

This is an especially heartbreaking day for all our friends—our fellow Americans—who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The shooter targeted a nightclub where people came together to be with friends, to dance and to sing, and to live. The place where they were attacked is more than a nightclub; it is a place of solidarity and empowerment where people have come together to raise awareness, to speak their minds, and to advocate for their civil rights.

So this is a sobering reminder that attacks on any American—regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation—is an attack on all of us and on the fundamental values of equality and dignity that define us as a country. And no act of hate or terror will ever change who we are or the values that make us Americans.

Today marks the most deadly shooting in American history. The shooter was apparently armed with a handgun and a powerful assault rifle. This massacre is therefore a further reminder of how easy it is for someone to get their hands on a weapon that lets them shoot people in a school or in a house of worship or a movie theater or in a nightclub. And we have to decide if that's the kind of country we want to be. And to actively do nothing is a decision as well.

In the coming hours and days, we'll learn about the victims of this tragedy: their names, their faces, who they were, the joy that they

brought to families and to friends, and the difference that they made in this world. Say a prayer for them, and say a prayer for their families: that God give them the strength to bear the unbearable; and that He give us all the strength to be there for them and the strength and courage to change. We need to demonstrate that we are defined more—as a country—by the way they lived their lives than by the hate of the man who took them from us.

As we go together, we will draw inspiration from heroic and selfless acts: friends who helped friends, took care of each other, and saved lives. In the face of hate and violence, we will love one another. We will not give in to fear or turn against each other. Instead, we will stand united, as Americans, to protect our people, and defend our Nation, and to take action against those who threaten us.

May God bless the Americans we lost this morning, may He comfort their families, and may God continue to watch over this country that we love. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:59 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Omar Mateen, suspected gunman in the terrorist attack at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, FL. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. The related proclamation is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

## Remarks Following a Briefing on the Terrorist Attack in Orlando, Florida, and an Exchange With Reporters

June 13, 2016

*The President.* I just had the opportunity to get the latest briefing from FBI Director Comey, as well as Deputy Attorney General Yates and the rest of my national security team, about the tragedy that took place in Orlando. They're going to be doing a more extensive briefing around noon, just a little bit after noon, over at FBI headquarters. So I will allow them to go into all the details, but I thought it

was important for you to hear directly from me.

First of all, our hearts go out to the families of those who have been killed. Our prayers go to those who have been wounded. This is a devastating attack on all Americans. It is one that is particularly painful for the people of Orlando, but I think we all recognize that this could have happened anywhere in this country.

And we feel enormous solidarity and grief on behalf of the families that have been affected.

The fact that it took place at a club frequented by the LGBT community, I think, is also relevant. We're still looking at all the motivations of the killer. But it's a reminder that regardless of race, religion, faith, or sexual orientation, we're all Americans, and we need to be looking after each other and protecting each other at all times in the face of this kind of terrible act.

With respect to the killer, there's been a lot of reporting that's been done. It's important to emphasize that we're still at the preliminary stages of the investigation, and there's a lot more that we have to learn. The one thing that we can say is that this is being treated as a terrorist investigation. It appears that the shooter was inspired by various extremist information that was disseminated over the Internet. All those materials are currently being searched, exploited so we will have a better sense of the pathway that the killer took in making a decision to launch this attack.

As Director Comey, I think, will indicate, at this stage, we see no clear evidence that he was directed externally. It does appear that, at the last minute, he announced allegiance to ISIL, but there is no evidence so far that he was in fact directed by ISIL. And there also at this stage is no direct evidence that he was part of a larger plot. In that sense, it is—appears to be similar to what we saw in San Bernardino, but we don't yet know. And this is part of what is going to be important in terms of the investigation.

As far as we can tell right now, this is certainly an example of the kind of homegrown extremism that all of us have been so concerned about for a very long time. It also appears that he was able to obtain these weapons legally because he did not have a criminal record that, in some ways, would prohibit him from purchasing these weapons. It appears that one of those weapons he was able to just carry out of the store—an assault rifle, a handgun—a Glock—which had a lot of clips in it. He was apparently required to wait for 3 days under Florida law. But it does indicate the de-

gree to which it was not difficult for him to obtain these kinds of weapons.

Director Comey will discuss the fact that there had been some investigation of him in the past that was triggered, but as Director Comey, I think, will indicate, the FBI followed the procedures that they were supposed to and did a proper job.

At the end of the day, this is something that we are going to have to grapple with—making sure that even as we go after ISIL and other extremist organizations overseas, even as we hit their leadership, even as we go after their infrastructure, even as we take key personnel off the field, even as we disrupt external plots—that one of the biggest challenges we are going to have is this kind of propaganda and perversions of Islam that you see generated on the Internet and the capacity for that to seep into the minds of troubled individuals or weak individuals and seeing them motivated then to take actions against people here in the United States and elsewhere in the world that are tragic. And so countering this extremist ideology is increasingly going to be just as important as making sure that we are disrupting more extensive plots engineered from the outside.

We are also going to have to have to make sure that we think about the risks we are willing to take by being so lax in how we make very powerful firearms available to people in this country. And this is something that obviously I've talked about for a very long time.

My concern is that we start getting into a debate, as has happened in the past, which is an either-or debate. And the suggestion is, either we think about something as terrorism and we ignore the problems with easy access to firearms, or it's all about firearms and we ignore the role—the very real role that that organizations like ISIL have in generating extremist views inside this country. And it's not an either-or, it's a both-and.

We have to go after these terrorist organizations and hit them hard. We have to counter extremism. But we also have to make sure that it is not easy for somebody who decides they

want to harm people in this country to be able to obtain weapons to get at them.

