

Statement by NSC Spokesperson Bernadette Meehan on Counter-ISIL Operation in Syria

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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

May 16, 2015

Last night, at the President's direction, U.S. personnel based out of Iraq conducted an operation in al-Amr in eastern Syria to capture an ISIL senior leader known as Abu Sayyaf and his wife Umm Sayyaf. During the course of the operation, Abu Sayyaf was killed when he engaged U.S. forces.

Umm Sayyaf was captured and is currently in U.S. military detention in Iraq. The operation also led to the freeing of a young Yezidi woman who appears to have been held as a slave by the couple. We intend to reunite her with her family as soon as feasible.

No U.S. personnel were killed or injured during this operation.

Abu Sayyaf was a senior ISIL leader who, among other things, had a senior role in overseeing ISIL's illicit oil and gas operations – a key source of revenue that enables the terrorist organization to carry out their brutal tactics and oppress thousands of innocent civilians. He was also involved with the group's military operations. We suspect that Umm Sayyaf is a member of ISIL, played an important role in ISIL's terrorist activities, and may have been complicit in the enslavement of the young woman rescued last night.

The President authorized this operation upon the unanimous recommendation of his national security team and as soon as we had developed sufficient intelligence and were confident the mission could be carried out successfully and consistent with the requirements for undertaking such operations. This operation was conducted with the full consent of Iraqi authorities and, like our existing airstrikes against ISIL in Syria, consistent with domestic and international law.

We are working to determine an ultimate disposition for the detainee that best supports the national security of the United States and of our allies and partners, consistent with domestic and international law. We will follow our usual practice with respect to giving the ICRC notification and access to the detainee.

As Commander-in-Chief, the President is grateful to the brave U.S. personnel who carried out this complex mission as well as the Iraqi authorities for their support of the operation and for the use of their facilities, which contributed to its success. The United States will

continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our Iraqi partners in our effort to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.