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afgazad@gmail.com

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Barry Grey

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Deflecting questions on massive security failures

Director Wray tells Congress FBI has no evidence of conspiracy in Trump shooting



FBI Director testifying before Congress on the assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump. July 22, 2024 [Photo: CSPAN]

FBI Director Christopher Wray testified for more than four hours Wednesday before the House Judiciary Committee, taking questions on his agency's investigation into the July 13 assassination attempt against former president and Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

The hearing had been previously scheduled as a routine part of congressional oversight of the FBI and Justice Department, but it took on added significance in the wake of the near assassination of Trump at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania 11 days before and

unanswered questions regarding the failure of the Secret Service and state and local law enforcement to prevent it.

The hearing was held two days after Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle resigned under fire from Democrats as well as Republicans when she refused to answer questions at a hearing Monday of the House Oversight Committee about her agency's failure to prevent twenty-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks from firing eight shots at Trump from a nearby factory roof with an unobstructed line of sight to the rally platform.

The assassination attempt, followed in rapid succession by the fascistic outpouring at the Republican National Convention, the withdrawal of Biden from the presidential race and the resignation of Cheatle, reflects the unprecedented and highly explosive political crisis of American capitalism.

Cheatle's stonewalling came amidst revelations that more than an hour before the shooting, Crooks had been identified by local police as "suspicious" and photographed when he was seen using a range finder. Among the questions Cheatle would not answer were: (1) Why the Secret Service's security perimeter did not include the building from which the gunman fired, (2) why no law enforcement officer was stationed there before or during the rally, and (3) why Trump was allowed to take the stage when the Secret Service and local police were still searching for the suspicious person.

Crooks was killed by a Secret Service countersniper after the shots from his AR-style weapon had wounded Trump in the ear, killed one attendee and seriously wounded two others.

Wray's main concern in his testimony seemed to be quelling suspicions—well founded—that Crooks was not simply acting alone, but rather was part of a broader conspiracy, very possibly involving elements in the intelligence and police apparatus. The very fact that he answered questions about the FBI's findings to date was highly unusual. Agency policy is to refuse to answer questions about an ongoing investigation. But on Wednesday, Wray repeated at least four times that the FBI had "to date found no evidence that the gunman had accomplices or co-conspirators."

At the same time, he deflected all questions about the security failures of the Secret Service and state and local police by saying those issues were the purview of investigations by the Department of Homeland Security inspector general and independent investigators. This, however, took as its premise the absurdity that the existence or non-existence of a conspiracy could be considered apart from the role of the security agencies themselves.

Wray maintained that the FBI had no prior knowledge of or contact with Crooks, saying that "the shooter was not in our holdings before the shooting." He confirmed that the agency had

been able to get into the shooter's cell phone, but complained that many of his electronic and digital communications were encrypted and could not be accessed. When Representative Wesley Hunt (R-TX) asked for the identity of the encryption applications, Wray dodged the question.

According to Wray, Crooks' contacts, communications and computer searches, as well as FBI interviews with hundreds of individuals, did not establish a political motivation or agenda behind the shooting. It was previously revealed that Crooks registered as a Republican in 2023 but had previously, in January 2021, donated \$15 to a pro-Democratic group.

It has also been reported that Crooks, known as an excellent student, was bullied in school and largely kept to himself. Additionally, reports say that he had been diagnosed as suffering from depression. He was working in the kitchen of a seniors' residence at the time of the shooting.

Both he and his father were gun enthusiasts. Wray reported that 14 weapons were found at the Crooks' home in the middle class community of Bethel Park. He also told the committee that Crooks purchased the weapon he used in the shooting from his father in October 2023 and that he regularly practiced shooting at a local firing range. He went to the firing range on July 12, the day before the assassination attempt.

Asked if the FBI had interviewed the family, Wray said it had and that the father was cooperative, but he said nothing beyond that.

As for the timeline leading up to July 13, Wray confirmed things that had been previously reported but also added new information. He noted that on July 6, the day the rally was publicly announced, Crooks did a Google search asking how far Lee Harvey Oswald was from John F. Kennedy when he allegedly fired on him from the Texas Book Depository Building in Dallas on November 22, 1963. The same day, Crooks registered for the Trump rally in Butler.

On July 7, Crooks visited the rally site for the first time and stayed some 70 minutes. He revisited the site on the morning of the rally, July 13, for a briefer period, and finally returned in the afternoon of the event. Wray confirmed that Crooks flew a drone some 200 yards from the rally stage for 11 minutes sometime between 4:50 pm and 5 pm, about an hour prior to the rally's start.

He reported that the FBI had retrieved the drone from Crooks' car, along with two explosive devices that were connected to a detonator, the remote trigger for which the shooter had on his person when he was killed. The agency also retrieved an explosive device from the

Crooks home. Wray confirmed as well that Crooks purchased 50 rounds of ammunition the morning of the rally.

The FBI director told the committee that Crooks was spotted by Secret Service agents or local police three times on the day of the rally. The first time was an hour prior to the shooting when Crooks, wearing a backpack, was seen peering into the lens of a range finder toward the rooftops behind the rally stage. The second time, 20 minutes before the shooting, according to NewsMax, was when he was spotted by local police snipers on the roof of the building, although, according to Wray, he was not seen at that time holding a weapon. Wray said one of the officers began radioing to others. However, according to NewsMax, the House Homeland Security Committee says it has found that the Secret Service and local police were not able to talk to one another on their radios.

Finally, according to Wray, a local cop was able to get lifted to the roof where he saw Crooks lying in a prone position with his automatic rifle pointed at the rally stage. That, however, was only seconds before the shooting began.

Wray also cast doubt on whether Trump was actually hit by a bullet, or merely grazed by shrapnel, something that outraged Trump supporters on Capitol Hill, including House Speaker Mike Johnson, who denounced Wray for questioning the official Trump narrative.

The revelation concerning the shooter's search for information on the Kennedy assassination is instructive. Without suggesting an equivalence between the attempted assassination of Trump and that of Kennedy, it is necessary to recall that the killing of JFK triggered a massive state coverup of Oswald's extensive connections to the CIA and the intensive surveillance of him by the FBI in the period leading up to the shooting in Dallas' Dealey Plaza. The infamous Warren Commission report and its conclusion of a "lone gunman," long ago discredited, remains the official position of the US government.

documents concerning the In October of 2017, 2,900 previously classified and suppressed were released, while 300 others, deemed the most sensitive and potentially **JFK assassination** incriminating, were withheld under immense pressure from the CIA and FBI. Nevertheless the documents that were released made clear that both agencies were well aware of Oswald's activities and were closely tracking him in the period leading up to the assassination.

Barry Grey@wsmsgrey

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