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National Commission on Terrorist Attacks

Internal Transcript

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INTERVIEW OF
WHITE HOUSE COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR DAN BARTLETT
BY SCOTT PELLEY, CBS

Office of Mr. Bartlett
The West Wing

2:23 P.M. EDT

Q Let me start with the school. The first tower is hit. How did you learn that the second tower had been hit?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, we're inside what's called a staff hold, which was in this case, since we were in an elementary school, it was an elementary school room, classroom, which we had -- the staff there had converted into an area where the President and more staff could confer before and after and in between the events that were taking place there at the school

So we use that as an opportunity to communicate back to the office. We had just learned as we had gotten to the school about the first plane that had hit. All of us are still trying to find out information about that, to confirm what our instincts were -- and our instincts were that this was a tragic accident.

So here we are and the second tower is hit. The flood of phone calls are coming into our cell phones, into our pagers and such, telling us about this information. And at this point we are huddling there with Chief of Staff Andy Card, Ari Fleischer, Karl Rove and myself and others, about informing the President about what now is all but certain some sort of attack on the United States.

Q You received a call from the White House when the second tower was hit.

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MR. BARTLETT: I did. I did. And this was my assistant who -- we all have our quirks or our methods of being informed on the road when news develops. And in this case, our assistant called and she said, almost in tears, "You're not going to believe this, Dan, but" -- in total disbelief saying "the other tower was hit." And I didn't understand what she was saying and I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Another plane, another plane hit the other tower, World Trade Center."

And it takes a moment for it to register. Other people were getting the exact same information. At this time we were asking them to find a TV so we could have a television that we could view this and see, get the video ourselves; also talking back to other people at the White House, coordinating a response. And, again, in our mind right now, the President is about to return to Washington. We were going to -- we knew we were going to have to cut the event short. Andy Card makes the decision to go in and tell the President.

Q When the President walked back into the hold, try to recall that moment when he first walks in. What does he say? What's happening in that small room?

MR. BARTLETT: At that point, right when he walks in, "Get the Vice President on the phone, I want to talk to the Vice President." He wanted to know exactly if we had a sense of whether this was it, or we were in the middle of a wave of the first of attack.

Q Whether the World Trade Center was all --

MR. BARTLETT: That's correct.

Q -- or whether there was going to more.

MR. BARTLETT: That's correct. And at this point, we don't have that information. In that brief period, the decision was made that the President would make a brief statement, cut his trip short and return to Washington. He also spoke with Bob Mueller, the Director of the FBI, in which he gave Director Mueller -- who was just on the job only for a couple weeks -- very clear marching orders to tell his guys to get their heads down and get after that, that we have a -- we've got a big task ahead of us and it's time for us to move quickly.

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So his mind set at that point was very much focusing not as much on what had happened, but more about responsibilities going forward.

Q There's a photograph of the hold. The President is on the secure phone and he's in motion -- you can tell that he had just snapped around to look at the television and you're pointing at the television. What's happening in that moment?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, this is the first time the President has a visual confirmation for what he's been told. This was -- we had finally gotten the television -- on live TV. And they were now replaying the second plane hitting.

And you have to understand, as a staff person and going through this, you have conflicting emotions. First and foremost, you're thinking about doing your job, you're thinking about what are my responsibilities, what do we have to do to make sure the President can do his job. And that dominates your thinking. But at the same time, you also have these very natural feelings that every other American and human being does, and that is shock, disbelief, fear, not knowing what was next. And I think almost as I was pointing at that TV, it's almost just our way of just pointing and saying, how is that happening; and the disbelief.

So throughout the day we found ourselves almost having to stop ourselves and really take in exactly what was going on. And that was the case at that point in that picture.

Q What did the President say, if you recall, the first time he saw it? There must have been an expression of disbelief, like, "My God," or "I can't believe this is happening."

MR. BARTLETT: "We're at war."

"We're at war"

Q That's the first thing he said?

MR. BARTLETT: That's the first thing I remember him saying. And he just briefly looked at it and turned around and went back to working the phone. Again, a lot of these visuals played throughout the day, both there at the school and when we were on Air Force One. And he saw it often. And a lot of -- at this point you're seeing a lot of the tragedy, a lot of the victims. He was -- it's a mixture of emotions, of mourning, of anger, of disbelief.

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But he was preparing his staff who was with him and those he was on the phone with, "This is the first strike of a war we've just entered."

