



ANALYSIS | The evil banality of guns in America

Even Obama seems resigned to the futility of changing the U.S. gun culture

By Neil Macdonald, CBC News Posted: Oct 03, 2015 5:00 AM ET | Last Updated: Oct 03, 2015 7:10 PM ET



Jessica Vazquez hugs her aunt, Leticia Acaraz, as they await word on Acaraz's daughter after a deadly shooting at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, on Thursday that left nine people dead. (Andy Nelson/The Register-Guard/Associated Press)

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Conventional journo-wisdom has always held that it's not just dangerous but unspeakably stupid for a reporter to carry a gun in a war zone.

Get caught with one and you instantly go from observer to participant. You can get yourself killed, and maybe other journalists, too.

Your best weapons, the old reporters said, are your wits and your neutrality.

I believed in and abided by that. And I applied more or less the same logic to living in America.

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I could have bought a gun there anytime I wanted. A pistol, an assault weapon, a sniper rifle — anything my credit card could handle.

I didn't, though. I'm well aware that the presence of a gun in a home vastly increases the chance of homicide, suicide or accidental death.

Plus, you have to train constantly to be of any use with the thing, and anyway, I generally believe the fewer guns in circulation the better.

But war zones have changed. Journalists are now hunted. And in America, being gunned down, either by someone you know or a perfect stranger, is now so common it's almost banal.

Resigned and bitter

Someone killing people indiscriminately with a gun, or guns, is just another news story these days, and almost a minor one at that, unless

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the body count is double-digit, or the victims are all kids, or churchgoers slaughtered at prayer, or, of course, if the shooter is a Muslim (in which case it's almost always a huge story, even if there's only one victim).

There have been so many slaughters and rampages on Barack Obama's watch that he's developed a sort of set-piece speech — expressions of grief, speculation on the senseless nature of it all, and, of course, frustration that gun-lovers and Second Amendment fanatics have managed to block or dismantle most gun control efforts.

Sometimes he mixes in some Christian love and we-shall-overcome optimism.

But there was none of that when he talked Thursday about the mass murder at an Oregon community college.



Obama on Oregon school shooting 12:39

He actually invited reporters to add up the numbers of Americans killed by terrorists in the past decade and compare that number to all the people killed by gun violence in the U.S.

Citing the Global Terrorism Database and the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, NBC put the numbers at just over 3,000 versus just over 150,000, going back to 9/11.

'Bad guy with a gun'

The gun lobby actually once feared Obama. It warned its acolytes that he'd take away their guns (a scare tactic that triggered a boom in gun and ammo sales in the early Obama years), but now basically ignores him.

After all, he lost the fight, and he'll be gone soon anyway.

Obama, and liberals across America, thought they had their chance after 20 schoolchildren and six school staff were massacred by a deranged young man with a Bushmaster rifle and two pistols three years ago in Newtown, Conn.

In its wake, the White House proposed some mild gun controls.

Then the NRA stepped in. It basically declared that the school had been negligent.

Schools, it said, should let teachers carry guns, or at least hire armed guards. "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun," announced the NRA's chief spokesman Wayne Lapiere.

Not necessarily true, but never mind. The NRA essentially terrorized Congress into blocking Obama's reforms.



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The gun lobby has also won in the courts, which have largely dismantled municipal gun control efforts in cities like Chicago and Washington, D.C.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the constitutional right to bear arms is literal, and once the Supreme Court rules, that's that.

Nasty corners

But back to the NRA message: After a white supremacist opened fire on black worshippers at a Charleston church in June, killing nine, an NRA board member suggested the worshippers and pastor might have survived had they been armed.

Following its playbook for cases of mass slaughter, the NRA currently says it won't comment on the Oregon murders "until all the facts are known." (Fact: a guy wearing body armour and carrying several guns murdered nine people). But it isn't hard to imagine what it will eventually say.

Allow students to carry weapons, issue weapons to professors, hire armed undercover mercenaries, install gun racks in class, whatever. Just make sure more and more people have guns.

It sounds crazed, but as America's gun anarchy grows, it has a weird logic.

Common-sense solutions — like the crackdown Australia imposed after the Port Arthur massacre in 1996 — are not just *politically* impossible in America, they're impossible, period.

There are as many guns as people in the U.S. Plus, guns don't have expiry dates.

That means that for generations to come, nutcases and violent racists and other criminals will have all the firepower their hearts' desire.



A line stretches outside a blood donor clinic for the shooting victims in Roseburg. CBC National news reporter Chris Brown said every person he spoke to in line rejected gun control. (CBC News)

So the old rules don't sound as sensible. If I were to cover war zones again, I might take a different view.

For all the logic of the no-guns rule back in the day, I suspect I'd be awfully happy to have some sort of weapon, the more destructive the better, if my car was headed off by a bunch of characters dressed in black in a Toyota pickup in some nasty corner of nowhere.

America, too, is now full of nasty, violent corners of nowhere. They erupt all the time, and if you're there, you're on your own.

If I spent much time in a public place in the U.S., like a government building, or subway stations, or, above all, a university or even a high school, I think I'd rather have a gun than hide behind a desk, hoping the latest whack job with a Bushmaster doesn't find me.

I might not trust myself totally with a gun, but I trust myself more than I trust all the violent, crazy, evil people the NRA has helped arm.

It's happened. The ceremony of innocence that was once the American ideal is drowned. Common sense is moot. It no longer even applies.



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