

**Remarks Prior to a Briefing With Senior Military Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters**

*October 23, 2018*

*The President.* Thank you very much. This evening I'm honored to host America's senior military leaders at the White House. I want to thank Secretary Jim Mattis, Chairman Joseph Dunford—terrific people—and other esteemed military leaders for their distinguished service and sacrifice and for ensuring that America's military might remains unchallenged, unquestioned, and unrivaled—and it is that; it is unrivaled, especially with what we've done over the last period of a year.

To keep America safe, America's Armed Forces must remain the most powerful, lethal, and effective fighting force anywhere on Earth. The best way to prevent war is to be certain that no one doubts our capacity to deliver overwhelming force. Overwhelming force means you'll probably never have to use the overwhelming force.

Over the past 21 months, we have made historic progress rebuilding our military, streamlining our defenses, and improving our readiness. We have achieved record funding for the military—record by a lot—\$700 billion last year and \$716 billion this year. These funds are supporting new fighter jets, ships, tanks, and a modernized nuclear arsenal, and the largest pay raise for our troops in nearly 10 years. Our military will soon be more powerful than ever before, by a long shot.

We've also greatly increased member contributions to NATO so that other countries are starting to pay much closer to their fair share or, in some cases, even their fair share. And many of them are absolutely amazed that they've been put in that position. But they have really had to do that, and we're grateful to them. Last year, we took in \$44 billion more. And this year, it will be a number even bigger than that. Not from us, but from other countries.

We've made significant progress in the fight against radical Islamic terrorism. In Syria and Iraq, our brave warfighters have decimated ISIS. And we are working to get our regional partners to step up their contributions and take greater responsibility for the future of their own region.

The United States will continue to deny terrorists any funding, territory, support, or means of infiltrating our country. In this effort, we understand that immigration security is a national security; it's about security as a whole. And that includes our borders that you've been reading so much about over the last long period of time, but especially over the last 2 weeks.

Under my administration, we are also recognizing both cyber and space as critical warfighting domains, just like land, air, and sea. In May, we elevated Cyber Command to a Unified Combatant Command, which is a big step. It tells you we think it's very important, Joe, right? It's very, very important.

We have published the first National Cyber Strategy in over a decade. And tonight I will hear an update on our progress to create the sixth military branch: the United States space force. So that's where it's at. It's going to be a big part of it.

In everything we do, we are guided by one sacred goal: to defend—we have to—to defend the safety and the sovereignty of our great country and its citizens. Each of you here today has devoted your life to this very important mission. Each of you leads the best, brightest, and bravest in the world. And each of you proudly serves the greatest nation on the face of the Earth.

We are doing better as an economy than we've ever done before. Very important for everyone in this room to understand that because without economic strength, we can't have military strength. And you've known that, and you've seen that, and you've watched that, because our forces have been very seriously depleted over the last number of years, and now they're built up. And they're built up in the proper way, with the best equipment in the world, all made right here in the U.S.A.

So I look forward to a productive discussion and to joining you all for dinner. We're going to be having dinner after this. I think the media will be allowed to go home, finally. You can go home. You had a long day. We'll be discussing a lot of different things, especially our forces.

But we have the finest people, the finest leaders, and the finest equipment anywhere in the world. And it's an honor to have you all. Thank you very much. You're all my friends. Most of you I know very well. Some of you I know just well. But I want to thank you all. And General, General—great job. Thank you very much. Appreciate it. Thank you, everybody. Thank you.

### *U.S. Military Strategy in Afghanistan*

*Q.* Mr. President, last week, there was a—earlier this week, there was an attack on—essentially, an attempted assassination on the top U.S. general in Afghanistan. Are you convinced—are you going to discuss your strategy for Afghanistan? And are you convinced that it will work?

*The President.* We have, we have. We discuss it all the time. We discuss it all the time.

*Q.* Is it working?

*The President.* We feel very badly about that. It's war. It's a tough business. Right, General? Tough business you do.

### *Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi*

*Q.* Mr. President, you said that you believe that Khashoggi's death was a coverup. Does that mean you don't believe the Saudis' explanation that it was an accident?

*The President.* No. However they talked about it, nothing that they've done has gone—has done well. It certainly has not been spoken of properly. They did the wrong thing in even thinking about the idea. They certainly did a bad job of execution, and they certainly did a bad job of talking about it or covering it up, if you'd like to say that.

But I would say it was a total fiasco. From day one, from the thought—whoever put it in their minds—that was not a good thought. The process was no good. The execution was no good, and the coverup, if you want to call it that, was certainly no good.

*Q.* Mr. President—

*Q.* But, Mr. President, will you be discussing—

*The President.* Yes. Do you have one? Go ahead.

### *The President's Discussions With Military Leaders*

*Q.* Mr. President, will you be discussing a potential military response to Saudi Arabia and/or the migrant caravan?

*The President.* We discuss everything in this room. You'll be the last to know. [Laughter]

### *Border Security/Immigration Reform/Unemployment Rate*

*Q.* What about the migrant caravan with—

*The President.* Yes. It's coming up. We'll discuss that too. Because we're not going to allow these people to come into our country. You know, we have people—millions of people—that have worked for years to come into our country legally. They work for years. They've gone through all sorts of hell to proudly be a citizen of the United States. And it's taken a long time. And they've worked very hard.