Q My sense of it is that while the rest of the country was watching these pictures with shock and fear, the President's principal reaction was one of anger.

MR. BARTLETT: Throughout those first days there was, just below the surface, a level of anger that I think most Americans can identify with. And it was a controlled anger, and one which when channeled properly -- as they used to say when you played football -- can be very effective. And it surfaced at times, both privately and publicly, but I think it gave probably the American people the best look at the range of emotions that the President and others were feeling during these times. And he had plenty to be mad about.

Q How was the decision made to leave the hold, and how does that happen? Who says, "We're getting out of here"?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, we're there at the hold and the first decision is that we're going to make remarks to the country about what had just taken place. So we worked with the President on some remarks to do just that. And then it was we're quickly going to go back to Washington, so we pre-positioned and we got in the motorcade while the President delivered the remarks -- or, at least, most of the people did -- and then --

Q Let me stop you, I skipped a step here and I apologize. You know, I think you might have been forgiven if you jumped in the motorcade and left. But a decision was made that there's going to be a statement.

MR. BARTLETT: Yes.

Q How did that develop?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, I think in talking back to people at the White House, as well as a conversation I had with people like Karen Hughes, we thought it was important, as the American people saw chaos that they also knew their government was functioning. And the best person to deliver that message, obviously, is the President of the United States, the head of the government.

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So it was clear in our minds that the President had to speak. What we had to be careful about is the characterization of what was taking place, and that's why there was some language about "it appears a terrorist attack has taken place." But it was a method -- it was a message of reassurance to the American people, that the government was responding, particularly in New York, with the chaos that was unfolding.

Q Who wrote that statement?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, the first cut at it was Ari Fleischer and myself. But it was, for the most part, quickly discarded by the President and he jotted -- he actually took an old note card from the prepared remarks for that day, which was on education, flips it over and starts jotting down some of the key phrases and words that he wanted to use -- taking a little bit, selectively, from what we prepared, but putting it in his own words in his own way.

Q Once the President makes that statement, leaves the room -- look around you. What do you see? What do you hear?

MR. BARTLETT: Again, it's a -- it's almost like as a tornado leaves -- it was kind of quiet. We kind of pull out of there and at this point you're almost in a dreamlike state, you're moving so fast. You want to make sure you don't get left, because security at this point is being particularly aggressive, as well as moving very quickly.

So the President, I knew, would want to make remarks. We knew they were going to be very brief, so the point was trying to get from A to B as quickly as possible.

Q But in mounting up the motorcade and getting it out of there, is there running, is there shouting?

MR. BARTLETT: There's running, particularly herding the press and getting the reporters on their buses and making sure everybody was in place; full-scale running; got in the motorcade, which we might as well have been in a NASCAR event, because that was the fastest we had ever gone in a motorcade. It was -- and you always recognize the security around the President -- around Presidents, and particularly when he travels on the road. But it's a different type of security, it's like police presence.

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What quickly changed, almost, it seemed, instantly, was -- and particularly when we got to the airport -- it was a military presence. We saw a lot of military uniforms, we saw increased amount of -- the perimeters increasing and the scrutiny for entering the perimeter was much tougher than you could ever imagine. So the feel and the shape and the presence of the Presidential movements at that time dramatically changed.

Q Secret Service agents usually keep their automatic weapons in bags. I imagine they came out of the bags?

MR. BARTLETT: Fully exposed and at full alert. At this point, somewhere between leaving the school and getting to the airplane is when the Pentagon was hit. We now understand that this is beyond just New York, but we don't know the entire scope of what was happening at this point.

Q Dan, just informationally, when we spoke last week you weren't sure when, precisely, and how the President was notified of the Pentagon. Do you know any more about that now?

MR. BARTLETT: I believe it was in a phone conversation in the limousine.

Q In the limousine.

MR. BARTLETT: But I don't have that --

Q I'll go to the source on that, as we say.

Air Force One departure. First of all, did you see the President get on the airplane?

MR. BARTLETT: He got on before us, but we quickly came in and went -- a handful of us aides were in the Presidential cabin, in his office there in Air Force One.

Q What was the take-off like?

MR. BARTLETT: It was like a rocket. Traditionally, Air Force One departs and arrives very quickly, for obvious security reasons. But I remember most of us weren't buckled in, we weren't really anticipating anything different. But for a good 10 minutes the plane was going almost straight up.

