

Imagine if Sarah Palin Had Said “Buy a Shotgun” Before the Navy Yard Shooting

☒ Last February, as part of a White House push for a ban on semi-automatic rifles in response to the Newtown, Connecticut shooting, Vice President Joe Biden offered some advice to a mother who was concerned about losing the ability to protect her children inside their home.

“Buy a shotgun, buy a shotgun,” he told the woman during a Facebook town hall event for *Parents* magazine. Biden explained that he had given this same advice to his wife, instructing her to take the Biden family shotgun and fire it into the air if she ever felt threatened at their home.

A month earlier, in a similar forum, Biden offered a similar recommendation, explaining that gun-owners will feel much safer with a shotgun than with an AR-15 rifle because they are more accurate and easier to use.

Following Monday’s Navy Yard shooting in Washington, D.C. several media outlets initially reported that the shooter, Aaron Alexis, had used an AR-15 to carry out his killing spree that resulted in the deaths of 12 innocent victims. The reports turned out to be *wishful thinking* on behalf of a media that desperately wanted to tie the horrific event to the kind of weapon that would have been banned by the Obama administration’s proposed gun laws.

The weapon that Alexis *actually* used? A shotgun – the very weapon that Joe Biden advocated for.

Is it fair to say that Joe Biden is at least *partially* responsible for what went down at the Navy Yard on Monday?

Of course not! Making that claim would be absolutely insane and totally unfair. Biden obviously had nothing to do with it.

But isn't that essentially the same criteria the media used to indict former Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin in the Gabrielle Giffords shooting a couple of years ago?

As many might recall, almost immediately after Jared Lee Loughner opened fire at an Arizona event put on by Giffords (then a congresswoman), several media personalities were desperately looking to connect the violence to the vocal Tea Party movement. Sarah Palin in particular took a lot of heat after left-wing bloggers did a Google search on "Sarah Palin" and "Gabrielle Giffords" and discovered that Giffords' congressional district had been "targeted" months earlier on one of Palin's websites as part of a *get out the vote* election strategy. Along with several others, Giffords' district was marked on a map of the United States with a cross-hair icon superimposed over it.

"Mission accomplished, Sarah Palin," the Daily Kos website tweeted soon after word of the Arizona shooting broke.

The media ran with the narrative.

Michael Daly (no relation) of the *New York Daily News* wrote a column entitled "Rep. Gabrielle Giffords' blood is on Sarah Palin's hands after putting cross hair over district." Among other accusations, Daly wrote, "At the very least, Palin added to a climate of violence."

The *New York Times'* Matt Bai wrote, "it's hard not to think [Loughner] was at least partly influenced by a debate that often seems to conflate philosophical disagreement with some kind of political Armageddon." He went on to explain that Palin and others used "imagery of armed revolution."

The *Today Show* ran a segment on the Palin criticism, putting forth the question of whether or not "today's political

rhetoric is inspiring a lunatic fringe?"

Caroline Howard of *Forbes* attributed the condolences Sarah Palin wrote on her Facebook page toward the Giffords family to a guilty conscience.

MSNBC's Chris Matthews shamed Palin for using "gun play language" against Giffords.

Matthews' colleague at the time, Keith Olbermann, went a step further saying, "If Sarah Palin... does not repudiate her own part, however tangential, in amplifying violence and violent imagery in American politics, she must be dismissed from politics, she must be repudiated by the members of her party."


CBS News ran an article on their website highlighting social media outrage of Palin's use of the target symbol, and celebrities had a field day with their online condemnation of the former governor of Alaska.

There were plenty more examples.

It eventually came out that Loughner, who peers described as a "liberal", suffered from severe mental illness. He had a documented fixation on Giffords that pre-dated both the Tea Party movement and Sarah Palin's ascendancy to the national scene. Palin had no influence whatsoever on Loughner, as any fair-minded thinker would have simply just assumed in the first place.

Still, that didn't stop ABC News, ten full months later, from recalling Sarah Palin's "targeting" of Giffords during a television special on the former congresswoman's inspirational recovery, listing it as a danger that Giffords overcame. It also didn't stop CNN's Piers Morgan, in an interview with Giffords' husband Mark Kelly, from expressing appall over Palin's refusal to take any responsibility for the incident.

The truth is that many in the media never were able to bring

themselves to detach Palin from the the Giffords shooting, despite there being no connection between Palin and what happened that day. 

So I would ask those same people in the media why, then, isn't Joe Biden somehow to blame (if even in a small way) for the Navy Yard shooting? Why do his comments get a pass when the weapon he recommended that people use was the same one used by Aaron Alexis (a man who reportedly supported President Obama)? Why does a cross-hairs icon on a geographical map inspire murder, but telling people to "buy a shotgun" does not?

Again, I certainly don't blame Biden for Monday's shooting. But why don't *you* in the media? You set the standard after all.