# The Tucson shootings: A warning to the American people

**Barry Grey**
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The shooting rampage on Saturday in Tucson, Arizona was clearly an act of right-wing terrorism. The gunman shot a total of 20 people, critically wounding Democratic Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and killing Federal Judge John M. Roll and five others.

In his first statement to the press, Pima County Sheriff Clarence W. Dupnik got it right when he placed the shootings in their political context. He denounced the "political vitriol" that animates the politics of the right and characterized Arizona as the national center of bigotry.

He was alluding to the promotion of anti-immigrant hysteria and the activities of armed vigilantes on the Mexican border, which have been endorsed by the state government and legitimized by the national media. Last year, Arizona passed a blatantly unconstitutional law that gives police the right to search, stop and detain any "suspicious" individuals who cannot prove their legal status.

Almost immediately, media commentators began to back away from the sheriff's linkage of the Tucson shootings to the reactionary political environment and attempted to obscure the gunman's connections to right-wing politics.

The media is seeking to portray the assault as an inexplicable act of violence by a single deranged individual. Typical is a column by the *Daily Beast*'s Washington bureau chief and CNN moderator, Howard Kurz, who wrote Saturday, "This isn't about a nearly year-old Sarah Palin map; it's about a lone nutjob who doesn't value human life."

Liberal MSNBC talk show host Rachel Maddow sounded a similar theme. In a tweet quoted by Jack Shafer of the online magazine *Slate*, she wrote, “There is nothing to be gained from speculating on the motives and affiliations of AZ shooter w/o facts.”

But the facts are clear. The initial information about the gunman, Jared Lee Loughner, 22, establishes that he was under the influence of ultra-right politics. Statements on his YouTube web site are replete with references—to the "second" US Constitution, "treasonous" laws, currencies not backed by gold—which reproduce the coded language of the far right.

It is well known that Congresswoman Giffords was the target of political attacks from the right, including the smashing of the plate glass window of her Tucson office last March, the day after she voted in favor of President Obama's health care bill. During the 2010 midterm election campaign, Sarah Palin posted a map of the US showing 20 vulnerable Democratic-held congressional districts, with each of the districts marked by a crosshair target. One of those was Giffords' district in Tucson.

Giffords' Tea Party-backed opponent, a former Marine sergeant, held campaign events under the slogan "Help remove Gabrielle Giffords from office" and invited his supporters to "shoot a fully automatic M16."

Judge Roll was also the target of hundreds of death threats from anti-immigration fanatics. US marshals put him under 24-hour protection for a month in 2009.

Threats against Giffords continued after she narrowly defeated the Tea Party-backed Republican candidate and won a third term in Congress last November. Asked by the media after the shooting whether Giffords, who is Jewish, had any enemies, her family named the Tea Party.

It is indisputable that the language of the political right is laden with emotive appeals to violence. Sheriff Dupnik pointed specifically to the role of radio and television talk show hosts in promoting an atmosphere

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of violence. It is a fact that the airwaves are dominated by right-wing talk-show personalities the likes of Rush Limbaugh and psychopathic personalities like Glenn Beck.

That such appeals should provide an impulse for unstable and disoriented individuals to act can hardly come as a surprise.

Since the deadly bombing of the federal office building in Oklahoma City in 1995, there have been a number of other major episodes of right-wing violence, including the anthrax attacks in 2001 and the murder of Kansas physician Dr. George Tiller by an anti-abortion fanatic in 2009. In all three cases, reported connections of the perpetrators to right-wing groups have been left in the dark by the government and the media.

For more than 40 years, the Republican Party has appealed to and allied itself with racist and fascistic forces in order to shore up its base of support. The corporate-controlled media has assiduously sought to promote a right-wing political atmosphere.

Only weeks ago, some of the same politicians and media spokespeople who are today disavowing the shooting of Giffords were calling for the assassination of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Now the likes of Fox News media mogul Rupert Murdoch, who have incited ultra-right elements, contemptuously deny any responsibility for the carnage in Tucson.

The Tucson shootings follow 10 unbroken years of war and the relentless promotion of the American military. The sickening, obligatory obeisance of all politicians, especially the liberal Democrats, to the military has gone hand in hand with a devaluation of human life, summed up in routine references to killing enemy forces and the legitimization of torture.

It should not be forgotten that right-wing violence, supported by elements within the state, has historically been used to shift political direction at points of great social crisis in the United States. In the 1960s, three political assassinations—of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy—played a major role in shifting the axis of American politics to the right.

As always, the right wing is brazen in its response to the events in Tucson, the liberals are cowardly and evasive. The Democrats always give the impression of being petrified of exposing the real nature of bourgeois politics. Its malignant character finds its clearest expression in the Republican Party and the network of corporate-financed media demagogues, but the Democratic Party makes its own critical contribution.

The overall social and political environment is the product of the wars overseas and endless invocations of military violence that are essential to imperialism, and the social disintegration at home that is the result of the ceaseless pursuit of corporate profit at the expense of society. This is why the Democrats can never speak openly and honestly, even in the face of events whose political character is obvious.

Placid appeals to "come together" and reject "extremism of the left and right"—such as those made by Obama and other leading Democrats in the aftermath of the shootings—are false and hypocritical and serve to politically chloroform the public.

The connections between the gunman and right-wing forces must be carefully pursued and revealed to the public. Loughner may have pulled the trigger, but highly placed elements in the corporate and political establishment bear the principal moral and political responsibility. They must be exposed and held accountable.

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