

Remarks by President Trump on the Death of ISIS Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

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Remarks

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THE PRESIDENT: Last night, the United States brought the world's number one terrorist leader to justice. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead. He was the founder and leader of ISIS, the most ruthless and violent terror organization anywhere in the world.

The United States has been searching for Baghdadi for many years. Capturing or killing Baghdadi has been the top national security priority of my administration. U.S. Special Operations Forces executed a dangerous and daring nighttime raid in northwestern Syria and accomplished their mission in grand style. The U.S. personnel were incredible. I got to watch much of it.

No personnel were lost in the operation, while a large number of Baghdadi's fighters and companions were killed with him. He died after running into a dead-end tunnel, whimpering and crying and screaming all the way. The compound had been cleared by this time, with people either surrendering or being shot and killed. Eleven young children were moved out of the house and are uninjured. The only ones remaining were Baghdadi in the tunnel, and he had dragged three of his young children with him. They were led to certain death.

He reached the end of the tunnel, as our dogs chased him down. He ignited his vest, killing himself and the three children. His body was mutilated by the blast. The tunnel had caved in on it, in addition. But test results gave certain immediate and totally positive identification. It was him.

The thug who tried so hard to intimidate others spent his last moments in utter fear, in total panic and dread, terrified of the American forces bearing down on him.

We were in the compound for approximately two hours, and after the mission was accomplished, we took highly sensitive material and information from the raid, much having to do with ISIS origins, future plans, things that we very much want.

Baghdadi's demise demonstrates America's relentless pursuit of terrorist leaders and our commitment to the enduring and total defeat of ISIS and other terrorist organizations.

Our reach is very long. As you know, last month, we announced that we recently killed Hamza bin Laden, the very violent son of Osama bin Laden, who was saying very bad things about people, about our country, about the world. He was the heir apparent to al Qaeda.

Terrorists who oppress and murder innocent people should never sleep soundly, knowing that we will completely destroy them. These savage monsters will not escape their fate, and they will not escape the final judgment of God.

Baghdadi has been on the run for many years, long before I took office. But at my direction, as Commander-in-Chief of the United States, we obliterated his caliphate, 100 percent, in March of this year.

Today's events are another reminder that we will continue to pursue the remaining ISIS terrorists to their brutal end. That also goes for other terrorist organizations. They are, likewise, in our sights.

Baghdadi and the losers who worked for him — and losers they are — they had no idea what they were getting into. In some cases, they were very frightened puppies. In other cases, they were hardcore killers. But they killed many, many people. Their murder of innocent Americans — James Foley, Steven Sotloff, Peter Kassig, and Kayla Mueller — were especially heinous.

The shocking publicized murder of a Jordanian pilot, a wonderful young man — spoke to the King of Jordan; they all knew him, they all loved him — he was burned alive in a cage for all to see. And the execution of Christians in Libya and Egypt, as well as the genocidal mass murder of Yazidis, rank ISIS among the most depraved organizations in the history of our world.

The forced religious conversions, the orange suits prior to so many beheadings, all of which were openly displayed for the world to see, this was all that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi — this is what he wanted. This is what he was proud of. He was a sick and depraved man, and now he's gone. Baghdadi was vicious and violent, and he died in a vicious and violent way, as a coward, running and crying.

This raid was impeccable, and could only have taken place with the acknowledgement and help of certain other nations and people.

I want to thank the nations of Russia, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. And I also want to thank the Syrian Kurds for certain support they were able to give us. This was a very, very dangerous mission.

Thank you, as well, to the great intelligence professionals who helped make this very successful journey possible.

I want to thank the soldiers, and sailors, airmen, and Marines involved in last tonight's operation. You are the very best there is anywhere in the world. No matter where you go, there is nobody even close.

I want to thank General Mark Milley and our Joint Chiefs of Staff, and I also want to thank our professionals who work in other agencies of the United States government and were critical to the mission's unbelievable success.

Last night was a great night for the United States and for the world. A brutal killer, one who has caused so much hardship and death, has violently been eliminated. He will never again harm another innocent man, woman, or child. He died like a dog. He died like a coward. The world is now a much safer place.

God bless America. Thank you.

Any questions?

Q When did you first hear that this was — operation was going to get started?

