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White House Press Secretary: Anyone—and He Means "Anyone"—Who Criticizes Yemen Raid Owes Apology to Dead U.S. Soldier

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White House press secretary Sean Spicer on Wednesday said anyone questioning the success of a U.S. military raid in Yemen last month, which resulted in dozens of deaths, is doing "a disservice" to the American soldier who was killed in the operation.

Spicer's comments came just after Yemen reportedly withdrew permission for the U.S. to conduct ground operations in the country in response to the botched raid.

Criticism of the operation has been widespread. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who chairs the Armed Services Committee, told *NBC News*, "When you lose a $75 million airplane and, more importantly, an American life is lost…I don't believe you can call it a success."

During Spicer's daily briefing on Wednesday—where he has been known to make Orwellian comments on recent events—*NBC News*' White House correspondent Kristen Welker asked, "Yemen has withdrawn permission for the United States to run special operations and ground missions against suspected terrorists in the wake of the recent raid there that claimed so many civilian lives. Do you stand by your assessment that it is a success?"

"It's absolutely a success, and I think anyone that would suggest it's not a success does a disservice to the life of Chief Ryan Owens," Spicer said.

"But even Senator John McCain—" Welker began.

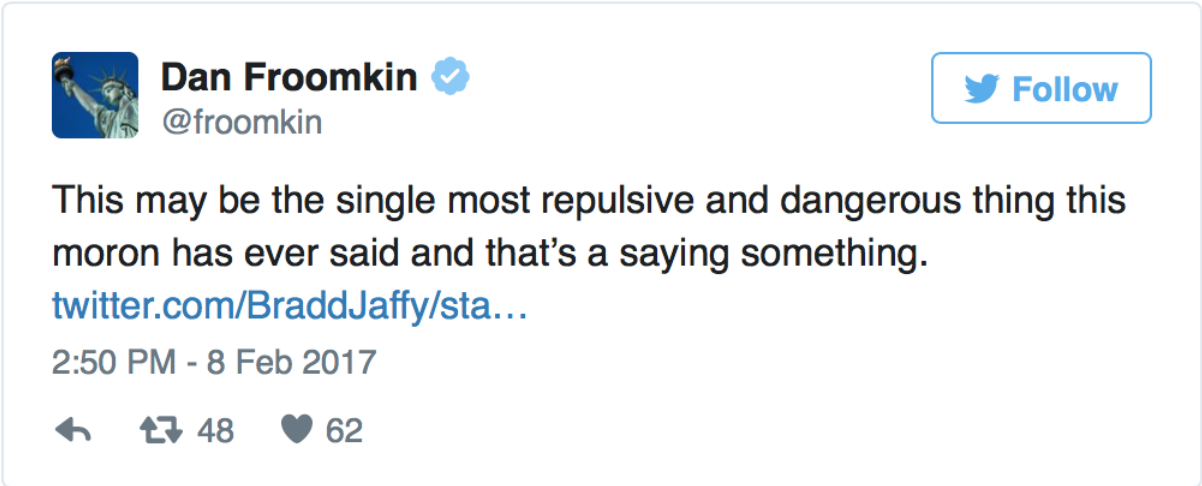
"I understand that. I think my statement's very clear on that, Kristen," Spicer said. "I think anybody who undermines the success of that raid owes an apology and… [it's] a disservice to the life of Chief Owens."

Watch the exchange below:

Owens, 36, was killed in a firefight on January 28 during an operation authorized "without sufficient intelligence, ground support, or adequate backup preparations" by President Donald Trump, as *Reuters* explained at the time. The raid also killed an eight-year-old girl and an unknown number of Yemeni civilians.

The Intercept journalists Glenn Greenwald and Dan Froomkin described the comments as "despicable" and "the single most repulsive and dangerous thing this moron has ever said,"

respectively.



"So you're saying that Senator John McCain owes him an apology?" Welker continued.

"I'm answering the question, please let me finish. The raid, the action that was taken in Yemen was a huge success," Spicer said.

> "American lives will be saved because of it. Future attacks will be prevented. The life of Chief Ryan Owens was done in service to this country and we owe him and his family a great debt for the information that we received during that raid. I think any suggestion otherwise is a disservice to his courageous life and the actions he took, full stop."

"Is that your message to Senator John McCain?" Welker said. "He's called it a failure."

"That's my message to anybody who says that, anybody," Spicer said. "I don't know how much clearer I can be."

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