

Remembering the 2009 Little Rock Jihadist Attack and President Obama's Days of Silence

MAY 21, 2018 1:30 PM BY STEPHEN M. KIRBY



June 1, 2018 will be the ninth anniversary of two tragic events. The first event was the shooting of two United States Army privates by a Muslim convert outside the recruiting station in Little Rock, Arkansas; one private was killed and the other was wounded. The second event was the start of the multi-day silence about this shooting from President Barack Hussein Obama, their Commander-in-Chief.

On June 1, 2009, shortly after 10:00 AM (Central Time Zone), Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad, an American citizen and Muslim convert, drove up to the Army recruiting station in Little Rock, Arkansas. There were two Army privates standing outside. Muhammad opened fire and killed Private William Long, 23 years old, and wounded Private Quinton Ezeagwula, 18 years old. Muhammad was arrested shortly afterwards, and numerous newspaper articles the next day quoted the police as saying that Muhammad had “political and religious motives” for his attack.

For the folks in Washington D.C., the attack occurred shortly after 11:00 AM (Eastern Time Zone). The silence about this attack from President Obama lasted over a multi-

day period in spite of the following activities mentioned on the White House website (all times are Eastern Time Zone).

That Same Day (Day 1)

At 2:20 PM, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs gave a briefing to the press. The press asked questions about a package left along the northeast gate of the White House; the federal government's bailout of General Motors; North Korea; the cost of the recent "out-of-town date night" of President Obama and the First Lady; reducing the U.S. debt, the price of oil; Obama's upcoming trip to the Middle East; and the upcoming D-Day Commemoration. There was no mention of Army Privates Long and Ezeagwula.[\[1\]](#)

At 3:34 PM, President Obama was interviewed by *BBC* Correspondent Justin Webb. Among the items Obama talked about were his upcoming speech in Cairo and how he hoped it would open a dialogue between the Muslim world and the West. He stated that "the U.S. Muslim population is more numerous than the populations of many majority-Muslim countries." He talked about his Cairo speech and the importance of "closing Guantanamo." He then talked about Israeli-Palestinian relations and noted that it was "in the world's interests for Iran to set aside ambitions for a nuclear weapon." Obama ended the interview by talking about how he spends his personal time. There was no mention of Army Privates Long and Ezeagwula.[\[2\]](#)

At 3:50 PM, President Obama was interviewed by French correspondent Laura Haim of *Canal Plus*. President Obama expressed his condolences for the crash of Air France Flight 447 into the Atlantic Ocean in the early morning hours of June 1st, with the loss of all aboard. The conversation then turned to, among other topics, Obama's upcoming trip to the Middle East on June 2nd, and Obama erroneously claimed "that if you actually took the number of Muslims [sic] Americans, we'd be one of the largest Muslim countries in the world." He pointed out that his love for France included its food, wine, and Paris; he said he had traveled through the south of France as a college student. He ended by noting that although he had studied French in high school, he had forgotten that language. There was no mention of Army Privates Long and Ezeagwula.[\[3\]](#)

At 4:02 PM, President Obama was interviewed by *National Public Radio*. The interviewers asked about how the U.S. could improve relations with the Muslim world and would such efforts affect relations with Israel; how could peace be established between the Israelis and Palestinians; how to deal with countries that have "undemocratic governments"; how to deal with Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas; nuclear proliferation; Guantanamo; and the possible impact that fighting in a Muslim country (Afghanistan) could have on relations with other Muslim countries. There was no mention of Army Privates Long and Ezeagwula.[\[4\]](#)

June 2nd (Day 2)

The FBI issued a press release about the arrest of Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad:

Little Rock Special Agent in Charge Thomas J. Browne issued the following statement:

On June 1, 2009, Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammed, formerly known as Carlos Bledsoe, was arrested by the Little Rock, Arkansas Police Department for the murder of Pvt. William Long and the attempted murder of Pvt. Quinton Ezeagwula, two soldiers in the United States Army at an Army Recruiting Office in Little Rock...[5]

