

Day One Response to Oklahoma City Bombing

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General Information

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Description

A stern and somber President Bill Clinton reacts to the Oklahoma City bombing and its growing death toll.

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Transcript

DAY 1: Presidential/Federal Response to Oklahoma City Bombing

BRIAN WILLIAMS: A stern and somber President Clinton this evening, reacted to the explosion and the growing death toll.

President BILL CLINTON: The bombing in Oklahoma City was an attack on innocent children and defenseless citizens. It was an act of cowardice, and it was evil. The United States will not tolerate it, and I will not allow the people of this country to be intimidated by evil cowards.

WILLIAMS: It was just after the president and the prime minister of Turkey had answered reporters' questions in the Oval Office. Press Secretary Mike McCurry leaned over and told the president at 10:32

Eastern time what had happened in Oklahoma City.

Chief of Staff Leon Panetta then left the Oval Office to convene a White House meeting on the bombing. From there, the Federal Emergency Management Plan was put into place. Immediately en route to Oklahoma City were elements of the Department of Justice, including the FBI, FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the US Marshals, and the Secret Service.

Included in the 40-person FBI bomb squad, some of the same experts who helped solve New York's World Trade Center bombing. They'll now try to reconstruct what's been blown apart in Oklahoma City. At the White House, the president watched the all-day television coverage of the bombing while outside security at the White House was visibly tightened, with visitors, reporters, and staff subject to heightened scrutiny. Blocks away, all visitors were evacuated from the FBI headquarters after a threat was phoned in there. Security around the US Capitol was tightened as well just moments after initial word of the Oklahoma City explosion.

At the State Department, these pictures from Oklahoma looked very familiar. Several US government officials drew immediate similarities to last summer's bombing in Argentina: an estimated thousand pounds of explosives in a van parked in front of a building, the damage radiating out. Argentine and US officials blamed the Hezbollah for the blast. Both the State and Justice Departments are sending terrorism experts to the scene of the Oklahoma City blast.

President CLINTON: These people are killers, and they must be treated like killers.

WILLIAMS: Tonight, the president responded by sending a small army to Oklahoma, cargo planes, a team of surgeons and helicopters. The attorney general responded by promising the death penalty for those involved. Brian Williams, NBC News, the White House.

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