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Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney and Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism John Brennan, 5/2/2011**James S. Brady Press Briefing Room**

2:00 P.M. EDT

MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I just wanted to make one point before we get started. I have with me today John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism. And he will take questions from you about the events of last night and yesterday afternoon and what preceded those events.

And then if you have any questions on other subjects I'll do about 10 minutes after Mr. Brennan is finished to take those questions.

I just want to make a point before John comes up that as many of you know, the President, even before he was President, when he was a candidate, had a very clear idea about the approach he would take as President towards Osama bin Laden. In August of 2007, he said, "If we have actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets and President Musharraf won't act, we will." In July of 2008, he said, "We must make it clear that if Pakistan cannot or will not act, we will take out high-level terrorist targets like bin Laden if we have them in our sights."

And he repeated statements like that. Again, I just want to be clear that this is an approach that he always felt that he would take when he was President and then, as John will elaborate, once he took office he made sure that we would revitalize our focus on Osama bin Laden and the hunt for him.

So, with that, I'd like to invite John up to take your questions. And I will be standing here, if you have questions on other topics. Thank you.

Associated Press.

Q Thank you, sir. I wanted to ask about the specific goal of the raid. Was there a consideration to try to take bin Laden alive, or was the mission to kill him on sight?

MR. BRENNAN: Absolutely it was to prepare for all contingencies. If we had the opportunity to take bin Laden alive, if he didn't present any threat, the individuals involved were able and prepared to do that. We had discussed that extensively in a number of meetings in the White House and with the President. The concern was that bin Laden would oppose any type of capture operation. Indeed, he did. It was a firefight. He, therefore, was killed in that firefight and that's when the remains were removed.

But we certainly were planning for the possibility, which we thought was going to be remote, given that he would likely resist arrest, but that we would be able to capture him.

Q So you went into the operation believing that the most likely outcome was that he would be killed on sight?

MR. BRENNAN: We were trying to make sure that we were able to accomplish the mission safely and securely for the people who were involved. We were not going to put our people at risk. The President put a premium on making sure that our personnel were protected and we were not going to give bin Laden or any of his cohorts the opportunity to carry out lethal fire on our forces. He was engaged and he was killed in the process. But if we had the opportunity to take him alive, we would have done that.

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Q And if I could just ask, have you been able to determine how bin Laden was able to hide in this relatively prominent location, and do you believe the Pakistanis when they say that they had no idea that he was there?

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MR. BRENNAN: People have been referring to this as hiding in plain sight. Clearly this was something that was considered as a possibility. Pakistan is a large country. We are looking right now at how he was able to hold out there for so long, and whether or not there was any type of support system within Pakistan that allowed him to stay there.

We know that the people at the compound there were working on his behalf, and that's how we ultimately found our way to that compound. But we are right now less than 24 hours after this operation, so we are talking with the Pakistanis on a regular basis now, and we're going to pursue all leads to find out exactly what type of support system and benefactors that bin Laden might have had.

Q But you don't necessarily take them at their word that they didn't know?

MR. BRENNAN: We are pursuing all leads in this issue.

Q Just to follow on that, is it really credible that Pakistani authorities had no idea that this compound was being built and that it existed -- such an elaborate compound?

MR. BRENNAN: I think it's inconceivable that bin Laden did not have a support system in the country that allowed him to remain there for an extended period of time. I am not going to speculate about what type of support he might have had on an official basis inside of Pakistan. We are closely talking to the Pakistanis right now, and again, we are leaving open opportunities to continue to pursue whatever leads might be out there.

Q And also one of the things that a lot of people think about when they hear this news is what does this mean for the war in Afghanistan? Does it make it easier to wind things down there?

MR. BRENNAN: I think the accomplishment that very brave personnel from the United States government were able to realize yesterday is a defining moment in the war against al Qaeda, the war on terrorism, by decapitating the head of the snake known as al Qaeda. It is going to have, I think, very important reverberations throughout the area, on the al Qaeda network in that area.

This is something that we've been after for 15 years, goes back before 9/11. So I think what we're doing now is going to try to take advantage of this opportunity that we have to demonstrate to the Pakistani people, to the people in the area that al Qaeda is something in the past. And we're hoping to bury the rest of al Qaeda along with bin Laden.

Q In the Situation Room yesterday, could you describe how you were monitoring the goings-on? It's been described as a very tense -- understandably, a very tense scene. Were you watching the operation? Were you -- were you listening to it? How were you getting your information?

MR. BRENNAN: The principals convened yesterday around midday. There were others who -- we were here early yesterday morning. The President joined us then early afternoon before the operation got underway. When the operation did get underway, then the President rejoined the group, and we were able to monitor in a real-time basis the progress of the operation from its commencement to its time on target to the extraction of the remains and to then the egress off of the target.