At 11:56 AM President Obama held a press conference to announce his nomination of then-Republican Congressman John McHugh (New York) to become the Secretary of the Army. Obama talked about the importance of the U.S. military. He stated, “Few have borne a heavier burden in recent years than America’s Army...” and he said, “As a nation, we have a sacred trust with all those who wear the uniform: To always take care of them as they take care of us.” Obama continued:

And today I’m proud to announce the distinguished public servant who will help keep us safe and keep our sacred trust with our soldiers and their families, the next Secretary of the Army — the ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, John McHugh...John understands that the Army’s greatest strength is its people...As Secretary, he will ensure that America keeps faith with our soldiers — increasing their pay, increasing child care and helping families deal with the stress and strain of war.

Congressman McHugh then stepped to the microphone and stated that “the most important common good” was

the welfare and the interest of the men and women who voluntarily put on the uniform of the branches of the United States military — and their families, because they serve as well.

McHugh also pointed out that

for all of the special feelings for all of the military, I’ve always had the Army somewhat apart....The Army has always had a special place in my heart...

At this press conference announcing the nominee for Secretary of the Army, there was no mention of Army Privates Long and Ezeagwula.[6]

June 3rd (Day 3)

President Obama issued the following, almost generic, statement about Privates Long and Ezeagwula:

I am deeply saddened by this senseless act of violence against two brave young soldiers who were doing their part to strengthen our armed forces and keep our country safe. I would like to wish Quinton Ezeagwula a speedy recovery, and to offer my condolences and prayers to William Long's family as they mourn the loss of their son. [7]

There were reports that correspondent Major Garrett had appeared on *Special Report with Brett Baier* this same day (June 3rd) and said that this statement by Obama had been made available only to the Arkansas media. This seemed to be confirmed later during a June 10th press conference, when White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs was asked regarding a presidential statement about the shooting of Long and Ezeagwula. Gibbs replied, "Well, I believe a statement did go to many stations in Arkansas regarding that." [8]

Additional information about this limited release was later given on December 7, 2011, when Daris Long, father of Private Long, appeared in front of a Congressional joint hearing on "Islamist Radicalization." This is from Long's prepared statement submitted to the two committees:

Three days after Andy died this was on the internet and I quote: "FNC Special Report's on-line broadcast from last night is well worth the watch on the topic. Major Garret comes on to discuss the White House handling of it. The White House prepared a comment to be released about the attack for 'those who requested comment.' He goes on to explain the White House explained this was available upon request instead of just releasing it because the press didn't seem interested. Garret was clearly squirming, knowing how awful what he was saying sounded." [9]

It is notable that Obama's June 3rd statement about Privates Long and Ezeagwula was not listed on the White House website. [10]

When nominating John McHugh to be Secretary of the Army, President Obama had said,

...we have a sacred trust with all those who wear the uniform: To always take care of them as they take care of us.

Unfortunately, for two of those wearing the uniform and serving under his command, Obama's condolences were delayed for days, generic in nature, limited in distribution, and not listed on the White House web site.

This is in stark contrast to how Obama handled the deaths of three individuals around that same time period: George Tiller, President El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba, and Stephen Johns.

George Tiller

Dr. George Tiller was a physician who was nationally known for being one of the few doctors in the United States to perform late-term abortions. On May 31, 2009, he was murdered by Scott Roeder, who was anti-abortion. Later that same day Obama issued the following statement:

I am shocked and outraged by the murder of Dr. George Tiller as he attended church services this morning. However profound our differences as Americans over difficult issues such as abortion, they cannot be resolved by heinous acts of violence.^[11]

This statement was marked “For Immediate Release” and was listed on the White House website.^[12]

President El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba

Omar Bongo was the president of the African country of Gabon. Bongo had assumed the presidency in 1967 and converted to Islam in 1973.^[13] Bongo died of natural causes on June 8, 2009. A few weeks before his death, *BBC News* had posted an article about him. This article noted that:

Mr. Bongo is one of three African leaders accused of embezzlement... It is alleged that the volume of real estate owned by Mr. Bongo's family in France could not have been purchased with official salaries alone. In recent weeks this has been followed by the freezing of Mr. Bongo's bank accounts in France following bribery allegations... critics have long argued that Mr. Bongo's stay in power has been as a consequence of a combination of violence and corruption.^[14]

Bongo died on June 8th and later that same day Obama issued the following statement:

I am saddened to learn of the death of President El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba of Gabon. President Bongo played a key role in developing and shaping the strong bilateral relationship that exists between Gabon and the United States today.