Q What was it like inside? I would imagine things would be falling around, people would be grabbing on -- paint the picture.

MR. BARTLETT: It was -- you know, the plane is always prepared for take-off, so there was not a lot of garments or anything like that, or objects moving around, but people catching themselves, bracing themselves. Most of the, you know, 90 percent of the staff were buckled in and sitting down and trying to stay out of the way. The handful of us that were up there in the cabin were basically just grabbing onto anything we could just to hold our ground.

Q And what's the President doing at that moment?

MR. BARTLETT: He's on the phone already; he's talking to the Vice President, getting an assessment of what's going on there. And this is -- and these stages is really where we start experiencing the phrase "fog of war." And this is where new information is coming. We have the TVs on, so we're getting raw information from reporting on the ground, whether it be in New York or some in Washington. We have information coming through the communications deck and being filtered through the staff. And we also have the information that's being shared directly with the President.

So at this point there was a decision to land all aircraft, yet the first thing we had to do was try to communicate with all aircraft before you can make them land. And I believe in these early minutes, and in the first hour there was more than a dozen planes we couldn't make communication with, just for whatever various reason. But in our minds, and the first thing you have to think is that these are more planes that have been overcome by terrorists.

Q So that's the state of the President's knowledge at that moment, that there could be a dozen airplanes headed for targets?

MR. BARTLETT: We have no knowledge at this point about where we were in the attack, whether it was the first phase, the middle of the first phase, we don't know the duration, we don't know if the worst was yet to come. We were really bracing for the worst.

Q And what you did know was after the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, anything was possible.

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MR. BARTLETT: That's exactly right. And we hear about a car bomb at the State Department, we hear about a plane going down in the midwest, around the eastern Kentucky border -- which turns out to be Flight 93, is where it was overcome and they had turned the transponder off on the plane and had turned it back east, to its intended target.

So we think at this point now that there is at least four aircraft that have crashed, not knowing the details of the latest one -- we think we're just in the beginning of a full-frontal assault.

Q What are some of the other messages that are coming to the President about other assaults and threats in that moment?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, in the early hours you have discussions about a plane headed toward -- initially thought was Congress or the White House. This turns out to be Flight 93, that was reported to us as crashing near Camp David -- it turns out to be in Pennsylvania.

We have the State Department car bomb. We have at some point during the day an unidentified object quickly moving towards the President's ranch in Texas. We have communication about potentially an attack on Air Force One, the actual code name for the plane was misinterpreted and picked up and thought it was an actual threat of the airplane, itself.

So it's a time on the plane which is very different than, I think -- obvious for a lot of different reasons that are different than anybody else experienced. But for the most part it was a very surreal, divorced feeling, because at this point there are times when you're in the air and you think the only other people up in the air besides us are the terrorists, that they still are on aircraft.

And it was interesting, because we actually found ourselves, found the President and us periodically looking out the window, almost hoping and making sure that you didn't see anything out there. And it was an eerie feeling, surreal feeling of being up in the air. There was a lot of tranquility to it because it was so calm up there. But it also was kind of an unnerving situation as well, from a standpoint of feeling like we're one of the only few aircraft in the air in the entire United States.

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Q And, yet, you had the President looking out the window, almost scanning the skies. What's he looking for?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, again, I think -- like I said, there is many of us that are -- it's almost not what you're looking for, it's you're hoping for what you don't see. But also we had fighter escorts, as well, and a lot of times people were looking out to see if they could see the escorts. And for the most part of the flight from Florida, you couldn't see them -- only right on approach into Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana could you see them peel off at the end. And then you could see them as we were on approach later that day, flying into Washington, D.C. Those fighter jets were right on the tips of the aircraft.

So the President -- I'm sure one of those times in the frames in the pictures was looking out either thinking about what was to come, but may also be looking at those men and women who were helping protect us.

Q In fact, there was a particular time much later in the day when one of the fighter planes came up along Air Force One and there was an interaction there. Tell me that --

MR. BARTLETT: Well, as it -- it was towards the end of the day and we were flying into Washington, D.C. air space. And the aircraft was just about to begin its approach and the fighter jets came up on both tips of Air Force One, right on the wing tips. And the staff and the President and us were -- filed out along the outside hallway of his Presidential cabin there, looking out the windows.