It was probably one of the most anxiety-filled periods of time, I think, in the lives of the people who were assembled here yesterday. The minutes passed like days. And the President was very concerned about the security of our personnel. That was what was on his mind throughout. And we wanted to make sure that we were able to get through this and accomplish the mission.

But it was clearly very tense, a lot of people holding their breath. And there was a fair degree of silence as it progressed, as we would get the updates. And when we finally were informed that those individuals who were able to go in that compound and found the individual that they believe was bin Laden, there was a tremendous sigh of relief that what we believed and who we believed was in that compound actually was in that compound and was found. And the President was relieved once we had our people and those remains off target.

Q Was it -- was there a visual, or was it just radio reports or phone reports you were getting?

MR. BRENNAN: We were able to monitor the situation in real time and were able to have regular updates and

to ensure that we had real-time visibility into the progress of the operation. I'm not going to go into details about what type of visuals we had or what type of feeds that were there, but it was -- it gave us the ability to actually track it on an ongoing basis.

Q And I understand that there was a moment of real tension, one with the helicopter, but then also when the Navy SEALs were leaving and the Pakistani government started scrambling their jets, and there was a concern that they were coming to where the U.S. troops were, where the Navy SEALs were. Was there an actual concern that the Pakistanis -- since they were not apparently informed about this military operation, was there an actual concern that they might actually take military action against the Navy SEALs?

MR. BRENNAN: We didn't contact the Pakistanis until after all of our people, all of our aircraft were out of Pakistani airspace. At the time, the Pakistanis were reacting to an incident that they knew was taking place in Abbottabad. Therefore, they were scrambling some of their assets.

Clearly, we were concerned that if the Pakistanis decided to scramble jets or whatever else, they didn't know who were on those jets. They had no idea about who might have been on there, whether it be U.S. or somebody else. So we were watching and making sure that our people and our aircraft were able to get out of Pakistani airspace. And thankfully, there was no engagement with Pakistani forces. This operation was designed to minimize the prospects, the chances of engagement with Pakistani forces. It was done very well, and thankfully no Pakistani forces were engaged and there was no other individuals who were killed aside from those on the compound.

Q Thank you, sir.

Q Thank you. Can you talk to us about what documentation you may have found there? Was it a bank vault worth of information, and are you able to potentially get some additional leads out of the information that was found?

MR. BRENNAN: The people who were on the compound took advantage of their time there to make sure that we were able to acquire whatever material we thought was appropriate and what was needed. And we are in the process right now of looking at whatever might have been picked up. But I'm not going to go into details of what might have been acquired. We feel as though this is a very important time to continue to prosecute this effort against al Qaeda, take advantage of the success of yesterday and to continue to work to break the back of al Qaeda.

Q But was it a lot of information? How would you describe it in terms of the volume?

MR. BRENNAN: We are trying to determine exactly the worth of whatever information we might have been able to pick up. And it's not necessarily quantity; frequently it's quality.

Q Now that you have Osama bin Laden, can you tell us how close the U.S. has gotten to him in the past, beyond Tora Bora? Any other close calls that we have not been informed about?

MR. BRENNAN: Over the years -- Tora Bora was certainly the last time that we had actionable and we thought was very credible information about where he was located. A number of leads have been pursued over the years. I think what this operation demonstrates is that there are some very, very good people who have been following bin Laden for many, many years. They have been very persistent. They have pulled on every thread. And as a result of that diligence and their analytic capabilities, they were able to track this and continue to build a body of evidence that suggested, circumstantially, that bin Laden was at that compound. That's what they did. It was much greater confidence that we had in this body of intelligence, in this body of information, than we've had since Tora Bora.

Still, though, there was nothing that confirmed that bin Laden was at that compound, and therefore, when President Obama was faced with the opportunity to act upon this, the President had to evaluate the strength of that information and then made, what I believe was one of the most gutsiest calls of any President in recent memory.

Q And in the lead-up to that final mission, can you talk to us about how -- the anxiety of not being able to track, or even get the name initially of the gentleman who led you to the compound?

MR. BRENNAN: In counterterrorism work and doing what's called targeting analysis, it is exceptionally tedious and painstaking as far as taking a little bit of data and piecing it together and trying to correlate it with something else. And as a result of the information that we had in a very generic way about these couriers and individuals who were cohorts with bin Laden, over time we were able to piece together additional information, get the name he was known by, his nom de guerre, associate that then eventually with his real name, associate that then with other things that that real name was associated with, and track it until we got to the compound in Abbottabad.

