so far, who has his foreign affairs experience."

Most of the Republicans mentioned as possible candidates are governors or former governors - Mitt Romney of Massachusetts, Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota, Mitch Daniels of Indiana, for example - and they have no foreign affairs experience. "If one of those is the candidate, Obama will be up against a Republican foreign policy résumé that is blank," Mann said. "Nothing you do as a governor prepares you to attack a compound in Pakistan and kill Osama bin Laden."

More bipartisan support?

Mann said Republicans have for decades been seen as stronger on defense and security than Democrats, but said Obama could change that and possibly win over some independent voters and moderate Republicans.

The bin Laden raid may have already changed the relationship that Obama has with Republicans in Washington. GOP congressional leaders conceded last week that an overhaul of Medicare - previously one of their major political thrusts - is unlikely this term. They offered to open budget talks by focusing on areas where both parties can agree, such as cutting farm subsidies.
"Yes, possibly the popularity gained from the killing of bin Laden can benefit the president in his negotiations over the budget," Rae said. "He can use that."

Rae and Wagner said they think the events in Pakistan will hurt fringe candidates. Wagner said the bin Laden killing especially damages Donald Trump and the doubts he has raised about Obama's citizenship and his past. Those issues were made "trivial" by the bin Laden killing, he said.

"This has eliminated celebrity candidates," Rae said. "This says, 'The presidency is about real things. You have to have a real candidate.' "