And they are so close to us you can see the stubble of the beard of the pilot. And we're all giving thumbs-up and such, and the President gives them the signal of a salute and the pilot is looking straight at us, kind of tips his wing and fades off and backs into formation.

That's when you're really feeling your emotions swell of reassurance, of patriotism, of knowing things are going to be all right. At this point in the day we have a sense, at least, that if this was -- that the attack was over, at least the first wave of attack was over and we were returning to Washington, D.C. And that type of reassurance and patriotism was well-timed.

Q Tell me about the salute, the fighter pilot and the salute. Paint that picture for me.

MR. BARTLETT: Well, like I said, I was looking out the side of my eyes, so I didn't really see that -- I saw the President make the acknowledgement to him, because we're all looking out, and as if he just turned and looked at us, the pilot did. And before he went off formation, he dipped his right wing twice and pulled out and, just, goosebumps go up your spine as that happens.

Q And the President's reaction to that was what?

MR. BARTLETT: Like, again, it's almost like the chest swells, of knowing we've got -- you know, the good guys are going to prevail. That's why -- that's why the United States is going to prevail.

Q But more specifically, the salute. Did that come before the wing tip or after?

MR. BARTLETT: I think it was after.

Q You think it was -- and so when the pilot tipped his wing, the President did what?

MR. BARTLETT: My understanding is that he goes back and he does a quick salute back to them as we're all giving thumbs-up out the windows.

Q The end of a hell of a day.

MR. BARTLETT: Not quite the end.

Q Not quite the end.

MR. BARTLETT: But a lot had been experienced by that time.

Q Let me jump back a couple of places here. Why land at Barksdale?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, I think that at first the decision is made to head west, that the climate in Washington, D.C. is not secure enough in our minds, the intelligence wasn't firm enough to understand whether Washington was safe; and that it's important for us to take the continuity of government and make sure the Commander in Chief is in a position to make real-time decisions. So the decision was to go west.

~~★~~
Head
West

And the President's directive was, I want to meet with my team through secure link-up, I want to gather my team and hear firsthand their assessments and the response that was going on.

And from a security standpoint and things like that, as those decisions were being made as to how to set up and communicate with the war cabinet, it was important for the President to get down on the ground, allow them to fuel up the plane and do any things that they need from a security standpoint from there, do a quick assessment, let the President make some phone calls from down there and then chart our next path.

Q Was the President alone when he made his calls to the First Lady and then to his father during the course of that?

MR. BARTLETT: I think Andy Card was in the cabin, but not many others. I think he went into his private cabin to take those phone calls. I think he talked to Mrs. Bush just before the noon hour. And he spoke to his father en route to Offutt Air Force Base.

Q You arrive at Offutt and reach the door that leads to the underground command center. Paint that picture for me, following the President down there.

MR. BARTLETT: Well, it's a -- for most purposes, it's a typical Air Force base. We land, we're taken in a military convey of these camouflaged Humvees, quickly moved over to what I thought would be one of the buildings there but, in fact, we stopped before basically just a small, little concrete edifice with a door. And out comes the door a four-star general who escorted the party, the President, the security and us down, spiraling four floors of staircases with heavily armed guards and into the command center, where the President could communicate directly with his war cabinet.

Q What were you thinking as you were coming down these four flights of stairs with all of these men with M-16s around you?

MR. BARTLETT: You feel like you're playing a part in a movie, actually. It really is -- you see the looks on their faces -- I'm not sure how often they see people from the outside, much less the President of the United States. And it was a surreal feeling of, like I said, the whole day went real fast but at the same time felt like we were in slow motion.

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But what you also saw, again, was -- and one of the things that I'll always be reminded of is the people who were paid to protect us doing their job. And the military was responding admirably. The people there, you could tell they had been trained, they were going through -- they were executing their responsibilities. But you're having these moments where -- again, you have these conflicting emotions of focusing on your job, but then having just the typical normal reaction that any human would be put into the situation.

Q When you reached the bottom of the four flights of stairs, what do you see?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, it's a command center. For obvious reasons, I can't go into all the specifics because it is classified. But it is a very state-of-the-art command center in which technology is used to monitor everything going on in the world simultaneously. This is the nuclear command center, as well, so all nuclear forces and such are also monitored from this location.

And it's a sight to see. A lot of activity. Dozens upon dozens of soldiers -- intelligence officers, I'm sure -- moving around quite fast, collecting the most information as possible.