And then over the past six months, with trying to ensure that we had the best visibility in terms of understanding what was happening at the compound, that body of evidence accumulating to the point when the President said, I want to have operations against this compound, I want to know what the pros and cons are of them, I want to have options, and I want to make sure that we've taken into account the safety and security of the American people -- or of the Americans that would be conducting this operation, that we look at it from the standpoint of limiting collateral damage, and making sure that we're able to maximize the chances of mission success.

And ultimately we got to that point; we could bring those together. The President made the decision. And the results I think speak for themselves.

MR. CARNEY: Chip.

Q You said that Osama bin Laden was actually involved in the firefight, and we had -- it has been reported that he reached for a weapon. Did he get his hand on a gun and did he fire himself?

MR. BRENNAN: He was engaged in a firefight with those that entered the area of the house he was in. And whether or not he got off any rounds, I quite frankly don't know.

Thinking about that from a visual perspective, here is bin Laden, who has been calling for these attacks, living in this million dollar-plus compound, living in an area that is far removed from the front, hiding behind women who were put in front of him as a shield. I think it really just speaks to just how false his narrative has been over the years. And so, again, looking at what bin Laden was doing hiding there while he's putting other people out there to carry out attacks again just speaks to I think the nature of the individual he was.

Q In these anxiety-filled minutes that you said lasted like days, what was the most anxiety-filled moment? Was it when the helicopter appeared to be inoperable, or was it when you heard shots fired? And when you monitored in real time, could you actually hear the shots fired?

MR. BRENNAN: You know, when you plan these things out, you have already -- you know in your mind exactly what's the first step, second step, and everything going along. If there's any deviation from that, it causes anxiety. But the individuals who carried out this assault planned for all the various contingencies.

So when that helicopter was seen to be unable to move, all of a sudden you had to go into Plan B. And they did it flawlessly. They were able to conduct the operation as they were preparing to do. But seeing that helicopter in a place and in a condition that it wasn't supposed to be, I think that was one -- at least for me, and I know for the other people in the room -- was the concern we had that now we're having to go to the contingency plan. And thankfully, they were as able to carry out that contingency plan as they were the initial plan.

Q Could you hear shots fired?

MR. BRENNAN: We were able to monitor the situation in real-time. (Laughter.)

Q When he actually -- can you describe any reaction by the President specifically when it became clear that this was Osama bin Laden and that he had been killed? Do you remember the President's words or a reaction from

MR. BRENNAN: Well, you say "when it became clear," and that's one of the things that we had to do throughout the course of this operation. When we heard that the individuals who carried out this assault felt as though they had an individual who appeared to be bin Laden, that is one data point. Then there were other types of things: facial recognition, height, the preliminary DNA analysis, so there was an incremental buildup.

And the confidence was building. But yet at what point do you feel confident that you have the person you're after? So it was more of a growing sense of confidence and a growing sense of accomplishment. There wasn't one "ah-hah," when people say, okay, the DNA results came in. No, this is something that was building over time, and we made a decision then last night, because we felt as though we were confident enough to go out to the American people and out to the world to say, we got him.

Q -- the President's reaction at any time?

MR. BRENNAN: We got him.

Q All right, circle back to a point you just made. Bin Laden used women as human shields when American

personnel went in?

MR. BRENNAN: There was family at that compound, and there was a female who was in fact in the line of fire that reportedly was used as a shield to shield bin Laden from the incoming fire.

Q I'm wondering where you are at this point on the idea of releasing photos of bin Laden to show the world that he is dead.

MR. BRENNAN: We are less than 24 hours from the arrival on target of those individuals. We have released a tremendous amount of information to date. We are going to continue to look at the information that we have and make sure that we are able to share what we can, because we want to make sure that not only the American people but the world understand exactly what happened, and the confidence that we have that it was conducted in accordance with the mission design.

At the same time, we don't want to do anything that's going to compromise our ability to be as successful the next time we get one of these guys and take them off the battlefield.

Q Is there some thought, though, that releasing a photo or two might avoid conspiracy theories throughout the Muslim world?

MR. BRENNAN: We are going to do everything we can to make sure that nobody has any basis to try to deny that we got Osama bin Laden. And so, therefore, the releasing of information, and whether that includes photographs, this is something to be determined.

Q John, is the debate about whether to release something, or what to release, when it comes to visual evidence?

MR. BRENNAN: I think it's both. I think, first of all, what falls into the category of things that you can potentially release to the public, whether it be those DNA results, whether it be comments about the conduct of the operation, what happened, the intelligence case. And then you have to take a look at it from the standpoint of what are the upsides and downsides. And sometimes when you conduct an operation that is based on intelligence and is based on the very sensitive and very capable forces that we have available to us in the U.S. government, you want to make sure that you're not doing anything to expose something that will limit your ability to use those same intelligence sources and capabilities in the future.