President Bongo consistently emphasized the importance of seeking compromise and striving for peace, and made protecting Gabon's natural treasures a priority. His work in conservation in his country and his commitment to conflict resolution across the continent are an important part of his legacy and will be remembered with respect.

On behalf of the United States government, I offer my condolences to his family and to the people of Gabon.^[15]

This statement was marked “For Immediate Release” and was listed on the White House website.^[16]

Stephen Johns

Stephen Johns was a Special Police Officer at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. On June 10, 2009, James Wenneker von Brunn entered the museum and fatally shot Officer Johns. Later that same day Obama issued the following statement:

I am shocked and saddened by today's shooting at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. This outrageous act reminds us that we must remain vigilant against anti-Semitism and prejudice in all its forms. No American institution is more important to this effort than the Holocaust Museum, and no act of violence will diminish our determination to honor those who were lost by building a more peaceful and tolerant world.

Today, we have lost a courageous security guard who stood watch at this place of solemn remembrance. My thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends in this painful time. [\[17\]](#)

This statement was marked "For Immediate Release" and was listed on the White House website. [\[18\]](#)

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that Obama's statements about Tiller, Bongo, and Johns were marked "For Immediate Release" and were so released, while his statement about Long and Ezeagwula was delayed for days. Obama's statements about Tiller, Bongo and Johns were listed on the White House web site, but his statement about Long and Ezeagwula was not.

And there was also an interesting difference in the content of the statements about the three shooting incidents: specificity vs. vagueness. With regard to Tiller, Obama spoke of profound differences over abortion, but said that these differences could not "be resolved by heinous acts of violence." In the shooting of Johns, Obama said, "This outrageous act reminds us that we must remain vigilant against anti-Semitism and prejudice in all its forms." Yet in his statement about a shooting that had been done by a Muslim convert who had "political and religious motives," Obama referred to it only as a nondescript "senseless act of violence," with no mention being made of Islam.

Why was there a two day delay in the release of Obama's statement about the shooting on June 1st by a Muslim convert, and why did the resulting statement have a generic approach with a limited distribution? It likely had to do with President Obama's travel schedule. On June 3rd, Obama was meeting with King Abdullah in Saudi Arabia. On June 4th, Obama was in Cairo, Egypt giving a speech that paid homage to Islam and earned repeated rounds of applause from his Muslim audience. The reception in the Middle East might not have been as warm if Obama had just a few days before drawn national and international attention to a Muslim convert who had religious motives for gunning down two U.S. soldiers on American soil.

Yet it was on May 27, 2009, only a few days before the shooting of Privates Long and Ezeagwala, that President Obama had said this in a speech at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada:

... I want to thank all of you, the men and women in uniform, for your service to our country. We're grateful to you. Thank you... The fact that you serve each and every day to keep us safe is something that every American is grateful for. And so if I don't do anything else as your Commander-in-Chief, I'm going to make sure that we're there for you just as you've been there for us. So thank you very much. [19]

How soon he forgot.

Dr. Stephen M. Kirby is the author of five books about Islam. His latest book is *The Lure of Fantasy Islam: Exposing the Myths and Myth Makers*.

[1] *Briefing by White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs*, June 1, 2009, 2:20 PM; accessible at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/briefing-white-house-press-secretary-robert-gibbs-612009>.

[2] *Transcript of the Interview of the President with Justin Webb, BBC*, June 1, 2009, 3:34 PM; accessible at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/transcript-interview-president-with-justin-webb-bbc-6-1-09>.

