Trump Announced Baghdadi’s Death like a Public Relations Stunt

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The capture or killing of a foreign terrorist is an important historical event and rhetorical occasion, a time to communicate with a somber tone and without obvious political overtones. I was sorry, therefore, that on Sunday morning President Donald Trump used his announcement of the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as a public relations opportunity for himself and his presidency.

While this event certainly was good news, it should have been announced immediately after confirmation without a Twitter tease by Trump — “Something very big has just happened!” —the day before to create added drama, suspense and increase audience size.

Not notifying House Speaker Nancy Pelosi or other top Congressional leaders was inexcusable. Moreover, the announcement should have
been brief, to the point and clear, and avoided oversharing that could compromise U.S. intelligence.

How rhetorically inappropriate it was, then, for Trump to take a victory lap and for him to describe in great detail how Baghdadi "died like a dog, he died like a coward, he was whimpering, screaming and crying," — something likely to infuriate ISIS and enhance their recruitment.

Bracketing the question of whether Trump’s announcement was completely accurate, an issue that fairly can be raised given his documented record of not telling the truth, the focus should have been on the many brave U.S. military personnel who made this possible—not a chance for Trump to praise his administration and for him to emphasize how it was he who went after al-Baghdadi.

*Rick Cherwitz,*

*Ernest A. Sharpe Centennial Professor Emeritus in the Moody College of Communication, The University of Texas at Austin*