Q Who has -- has anybody secured this compound? Has the Pakistani government now gone in, or the Pakistani army gone in to secure this compound since we --

MR. BRENNAN: I was just looking at al Jazeera a little while ago, I saw that I think the ISI or the Pakistani military police have that compound now under control. And clearly it is the site of a major incident yesterday, and so, therefore, it would be my presumption that the Pakistani authorities would be in control of that compound.

Q Who owned the land?

MR. BRENNAN: Whether it be the land or the compound, but it was two of the individuals who were killed -- the al Qaeda facilitators, as they're called -- the individual who was identified as the gatekeeper courier, the residence was, at least in my understanding, in his name.

Q And it's my understanding that -- you called it just now that the President made one of the gutsiest decisions that he made. That implies that there was some disagreement around the table about whether this was not -- this was not a unanimous recommendation --

MR. BRENNAN: Absolutely. Absolutely. And that's been the --

Q -- this is the way to go.

MR. BRENNAN: -- way he goes. He goes around the room and he wants to hear people's views. And so you have a circumstantial intelligence case. And so people will see that either there is insufficient circumstantial evidence to go forward with something like this, which involves a unilateral operation in another country to go after somebody you believe is Osama bin Laden -- and there were differences of views that were discussed. That's what the President wanted to know.

As well as a different -- what's called COAs, courses of action, which are the types of things that you can do that involve an assault on a compound, as well as from a standoff position -- what are the benefits of doing that from a remote location, like we've done in the past in certain areas, as well as what are the risks associated with security forces actually going into the compound.

So this was debated across the board and the President wanted to make sure at the end that he had the views of all the principals.

Q Was it a close call, in your opinion?

MR. BRENNAN: For the President to go forward with this?

Q Yes.

MR. BRENNAN: I have been following bin Laden for 15 years, been after this guy, and I have the utmost confidence in the people, particularly at CIA, who have been tracking him. They were confident and their confidence was growing: This is different. This intelligence case is different. What we see in this compound is different than anything we've ever seen before.

I was confident that we had the basis to take action. I also, though, had the confidence that the U.S. team that went in there has exceptional skill to do this very capably. So I was a supporter and I know a number of other people were supportive to do this.

But the President had to look at all the different scenarios, all the different contingencies that are out there -- what would have been the downsides if, in fact, it wasn't bin Laden? What would have happened if a helicopter went down? So he decided that this is so important to the security of the American people that he was going to go forward with this.

Q Can you tell us more about the role that the U.S. -- more of the role of how the U.S. is interacting with Pakistan and are we actively investigating what they knew and didn't know about Osama bin Laden being there or not?

MR. BRENNAN: Well, a couple things. One, the President mentioned yesterday that he spoke to President Zardari, and a number of senior U.S. officials are in regular contact now with their Pakistani counterparts. We are continuing to engage with them -- we're engaging with them today -- as we learn more about the compound and whatever type of support system bin Laden had.

I would point out that we've had differences of view with the Pakistani government on counterterrorism cooperation, on areas of cooperation, and what we think they should and shouldn't be doing. At the same time, I'll say that Pakistan has been responsible for capturing and killing more terrorists inside of Pakistan than any country, and it's by a wide margin. And there have been many, many brave Pakistani soldiers, security officials, as well as citizens, who have given their lives because of the terrorism scourge in that country. So although there are some differences of view with Pakistan, we believe that that partnership is critically important to breaking the back of al Qaeda and eventually prevailing over al Qaeda as well as associated terrorist groups.

Q John, can you tell us about the burial at sea? Where did it happen? When did it happen?

MR. BRENNAN: The disposal of -- the burial of bin Laden's remains was done in strict conformance with Islamist precepts and practices. It was prepared in accordance with the Islamic requirements. We early on made provisions for that type of burial, and we wanted to make sure that it was going to be done, again, in strict conformance.

So it was taken care of in the appropriate way. I'm not going to go into details about sort of the where, but that burial has taken place. It took place earlier today our time.

Q And why?

Q When was that decision made?

MR. BRENNAN: I'm sorry?

Q When was that decision made that he would be buried at sea if killed?

Q Can you explain why –

MR. CARNEY: One at a time.

Q Was it thought through years ago? Was this part of the plan all along?

MR. BRENNAN: The COAs -- the course of action and the subsequent decisions that would have to be made have been developed over the course of the last several months. Senior officials, and there was a working group that was working this on a regular basis, if not a daily basis, over the last several weeks, looking at every decision and based on what type of scenario would unfold, what actions and decisions would be made. It was looked at from the standpoint of if we captured him, what will we do with him? Where would he go? If he was killed, what will we do with him, and where would he go? And it was determined that it was in the best interests of all involved that this burial take place, again, according to Islamic requirements, at sea.