And my hope is, is that over the next days and weeks that we are being sober about how we approach this problem, that we let the facts get determined by our investigators, but we also do some reflecting in terms of how we can best tackle what is going to be a very challenging problem not just here in this country, but around the world.

Again, my final point is just to extend our deepest sympathies to the families of those who were affected and to send our prayers to those who are surviving and are in hospitals right now, with their family members hoping that they get better very soon.

But in the meantime, you can anticipate sometime around noon that Director Comey and Deputy Attorney General Yates will provide you with a more full briefing about this. Okay?

*Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Terrorist Organization/Discrimination Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People*

Q. Mr. President, is there anything more on the LBGT angle to this?

*The President.* Well, I think we don't yet know the motivations. But here's what we do know, is, organizations like ISIL or organizations like Al Qaida or those who have perverted Islam and created these radical, nihilistic, vicious organizations, one of the groups that they target are gays and lesbians, because they believe that they do not abide by their attitudes towards sexuality.

Now, we also know these are organizations that think it's fine to take captive women and enslave them and rape them. So there clearly are connections between the attitudes of an organization like this and their attitudes towards tolerance and pluralism and a belief that all people are treated equally regardless of sexual orientation. That is something threatening to them. Women being empowered is threatening to them.

So yes, I'm sure they're going to—we will find that there are connections—regardless of the particular motivations of this killer—there

are connections between this vicious, bankrupt ideology and general attitudes towards gays and lesbians. And unfortunately, that's something that the LGBT community is subject to not just by ISIL, but by a lot of groups that purport to speak on behalf of God around the world.

*Gun Control*

Q. What are your thoughts about the fact that after all of these incidents over these years, that there has not been any move to reform gun control in this country?

*The President.* April [April Ryan, American Urban Radio Networks], I think you know what I think about it. The fact that we make it this challenging for law enforcement, for example, even to get alerted that somebody who they are watching has purchased a gun—and if they do get alerted, sometimes, it's hard for them to stop them from getting a gun—is crazy. It's a problem. And we have to, I think, do some soul searching.

But again, the danger here is, is that then it ends up being the usual political debate. And the NRA and the gun control folks say that, oh, Obama doesn't want to talk about terrorism. And if you talk about terrorism, then people say, why aren't you looking at issues of gun control?

The point is, is that if we have self-radicalized individuals in this country, then they are going to be very difficult oftentimes to find ahead of time. And how easy it is for them to obtain weapons is, in some cases, going to make a difference as to whether they're able to carry out attacks like this or not. And we make it very easy for individuals who are troubled or disturbed or want to engage in violent acts to get very powerful weapons very quickly. And that's a problem.

It's a problem regardless of their motivations. It's a problem for a young man who can walk into a church in South Carolina and murder nine people who offered to pray with him. It's a problem when an angry young man on a college campus decides to shoot people because he feels disrespected. So it's certainly a problem when we have organizations like ISIL

or Al Qaida who are actively trying to promote violence and are doing so very effectively over the Internet, because we know that at some point there are going to be, out of 300 million, there are going to be some individuals who find for whatever reason that kind of horrible propaganda enticing. And if that happens, and that person can get a weapon, that's a problem. All right.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:13 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Omar Mateen, suspected gunman in the terrorist attack at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, FL, on June 12; and Dylann S. Roof, accused gunman in the shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, on June 17, 2015.

## Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Global Deployment of United States Combat-Equipped Armed Forces June 13, 2016

*Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)*

I am providing this supplemental consolidated report, prepared by my Administration and consistent with the War Powers Resolution (Public Law 93-148), as part of my efforts to keep the Congress informed about deployments of U.S. Armed Forces equipped for combat.

### *MILITARY OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF U.S. COUNTERTERRORISM OBJECTIVES*

In furtherance of U.S. counterterrorism efforts, the United States continues to work with partners around the globe, with a particular focus on the U.S. Central Command's and U.S. Africa Command's areas of responsibility. In this context, the United States has deployed U.S. combat-equipped forces to enhance the counterterrorism capabilities and support the counterterrorism operations of our partners and allies. Specific information about counterterrorism deployments to select countries is provided below, and a classified annex to this report provides further information.

#### *Military Operations Against al-Qa'ida, the Taliban, and Associated Forces and in Support of Related U.S. Counterterrorism Objectives*

Since October 7, 2001, U.S. Armed Forces, including special operations forces, have conducted counterterrorism combat operations in Afghanistan against al-Qa'ida, the Taliban, and

associated forces. Since August 2014, these operations have targeted the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which was formerly known as al-Qa'ida in Iraq. In support of these and other overseas operations, the United States has deployed combat-equipped forces to a number of locations in the U.S. Central, Pacific, European, Southern, and Africa Command areas of operation. Such operations and deployments have been reported previously, consistent with Public Law 107-40 and the War Powers Resolution, and operations and deployments remain ongoing. These operations, which the United States has carried out with the assistance of numerous international partners, have been successful in seriously degrading al-Qa'ida's and ISIL's capabilities and brought an end to the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan. These operations also included an airstrike conducted by U.S. forces on May 21, 2016, against Taliban leader Mullah Mansur in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. If necessary, in response to terrorist threats, I will direct additional measures to protect U.S. citizens and interests. It is not possible to know at this time the precise scope or the duration of the deployments of U.S. Armed Forces necessary to counter terrorist threats to the United States.

*Afghanistan.* As I previously announced, U.S. Armed Forces have transitioned the lead for security to Afghan security forces while striking significant blows against al-Qa'ida's leadership and preventing Afghanistan from