

June 7, 2011

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

RE: Request from National and State Gun Violence Prevention Organizations for Action to Prevent Terrorist Attacks with Firearms on U.S. Soil in Response to Latest Al Qaeda Warning

Dear Mr. President:

On June 3, 2011, a video was released on the Internet urging Al Qaeda followers to undertake terrorist attacks using firearms on U.S. soil. The video message features Adam Gadahn, an American-born member of the terrorist group, urging followers to immediately launch violent acts of jihad by exploiting the firepower available on the U.S. civilian gun market and the weaknesses in U.S. gun laws and the background check system. According to Gadahn:

America is absolutely awash with easily obtainable firearms. You can go down to a gun show at the local convention center and come away with a fully automatic assault rifle, without a background check, and most likely, without having to show an identification card. So what are you waiting for?

The unmistakable message to terrorists is to exploit America's singularly weak gun laws to obtain firearms for a few hundred dollars that can be used to kill scores or even hundreds of Americans.

Friday's video is not the first warning of this type. Within two months of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, for example, a six-page document entitled *How Can I Train Myself for Jihad* was discovered in a terrorist safe house in Afghanistan. The document described the ease with which military style firearms and training were available in the United States and encouraged would-be terrorists to take advantage of it:

In other countries, e.g. some states of USA...it is perfectly legal for members of the public to own certain types of firearms. If you live in such a country, obtain an assault rifle legally, preferably AK-47 or variations, learn how to use it properly and go and practice in the areas allowed for such training.

The commando-style terror attacks in Mumbai, India, on November 26, 2008, raised clear red flags about the vulnerability of the United States to a similar attack, especially in light of our nation's wide-open militarized civilian firearms market. There was nothing secret about the implications. For example, in March 2009, James W. McJunkin, Deputy Assistant Director of the FBI's Counterterrorism Division, told a U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee:

The principal lesson from the Mumbai attacks remains that a small number of trained and determined attackers with relatively unsophisticated weapons can do a great deal of damage... We are concerned about the possibility that other terrorist groups, including al Qaeda or its affiliates, will take note of these attacks and attempt to emulate them.¹

Notwithstanding many stark warnings like this one, the gun lobby and the gun industry have blocked even as simple and common sense a measure as prohibiting firearms and explosives sales to persons on terrorist watch lists.

Moreover, the threat of mass casualties from armed attack in the United States has not been merely theoretical. A September 2010 study from the Bipartisan Policy Center, "Assessing the Terrorist Threat," identified two terrorist attacks in the United States in 2009, both of which were accomplished with firearms: the June 2009 shooting that killed one soldier and wounded another at a U.S. military recruiting station in Little Rock, Arkansas, in which the shooter, Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad a.k.a Carlos Bledsoe, had spent time in Yemen and claimed to be a member of the group Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula; and, the November 2009 attack at Fort Hood, Texas, in which Major Nidal Hasan opened fire on the base with two FN Five-sevenN pistols, killing 13 and wounding 43 before security officers shot and disabled him.

Also in September 2010, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano testified before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs warning:

There is a rising threat from attacks that use improvised explosives devices (IEDs), other explosives, and small arms. This type of attack has been common in hotspots around the world for some time, but we have now experienced such attempted attacks in the United States. Other countries, from Afghanistan to Somalia to Russia, have also experienced attacks where small teams of operatives storm a facility using small arms. Unlike large-scale, coordinated, catastrophic attacks, executing smaller-scale attacks requires less planning and fewer pre-operational steps. Accordingly, there are fewer opportunities to detect such an attack before it occurs.²

Respectfully, Mr. President, the time is now to act to prevent a large-scale terror attack with firearms. The United States' weak gun laws are well known throughout the terrorist community and today act as a beacon for lone wolves and small groups of terrorists with few resources seeking to inflict maximum damage. American gun stores and gun shows are stocked with the most lethal firearms available anywhere in the industrialized world. Terrorists can easily obtain the same 50 caliber anti-armor sniper rifles that our troops deploy in Afghanistan. Military assault weapons and high-capacity pistols can be obtained inexpensively and in bulk. Even armor-piercing and incendiary ammunition is freely available. It takes no imagination to conjure the outcome of an

¹ Statement of James W. McJunkin, Deputy Assistant Director, Counterterrorism Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection (March 11, 2009).

² Statement of Janet A. Napolitano, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (September 22, 2010).

attack by a few well-armed individuals on a shopping mall, a sporting event, or just a busy city street.

Therefore, we call on you in the strongest terms to order an immediate and thorough review of steps the Administration can take in the short term to reduce the firepower available on the civilian gun market, to tighten existing laws regulating the gun industry, and to improve the background check system to make it harder for those with terrorist ties to obtain firearms.

We also urge you to call on Congress to convene extensive, serious hearings to explore and identify the legislative steps that ultimately must be taken if a small arms terrorist attack is to be prevented. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss specific policy options with you directly.

Sincerely,

Josh Sugarmann
Executive Director
Violence Policy Center

Paul Helmke
President
Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence

Josh Horwitz
Executive Director
Coalition to Stop Gun Violence

Robyn Thomas
Executive Director
Legal Community Against Violence

Andy Pelosi
Executive Director
States United to Prevent Gun Violence

State and Regional Gun Violence Prevention Organizations

Arizonans for Gun Safety
North Carolinians Against Gun Violence
Ohio Coalition Against Gun Violence
Ceasefire Oregon
GunFreeKids.org
Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence
Maine Citizens Against Handgun Violence
Protect Minnesota
Protest Easy Guns/Campaign to Close the Gun Show Loophole
New Yorkers Against Gun Violence
Utah Gun Violence Prevention Center
Virginia Center for Public Safety
Richmond & Hampton Roads Chapters of the Million Mom March
WAVE Educational Fund

cc: Attorney General Eric Holder