Q Why at sea?

Q Can you just tell us why that was a good idea?

MR. BRENNAN: It was determined that that -- there is the requirement in Islamic law that an individual be buried within 24 hours. Went inside of Pakistan, carried out the operation, he was killed, he was removed from Pakistan. There were certain steps that had to be taken because of the nature of the operation, and we wanted to make sure we were able to do that in the time period allotted for it. Going to another country, making those arrangements, requirements, would have exceeded that time period, in our view. And so, therefore, we thought that the best way to ensure that his body was given an appropriate Islamic burial was to take those actions that would allow us to do that burial at sea.

Q John, did you consult a Muslim expert on that?

MR. BRENNAN: We consulted the appropriate specialists and experts, and there was unanimity that this would be the best way to handle that.

Q And last question. Do you know if detainees at Gitmo have been informed of what has happened to --

MR. BRENNAN: I do not know.

Q There are reports that he was wrapped in a weighted white sheet. How secure is that? Are you confident the body is not going to --

MR. BRENNAN: Burials at sea take place on a regular basis. The U.S. military has the ability to ensure that that burial is done in a manner that is, again, consistent with Islamic law, as well as consistent with what the requirements are for a burial at sea. And so that burial was done appropriately.

Q And so today lawmakers are urging -- possibly reconsidering or reevaluating aid to Pakistan, maybe attaching strings to military aid there. Was the White House --

MR. BRENNAN: I think people are raising a number of questions, and understandably so. Again, we're in just the first day after the operation, and he was found in Abbottabad outside of Islamabad. I'm sure a number of people have questions about whether or not there was some type of support that was provided by the Pakistani government. So I think people are raising these questions and how we're going to have to deal with them.

Q Is there a visual recording of this burial?

MR. CARNEY: We've got to get other people a chance here. Mara.

Q Just a quick question about the burial and then something else. Was there an imam there? Was there a religious --

MR. BRENNAN: It was done appropriately with the appropriate people there.

Q Okay. And a question -- I don't know if this is for you or for Jay. The President is going to speak to the bipartisan leadership tonight at this dinner. What is he going to say about this that's different than what he said before and that's particularly geared to them? Can you just give us a preview?

MR. BRENNAN: Well, you're going to have another 20 hours of information that has been acquired since what he said to the nation last night. I think what he's going to try to do is to give the congressional visitors here an update on that. Last night, we didn't have some of the analysis that was done. Now, we can say with 99.9 percent confidence that this was bin Laden. So it's those types of things, as well as to explain to the Congress, in many respects, some of the unique features of this mission, which were the extreme compartmentation of it; how it was kept so closely held within our government; why it was done in a unilateral fashion – and so things along those lines.

Q There's been some reporting that the burial – that the U.S. offered the body to the Saudis for a burial, but they declined. Is that true?

MR. BRENNAN: We, after we had confidence that it was bin Laden and that he was dead, we took the steps that we had agreed to in the interagency that were necessary to ensure that that burial entity was the most appropriate thing to do. And so we touched base with the right people. I'm not going to go into any details about who we might have consulted with in the aftermath of his death and before his burial.

Q Mr. Brennan, can you give us any details on whether there were previous operations that were held off at the last minute because of fears and risks, or perhaps the inability to identify bin Laden's body positively had it been done differently?

MR. BRENNAN: You mean against this target?

Q Against this target.

MR. BRENNAN: As I said, there were different courses of action about the options that were available to the President as far as whether there was going to be an assault on the ground or whether there was going to be some type of standoff option. Discussed all the pros and cons of them, and through that process of discussion, the options were narrowed down until the President decided that this was the best option because it gave us the ability to minimize collateral damage, ensure that we knew who it was that was on that compound, as opposed to taking some time of strike there, and also as a way to do what we could to respect the sovereignty of Pakistan and also to allow us to engage with them immediately after the fact, as opposed to some type of ordinance that might be dropping on it.

Q Can I ask one follow? You mentioned that questions are going to be raised about Pakistan, understandably, and the role of Pakistan. For you and your counterterrorism job, given now the history of the Raymond Davis episode and the fact that this was done without consultation, are you concerned that in just in your line of work it will be very difficult to reestablish a good working relationship with the ISI or the intelligence authorities there?

MR. BRENNAN: There's dialogue going on with our counterterrorism counterparts in the aftermath of this. They're expressing understanding about the reasons why we did this. They are appreciative that it was done without having Pakistani casualties outside of that compound. The U.S.-Pakistani relationship, which is a strategic relationship, goes on a number of different areas and levels; counterterrorism is one of them. It can be a complicated matter. As I say, we don't always agree on some of the things that we want to do. But through that continued dialogue and communication, I think we get where we need to be.