THE PRESIDENT: We've had him under surveillance for a couple of weeks. We knew a little bit about where he was going, where he was heading. We had very good information that he was going to another location. He didn't go. Two or three efforts were cancelled because he decided to change his mind — constantly changing his mind. And, finally, we saw that he was here, held up here. We knew something about the compound. We knew it had tunnels. The tunnels were a dead-end, for the most part. There was one, we think, that wasn't. But we had that covered too, just in case.

The level of intelligence, the level of work, was pretty amazing. When we landed with eight helicopters, a large crew of brilliant fighters ran out of those helicopters and blew holes into the side of the building, not wanting to go through the main door because that was booby-trapped. And there was something — it was something really amazing to see. I got to watch it, along with General Milley, Vice President Pence, others, in the Situation Room. And we watched it so clearly.

Q They had body cameras? Or how did you watch the —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't want to say how, but we had absolutely perfect — as though you were watching a movie. It was — that — the technology there alone is really great.

A big part of the trip that was of great danger was the — it was approximately an hour and 10-minute flight, and we were flying over very, very dangerous territory. In fact, some of our leaders said that that could be the most dangerous — flying in and flying out. And that's why, last night, we were so quiet about it. We didn't say anything, and I didn't make my remark until after they had landed safely in a certain area.

But the flight in, the flight out, was a very, very dangerous part. There was a chance that we would have met unbelievable fire. Russia treated us great. They opened up. We had to fly over certain Russia areas, Russia-held areas. Russia was great. Iraq was excellent. We really had great cooperation.

And you have to understand: They didn't know what we were doing and where we were going, exactly. But the ISIS fighters are hated as much by Russia and some of these other countries as they are by us. And that's why I say they should start doing a lot of the fighting now, and they'll be able to. I really believe they'll be able to.

Yes, Jennifer?

Q Sir, can you say what role the Kurds played in this, just generally?

THE PRESIDENT: They gave us not a military role at all, but they gave us some information that turned out to be helpful, the Kurds.

Q And can you tell us what the role of Turkey might have been, and Iraq?

THE PRESIDENT: Who?

Q What was the role of Turkey? How did they help?

THE PRESIDENT: Turkey — we dealt with them. They know we were going in. We flew over some territory. They were terrific. No problem. They were not problem. You know, they could start shooting, and then we will take them out. But a lot of bad things can happen. Plus, it was a very secret mission. We flew very, very low and very, very fast. But it was a big — it was a very dangerous part of the mission. Getting in and getting out too, equal. We went in identical — we took an identical route. We met with gunfire coming in, but it was local gunfire. That gunfire was immediately terminated. These people are amazing. They had the gunfire terminated immediately, meaning they were shot from the airships.

Q I'm trying to understand the timing. You talked earlier — you know, several weeks — about pulling troops out, you know, and then troops were put back in. And then, you know — I'm trying to understand the timing of when this operation — how it fits —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I'll tell you, from the first day I came to office — and now we're getting close to three years — I would say, "Where's al-Baghdadi? I want al-Baghdadi." And we would kill terrorist leaders, but they were names I never heard of. They were names that weren't recognizable and they weren't the big names. Some good ones, some important ones, but they weren't the big names. I kept saying, "Where's al-Baghdadi?" And a couple of weeks ago, they were able to scope him out.

You know, these people are very smart. They're not into the use of cellphones anymore. They're not — they're very technically brilliant. You know, they use the Internet better than almost anybody in the world, perhaps other than Donald Trump. But they use the Internet incredibly well.

And what they've done with the Internet, through recruiting and everything — and that's why he died like a dog, he died like a coward. He was whimpering, screaming, and crying. And, frankly, I think it's something that should be brought out so that his followers and all of these young kids that want to leave various countries, including the United States, they should see how he died. He didn't die a hero. He died a coward — crying, whimpering, screaming, and bringing three kids with him to die a certain death. And he knew the tunnel had no end. I mean, it was a — it was a closed-end — they call it a closed-end tunnel. Not a good place to be.

Q So this was going on before you made the announcement that you're pulling them out?

THE PRESIDENT: I've been looking for him for three years. I've been looking for him. I started getting some very positive feedback about a month ago, and we had some incredible intelligence officials that did a great job. That's what they should be focused on.

