

Colorado Carnage: Proof of Obama Ineptitude

Sick individuals are the product of a "sick society"

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In a society which criminalizes and degrades whole communities on the basis of skin color and low economic status and which refuses appeals for clemency even for mentally sick individuals is it any wonder when certain other members of that society treat their fellow citizens with brutality over perceived grievances and grudges? Sick individuals are the product of a sick society. President Barack Obama has led the American nation's soul-searching over the latest shooting spree in their country in which 12 people were murdered in a Colorado cinema house by a seemingly crazed 24-year-old man.

Obama said he was "shocked and saddened by the horrific shooting" in which a university doctoral student calmly, callously opened fire on families and friends who had packed a theater in Aurora, Colorado, for the opening night of the latest Batman movie, The Dark Knight Rises.

James Holmes, the alleged shooter, had likened himself to The Joker, the arch-villain of the Batman series. Methodically, he entered minutes after the movie began screening at midnight last Thursday, wearing a helmet and gasmask and clad in full body armor. Holmes set off two tear gas grenades and then proceeded to spray the terrified audience with bullets from a 12-gauge shotgun, a 0.40 Glock handgun and a semiautomatic assault rifle. Tragically, some of the people initially thought it was a promotional stunt for the film.



In somber tones, Obama urged fellow Americans, "When confronted by moments of darkness and challenge, we must now come together as one American family. We must stand together."

Moments of such darkness recur with disturbing frequency in the American society. Since Obama took office in early 2009, there have been at least six mass shootings across the United States, from Binghamton in New York where 13 people were killed in April 2009 at an immigration services centre, to Oakland, California, where seven people were shot dead at a Christian college earlier this year.

Before that, the biggest murder spree was in 2007 at Virginia Tech when a gunman killed 32 people at a college before taking his own life. In 1999, only 17 miles from the latest massacre, two teenagers went on a shooting rampage in Colorado's Columbine High School, killing 12 of their fellow students and a teacher, and then turning their guns on themselves.

What is it about the American society that makes the wanton destruction of human life such a routine occurrence?

Some point to the constitutional right for all citizens to bear firearms and the easy access of buying even high-powered weapons over a shop counter. Campaigners for stricter gun controls point out that there are more firearms in the US than there are citizens – some 300 million. Such is the prevalence of mass shootings in the US that even conservative public figures, such as commentator Bill Kristol and New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, are now calling for greater restrictions on gun ownership.

The American gun lobby claims that the perpetrators of such horrific killings are simply sick individuals who have become unhinged, morally and psychologically.

Added to the debate are complaints that American popular culture has become saturated with gratuitous violence, from Hollywood to television to video games, which has desensitized young people to killing and maiming. Indeed, the Batman movies themselves are known for scenes of unremitting, explosive violence.

However, the spectrum of American politicians and media pundits does not seem capable of acknowledging nor even being cognizant of a deeper malaise for these mass killings. This malaise stems from how deeply engrained and integrated violence is in the very fabric of US society. That is because it stems from America's capitalist social disorder of haves and have-nots, its structural violence against marginalized communities, its system of self-enriching cronyism for ruling elites at the federal and state levels, the looting of public finances by banks and corporations, and from the country's increasingly lawless and destructive relations with the rest of the world. What makes the systematic violence of the US so lamentable is that not one of the political parties or mainstream media is able to provide a comprehensive narrative for the root cause. They are intellectually bankrupt. Therefore the solution will continue to elude and the violence will continue, again and again.

A look back at some of the incidents and news in the days preceding and following the Colorado cinema shooting casts some light on where such depravity may stem from.

Earlier in the week that the shooter held his finger on the trigger, there was another gratuitous homicide. US Navy men onboard a 670-foot warship, the USNS Rappahannock, opened fire with heavy machine guns on a small fishing boat in the Persian Gulf. Survivors among the Indian fishing crew said that without warning shots or signals, their vessel was sprayed with a hail of lead from 0.40 caliber armor-piercing guns. One of fishing crew died when his body was torn into three pieces from the gunfire, while three others were critically wounded. The US Navy ship didn't even stop to tend the injured. Respect for law, human life? Not as far as US government military forces are concerned in this instance as in so many other instances in Afghanistan, Iraq and countless other countries where they operate.

The day before the Colorado murders, the American mainstream media reported that Congress had approved an annual budget of \$606 billion for Pentagon military expenditure, including overseas operations such as the massive build-up of American warships and fighter jets in the Persian Gulf against Iran, and the ongoing 11-year war in Afghanistan – the longest war in American history. Such official disclosure of military spending – larger than that of all countries of the world combined – eclipses total American government spending on health, education, employment and training, research and development, community and social welfare, public infrastructure and utilities, and it comes at a time when poverty is ripping apart families and communities the length and breadth of the US, afflicting some 50 million Americans. This is an economy of war and violence writ large. An

economy dictated by a few, unaccountable to the majority.