This is one more incident that we're going to have to deal with, and we look forward to continue to work with our Pakistani colleagues, because they are as much, if not more, on the front lines of the battle against terrorism.

Q How certain are you that there will be some kind of movement to avenge this death, some kind of retaliation? Is there – if you still had the color-coded alerts, would this be a time when you would raise that alert?

MR. BRENNAN: Janet Napolitano, Secretary of Homeland Secretary, had announced that there was a change in the color-code system to the National Threat Advisory System. And I think she has put out a statement saying that we don't have the specific and credible threat reporting that would require some type, in their mind, of an elevation of that threat status. Like any incident like this, what we do is take the prudent steps afterward to make sure that we have our vigilance up, that we are taking the appropriate measures so that our security posture is strong, both overseas and here.

But I think there is always the potential for terrorist groups to try to strike out and avenge an operation like this, but also I think some of them are asking themselves, bin Laden is dead; the al Qaeda narrative is becoming increasingly bankrupt; there is a new wave sweeping through the Middle East right now that puts a premium on individual rights and freedom and dignity; and so al Qaeda, bin Laden -- old news. Now is the time to move forward.

And we're hoping that this is going to send a message to those individuals who are out there that terrorism and militancy is not the wave of the future, it's the wave of the past.

Q Is al Qaeda weaker and never able to return to --

MR. BRENNAN: This is a strategic blow to al Qaeda. It is a necessary but not necessarily sufficient blow to lead to its demise. But we are determined to destroy it. I think we have a lot better opportunity now that al Qaeda -- that bin Laden is out of there to destroy that organization, create fractures within it.

The number two, Zawahiri is not charismatic. He has not been -- was not involved in the fight earlier on in Afghanistan, so -- and I think he has a lot of detractors within the organization. And I think you're going to see them start eating themselves from within more and more.

MR. CARNEY: Christi.

Q Mr. Brennan, thank you. There are reports that there was a replica of the compound. Can you tell us anything about where and how that was put together?

MR. BRENNAN: You can imagine that for something as important as this, and something as risky as this, every effort would be made to do the practice runs, understand the complexities and the layout of the compound. There were multiple opportunities to do that in terms of going through the exercises to prepare for it, so that once they hit the compound they had already simulated that a number of times. So this was done -- and again, I'm not going to go into details about where or when. But needless to say, when they hit that compound, they had already trained against it numerous times.

Q Can I just ask you, as a follow-up, if you -- the compound was so big. How did the SEALs know where to find bin Laden? And was it -- can you say anything about was it a bedroom or a dining area or an open area or something like that?

MR. BRENNAN: The outer features of the compound were studied intensively and there were certain assessments made about where individuals were living and where bin Laden and his family were. And they operated according to that. And they didn't know when they got there exactly what some of the internal features of it would be, but they had planned, based on certain, again, observable features of the compound, how to carry it out. And whoever it was that actually did the assault on that -- you named a certain group --

Q Was the bin Laden family part of the compound? It sounds like that's what you're saying.

MR. BRENNAN: Absolutely.

MR. CARNEY: Carrie.

Q This might be a question more for Jay, but given the sort of unity that you've seen from messaging from both sides, both parties in the last 24 hours, is the President going to make any appeal to leaders tonight that this sense of unity can carry through to the other issues that they need to --

MR. CARNEY: I'll address that because that goes to Mara's question, but I want to give John just a few more because he's got other things he needs to do.

Let me go to April -- maybe two or three more for -- I'm sorry --

Q Were there any civilian -- I mean, how many civilian casualties were there?

MR. BRENNAN: Bin Laden died; the two al Qaeda facilitators -- the brothers, who were -- the courier and his brother in the compound; bin Laden's son Hamza; and the woman, presumed to be his wife, who was shielding bin Laden.

Q Did he use her as a -- did he actually take her as a shield or did someone put her in front of him?

MR. BRENNAN: I wasn't there so I hesitate to say --

Q But she was in front of him --

MR. BRENNAN: -- but it was an effort to try to shield bin Laden from the --

Q Bin Laden's wife or his son's wife?

MR. BRENNAN: Bin Laden's wife.

Q All right, I want to go back to a couple questions, one on security. The mindset of intelligence folks in this administration and the administration prior was that an attack -- it's not about if it would happen; when it will happen. So are we now -- because you're saying this was a strategic blow, the head of the snake was lopped off, are we now changing that mindset, or has it changed because of this blow?

MR. BRENNAN: I haven't had the mindset that it's not if, it's when. I mean, that's basically saying something is going to happen there. I think every day counterterrorism professionals, whether it be intelligence, military, Homeland Security, law enforcement, are trying to stop whatever attack might be out there, trying to uncover a plot that might be out there. And so they go into each day believing that they can, in fact, have another day without a terrorist attack against U.S. interests either abroad or here.