Q And about what time did this operation start yesterday, sir? And have you notified the leaders on —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, this operation started two weeks ago, in terms of the real operation, because we had him scoped. We thought he'd be in a certain location. He was. Things started checking out very well. We were involved, on our own team, with some brilliant people who I've gotten to know. Brilliant people that love our country. Highly intelligent people. And we — we've had it pretty well scoped out for a couple of weeks.

But he tends to change immediately. He had a lot of cash. He tends to change, like, on a dime, where he'll be going to a certain location. All of a sudden, he'll go someplace else and you'll have to cancel.

But this was one where we knew he was there. And you can never be 100 percent sure because you're basing it on technology, more than anything else. But we thought he was there, and then we got a confirmation. And when we went in, they were greeted with a lot of firepower. A lot of firepower.

I'll tell you, these guys, they do a job. They are so brave and so good. And, so importantly, many of his people were killed. And we'll announce the exact number over the next 24 hours. But many were killed. We lost nobody. Think of that. It's incredible.

Q And when you told the Russians, you requested permission —

THE PRESIDENT: Our dog was hurt. Actually, the K-9 was hurt, went into the tunnel. But we lost nobody.

Q And so you requested to the Russians to fly over this area they controlled. What did you tell them —

THE PRESIDENT: We spoke to the Russians.

Q What did you tell them you were going to do?

THE PRESIDENT: We told them we're coming in.

Q Okay.

THE PRESIDENT: And they said, "Thank you for telling us." They were very good.

Q But did you tell them why? No? You just —

THE PRESIDENT: No. They did not know why.

Q Was any other country given —

THE PRESIDENT: We did tell them, "We think you're going to be very happy." Because, you know, again, they hate ISIS as much as we do. You know what ISIS has done to Russia. So, no, we did not tell — they did not know the mission, but they knew we were going over an area that they had — they had a lot of firepower.

Q And have you notified the congressional leaders about this? Pelosi? Mitch McConnell?

THE PRESIDENT: We've notified some. Others are being notified now, as I speak. We were going to notify them last night but we decided not to do that because Washington leaks like I've never seen before. There's nothing — there's no country in the world that leaks like we do. And Washington is a leaking machine. And I told my people we will not notify them until the — our great people are out. Not just in, but out. I don't want to have them greeted with firepower like you wouldn't believe.

So we were able to get in. It was top secret. It was kept. There were no leaks, no nothing. The only people that knew were the few people that I dealt with. And again, Mark Milley and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were incredible. We had some tremendous backup. Robert O'Brien, Secretary Esper, Secretary Pompeo. Pence, I told you, he was great. There's a very small group of people that knew about this. We had very, very few people. A leak — a leak could have cost the death of all of them.

Now, they're so good that I think nothing was going to stop them anyway, if you want to know the truth. That's how good they were. We had them also surrounded by massive airpower. Up in the air, yesterday, surrounded at very high levels. We were very low. We had tremendous airpower.

Q And you watched all this from the Sit Room? Who were you with in the Sit Room when you watched this?

THE PRESIDENT: Secretary Esper, a few of the Joint Chiefs, Mark Milley, some generals. We had some very great military people in that room. And we had some great intelligence people — Robert O'Brien. It was really great.

Yes.

Q Was the pullout of the U.S. troops in Syria last month strategically tied in with this raid? Was it —

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, the pullout —

Q Is this a red herring?

THE PRESIDENT: Right. Sure. It's a great question. And you're doing a great job, by the way. Your network is fantastic. They're really doing a great job. Please let them know.

Q Yes, sir. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: No, the pullout had nothing to do with this. In fact, we found this out at a similar time. It's a very good question — because we found this out at a similar time.

No, we're after these leaders. And we have others in sight, very bad ones. But this was the big one. This is the biggest one, perhaps, that we've ever captured, because this is the one that built ISIS, and beyond, and was looking to rebuild it again. Very, very strongly looking to build it again. That's why he went to this province; this is why he went to this area.

You know, a lot of people — I was watching, this morning, and hearing, and they said, "Why was he there?" People were so surprised. Well, that's where he was trying to rebuild from because that was the place that made most sense, if you're looking to rebuild.

Yeah.

Q You sent out your tweet last night. At what moment did you decide to send that?

THE PRESIDENT: So, I sent that right after I knew they had landed safely.

