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## Terror and school shootings sides of same coin

By Spengler  
12/19/2012

Consider two situations. First, a madman kills 20 schoolchildren in America for unexplained reasons. Second, Muslim terrorists kill 22 children in Israel (at Ma'alot in 1974), or 186 children at Beslan in the Russian Caucasus in 2004, for clearly stated reasons. What do they have in common?

The suicidal jihadi is the *Doppelganger* of the angst-ridden Westerner. The jihadi attempts to reconstruct a faux version of a traditional society that cannot survive the bright light of modernity; the Westerner seeks distractions from the inevitability of death. What the jihadi does in practice, the jaded West does in its imagination - and occasionally in real life.

Slaughter of innocents is commonplace in many Muslim countries. In this morning's news, we hear that 10 Afghan girls were killed by a roadside bomb, and that 27 Iraqis were killed by bombs near Mosul. The National Counterterrorism Center counts 79,766 terror attacks from 2004 through 2011, with 111,774 killed and 228,317 wounded. It does not report how many of the dead and injured were children.

Why are so many Muslims willing to kill themselves and others? It is an expression of cultural despair. Muslim civilization is disintegrating under the onset of modernity, as I argued in my 2011 book *How Civilizations Die (and Why Islam is Dying, Too)*. The encroaching sense of social death motivates the most horrific sort of acts.

What kind of mind could walk into an elementary school and shoot 20 young children to death? Whatever it was that motivated the Sandy Hook killer, he had something in common with the Chechnyan and Arab terrorists who systematically murdered 186 school children during the 2004

Beslan massacre. That probably was the single most horrific act since the downfall of National Socialism.

The slaughter of children is sufficiently rare in the West that it overwhelms us with horror and grief. There have been five school shootings in Europe during the past 10 years with 10 or more dead, and two in the United States - the 2007 Virginia Tech incident and the Sandy Hook shootings. Despite its much stricter gun control, Europe has been the scene of more mass school killings than the United States. We Americans would be fooling ourselves to think that stricter gun laws would help.

Meanwhile, we in the West suppurate in imagined mass killings. The only surprising thing is that we are surprised when the fantasy turns into reality in the case of a deranged individual. The horror genre consumes a tenth of Hollywood's total output of films and television programs. The zombie apocalypse, with its images of repetitive killing, is the subject of the most-popular cable series ever, AMC's *The Walking Dead*.

And that doesn't count the action films whose main content is the mowing down of numerous assailants by a heavily armed hero. We should not be surprised at incidents like the Sandy Hook horror. We should be surprised, instead, that deranged individuals do not cross the line between fantasy mass killing with greater frequency.

Why does the West wallow in images of death - not merely death, but death in massive doses, in the form of zombie armies of the walking dead? Jihadi atrocities and mass murders in the West do not occur in different worlds. On September 11, 2001, the horror of Muslim despair broke into American consciousness. As I wrote on the 10th anniversary of the attack (How the hijackers changed American culture, Asia Times Online, September 8, 2011), the popularity of horror films increased sharply after 9/11, from one in 25 in 2000 to one in 10 in 2009. During the 1930s, the proportion was only one in 200.

Earlier this year, I wrote :

We have dismissed the Jewish and Christian hope of eternal life as superstition offensive to reason, but instead, we find ourselves trapped in a recurring nightmare. We know that we will die, but (as Woody Allen said) we don't want to be there when it happens. We act as if exercise, antioxidants and Botox will keep the reaper away, but we know that our flesh one day must putrefy nonetheless. The more we try to ignore death, the more it fascinates us. The more we tell ourselves that mortality doesn't apply to us, the more it surrounds us. And the more we try to fight off the fear, the more we feel like the beleaguered survivors resisting the zombie herd. (Zombies remind us that death is social, Asia Times Online, May 15, 2012.)

Nothing horrifies more than the murder of children. It is not only that all children are beautiful in their own way, and that their innocence testifies to something inherently good in humankind. Children are our future. We know that we will die, and we hope that something will remain of our time on earth after we die. Otherwise our lives will have no ultimate meaning.

Man's much-discussed search for meaning is a search for enduring meaning. The murder of children is the ultimate rejection of life, for it destroys our hope to bringing meaning to our own lives. Among the pool of prospective suicides, there is a small but disturbing number who not

only wish to destroy their own life, but life in general. These are the candidates for mass killings.

Enlightened secular culture tells us that the brain is a machine, albeit a very sophisticated one, that ultimately will be decoded by the neuroscientists; that sin and salvation were sad imaginings of our ignorant ancestors; that the soul is an illusion of flickering neural impulses; that human life has nothing more to offer than fleshly satisfaction combined with a random sense of idiosyncratic spirituality; that our choices of lifestyle are ultimately arbitrary, such that every culture, quirk, and sexual subculture has equal rights to social esteem; that there is nothing sacred to human sexuality, such that we may enjoy our partner's bodies the that the only truth is that there is no truth; and that we are all one our own to seek whatever meaning we might eke out of the chaos.

That is a prescription for despair, and to counteract the effects of postmodern despair we consume vast amounts antidepressants, tranquilizers and narcotics. Eleven percent of Americans take antidepressants, the most-prescribed drug in the US.

If it were not for the residue of Judeo-Christian faith, a great many more people would go mad, and kill themselves, or kill others around them. Most Americans still believe in a personal God, even if their idea of what this God might require of them might be vague and confused. Our laws, institutions and common civility derive from this heritage of faith.

Our civilization is not doomed by modernity. To a great extent, our civilization is what made modernity in the first place. We have good reason for optimism. Nonetheless, despair is gaining ground. The fantasy-world of our young people revolves around objects of horror: zombies, vampires, werewolves, demons, not to mention human mass killers. What people do in fantasy, they also can do in reality. We should be afraid - very afraid.

Constitutionally, it is easier for Americans to censor film violence than to restrict the possession of firearms. There is a constitutional guarantee of the right to bear arms, but no such guarantee of the right to splash rivers of fake blood across movie screens. That is a matter of judicial interpretation of the First Amendment. Censorship of violence might or might not survive court challenges, but it is time to make a stand.