So this does not mean that we are putting down our guard, as far as al Qaeda is concerned. It may be a mortally wounded tiger that still has some life in it, and it's dangerous and we need to keep up the pressure. We cannot relent, because there are individuals in that organization that are determined to try to carry out attacks and murder innocent men, women and children.

Q Since the death of bin Laden, what is the thought of this administration -- do you believe that the Pakistani government was transparent and being honest and forthcoming, given the information that they have now on Osama bin Laden -- what they knew, or going in to finding out more about this situation?

MR. BRENNAN: There are a lot of people within the Pakistani government, and I'm not going to speculate about who or if any of them had prior knowledge about bin Laden being in Abbottabad. But certainly his location there outside of the capital raises questions. We are talking to the Pakistanis about this. But they, at least in our discussions with them, seem as surprised as we were initially that bin Laden was holding out in that area.

Q You spoke earlier about using this as kind of a pivot point to demonstrate to the people of Pakistan that al Qaeda has passed, that there's a different future. Is the President still firmly committed to visiting Pakistan this year to make that message in person?

MR. BRENNAN: I'm not going to address the President's schedule. I think there's a commitment that the President has made that he is intending to visit Pakistan. A lot depends on availability, scheduling, whatever. The President feels very strongly that the people of Pakistan need to be able to realize their potential to have a life that is full of security as well as prosperity. And because of the al Qaeda menace as well as other militant organizations in that country, too many Pakistanis have suffered and have died because of that. And what the President is wanting to do and what we're doing with the Pakistani government is to see what we can do to help the Pakistani government provide that type of lifestyle for their populace in the future.

MR. CARNEY: All right, let's do Stephen and then Sam. And then we'll let John go.

Q Does the fact that bin Laden was found in such apparently comfortable conditions in Pakistan, and there are obviously big threats to the U.S. interests in places like Yemen in terms of terrorism, undercut the strategic rationale for the need to still have 100,000 troops in Afghanistan?

MR. BRENNAN: The basis for the ISAF presence in Afghanistan is to bring that country the security that it can have, and to not allow al Qaeda to ever again use Afghanistan as a launching point. This is something that we're in ongoing discussions with the Afghan government, obviously the Pakistani government. We need to make sure that that part of the world, which has given rise to a number of groups -- al Qaeda, others -- that they cannot use that area with impunity to carry out attacks.

So we are as determined as we ever have been to bring the security that these countries and these people need and deserve because of what we can, in fact, help them with.

Q Jay, may I?

MR. CARNEY: Sam.

Q Yes, I'm just curious – I know that we didn't let any other countries know before the strikes, but in the time that's unfolded since, has the President had any contact with the leaders of NATO countries?

MR. BRENNAN: The President has had a number of conversations with foreign leaders about this issue. I'm not going to go into the individual discussions he's had, but clearly this is something of international significance, and that he has -- and will continue to have in the coming days those discussions.

Q But you can't say if he's talked to, say, Chancellor Merkel or President Sarkozy?

MR. BRENNAN: Yes, I could, but I'm not going to.

MR. CARNEY: I know that's a follow, so --

Q Mr. Brennan, in light of the size of this – the unique features and the size of this compound, is it likely that the neighbors had known anything about this, who lived there?

MR. BRENNAN: When you look at the features of this compound, these very high walls -- 12-, 16-, 18-foot walls, barbed wire on the top, this was a family, this was a compound that had very limited interaction, to the best of our knowledge and observation, with the surrounding houses. But it clearly was different than any other house out there. It had the appearance of sort of a fortress, so it does raise questions about --

Q Did they help them -- basically?

MR. BRENNAN: Well, I think there was -- we have had some indications that the family that was there tried to remain anonymous and tried not to have that interaction. But again, it does raise questions about a compound of that size in this area not raising suspicions previously.

Q Thank you, sir.

MR. CARNEY: Jake had a follow-on --

Q I'm sorry. I just want to clear something up because I think a few of us are confused. The woman that was killed was bin Laden's wife?

MR. BRENNAN: That's my understanding. It was one of them.

Q And he was using her as a shield?

MR. BRENNAN: She served as a shield. Again, this is my understanding – and we're still getting the reports of exactly what happened at particular moments – that when -- she fought back; when there was the opportunity to get to bin Laden, she was positioned in a way that indicated that she was being used as a shield – whether or not bin Laden or the son, or whatever, put her there, or she put herself there, but, yes, that's again, my understanding that she met her demise, and my understanding is that she was one of bin Laden's wives.

Q How many other people were in that compound?