Q When they had returned?

THE PRESIDENT: Right. And that was to notify you guys that you have something big this morning, so you wouldn't be out playing golf or tennis, or otherwise being indisposed.

Q Where did they land? Where were they safe? Where had they landed?

THE PRESIDENT: I'd rather not say. But we landed in a very friendly port in a friendly country.

Q Does this give you any pause by your decision to withdraw the troops?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I think it's great. Look, we don't want to keep soldiers between Syria and Turkey for the next 200 years. They've been fighting for hundreds of years. We're out. But we are leaving soldiers to secure the oil. And we may have to fight for the oil. It's okay. Maybe somebody else wants the oil, in which case they have a hell of a fight. But there's massive amounts of oil.

And we're securing it for a couple of reasons. Number one, it stops ISIS, because ISIS got tremendous wealth from that oil. We have taken it. It's secured.

Number two — and again, somebody else may claim it, but either we'll negotiate a deal with whoever is claiming it, if we think it's fair, or we will militarily stop them very quickly. We have tremendous power in that part of the world. We have — you know, the airport is right nearby. A very big, very monstrous, very powerful airport, and very expensive airport that was built years ago. We were in there — we're in that Middle East now for \$8 trillion.

So we don't want to be keeping Syria and Turkey. They're going to have to make their own decision. The Kurds have worked along incredibly with us, but in all fairness, it was much easier dealing with the Kurds after they went through three days of fighting, because that was a brutal three days. And if I — we would have said to the Kurds, "Hey, do you mind moving over seven miles?" Because, you know, they were in the middle, mostly. So you have seven or eight miles. "Could you mind moving over?"

Because, I have to say, Turkey has taken tremendous deaths from that part of the world. You know, we call it a safe zone. But it was anything but a safe zone. Turkey has lost thousands and thousands people from that safe zone. So they've always wanted that safe zone, for many years. I'm glad I was able to help them get it. But we don't want to be there; we want to be home. I want our soldiers home or fighting something that's meaningful.

I'll tell you who loves us being there: Russia and China. Because while they build their military, we're depleting our military there. So, Russia loves us being there. Now, Russia likes us being there for two reasons: because we kill ISIS, we kill terrorists, and they're very close to Russia. We're 8,000 miles away. Now, maybe they can get here, but we've done very well with Homeland Security and the ban, which, by the way, is approved by the United States Supreme Court, as you know. You know, there was a reporter that said we lost the case. And he was right, in the early court. He refused — he didn't want to say; just refused to say that we won the case in the Supreme Court. So, you know.

But we have a very effective ban, and it's very hard for people to come to our country. But it's many thousands of miles away, whereas Russia is right there, Turkey is right there. Syria is there. They're all right there. Excuse me, Iran is right there. Iraq is right there. They all hate ISIS. So, we don't — you know, in theory, they should do something.

And I'll give you something else: The European nations have been a tremendous disappointment because I personally called, but my people called a lot. "Take your ISIS fighters." And they didn't want them. They said, "We don't want them." They came from France, they came from Germany, they came from the UK. They came from a lot of countries. And I actually said to them, "If you don't take them, I'm going to drop them right on your border. And you can have fun capturing them again."

But the United States taxpayer is not going to pay for the next 50 years. You see what Guantanamo costs. We're not going to pay tens of billions of dollars because we were good enough to capture people that want to go back to Germany, France, UK, and other parts of Europe. And they can walk back. They can't walk to our country. We have lots of water in between our country and them.

So, yeah. Go.

Q You mentioned that you met some — gotten to know some brilliant people along this process who really helped provide information and advice along the way. Is there anyone in particular, or would you like to give anyone credit for getting to this point today?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I would, but if I mentioned one, I have to mention so many. I spoke to Senator Richard Burr this morning. And, as you know, he's very involved with intelligence and the committee. And he's a great gentleman.

I spoke with Lindsey Graham just a little while ago. In fact, Lindsey Graham is right over here. And he's been very much involved in this subject. And he's — he's a very strong hawk. But I think Lindsey agrees with what we're doing now.

And, again, there are plenty of other countries that can help them patrol. I don't want to leave 1,000 or 2,000 or 3,000 soldiers on the border.