A macabre form of cost-cutting came in the form of the Texas state execution of death row prisoner Yokamon Hearn. Just hours before the Colorado slayings, mentally disabled Hearn was put to death with a single lethal injection - instead of the customary administering of three chemicals. The single injection of pentobarbital will presumably save the state money. Pleas for clemency were ignored by the Texan authorities, even though Hearn was intellectually disabled from childhood. A second African-American man, Warren Hill, is to be executed this week, also by single lethal injection, in the state of Georgia, after more than 20 years on death row. Like Hearn, Hill is also mentally disabled. Their cases illustrate disquieting trends in the American justice system. First, the number of death row prisoners has increased five-fold from the mid-1970s, when the death penalty was reinstated, to some 3,100 currently. Second, the numbers awaiting execution are disproportionately higher for men from poor, black communities. And, thirdly, this capital punishment is being used increasingly on individuals who have clinical conditions of mental impairment. In 2002, the US Supreme Court ruled that execution of intellectually disabled inmates was "cruel and unusual punishment" - but the practice continues in many states.

In a society which criminalizes and degrades whole communities on the basis of skin color and low economic status and which refuses appeals for clemency even for mentally sick individuals is it any wonder when certain other members of that society treat their fellow citizens with brutality over perceived grievances and grudges? Sick individuals are the product of a sick society.

And the week of American violence was not over yet.

Almost a full week before the Colorado shootings, massacres, shooting and bombings were intensified in Syria under Washington's proxy war against the government of Bashar Al Assad. For the past 16 months, thousands of Syrian civilians have been murdered, kidnapped or dispossessed by foreign mercenaries waging a covert war at the behest of Washington and its allies Britain, France, Turkey, Israel and the Persian Gulf Arab monarchies. The illegal objective of "regime change" is now openly exulted by President Obama. Indeed, only last week US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned of yet more violence to bring down the Syrian government, a threat that culminated in the murder of four senior Syrian Cabinet members in a bomb attack that has all the hallmarks of a Western intelligence operation.

Needless to say, Washington did not condemn that act of mass murder. Days later, US lawlessness was underscored when John Bolton, the Bush-era neocon and former ambassador to the United Nations, urged the state of Israel to launch a military strike against Iran on the basis of outlandish allegations that the Islamic Republic had been involved in the car-bombing of seven Israeli tourists in Bulgaria. Just like that, acts of war dispatched from American mouths, as easy as rounds from a semiautomatic. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has since given notice that long-held joint American war plans towards Iran have been brought forward.

Meanwhile, American unmanned drone strikes continued to kill people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. The latest victims include two civilians in Nuristan, northeast Afghanistan, and 12 unknown people in Pakistan's North Waziristan province. These victims were presumably shortlisted by President Obama in his weekly meetings with Pentagon chiefs to sanction the coming week's assassination "hits" (- perhaps around the same time

that he was preparing his somber speech for the victims in Colorado).

Over the weekend, as the people of Aurora, Colorado, were mourning their family and friends, eight US-led soldiers were killed in Afghanistan in separate Taliban attacks, bringing the total troop fatalities in that country to 258 so far this year. Obama will no doubt claim that such loss of life is testimony to America's "leading the world in the cause of freedom."

Although, over the same weekend, when American citizens at home protested for freedom from poverty, unemployment and homelessness, they were batoned and shot at with rubber bullets and pepper spray by riot-clad police officers. The levels of police brutality in cities like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles have reached new heights. Only days before the Colorado killings, a San Francisco man who was handcuffed by police was shot twice fatally in the chest by officers. Two days after Colorado, another man was shot in the back as he ran away from officers in Anaheim, Los Angeles. In that incident, unarmed Manuel Diaz was brought down with the first volley and then as he fell wounded he was shot in the back of head. Local people said police officers handcuffed his prone corpse before carting it away. When Diaz's neighbors came out on their street to peacefully denounce police conduct, they were fired on with rubber bullets and set upon with police dogs.

Such gratuitous state violence towards its citizens makes a mockery of Obama's exhortations for Americans to "stand together as one family."

In his speech on the Colorado shootings, Obama added, "We may never understand what leads anybody to terrorize fellow human beings like this. Such violence, such evil is senseless. It's beyond reason."

What is beyond reason is just another week of American violence, at home and abroad.

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