Isn't it really unfair when people can just burst right over our borders, and now they end up staying in this great country? And one of the things that has happened is, we're doing so well economically, that everybody wants a piece of it. You didn't have that 2 and 3 and 4 years ago or 10 years ago. But everybody wants a piece of it. But you have to come in legally, and you have to come in through merit.

We have big companies coming into our country that would have never even thought about it 3 years ago. We have car companies coming in from Japan, brandnew plants, going to be announced soon—they've already announced some of them—going to Michigan and Ohio and Pennsylvania and Kentucky and North Carolina and South Carolina. Coming all over our country. Florida.

And they need workers. And we want people—I think everybody around this table wants to see people come in. We need people. We have 3.7 [percent]\* unemployment. It's the lowest number in many years. Overall, probably the lowest numbers, as a whole, that we've ever had.

African American, lowest numbers in history. Asian American. You look at any—Hispanic American. Lowest numbers—best unemployment numbers and best employment numbers in history. We have more people working today than we've ever had working in the history of the United States. Think of that.

So, with all of this, what happens is, a lot of people want to break into the system. We want people coming in, but they have to be of merit. They have to be merit based. And we need those people because all these companies coming in, they need people. They need workers. And we look forward to doing something on that, and we will be doing something on that.

### *U.S. Space Force*

*Q.* Mr. President, what's the timeline for the creation of space force?

*The President.* I'd like to ask General Mattis or Joe—maybe I'd like to ask one of you two, or both. How do you—how do you feel about it, General?

*Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis.* Right now what we're going to do is set up a combatant command. That's our initial goal. We're working with Congress for the legislation that we'll need to open the door to further organization, but we're not letting any moss grow. We're organizing now for combat, and that's combatant command. It's underway right now.

*The President.* Joe?

*Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., USMC.* That's it this year.

*Q.* Mr. President—

*The President.* I think I can say that everybody in this room feels strongly about space force. Everything is necessary, but that's going to be a very important part. It seems to be where it's at and where it's going—satellites—and I'm not just talking about sending rockets to the Moon or sending rockets to Mars, I'm talking about defense and offense.

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\* White House correction.

So much is going to be a part of space, and we all feel very strongly about it. We're pushing it as hard as we can, and I think we have a good chance, next year, of officially doing our space force. It's a very, very big thing. It's a legacy for everybody in this room. Very important part of our military, both offense and defense.

Yes, go ahead.

#### *Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi*

*Q.* Mr. President, when you—just to clarify, when you're saying that the Saudis' execution and coverup of the murder was a "fiasco," are you saying they should have executed it or covered it up better?

*The President.* No. I'm saying that the——

*Q.* What do you mean?

*The President.* Jeff [Jeff Mason, Reuters], you didn't hear me. I'm saying they should have never thought about it.

*Q.* Okay.

*The President.* Once they thought about it, everything else went wrong also. Very simple. They should have never thought about it. It should have never been done. But once they thought about it, everything else they did was bad too.

The coverup was horrible. The execution was horrible. But there should have never been any execution or a coverup, because it should have never happened. Is that more clear?

*Q.* Yes, sir.

#### *Death of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi*

*Q.* If the—Mr. President, if the Crown Prince is implicated, how do you plan to hold him accountable? Do you think he should lose his line of succession?

*The President.* Well, we'll have to do something. But I will say this: I spoke with the King. I spoke with the Crown Prince yesterday, and he strongly said that he had nothing to do with this. This was at a lower level.

We have people right now in Saudi Arabia that are literally just now getting on planes coming back. We have people—very talented people—in Turkey, dealing with the top people in Turkey. And we're all meeting tomorrow afternoon. Everybody is going to have a lot of information. We've gained a lot of information. And we'll know pretty much everything there is to know, I believe.

It's a very sad event for Saudi Arabia. Very, very sad. Very, very terrible.

#### *Border Security*

*Q.* Mr. President, about the border, you said that you want to—you threatened to close the border militarily. What are you thinking about, the National Guard?

*The President.* Well, Mexico is working with us. There is a movement toward our country. It's going to be a while before they get here. And this group that is around this table will be involved, and others will be involved. We cannot let people come into our country illegally. Just can't do it.

*Q.* But what is the military——

*The President.* Can't do it. You don't have borders, you don't have a country.

## *Border Security*

*Q.* But were you thinking about the National Guard or what options?

*The President.* I'm thinking about a lot of things. I'm thinking about——

*Q.* What would be——

*The President.* I'm thinking about everything, including the military, not just the National Guard. The military is what I'm thinking about.

*Q.* Okay.

*The President.* We can't have people coming into our country illegally. It's not fair for a lot of reasons, not fair to the people that are here, and not fair to the people that want to come here, the people that have worked so hard to become a citizen of this country that are waiting on line for 10 years. It's not fair to them, not fair to anybody. Okay?

## *Military Role in Border Security*

*Q.* What, legally, could the military do at the border?

*The President.* They can do a lot. They're the military. Right, fellas? They're the military. They can do a lot.

Okay. Thank you very much, everybody. Appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:13 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to King Salman bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization. A reporter referred to Gen. Austin S. Miller, USA, commanding general, U.S. Forces—Afghanistan and the NATO-led Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Senior military leaders, briefing; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

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