But where Lindsey and I totally agree is the oil. The oil is, you know, so valuable for many reasons. It fueled ISIS, number one. Number two, it helps the Kurds, because it's basically been taken away from the Kurds. They were able to live with that oil. And number three, it can help us because we should be able to take some also. And what I intend to do, perhaps, is make a deal with an Exxon Mobil or one of our great companies to go in there and do it properly. Right now, it's not big. It's big oil underground, but it's not big oil up top, and much of the machinery has been shot and dead. It's been through wars. But — and — and spread out the wealth.

But, no, we're protecting the oil. We're securing the oil. Now, that doesn't mean we don't make a deal at some point. But I don't want to be — they're fighting for 1,000 years, they're fighting for centuries. I want to bring our soldiers back home. But I do want to secure the oil.

If you read about the history of Donald Trump — I was a civilian. I had absolutely nothing to do with going into Iraq, and I was totally against it. But I always used to say, "If they're going to go in..." — nobody cared that much, but it got written about. "If they're going to go in..." — I'm sure you've heard the statement, because I made it more than any human being alive. "If they're going into Iraq, keep the oil." They never did. They never did.

I know Lindsey Graham had a bill where basically we would have been paid back for all of the billions of dollars that we've spent — many, many billions of dollars. I mean, I hate to say it, it's actually trillions of dollars, but many, many billions of dollars. And, by one vote, they were unable to get that approved in the Senate. They had some pretty big

opposition from people that shouldn't have opposed, like a president. And they weren't able. If you did that, Iraq would be a much different story today because they would be owing us a lot of money. They would be treating us much differently.

But I will say, Iraq was very good with respect to the raid last night.

Q Sir, just to pin down the timing a little bit better here: You got back to the White House around 4:30 yesterday afternoon. Did you immediately go to the Situation Room?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I knew all about this for three days.

Q Yes, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah. We thought, for three days, this is what was going to happen. It was actually — look, nobody was even hurt. Our K-9, as they call — I call it a dog, a beautiful dog, a talented dog — was injured and brought back. But we had no soldier injured. And they did a lot of shooting, and they did a lot of blasting, even not going through the front door. You know, you would think you go through the door. If you're a normal person, you say, "Knock, knock. May I come in?" The fact is that they blasted their way into the house and a very heavy wall, and it took them literally seconds. By the time those things went off, they had a beautiful, big hole, and they ran in and they got everybody by surprise.

Unbelievably brilliant, as fighters. I don't — I can't imagine there could be anybody better. And these, as you know, are our top operations people.

Q And Baghdadi apparently had been in bad health for some time. Was there any indication of that? Or —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we don't know that. But he was the last one out, and his people had either been killed, which there were many, or gave up and came out. Because with the 11 children that came out, we were able to do that. We don't know if they were his children. They might have been. But as I said, three died in the tunnel. And the tunnel collapsed with the explosion. But you had other fighters coming out also. And they're being brought back. They're being — they're — right now, we have them imprisoned.

Q I was going to ask whose children they were, but do you remember what time you went into the Situation Room?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I started at five o'clock. We were pretty much gathered at five o'clock yesterday. We were in contact all day long through, hopefully, secure phones. I'll let you know tomorrow. But nothing seemed to leak, so I guess they were secure, for a change.

But we gathered more or less at five. The attack started moments after that. The — the liftoff started moments after that. Again, the element of attack that they were most afraid of was getting from our base into that compound. Because there's tremendous firepower that we were, you know, flying over.

And I won't go into it, but you had a very big Russian presence in one area, you had a Turkish presence, you had a Syrian presence. And you're flying low. It's very dangerous. And there were shots made, but we think these were people that were shooting that were indiscriminately shooting. The helicopters took some shots, but we think that these were people that were just random people that don't like to see helicopters, I guess.

Q Sir, was there any kind of DNA test done? Or where is the body? You know —

THE PRESIDENT: So, that's another part of the genius of these people. They brought his — they have his DNA. More of it than they want, even. And they brought it with them with lab technicians who were with them. And they assumed that this was Baghdadi. They thought, visually, it was him. But they assumed it was him, and they did a site — an onsite test. They got samples.