Q While the President is having the telecon with the NSC group or the war cabinet group, you were busy doing your job as Communications Director. What were you trying to set up?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, two things. First, as we knew the President was going to have to address the nation somewhere, somehow. As we had flown -- we were flying into Nebraska, the President was very clear in his mind that he was going to return to Washington unless he had heard something at this meeting. So it was important from our standpoint to prepare the President to be able to speak to the nation. Our first priority was to do it from the Oval Office, that's where the President wanted to do it and that was where the American people expect to hear from their President in times of national emergency.

But I had to also plan for the potential of having to deliver it from Offutt Air Force Base, from there if they were not going to allow the President to return for security reasons. So I was doing contingency planning with the staff there to find out if there was an adequate room, satellite link-ups and things like that.

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Q The President of the United States addressing the nation from the bunker in Nebraska. That must have seemed like a terrible image to you.

MR. BARTLETT: It would not be our first priority. It's not the way that, as a communicator, that you want to deliver the important message he had to the American people. But, also, we're in the middle of a terrorist attack and we have to do what we -- we have responsibilities as far as the safety of the President of the United States.

Thankfully, the President did return; it was something that he wanted to do. The security staff wanted him to stay there and he refused that, said it was important for him to get back to Washington. So then we quickly shifted into beginning to work on the remarks for the President for that night.

Q The President walks out of the teleconference; what does he say?

MR. BARTLETT: He looks at us, says, "Let's go, we're going back -- we're going home." And as quickly as we arrived at the Air Force base, is about as quickly as we left.

Q Let's jump ahead to the White House. Where was the work done on the speech for that night?

MR. BARTLETT: Mostly it was done in this room, in where we sit. This was Karen Hughes's office.

Q What were the issues involved? What was the discussion like?

MR. BARTLETT: The biggest discussion really was to talk about is how to characterize the way forward. We felt, the President felt in communicating to us that the main mission was reassurance; that what the American people had just experienced was traumatic, chaotic and what they needed is reassurance. This was not the time to rattle the sabers, to try to do the war message. There were days ahead of us that were used for that purpose. This was the purpose for the Commander in Chief, the President of the United States to look at American people directly to them and say, "Your government is responding; we are prepared for this and we are responding adequately and we won't let it stand."

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He did -- there was a lot of conversation about whether we needed to go further and talk more about the war aspects. But the President was quite clear that he felt in these first moments and such that night that it was reassurance is what the American people needed.

Q The staff was putting war language, if you will, into the statement and the President was taking it out at this point.

MR. BARTLETT: Yes. There was a little bit back and forth, kind of. Some staffers -- and everybody at this point, you know, everybody is making recommendations, some saying we need to be this, we need to be that, we need to spell this out.

And I think he really from the first day, the first hours of this was thinking, "there's going to be a pace to this, we've got to let this unfold a little bit; let's don't rush out and say things that we're going to later regret." And I think he really wanted to -- he was already thinking in his mind how he wanted to do that, and he really felt this first night was one of reassurance.

Q After the President had signed off on the statement and had settled on what he wanted to say, the staff decided to make some changes and you were sent to tell the President about the changes.

MR. BARTLETT: Well, there was still some conversation about some last-minute -- as there always are and he's always prepared for that -- changes. Karen and I knew where the President felt about -- you know, how he felt about this, but we made the decision that we'd go ahead and raise them with him. And I drew the short straw and went over to the Residence, where the President was getting -- changing his suit and such, to speak to the nation. And it was quite clear he knew what he wanted to say. And I was turned away quite quickly.

Q What did he say to you?

MR. BARTLETT: "The speech is done and there will be no more changes."

Q He knew what he wanted to say.

MR. BARTLETT: He knew what he wanted to say.

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Q What was the issue? Just for -- when I write this, the issue about the change there that you were bringing to him?

MR. BARTLETT: There were people who were looking for more kind of in the lines of declaration of war.

Q It was, again, how much war do we put in the speech and how much we reassure the nation?

MR. BARTLETT: Right.

Q Were you in the Oval when he made the speech?

MR. BARTLETT: Yes.

Q There are things that the camera does not show us about that speech, and they are the minute before and the minute after. The minute before the camera goes on, what's happening in the room? What is he doing?