Q Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

MR. CARNEY: I'm sure we'll have more, I'm sure, as --

Q Was there a reason you said 99.9 percent certain it's been bin Laden? Why not say 100?

MR. CARNEY: I believe that's based on DNA.

I mean, if I could just -- I just want to start by addressing a question that Carrie and Mara had, which is tonight the President will obviously, as John said, make some remarks related to the successful mission against Osama bin Laden. I think one of the themes you'll likely hear him sound will echo what he said last night, which is that this is a good day -- or good days for America and for Americans. The fact that we were able to accomplish this says a lot about our country and our perseverance.

I think you can fairly say that the victims in this country on 9/11, the Americans who were victims, were not Republicans or Democrats -- they were Americans. Those who launched the -- who have been working on this

diligently for nine and a half years -- not Republicans or Democrats; they're Americans. Those who carried out the mission yesterday, the same could be said about them.

So I think that one theme you'd likely hear from the President on tonight is about the capacity for Americans to come together and achieve very difficult goals when we work together.

Q Will we get that live?

MR. CARNEY: We can follow up with you on logistics. I don't believe that we're -- there's some logistical issues here. We will get it to you right afterwards if not live.

But let me just do 10 minutes or so, so that we can all file and other things. I'll move around. I'll take the Associated Press and then I'll move around a little bit. Yes.

Q Thank you. This is sort of in line with some of what we were talking about, but obviously if the President gave this order, final order, on Friday morning and then went on this long trip on Friday, had the correspondents dinner on Saturday, he was golfing Sunday, can you talk a little bit about his mood as he was trying to keep this poker face going through these other events, meanwhile knowing the actions that were going to be taken in Pakistan?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think one thing that's important to note is that -- is, as John mentioned, the compartmentalization here. I mean, there was obviously a success here at a different level, which was the ability to keep the mission secret. And having spent a great deal of time with him on Friday, I can say that he was focused on the devastation in Tuscaloosa. He was focused on and talked a lot about it in the wake of that visit.

And the experience that I think was unique about that is you discover that when folks get an opportunity to meet the President, there are different ways that they do that, in town hall meetings, or rope lines, or things like that. But there is something unique about even a President being able to meet individuals who have suffered such terrible things as those residents of Tuscaloosa did in their moment of despair that's very powerful. And I think he felt that.

So he was focused on that, and then obviously Cape Canaveral and then on to the commencement address at Miami Dade College. Having said that, he was obviously taking calls and being updated regularly, and the same goes with Saturday and Sunday, which Sunday he spent a great deal of his day in the West Wing and in the Situation Room.

George.

Q Back to the meeting tonight, other than bin Laden, what is his objective as far as budget and the debt limit and so on?

MR. CARNEY: I think as we've said, this is a continuation of his effort to bring leaders of Congress here in a social setting with spouses to improve communication in general. And there is no agenda, there's no goal in terms of budget or any other issue, except to have that kind of conversation, which I think he finds to be a useful thing to do in terms of, in some ways, creating a better environment for the kind of work that the White House and the Congress need to do together. So nothing beyond that, George.

Andre.

Q Thank you. Thank you, Jay. Two things. Briefly, who is in charge of the compound now?

MR. CARNEY: That was asked. I mean, our understanding on the visuals that we've seen is that the Pakistani authorities are in charge of the compound.

Q And secondly, more importantly, what was the legal basis for the operation?

MR. CARNEY: I would just refer you to what the President has said. Since taking office and prior to it, that given the attack that Osama bin Laden launched the United States, the lives that he took not just on 9/11 but on other occasions, that he was a high-value target and a legitimate target, and that this President believed since long before he became President that given actionable intelligence to capture or kill Osama bin Laden, he would move very quickly and surely to take that action. And the opportunity presented itself.

Q So this would have applied not only to Pakistan but to other countries if he was found somewhere else?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would simply say that there was a great deal of confidence, as has been discussed by experts for a long time now, that he was in that border region or in Pakistan. So I don't think the hypothetical really makes a lot of sense.

Let's see. Cheryl.

Q Has the President picked a new Commerce Secretary, and when can we see that announcement?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any personnel announcements for you, or timing of personnel announcements for you.

Let me just do -- Bill.

Q Jay, almost lost in this news is the NATO strike against Qaddafi's compound on Saturday, where his son was killed and three of his grandchildren. Is it -- does the White House believe that that mission was in keeping with carrying out the U.N. resolution?

MR. CARNEY: Yes. And I think there have been ample -- there's been ample commentary about that from NATO. So we do believe that, and obviously continue to focus on that mission as we do on other missions.

Q Is there a message there to Qaddafi in this?

MR. CARNEY: You could say that. (Laughter.) Thank you.

END 2:49 P.M. EDT