And to get to his body, they had to remove a lot of debris because the tunnel had collapsed. But these people are very good at that. And — and they, as I said, they brought body parts back with them, et cetera, et cetera. There wasn't much left. The — the vest blew up, but there are still substantial pieces that they brought back. So they did an onsite test because we had to know this. And it was a very quick call that took place about 15 minutes after he was killed, and it was positive. It was — it's, "This is a confirmation, sir."

Q There was also a report that his wife had detonated — or one of his wives had detonated a vest. Is that —

THE PRESIDENT: So, there were two women. There were two women. Both wives, both wearing vests. They had not detonated. But the fact that they were dead and they had vests on made it very difficult for our men, because they had vests on. And it made it very difficult for our men. Because you never know what's going to happen. They're lying, they're dead. They never detonated. But they were dead.

Q And if (inaudible) on the successor — the possible successors, have you been briefed on who would possibly fill in the seats?

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah. We know the successors. And we've already got them in our sights. And we'll tell you that right now, but we know the successors. Hamza bin Laden was a big thing, but this is the biggest there is. This is the worst ever.

Osama bin Laden was very big, but Osama bin Laden became big with the World Trade Center. This is a man who built a whole, as he would like to call it, "a country," a caliphate, and was trying to do it again.

And I had not heard too much about his health. I've heard stories about he may not have been in good health. But he died a — he died in a ruthless, vicious manner. That, I can tell you.

Q Were any prisoners taken, sir? Were any adults taken for intel purposes?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, we have people that were taken. We have — many of the people died on the site. But we have people that were taken, yes. And — and the children, we are — we left them under care of somebody, that we understand.

Q Can you say how many? Or do you believe that these were —

THE PRESIDENT: Eleven children.

Q Eleven children. How many adults?

THE PRESIDENT: I'd rather not say. I'd leave that to the generals. But —

Q These were —

THE PRESIDENT: — a small group. More dead than alive.

Q Which operations teams were involved? Which Special Operations teams were involved?

THE PRESIDENT: Many of them, and at the top level. And people that were truly incredible at their craft. I've never seen anything like it.

Q And were there — as far as partnerships goes, were there any other forces involved? Or was this only American troops in this raid?

THE PRESIDENT: No, only American forces.

Q And did the U.S. —

THE PRESIDENT: Only American forces. But we were given great cooperation.

Q Did the U.S. rely on —

THE PRESIDENT: We told the Russians we're coming in, because we had to go over them. And they were curious, but — but we said, "We're coming." How we said — one way or the other, "Hey, look, we're coming." But they were very cooperative. They really were good. And we did say it would be a mission that they'd like, too. Because, you know, again, they hate ISIS as much as we do.

Q Sir, I meant for intel purposes, was there any foreign intel that proved useful along the way in this operation?

THE PRESIDENT: So, we had our own intel. We got very little help. We didn't need very much help. We have some incredible people. When we use our intelligence correctly, what we can do is incredible. When we waste our time with intelligence, that hurts our country, because we had poor leadership at the top. That's not good.

But I've gotten to know many of the intel people, and I will say that they are spectacular. Now, they're not going to want to talk about it. They want to keep it quiet. The last thing they want, because these are — these are great patriots. But the people that I've been

dealing with are incredible people. And it's really a deserving name: "intelligence." I've dealt with some people that aren't very intelligent, having to do with intel, but this is the top people and it was incredible. It was flawless. And it was very complicated.

But — so, I do appreciate Russia, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, to an extent, because, you know, we're flying into Syria, and a lot of Syrian people with lots of guns.

So we had good cover for probably the most dangerous part. It would not sound to — you know, when you fly in, it doesn't sound like that would be the most dangerous when you're going into shooting nests and all of the things that happened once they broke into that pretty powerful compound. That was a very strong compound and, as I said, had tunnels.

But the most dangerous part, we had great cooperation with.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Did you inform Speaker Pelosi ahead of time?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I didn't. I didn't do — I didn't do that. I wanted to make sure this kept secret. I don't want to have men lost — and women. I don't want to have people lost.

Q Do you anticipate inviting the Special Forces teams to the White House after this?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yeah. They'll be invited. I don't know if they'll want to have their faces shown, to be honest with you. You know, they want to — they're incredible for the country. They're not looking for public relations.

But they love doing what they're doing. I've seen it. The First Lady was out there, recently, looking at what they do. She came back, she said, "Wow, I've never seen anything like that." The training — you know, all of the training — and the power of the people. The men and women, the strength, the physical strength, the mental strength. These are incredible people. These are very unique individuals.

