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BIN LADEN: U.S. KILLS BIN LADEN; 9 YEARS, 7 MONTHS, 21 DAYS SINCE 9/11; Obama says U.S.-led team found terror leader in mansion in Pakistan

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WASHINGTON - Osama bin Laden is dead.

That was the stunning message President Barack Obama delivered late last night in an unscheduled speech from the East Room of the White House.

It was an epitaph to the deadly career of a dedicated terrorist whose plotting killed about 3,000 people in Manhattan, Washington and Pennsylvania nearly a decade ago on Sept. 11, 2001, and hundreds of others since the early 1990s.

Bin Laden, the most wanted man in the world, finally was detected in a remote hideout in a mansion in Pakistan last August by U.S. intelligence.

With Obama's approval, Navy SEALs yesterday moved in on bin Laden and killed him in a 40-minute fight that avoided harming uninvolved civilians, Obama said.

"Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted operation against that compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, a small team of Americans carried out the operations with extraordinary courage and capability," Obama said.

"After a firefight, they killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body."

Three men were also killed in Sunday's raid, including one of bin Laden's sons, whom officials did not name, according to The Associated Press. One of bin Laden's sons, Hamza, is a senior member of al-Qaida.

The death of bin Laden closes a terrifying chapter in the history of the United States and in the rest of the world, which had been targeted by bin Laden and his followers.

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The news inspired hundreds of people to gather outside the White House to mark the moment in jubilation, as they waved U.S. flags, sang patriotic songs and cheered the news. Similar celebrations broke out in New York City.

Former President George W. Bush, who was in office during the Sept. 11 attacks and famously said he wanted bin Laden dead or alive, said the death of the al-Qaida leader was a "momentous achievement."

"The fight against terror goes on, but tonight America has sent an unmistakable message: No matter how long it takes, justice will be done," Bush said in a statement.

Former President Bill Clinton said, "This is a profoundly important moment not just for the families of those who lost their lives on 9/11 and in al-Qaida's other attacks, but for people all over the world who want to build a common future of peace, freedom and cooperation for our children."

"I congratulate the president, the National Security team and the members of our armed forces on bringing Osama bin Laden to justice after more than a decade of murderous al-Qaida attacks."

Mayor Michael Bloomberg said, "The killing of Osama bin Laden does not lessen the suffering that New Yorkers and Americans experienced at his hands, but it is a critically important victory for our nation - and a tribute to the millions of men and women in our armed forces and elsewhere who have fought so hard for our nation."

"New Yorkers have waited nearly 10 years for this news. It is my hope that it will bring some closure and comfort to all those who lost loved ones on Sept. 11, 2001."

Sen. Charles E. Schumer said in a statement, "This is a thunderous strike for justice for the thousands of my fellow New Yorkers - and citizens from all over the world - who were murdered on 9/11 ... New York's heart is still broken from the tragedy of 9/11, but this at least brings some measure of closure and consolation to the victims and their families."

Rep. Tim Bishop (D-Southampton) said, "This is a milestone in the war on terror and a triumph for justice. The world is a better place with Osama Bin Laden no longer a part of it."

Obama said the operation had been long in the planning.

"Last August, after years of painstaking work by our intelligence community, I was briefed on a possible lead to bin Laden," Obama said.

"It was far from certain and it took many months to run this threat to ground," he said. "I met repeatedly with my national security team as we developed more information that we had located Bin Laden hiding within a compound deep inside Pakistan."

He added, "Finally last week I determined we had enough intelligence to take action and authorized an operation to get Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice."

But Obama reminded the American people that the threat of terrorism from radical Islamists continues.

"There is not doubt al-Qaida will continue to pursue attacks against us," Obama said. "We must and will remain vigilant at home and abroad."

Obama immediately held out an olive leaf to Muslims around the world, emphasizing that the war was not against them but against bin Laden and his vision of Islam.

But he recognized the suffering and misery of those who lost loved ones in the al-Qaida attacks on America.

"Damages of 9/11 are seared into our national memory. Hijacked planes cutting through a cloudless September sky,"

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Obama said.

"The Twins Towers collapsing to the ground. By smoke billowing up from the Pentagon. The wreckage of Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where the actions of heroic citizens saved even more heartbreakng destruction."

The Toll

2,976

People killed on 9/11

1,485

Troops killed in Afghanistan

(as of April 28)

\$82.8-\$94.8B

Estimated economic impact

of 9/11 attacks on New York City

\$659M

Estimated cost of Ground Zero cleanup

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GRAPHIC: 1) AFP / Getty Images file photo - Osama bin Laden, 2) AP PHOTO - President Barack Obama, 3) MCT PHOTO - In Washington, a crowd gathers in front of the White House last night to celebrate President Barack Obama's news that Osama bin Laden was killed by U.S. forces. 4) AP FILE COVER PHOTO - Osama bin Laden, CHART - The toll (SEE END OF TEXT)

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