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The NRA's Latest Terrorist Attack on U.S. Soil

By Paul Street
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It's long past time to start understanding the giant mass shootings that have become part of the new-normal fabric of life in the United States as terrorist attacks on the U.S. populace conducted by the nation's plutocracy through one of its key and rightward campaign funding, lobbying, and policy organizations – the National Rifle Association (NRA).

We know the drill. The venues are different each time – an elite private college campus in Virginia, a public university lecture hall in northern Illinois, a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, an elementary school in Connecticut, a Black church in Charleston, South Carolina, a gay dance club in Orlando, and now an open-air concert in Las Vegas (site of the biggest single-gunman mass-shooting ever) – but the story is always the same.

A demented male psychopath gathers ammunition and weaponry made available to him through loose gun laws passed by federal and state governments thanks to the deep pockets of the NRA. The shooter takes his NRA-sponsored weapons of mass destruction wreaks mass-murderous havoc on soft-target innocents. The incident usually includes the shooter's death (the Aurora and Charleston killings are exceptions), typically by suicide. The authorities interview the shooter's family members and associates. Local and federal police search his dwelling, belongings, computer, online record, and history to determine his motives, how he planned the operation, where he got his weapons, if he had any partners, etc.

After the news of the big mass shooting hits the airwaves and the Internet, NRA-backed politicians resist the morally elementary notion that the latest huge gun massacre– the most recent spectacular and concentrated example of an ongoing gun carnage that costs 33,000 U.S. lives per year – compels us to revise our absurdly lax gun laws. It's time, pro-gun politicians say, for prayers, mourning and healing, not for "politicizing a great tragedy." They blame the carnage on sheer evil and madness – the sinful and dark worst of human nature. They shrug off basic observations that the killer could not have scored such a terrible body count without the weapons and policies advanced by the gun makers and their NRA. This is what they are paid to say by the Gun Lobby.

The NRA, by the way, has been lobbying to make it so that Paddock could have equipped his rifles with silencers. He would have killed hundreds had he been so outfitted.

The vicious white-nationalist moron in the White House (who has been threatening thermonuclear genocide on the Korean peninsula) immediately attributed the Las Vegas massacre to "pure evil." His press secretary said it was "too early" to assess causation.

Bad people kill people, not bad guns, the line goes. "You can't legislate against evil," the "conservative" politicians say.

Meanwhile, we are asked yet again to believe that the U.S. Founders' desire to retain trained state militias to keep British Redcoats off the early republic's soils at the end of the 18th century makes it an unjust infringement of people's constitutional rights for 21st century America to try to stop freaks like Seung-Hi Cho (Virginia Tech), Steven Kazmierczak (Northern Illinois University), James Holmes (Aurora, Colorado), Adam Lanza (Sandy Hook Elementary School), Omar Mateen (Orlando), and now Stephen Paddock (Las Vegas) from getting high-kill automatic weapons and ammunition to slaughter children, college students, movie-goers, dancers, and concert-goers *en masse*.

Liberals and decent media voices call for elementary restrictions like banning mass-kill assault weapons from sale in the United States or just the requirement of stringent background checks for gun purchasers.

Gun control advocates note that other rich nations do not experience the astronomically high gun violence and murder rates that plague the United States thanks in no small part to the very different and civilized gun laws they have in place.

But it's all to no avail. The NRA always wins. A momentary upsurge of domestic popular revulsion against U.S. gun madness gives way to the usual resignation and retreat. We return to we turn to our newly diminished lives, counting the days *until the next giant mass shooting that everyone knows is coming*.

Meanwhile, gun violence on a more limited incident scale continues to take 93 lives per day in the U.S. – a nation with *more guns than adults in circulation*. Mass shootings, modestly defined as the killing of four people beyond the killer, are now absurdly common in the U.S. As *The Guardian* reports:

“1,516 mass shootings in 1,735 days: The attack at a country music festival in Las Vegas that left at least 58 people dead is the deadliest mass shooting in modern US history – but there were six other mass shootings in America this past week alone. No other developed nation comes close to the rate of gun violence in America. Americans own an estimated 265m guns, more than one gun for every adult. Data compiled by the Gun Violence Archive reveals a shocking human toll: there is a mass shooting – defined as four or more people shot in one incident, not including the shooter – every nine out of 10 days on average.”

Read that again: *there is a mass shooting in the U.S. now every 9 out of 10 days on average*.

Gun sales tend to go up after the big massacres. Gun owners stock up in anticipation of new restrictions that never come. People become new gunowners in response to dangers they now perceive in bolder relief than before. The Armed Madhouse (Greg Palast's description of the U.S.) that is 21st century America gets even more armed and nuttier than before.

