

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

**Remarks on the Hostage Situation at the Congregation Beth Israel Synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, and an Exchange With Reporters in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
January 16, 2022**

The President. Hey, folks. With regard to Texas and the synagogue, I spoke this morning with the Attorney General and—to get a rundown on—he said there's overwhelming cooperation with the local authorities and the FBI, and they did one hell of a job.

This was an act of terror. This was an act of terror. And it not only was related to someone who had been arrested, I might add, 15 years ago and been in jail for 10 years—the idea that it was something new.

And they did just a great job.

I also told him that I wanted to make sure we got the word out to synagogues and places of worship that we're not going to tolerate this, that we have this capacity to deal with the assaults on—particularly the anti-Semitism that has grown up.

And so—and I'll be talking with—I put a call into the rabbi. We missed one another on the way up here. And—but they should rest assured that we are focused. We are focused. The Attorney General is focused on making sure that we deal with these kinds of acts.

And thank God—thank God we have such a professional FBI, as well as—the local cooperation, I was told, was incredible. It was seamless. So I just wanted to let you know that.

Okay?

Suspect's Access to Weapons

Q. Mr. President, how could this man have gotten weapons? There's reports that he's only been in the country for a couple of—

The President. Well—

Q. —weeks.

The President. —allegedly—I—we—I don't have all the facts, nor does the Attorney General. But, allegedly, the assertion was he got the weapons on the street. He purchased them when he landed. And it turns out there apparently were no bombs that we know of. That—you know, he said that there are bombs he has as well.

But he—apparently, he spent the first night in a homeless shelter. I don't have all the detail yet, so I'm reluctant to go into more—much more detail.

But—and, allegedly, he purchased it on the street. Now what that means, I don't know. Whether he purchased it from an individual in a homeless shelter or a homeless community, or whether—because that's where he said he was—it's hard to tell. I just don't know.

Gun Control

Q. [Inaudible]—ramifications for the push to—on—to ensure that guns are not available?

The President. Well, no—well, it does, but it also doesn't. What the guns are—we should be—the idea of background checks are critical. But you can't stop something like this if someone is on the street buying something from somebody else on the street. Except that there's too—there's so many guns that have been sold of late; it's just ridiculous. And it's because of the failure

of us to focus as hard as we should and as consistent as we should on gun purchases, gun sales, ghost guns, and a whole range of things that I'm trying to do.

Motivations of the Suspect

Q. Mr. President, do you know more about the motivations of the person?

The President. No, I don't. I—there's speculation, but I'm not going to get into that. I will—I'm going to have a press conference on Wednesday, and I'll be happy to go into detail of what I know in detail at that time.

Q. Do you know why he targeted that specific synagogue, Mr. President?

The President. Well, no, I don't. We don't have—I don't think there is sufficient information to know about why he targeted that synagogue, why he insisted on the release of someone who's been in prison for over 10 years, why he was engaged—why he was using anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli comments. I—we just don't have enough facts.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:58 a.m. at the Philabundance food bank. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland; Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani national serving an 86-year sentence at FMC Carswell Federal prison in Fort Worth, TX, for attempted murder and other charges in the 2008 shooting of U.S. military and law enforcement personnel in Ghazni, Afghanistan; Charlie Cytron-Walker, rabbi, Congregation Beth Israel Synagogue, who, along with three congregants, was taken hostage in the synagogue on January 15 and later escaped unharmed; and Malik Faisal Akram of Blackburn, United Kingdom, the suspected hostage taker, who was killed when a Federal Bureau of Investigation Hostage Rescue Team entered the synagogue following the escape of the hostages.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Hostage situation at Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, TX; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: Philadelphia, PA.

Locations: Philadelphia, PA.

Names: Akram, Malik Faisal; Cytron-Walker, Charlie; Garland, Merrick B.; Siddiqui, Aafia.

Subjects: Civil rights : Minorities :: Anti-Semitism; Communications : News media :: Presidential interviews; Justice, Department of : Attorney General; Justice, Department of : Bureau of Investigation, Federal; Law enforcement and crime : Gun control; Law enforcement and crime : Law enforcement officers, service and dedication; Pennsylvania : President's visit; Terrorism : Global threat; Texas : Hostage situation at synagogue in Colleyville.

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