

Statement by President Joe Biden on Assassination of ISIS Leader Al-Qurayshi¹

February 3, 2022

In this speech, U.S. President Joe Biden reports on the successful American operation to assassinate Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi (also known as Hajji Abdullah), the leader of the Islamic State jihadist group. Biden describes al-Qurayshi's centrality in planning and carrying out the 2014 Yazidi Genocide. He also uses al-Qurayshi's death as proof that the U.S. will continue targeting jihadist leaders around the world who threaten America's national security.

Good morning. Last night, operating on my orders, United States military forces successfully removed a major terrorist threat to the world: the global leader of ISIS,² known as Hajji Abdullah.

He took over as the leader of ISIS in 2019 after [a] United States counterterrorism operation killed al-Baghdadi.³

Since then, ISIS has directed terrorist operations targeting Americans, our Allies and our partners, and countless civilians in the Middle East, Africa, and in South Asia.

Hajji Abdullah oversaw the spread of ISIS-affiliated terrorist groups around the world after savaging communities and murdering innocents.

He was responsible for the recent brutal attack on a prison in northeast Syria holding ISIS fighters,⁴ which was swiftly addressed by our brave partners in the Syrian Democratic Forces.⁵

He was the driving force behind the genocide of the Yazidi people in northwestern Iraq in 2014.

¹ Source excerpted from "Remarks by President Biden on a Successful Counterterrorism Operation," The White House, February 3, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/02/03/remarks-by-president-biden-on-a-successful-counterterrorism-operation/>.

² "ISIS," or the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria," is the more popular name of the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group. The organization changed its name from ISIS to IS after it declared a "caliphate" in Iraq and Syria in June 2014.

³ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was the leader of the Islamic State from 2010 until his death during a U.S. counterterrorism operation in 2019. Under his leadership, the jihadist group conquered large swathes of Iraq and Syria, declared itself a "caliphate," and evolved into a worldwide organization.

⁴ On January 20, 2022, the Islamic State launched an attack on the al-Sina Prison in the Syrian city of al-Hasakah to free imprisoned IS leaders and fighters. Hundreds of prisoners managed to escape, though IS forces were defeated ten days later.

⁵ The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) serve as the armed forces of the autonomous region of Rojava in northeastern Syria. They have long been allied with the United States against the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and other jihadist groups in Syria.

We all remember the gut-wrenching stories: mass slaughters that wiped out entire villages, thousands of women and young girls sold into slavery, rape used as a weapon of war.

And thanks to the bravery of our troops, this horrible terrorist leader is no more.

Our forces carried out the operation with their signature preparation and precision, and I directed the Department of Defense to take every precaution possible to minimize civilian casualties.

Knowing that this terrorist had chosen to surround himself with families, including children, we made a choice to pursue a special forces raid, at a much greater risk than our — to our own people, rather than targeting him with an air strike. We made this choice to minimize civilian casualties.

Our team is still compiling their report, but we do know that as our troops approached to capture the terrorist, in a final act of desperate cowardice, he — with no regard to the lives of his own family or others in the building, he chose to blow himself up — not just with a vest, but to blow up that third floor rather than face justice for the crimes he [had] committed, taking several members of his family with him just as his predecessor did.

I'm grateful for the immense courage and skill and determination of our U.S. forces who skillfully executed this incredibly challenging mission.

The members of our military are the solid-steel backbone of this nation, ready to fly into danger at a moment's notice to keep our country and the American people safe, as well as our Allies. And I'm also grateful to the families of our service members. You serve right alongside your — these soldiers and sailors, Marines, special forces — the loved ones, giving them the strength and support they need to do what they do.

To our service members and their families: We are forever grateful for the — what you do for us, and we owe you a debt. Thank you.

We're also aided by the essential partnership of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

I want to commend our dedicated intelligence community, the Department of Defense, and members of our national security team throughout the government whose meticulous and tireless work over the course of many months ensured that this mission succeeded.

This operation is a testament to America's reach and capability to take out terrorist threats no matter where they try to hide anywhere in the world.

I'm determined to protect the American people from terrorist threats, and I will take decisive action to protect this country.

And we'll continue working with our close allies and partners — the Syrian Democratic Forces; the Iraqi Security Forces, including the Kurdish Peshmerga;⁶ and the more than 80 members of the global coalition — to keep pressure on ISIS, to protect our homeland.

We remain vigilant. We remain prepared.

Last night's operation took a major terrorist leader off the battlefield. And it sent a strong message to terrorists around the world: We will come after you and find you.

Once again, today, we continue our unceasing effort to keep the American people safe and to strengthen the security of our Allies and partners around the world.

I want to thank you all. And may God bless you. And may God protect our troops.

⁶ The Peshmerga serve as the armed forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which governs the autonomous Kurdistan Region in northern Iraq.