

Media, politicians obscure social roots of Connecticut shooting

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Residents of Newtown, Connecticut began Monday to bury those killed in the mass shooting last Friday. Funerals were held for two of the 20 children killed, with more planned for this week.

Some information has begun to emerge about the circumstances surrounding the killing, though police have not released details of the evidence they have gathered. From the media and political establishment there is an effort to prevent any discussion of the social and political background to the tragedy, the latest in a long series of similar incidents.

On Sunday, police officially confirmed the identity of the killer, Adam Lanza, aged 20, who shot himself after killing his mother, Nancy Lanza, in her home, and 26 people at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

The guns Lanza used, including the Bushmaster semiautomatic rifle used at the school, belonged to his mother, as did the hundreds of rounds of ammunition he brought with him. Lanza was dressed in black army fatigues and a military vest when he carried out the massacre. He was apparently taught to shoot by his mother at local gun range.

The British *Telegraph* newspaper reported Sunday evening that Nancy Lanza was part of the “prepper” or survivalist movement, citing an interview with her sister-in-law, Marsha Lanza. “Survivalism”—which involves stockpiling weapons and food in preparation for economic or social collapse and is often associated with right-wing political conceptions—has expanded as a movement particularly since the beginning of the “war on terror.”

Other reports indicate that Adam Lanza suffered from Asperger’s syndrome, a mild form of autism that is characterized by difficulty interacting socially. The syndrome is common, however, and is not associated with violent behavior. At some point his mother

removed him from his high school and gave him home schooling.

Whatever the particular circumstances that led up to Friday’s tragedy, it and a series of similar mass homicides are linked to the brutalization of American society—a product above all of the violence promoted by the state, including unending war, the institutionalization and glorification of state assassinations, and the propaganda associated with the “war on terror.”

In the media and political establishment, commentary on the killing has focused on standard themes that follow every such tragedy—above all the need for a “national conversation” on gun control.

On Monday, following the nationally televised religious ceremony presided over by Obama in Newtown the night before, administration officials indicated that the president would make gun control a priority in his second term.

Leading Democrats as well as some Republicans have pledged quick action to resume a Clinton-era ban on assault weapons (that was allowed to lapse in 2004) and to close loopholes on regulations requiring background checks for gun purchases. Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein said she plans to introduce legislation to ban assault weapons on the first day of the new Congress in January. Some Democrats associated with the National Rifle Association, including Senator Joe Manchin III of West Virginia, have indicated they are willing to compromise on gun control measures.

While the ready availability of guns (the US has the most guns per capita of any country in the world) facilitates the homicidal impulses of certain individuals, it does not explain the regularity of mass killings in the US. The focus on gun control is, in part, aimed at evading discussion of the more fundamental sources of

anti-social violence in America.

Moreover, from the standpoint of the ruling class, the campaign for gun control is tied to efforts to extend the powers of the state, undermine democratic rights, and maintain the monopolization of violence by the police and military.

Among those at the forefront of the calls for gun control following the Newtown killings are political figures who have been the most strident supporters of militarism and the “war on terror.” Independent Senator Joseph Lieberman, the former chairman of the Senate Homeland Security Committee, has called for a ban on assault weapons and the formation of a commission to investigate gun violence.

The broader agenda was spelled out most clearly by New York’s billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, a Democrat-turned Republican-turned Independent, who is the most frequent political figure now cited in the media in connection with calls for gun control.

Bloomberg has presided over an intensification of police violence in New York City, combined with an attack on democratic rights associated with the “stop and frisk” policy of aggressive searches of individuals deemed “suspicious.”

In remarks on the “Meet the Press” program on Sunday, Bloomberg called for tightening the application process for gun purchases and banning the sale of assault weapons. Asked about the low crime rate in New York City, Bloomberg said: “I don’t think it’s remarkable because I think we’re doing the right things. We have sensible gun laws. We have proactive policing. And we incarcerate people when they are dangerous to society with tough punishment.”

David Gregory, the host of Meet the Press, referred to “searching methods that have been controversial,” i.e., stop and frisk. “That’s proactive policing,” Bloomberg responded. “We send our police officers to problem places where there are problem people. We focus our efforts where there is crime and we make sure that the people who might commit those crimes know that there’s a high probability that we will find them carrying weapons and they’ll go to jail.”

“We have the toughest gun laws in the country,” Bloomberg added. “Three-and-a-half-year mandatory sentence in jail is state law if you’re found carrying an illegal loaded gun.”

As for the Obama administration, one of the measures

the Justice Department has considered is the expansion of FBI databases on gun purchasers and their integration with the databases of other agencies.



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