Q You mentioned whimpering. Could you hear that on your video hookup?

THE PRESIDENT: Mentioned what?

Q The whimpering of Baghdadi. Did you hear it?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't want to talk about it, but —

Q Okay.

THE PRESIDENT: — he was screaming, crying, and whimpering. And he was scared out of his mind.

And think of James Foley. Think of Kayla. Think of the things he did to Kayla; what he did to Foley and so many others. And for those people that say, "Oh, isn't this a little violent? Think of how many times have you seen men — I think, in all cases, men, for the

most part — but in terms of this, where you see the orange suits, and you see the ocean and they're beheaded. Or how many of you got to see — because it was out there — the Jordanian pilot whose plane went down, they captured him, they put him in a cage, and they set him on fire.

And the King of Jordan actually attacked, very powerfully, when that happened. They've never seen anything like that. But he set him on fire. This was al-Baghdadi. And you should never, ever hopefully see a thing like that again.

Now, there'll be new people emerged, but this was the worst of this particular world. This was the worst. Probably, in certain ways, the smartest. He was also a coward. And he didn't want to die. But think of it: Everybody was out, and we were able to search him down and find him in the tunnel. We knew the tunnel existed. And that's where he was.

Q And you've taken a lot of heat for the Syria pullout. Do you think this will change the standing — your standing —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't have a Syria pullout. I just don't want to guard Turkey and Syria for the rest of our lives. I mean, I don't want to do it. It's very expensive. It's very dangerous. They've been fighting for centuries. I don't want to have my people — 2,000 men and women, or 1,000, or 28. We had 28 guards. And I said, "I don't want them there anyway. I don't want them."

Now, I will secure the oil that happens to be in a certain part. But that's tremendous money involved. I would love to — you know, the oil in — I mean, I'll tell you a story. In Iraq — so they spent — President Bush went in. I strongly disagreed with it, even though it wasn't my expertise at the time, but I had a — I have a very good instinct about things. They went in and I said, "That's a tremendous mistake." And there were no weapons of mass destruction. It turned out I was right. I was right for other reasons, but it turned out, on top of everything else, they had no weapons of mass destruction, because that would be a reason to go in. But they had none.

But I heard recently that Iraq, over the last number of years, actually discriminates against America in oil leases. In other words, some oil companies from other countries, after all we've done, have an advantage Iraq for the oil. I said, "Keep the oil. Give them what they need. Keep the oil." Why should we — we go in, we lose thousands of lives, spend trillions of dollars, and our companies don't even have an advantage in getting the oil leases. So I just tell you that story. That's what I heard.

Q Did Gina Haspel play a role in this? Can you talk a little bit about that? And I saw your NSC counter-terrorism director out in the hallway. Was there a role with NSC counter-terrorism?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Everybody. Gina was great. Everybody played a role. Joe was great. Gina was great. They were all great.

Q Just to follow up, did your Syria pullout, did that generate the intelligence that led to this operation?

THE PRESIDENT: No. We were looking at this — look, as I said, Steve, I’ve been looking at this — I’m here almost three years. I’ve been looking at this for three years. They’d come in, “Sir, we have somebody under...” — I said, “I don’t want somebody. I want al-Baghdadi. That’s the one I want.” They’d said, “Well, we have somebody else.” I said, “That’s great. Fine. Take them out. But I want al-Baghdadi. That’s who I want. I don’t want other people.”

And then I also wanted Hamza bin Laden because he’s a young man, around 30, looks just like his father. Tall, very handsome. And he was talking bad things, just like his father.

You know, if you read my book — there was a book just before the World Trade Center came down. And I don’t get any credit for this, but that’s okay. I never do. But here we are. I wrote a book — a, really, very successful book. And in that book, about a year before the World Trade Center was blown up, I said, “There is somebody named Osama bin Laden. You better kill him or take him out.” Something to that effect. “He’s big trouble.”

