

America Agonist

When you think: American, most people quickly think: guns. By any measure, that's a dubious achievement. With the recent Newtown massacre of school children, Americans are now looking into an abyss. What they should be doing is looking into the mirror. Here's why....

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Couple of years ago, I wrote [a piece about gun control](#), shortly after Jared Loughner perpetrated the Tucson massacre in which six people died and many were injured, including US Congress representative, Gabrielle Giffords. At that time, there was great outcry – as always – on the need to have a “national conversation” about gun control.

Well, since then the years have been alarmingly silent in that regard, despite other mass shootings during the period. That is, until Friday, December 14th of this year....

People don't kill without motivation, insane or otherwise. There is always a reason for doing something, however banal it is. Without doubt, Adam Lanza, the twenty-year-old who massacred those twenty-six innocents had a reason; we just don't know what it was. And, unhappily, we might never know because news reports claim that he destroyed the hard drive of his computer prior to attacking the children at Sandy Hook school.

Worse – in the near term and regardless of what happens about gun control in USA, there is this probability: somewhere in USA, another desperately deranged person – probably male – will perpetrate another massacre. In the last twelve months, for example, there have been [thirteen mass shootings](#) (including Newtown) across USA. *If* – a big if, granted – that rate continues, expect another heinous such crime in January, 2013; and perhaps one per month thereafter, on average. What kind of society allows that sort of carnage to continue?

Most importantly, what will it take to change or stop such a situation?

Everybody has opinions about that now, from the workable and practical to the fantastically stupid e.g. a ban on all private gun ownership. In the People's Republic of China, there is indeed a ban on all private ownership of guns; in USA, that's a non-starter, for sure, *given the fatally flawed ideology of personal freedom therein*. Even in Australia, for example, banning gun ownership did not happen after [Martin Bryant's massacre](#) in Port Arthur, Tasmania, and despite the two million gun buy-back initiated by then Prime Minister, John Howard. Years later, there are still too many guns in Australia, in my opinion – but the regulations about gun ownership have been beefed up.

Despite that, there are still firearm murders in Australia, but at a much reduced rate – by half in fact. And, there's *never* been an outrage like Newtown, or Virginia Tech, in

Australia. So the lesson is clear: the availability of and access to a mountain of guns – currently between 275 and 300 million in USA, depending on your source – will inevitably lead to more murders with firearms.

So, where to start?

Better regulations and more stringent enforcement are bandied about by many, so I see in the media. More help for those with mental problems is always mentioned. Control the ammo, not the guns, say others. Ban all assault rifles is heard often. Electronic trigger locks are the way to go, perhaps. And from a lunatic fringe: more guns means less murder. Go figure *that* one....

Whatever is done, it must work, and relatively quickly, I think. The American people demand and deserve no less, finally.

But, with such a complex, divisive and emotional issue as gun control, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Today (December 20), I read that Vice-President Joe Biden is to lead a task force to formulate a credible federal initiative to ensure fundamental change in gun control. The precise structure and composition of that task force is still unknown. Who will be on call? Will all state governors be invited? Until that task force is sorted out, however, nothing substantial about gun control can be done.

Moreover, considering the fact that most law makers in D.C. are firm adherents to the 2nd Amendment, avid gun owners/collectors and many are members of the NRA, I wouldn't hold out much hope that there will be any substantive federal initiative any time soon. Of course, there is a large section of the population that wants better gun control; but, they've been knocking on that door for a generation or more. From their perspective, Congress has dithered about on this issue for far too long.

Only one thing is certain, I reckon: this will be the mother of all contests between the pro-gun and anti-gun lobbies. Raw survival is at stake here – literally and figuratively – as never before in American history.

Because now, more than ever, this is what must haunt many – perhaps most – most Americans: trust is totally gone. And once gone, it's almost impossible to win back. Lanza lived with his mother in a small town that properly symbolizes the essence of what makes America so good: family, community, safety, tranquility. There are many such towns across the USA. I know that, having crisscrossed the country by road, twice, in the 1970s and meeting, talking with and listening to many ordinary folk.

However: do nothing to stop this deadly slaughter with guns and Americans can be sure that another foul deed – similar to or worse than the Newtown horror – will soon occur somewhere in USA. So who wants to wait until another gunman walks into another school or college, a hospital, a church, another cinema, a theme park, a day-care center, a train or bus station, a library, a factory, a shopping mall, a crowded bar or restaurant, a sports stadium, an employment exchange: *any* place where everybody habitually feels safe, secure ... and is perhaps unwary?

It's cold, cold comfort, of course, that Adam Lanza's horrendously despicable action has finally galvanized the US government and the American people into something

more than just words and hand-wringing. Equally obviously, though: that's all the more reason to make sure that his crime is *not* for naught. To do otherwise is to tragically fail the American people and the peaceful future of the society, once again.

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