MR. BARTLETT: Well, he's going over the speech, itself. I've always found him to be in those moments more relaxed than everyone else. He knows that there is, obviously, a certain demeanor that has to be on display when you speak. And I think he was preparing himself mentally to deliver this address.

We were trying to -- this was all done pretty quickly, so we're trying to get everybody settled down and make sure there's no disruptions during the middle of his speech.

Q And after he is through, when the camera goes off -- does he let out a big sigh, does he say anything?

MR. BARTLETT: He got up from behind the desk and as people ushered out, people were telling him he did a good job, but he -- he walked out those doors, out into the Rose Garden, and kind of looked out into the night from right out there -- I think trying to get some fresh air. So that was the first thing that he did.

He came back in briefly, and then went to the emergency center bunker for a war cabinet meeting, was back to work.

Q But he went to clear his mind a little bit, was your kind of --

MR. BARTLETT: Yes, that was really I think -- I think that was the first opportunity for him to exhale. And the movements

of the day, the building of the moment of the day, all the way to that point -- and I think it was an opportunity for him to exhale. There really was -- as a witness to it, for me, it really put it in historical perspective: here was the President of the United States speaking to the country from the Oval Office during a national emergency. And that, to me, you have images of past Presidents making those very same remarks, or types of remarks, and walking out. And that's when the enormity of it really sunk in for me.

Q The Cabinet meeting the next morning. The President walks into the room. What do you see, what do you hear?

MR. BARTLETT: Very quiet. I recall a very moving prayer delivered by Secretary Rumsfeld that basically called on to the prayer of the nation and the faith that we have and the reason why we're going to win this war.

And then it was the President telling his team that this is our moment, that this is why we're here, this is what we will be defined by, and it's the priority of this administration for every day we're here to win this war.

But then he did the smart thing -- I think -- and really went around and made sure that those Cabinet members that did not have direct line responsibilities in the war, to know that their issues were still important, that they still had to stay on top of their priorities, as well, that the American people expect us to be able to do both.

So he, despite all the things on his mind and such, as he patiently went through and made sure that each of those Cabinet Secretaries that were not on the war cabinet did feel like they were part of the team and could contribute to the team.

Q Most poignant moment in that Cabinet meeting?

MR. BARTLETT: It was to see -- this is a Cabinet full of very powerful and people with some incredible individual personalities; but it was really seeing a team come together as a family. And I think when the hands clasped together as the Cabinet prayed with the President, "give guidance to this nation," was the most poignant moment.

Q The Cabinet clasped hands?

MR. BARTLETT: No, I think some did -- not collectively around.

Q I see. All right.

The Pataki-Giuliani call in the Oval Office, the press is present. The President is asked a question about what sort of prayers the American people should be praying. And for the first time we see him lose his composure.

MR. BARTLETT: Well, again, I think what you're seeing is exactly probably how the American people felt, that just below the surface is a real deep sense of anger, of real type of natural emotion that could be expected during these times of tragedy, an evil attack like this.

And both publicly and privately there were glimpses of it, but I think that is the first time where I think somebody -- the way it was really phrased, the question asked is, "people are praying for you, Mr. President," and he didn't -- I think it hit him a little awkward, to think that people were thinking of him, when his mind and his heart was reaching out to all those victims and all those families.

And I think in those moments there that he really gave voice to every American who said we were not going to let this stand, that there's time to be sad but there's also time to make sure that we bring justice.

Q The cameras are ushered out at that point. What happened after the cameras left?

MR. BARTLETT: The President went back in his private study and I think just gathered his thoughts and his composure. That was just the beginning of a long day, that day -- that was in the morning. But there are moments all through those early days where all of us had to -- and, obviously, the President -- where you had to think about things and you had to refocus and you had to handle the raw emotions that everybody was feeling.

Q Leaping ahead to the joint session of -- no, no, let me not quite leap that far ahead. Leaping ahead to the Sunday morning after Camp David, in the Residence. Or was it Saturday night?

MR. BARTLETT: This was Sunday afternoon, late afternoon.

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Q Sunday afternoon.

MR. BARTLETT: The President had returned from Camp David. He called up to his private study up in the Residence. Karen Hughes, Ari Fleischer and myself, as his communications team, along with Condoleezza Rice. You could tell that he had made a lot of decisions the day before, very clear in his mind the strategy. This was his opportunity, as he said, "and now I'm going to tell you how to do your job."