Now, I wasn’t in government. I was building buildings and doing what I did. But I always found it fascinating. But I saw this man — tall, handsome, very charismatic — making horrible statements about wanting to destroy our country. And I’m writing a book. I think I wrote 12 books. All did very well. And I’m writing a book. The World Trade Center had not come down. I think it was about — if you check, it was about a year before the World Trade Center came down. And I’m saying to people, “Take out Osama bin Laden,” that nobody ever heard of. Nobody ever heard of. I mean, al-Baghdadi everybody hears because he’s built this monster for a long time. But nobody ever heard of Osama bin Laden until, really, the World Trade Center.

But about a year — you’ll have to check — a year, year and a half before the World Trade Center came down, the book came out. I was talking about Osama bin Laden. I said, “You have to kill him. You have to take him out.” Nobody listened to me.

And to this day, I get people coming up to me, and they said, “You know what one of the most amazing things I’ve ever seen about you? Is that you predicted that Osama bin Laden had to be killed before he knocked down the World Trade Center.” It’s true. Now, most of the press doesn’t want to write that, but you know — but it is true. If you go back, look at my book. I think it was “The America We Deserve.” I made a prediction, and I — let’s put it this way: If they would have listened to me, a lot of things would have been different.

Q Sir, can you talk about some of the difficult decisions you had along the way here in this operation? Anything that weighed on you or that you had to —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, just death. I mean, you know, I’m sending a large number of brilliant fighters. These are the greatest fighters in the world.

Q How many?

THE PRESIDENT: I'd rather let the generals tell you, but a large number. We had eight helicopters and we had many other ships and planes.

It was a large group. And again, this is a large group heading over very, very strong firepower areas where — that was decision one: Will they make it? And they made it, but they took fire, but they made it. They didn't take — we don't believe, again, it was nation fire; we believe it was individual group fire or gang fire, as they call it. So, they made it, so that was a big relief.

Then they went in, they blasted their way in — you've heard. They blasted their way in so quickly. It was incredible. Because this building was quite powerful, strong. They blasted their way in, and then all hell broke loose. It's incredible that nobody was killed — or hurt. We had nobody even hurt. And that's why the dog was so great. We actually had a robot to go in the tunnel, but we didn't get it because we were tracking him very closely. But we had a robot, just in case. Because we were afraid he had a suicide vest on, and if you get close to him and he blows it up, you're going to die. You're going to die. He had a very powerful suicide vest.

Q Did you have to make any decisions in the moment, while troops were on the ground?

THE PRESIDENT: No, they had it just incredible. We were getting full reports on literally a minute-by-minute basis. "Sir, we just broke in." "Sir, the wall is down." "Sir," you know, "we've captured." "Sir, two people are coming out right now. Hands up." Fighters. Then, the 11 children out. Numerous people were dead within the building that they killed.

Then, it turned out, they gave us a report: "Sir, there's only one person in the building. We are sure he's in the tunnel trying to escape." But it's a dead-end tunnel. And it was brutal. But it was over. And as I said, when he blew himself up, the tunnel collapsed on top of him, on top of everything — and his children. I mean, so he led his three children to death. So, you know —

Q And in the tunnel, that's when the robot followed him in? That's why no troops died?

THE PRESIDENT: The robot was set to, but we didn't hook it up because we were too — they were moving too fast. We were moving fast. We weren't 100 percent sure about the tunnel being dead-ended. It's possible that there could have been an escape hatch somewhere along that we didn't know about.

So we moved very, very quickly. I mean —

Q Was he being chased then?

THE PRESIDENT: — these people, they were moving — they were chasing, yeah. They were chasing. But again, because the suicide vest, you can't get too close.

Again, one of the reasons with the wives is if they have a suicide vest, you know, you have to be very, very careful. These vests are brutal. Brutal. And they go for a long distance.

Yes, please.

Q Have you spoken or will you speak to the families, like the Foley family?

THE PRESIDENT: I'm calling the families now. It will be a pleasure to do that. The Foley family, who I know. We'll be calling Kayla's family. What — what he did to her was incredible. It's a well-known story, and I'm not going to say it, but you know that. He kept her in captivity for a long period of time. He kept her in his captivity, his personal captivity. She was a beautiful woman, beautiful young woman. Helped people. She was there to help people. And he saw her and he thought she was beautiful, and he brought her into captivity for a long period of time and then he killed her. He was an animal, and he was a gutless animal.

Thank you all very much. I appreciate it. It's a very great day for our country.

END

10:08 A.M. EDT