[3] *Transcript of the Interview of the President by Laura Haim, Canal Plus*, June 1, 2009, 3:50 PM; accessible at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/transcript-interview-president-laura-haim-canal-plus-6-1-09>.

For an interesting article that looks at Obama's trip to France as a college student, and other travels, see Jack Cashill, "Obama went to France while in college?" *WND*, November 4, 2011; accessible at <http://www.wnd.com/2011/11/364149/>.

[4] *Transcript of the Interview of the President with Michele Norris and Steve Inskeep, NPR*, June 1, 2009, 4:02 PM; accessible at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/transcript-interview-president-with-michele-norris-and-steve-inskeep-npr-6-1-09>.

[5] "Arrest of Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammed," *Federal Bureau of Investigation, Little Rock Division*, June 2, 2009; accessible at <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/littlerock/press-releases/2009/lr060209.htm>.

[6] *Remarks by the President in Nomination of John McHugh as Secretary of the Army*, June 2, 2009; accessible at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-nomination-john-mchugh-secretary-army>.

[7] “Obama Issues Statement on Little Rock Shooting, *KATV Channel 7*, Little Rock, June 4, 2009; accessible at <https://islamseries.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/obama-issues-statement-on-little-rock-shooting-channel-7-news.jpg>.

[8] *Briefing by Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke and Press Secretary Robert Gibbs*, June 10, 2009; accessible at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/briefing-secretary-commerce-gary-locke-and-press-secretary-robert-gibbs-6-10-09>.

[9] “Compilation of Hearings on Islamist Radicalization, Vol. II,” *Joint Hearing before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives, and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, United States Senate*, December 7, 2011, p. 76; accessible at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112jhrq74648/pdf/CHRG-112jhrq74648.pdf>.

The lack of interest on the part of the press was glaringly evident during Robert Gibbs’ previously mentioned press briefing on June 1st; it had taken place about three hours after Long and Ezeagwula had been shot. The transcript of this press briefing showed that there were no questions from the members of the press, or even a statement by Gibbs, about the two privates having been shot!

[10] *Presidential Statements and Releases:*

May 29 – June 1, 2009 – https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-and-releases?term_node_tid_depth=41&page=1121

June 1-2, 2009 – https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-and-releases?term_node_tid_depth=41&page=1120

June 2-3, 2009 – https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-and-releases?term_node_tid_depth=41&page=1119

June 4-5, 2009 – https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-and-releases?term_node_tid_depth=41&page=1118

June 5-8, 2009 – https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-and-releases?term_node_tid_depth=41&page=1117

Presidential Speeches and Remarks:

May 27 – June 2, 2009 – https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/speeches-and-remarks?term_node_tid_depth=31&page=443

June 2-5, 2009 – https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/speeches-and-remarks?term_node_tid_depth=31&page=442

June 6-15, 2009: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/speeches-and-remarks?term_node_tid_depth=31&page=441

[11] *Statement From The President On The Murder Of DR George Tiller*, May 31, 2009; accessible at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/statement-president-murder-dr-george-tiller>.

[12] *Presidential Statements and Releases*, May 29 – June 1, 2009; accessible at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-and-releases?term_node_tid_depth=41&page=1121.

[13] See Bongo's obituary at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/politics-obituaries/5478816/Omar-Bongo.html>.

[14] "The Murky World of Omar Bongo," *BBC News*, May 21, 2009; accessible at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8056309.stm>.

[15] *Statement by the President on the death of President Bongo of Gabon*, June 8, 2009; accessible at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/statement-president-death-president-bongo-gabon>.

[16] *Presidential Statements and Releases*, June 8-9, 2009; accessible at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-and-releases?term_node_tid_depth=41&page=1116.

[17] *Statement by President Obama on Holocaust Museum Shooting*, June 10, 2009; accessible at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/statement-president-obama-holocaust-museum-shooting>.

[18] *Presidential Statements and Releases*, June 9-10, 2009; accessible at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-and-releases?term_node_tid_depth=41&page=1115.

[19] *Remarks by the President at Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, Nevada*, May 27, 2009; accessible at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-nellis-air-force-base-las-vegas-nevada>.