

The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

[American Raid Kills ISIS Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#)

United States Special Forces operatives executed a raid into northwestern Syria over the weekend, in an operation to find and eliminate Islamic State (ISIS) leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The raid, which had been planned over a number of months, culminated in al-Baghdadi detonating a suicide vest and killing himself, along with three of his children. American forces suffered no casualties as a result of the operation. While announcing the success of the raid on Sunday morning, President Trump praised his administration, the operatives who carried out the attack, and international actors for facilitating the operation.

During his address, the President painted al-Baghdadi as a coward, saying he died “whimpering and crying.” This was an effort by Trump to tarnish al-Baghdadi’s image, and poke holes in the facade that the extremist created for himself. In his announcement, President Trump praised Turkey, Iraq, and Russia by name for their contributions to the raid. Turkey allowed U.S. aircraft to fly through its airspace, Russia did the same over territory its forces control in Syria, and many of the Special Forces operatives who carried out the raid are based in Iraq. However, key Congressional Democrats including Speaker Nancy Pelosi were not notified of the raid in advance. The President is not legally bound to notify Congress before green-lighting a mission of this nature, but he went against precedent by not doing so.

The effort to locate al-Baghdadi was assisted by Kurdish intelligence in Syria, who had been tracking his movements for an extended period of time. Mazloum Abdi, the leader of the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces, tweeted his congratulations to President Trump and hailed five months of joint intelligence cooperation. It was revealed that there were multiple operations planned in the last few weeks to eliminate al-Baghdadi, but each was delayed due to the terror leader’s unpredictable movements. President Trump had been keen to approve the mission, but senior officials in the Department of Defense were adamant that the operation should only go ahead when there was a definitive identification on al-Baghdadi. This identification occurred late Saturday, with the mission proceeding in the early hours of Sunday morning.

The international response to al-Baghdadi’s demise has been overwhelmingly positive, but most world leaders have warned of the continuing threat of the Islamic State and radical ideology. The lone detractor of the move was Iran’s information minister, Mohammed Javad Azari-Jahromi, who called the killing of al-Baghdadi “not a big deal,” and accused the United States of facilitating the terror group’s rise. Al-Baghdadi had been increasingly reclusive as the Islamic State’s caliphate was dismantled, relegating his statements to audio recordings, which had indeterminate dates of origin. The last time he was recorded on camera was in response to the Easter Day bombings in Sri Lanka, where he praised the perpetrators. The death of al-Baghdadi marks another significant setback for ISIS, as not only was he the leader of the group, but the founder as well.

At the same time as the raid against al-Baghdadi was being enacted, Kurdish forces carried out an attack on other senior leaders of ISIS. The blow of losing top decision-makers figures to severely impact the terror organization’s ability to mount a comeback and retake land previously under the control of their caliphate. However, the threat of the Islamic State’s radical ideology is not diminished, which is evidenced by one of the group’s mottos, “kill wherever you are,” referring to their large foreign-born supporter network.

In the short-term, the death of al-Baghdadi is a major victory in the war against terrorism, but it should not minimize the attention to the threat that radical groups still pose to societies across the globe.