

Osama bin Laden dead; crowds celebrating in U.S.

By Peter Baker and Helene Cooper, New York Times

WASHINGTON – Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the most devastating attack on American soil in modern times and the most hunted man in the world, was killed in a firefight with United States forces in Pakistan on Sunday, President Obama announced.

In a dramatic late-night appearance in the East Room of the White House, Mr. Obama declared that “justice has been done” as he disclosed that American military and C.I.A. operatives had finally cornered the Al Qaeda leader who had eluded them for nearly a decade and shot him to death at a compound in Pakistan.

“For over two decades, Bin Laden has been Al Qaeda’s leader and symbol,” the president said in a statement carried on television around the world. “The death of bin Laden marks the most significant achievement to date in our nation’s effort to defeat Al Qaeda. But his death does not mark the end of our effort.” He added: “We must and we will remain vigilant at home and abroad.”

The death of Mr. Bin Laden is a defining moment in the American-led war on terrorism. What remains to be seen is whether the death of the leader of Al Qaeda galvanizes his followers by turning him into a martyr, or whether it serves as a turning of the page in the war in Afghanistan and gives further impetus to the Obama administration to bring American troops home.

The death of Mr. bin Laden came nearly 10 years after Al Qaeda terrorists hijacked four American passenger jets and crashed them into the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon

outside Washington and the countryside of Pennsylvania. Late Sunday night, as the president was speaking, cheering crowds gathered outside the gates of the White House shortly before midnight as word of his death began trickling out, waving United States flags, shouting in happiness and chanting "USA! USA!"

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