I am aware that the formal definition of terrorism involves the use of violence to achieve a political objective – a ruthless means to political ends(s). Does the actual shooter have to be a member of the terrorist organization – in this case, by my analysis, the NRA – and on board with its agenda? No, not when it comes to advancing the NRA's political goals. All that's required is that he kills a lot of people. The NRA surely knows that recruits are readily available, waiting to make their deadly mark with the high-kill weaponry that is so absurdly available in Gunfighter Nation.

It's all statistically foreordained, as the NRA is certainly aware. You cannot have untold thousands of demented psychopaths and millions of high kill automatic weapons simultaneously circulating in a violence-worshipping, highly militarized, and brutal video-game society like the United States without grisly mass gun massacres occurring every few years or so. Truth be told,

it's surprising that such spectacular mass shootings aren't more common. And, of course, the smaller mass shootings are now an almost daily occurrence, as *The Guardian* tells us.

The NRA doesn't have to actively recruit anyone. All it must do is make sure that the killers can get the weapons and ammo they need through the so-called invisible hand of the marketplace.

What is the agenda, the political objective? Selling guns is part of it, but the real program is deeper than just that immediate commercial intention. A bigger if related aim is to create a climate of fear and violence so pervasive that people are afraid to join together in movements and protests on behalf of democracy, social justice, peace, ecological sanity, and civil and human rights – the common good. The political goal is to promote an image of human nature and evil so vile and chilling that people give up on their species and on the aspiration to unite with their fellow workers and citizens to demand something better than a miserable world of low wages, savage socioeconomic and racial inequality, environmental ruin, abject plutocracy, rampant sexism, virulent racism, and endless war. The idea is to turn as many households as possible into atomized self-defense and survival units – to create a nation of armed Robinson Crusoes, each stuck on their own little island.

It is all intimately related to the militantly capitalist world view that took hold in post- New Deal America more than four decades ago. This toxic, late- bourgeois weltanschauung is dedicated to starving the liberating and egalitarian “left hand of the state” (Pierre Bourdieu) – the parts of government that provide safety, security, and inclusion for the poor and working class majority while helping distribute wealth and power downward to the people – while strengthening the repressive and regressive “right hand of the state”: the parts of government that concentrate wealth and power further upward while punishing the poor, oppressing and excluding minorities, waging permanent war, and repressing the majority non-affluent populace as a whole.

How darkly appropriate it is that Stephen Paddock – a multi-millionaire poker aficionado and a former Lockheed Martin auditor – set a new single-shooter body-count record in Las Vegas, the world's gambling capital. For all this right-handed madness is what the arch-capitalist and militantly imperial Casino Society has wrought. The NRA vision of a nation where every household is armed to the teeth with the latest tools of rapid fire mass-killing is perhaps the ultimate epitome of the neoliberal-capitalist vision of pure individualism and each against all. The logical outcome of this “free market” agenda – advanced by the entire U.S. ruling class, from Goldman Sachs to the infamous Koch brothers – is a vast militarized police state: Hobbesian chaos leading to authoritarian state power in the name of “law and order.”

It isn't just about class, of course. The people who are most repressed, tortured, incarcerated, and criminally marked by this authoritarian and pre- if not already-fascist police state are very disproportionately Black, Latino, and Native American. The mass killers of our time almost never come from any of those racial groups but the mass shootings, typically carried out by crazy and vicious white males, become a pretext for the strengthening of a police state that is fundamentally committed to – and largely rooted in – the white-supremacist project of keeping Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans down in their socioeconomic and related geographic places. The NRA, it should never be forgotten, is all about guns for white people only. And even

if the NRA likes to sell small-gun self-defense to its white female members, women, too, are expected to cower before the pseudo-phallic power of the great American rifle

The NRA knows what it's doing, trust me. The Las Vegas massacre is just the latest in the Gun Lobby's long line of terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. Expect more as Gunfighter Nation's changing racial demographics and gender relations combine with capitalist stagnation, globalization, and technical displacement to drive more and white U.S. males (most of whom lack anything remotely close to the lunatic Paddock's personal fortune) over the psychotic edge.

Did I mention that, if the NRA had gotten its way, Stephen Paddock would have been equipped with silencers and therefore been able to kill, who knows, maybe 200, not just 59, on the Las Vegas casino strip? Yes, I did, but it's worth repeating. When will the NRA experience one of these terrible incidents at one of its cocktail receptions or convention proceedings?

Meanwhile, predictably enough, the nation's proto-fascist "alt-right" noise machine (many of whose operatives are certainly NRA members) has gone to work claiming that Paddock was an "anti-Trump liberal," even an "Antifa member." Of course: the victims were part of red-state culture, white country music fans, and so the killer must have been some kind of vicious person of "the left." The hard right is in constant quest of a Reichstag Fire. So in its own way is the right-wing white nationalist Trump administration.

America is going down ugly, just like it came up. Watch your back.