And this is where he really -- we start getting the articulation of "unconventional war, we're not going to be able to see everything." I think he has in his mind now, obviously, how this is going to play out, how they're going to prosecute this. And he understands how the media and how the public is going to see or, in this case, not see a lot of this. And it was going to be critical that we were able to communicate these aspects of the war, whether it be the financial aspects of it, the diplomatic aspects, the intelligence aspects -- that it was not going to be a traditional war and therefore we couldn't have a traditional communications plan.

He understood his role was he's going to have to educate the American people, that he was going to have to be out early and often walking the American people through this thing, step by step, to really let them understand what this was about, what it was going to take and to make sure that he rallied the nation behind this new cause.

Q During that afternoon, a friend of the President's -- the President of Mexico, Vicente Fox -- called.

MR. BARTLETT: He did, he took the call, where he was sharing with President Fox -- as President Fox, obviously, was sharing his condolences for the loss of life, which the President obviously appreciated all the support the international community gave. This is also the President's opportunity, as he did in the days after, to really talk specifically with these leaders about the steps going forward, about this is a defining moment for all the nations, for all the world's leaders.

And started talking pretty graphically about al Qaeda and about Osama bin Laden. And this is where -- the first time I heard the President say, "We're going to get him dead or alive." And it was the mind set of, you know, these evil acts have been done and they're going to pay.

000147

Q Heading into the joint session of Congress, what has to be accomplished in that speech? As you're looking ahead to making the speech to the Congress and to the American people and the world, what do you have to get done there?

MR. BARTLETT: A lot. A, you still have to reassure the American people about where we are today. Again, they're still seeing the trauma, their television sets are filled with images of horror and pain to countless number of Americans. So there is a part of that has to be reassurance.

Then there has to be the education part that the President continued to talk about. Nobody understood what al Qaeda was. Today, it's a household name. It was important that he walk the American people through exactly what we meant by that.

Also, we had a new doctrine that the President was employing, and that was, "if you harbor a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorist." And this was the situation in Afghanistan and particularly with the Taliban, and it was important that the President lay out clear markers saying conditions that would have to be met or that they would see the same sort of wrath that was expected of al Qaeda.

Then it's important for the President to lift the spirits of the American people, to unite the country behind this singular cause. So the President views this as an opportunity to talk about the heroism that we saw in those moments after the attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The fact that he held up the shield of a fallen firefighter. These are the images and the stories that the American people needed to hear from their leader, in order to unite around a common cause.

So it was a difficult speech, but I remember the President, one of the first people he spoke to after the speech was Mike Gerson, the chief speech writer. And Mike had asked him how it went and he said, "I've never felt more comfortable in my life than I did giving that speech." Because that speech was so much what he felt, and his vision that it was his words, it was his belief and conviction. And oftentimes you would think that it would be hard for somebody to deliver a speech of that magnitude, but he felt like it was the most comfortable thing he'd ever done.

000148

Q Let me take you way back to Air Force One. A conversation begins about whether the President is going to authorize the shooting down of airliners.

MR. BARTLETT: Well, we have the situation where the Department of Defense authorizes the use of CAPs --

Q Combat air patrols.

MR. BARTLETT: -- combat air patrols, to protect the Washington, D.C. and -- the eastern corridor, essentially, was the charge. They had called over to the White House wanting some sort of guidance on rules of engagement.

Q When to shoot.

MR. BARTLETT: When to shoot. So the Deputy National Security Advisor, Steve Hadley, communicates this to the Vice President. The Vice President and the team that was there analyze this, looked at the situation, called the President on Air Force One, made the recommendation that this was a possibility, that we felt that Washington, D.C. was still a target, that we still had unaccounted for aircraft -- particularly, in this case, was the situation with Flight 93 -- and that they needed the rules of engagement.

The President said, "You have my full authorization." Which had to be, to this day, one of the most difficult decisions that the President makes, is to say that the potential of having to shoot down innocent American civilians, knowing that the targets were large population centers. It was very difficult.

Q Did you have any sense that he agonized over that?

MR. BARTLETT: No, I didn't.

Q Really?

MR. BARTLETT: It was a -- again, I'm hearing one side of the conversation, because the President is on the phone with the Vice President. But I think this was not a time for -- these were split-second decisions having to be made in real-time. And it seemed very firm in his convictions.

Q Great. Sensational. Thank you.

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MR. BARTLETT: All right.

END

3:07 P.M. EDT

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