

Crocodile tears from the commander-in-chief

Patrick Martin
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During a White House press appearance Tuesday, President Obama shed tears over the death toll among US children due to mass shootings, a display of emotion that was given widespread publicity by the American media. The attention was in part due to the obvious contrast with the cold and indifferent demeanor normally maintained by the US chief executive.

More emotionalism is likely to be on display tonight, when Obama hosts a “town hall” meeting on gun violence in the United States at George Mason University in the northern Virginia suburbs of Washington. The hour-long event is to promote the executive actions restricting gun sales that Obama announced on Tuesday.

A few responses are in order. First and foremost is to note the utter hypocrisy of an American president, responsible for the killing of tens of thousands of children in the Middle East and other US-targeted countries, putting on a display of sorrow over the deaths of innocents.

President Obama, as has been well documented, personally selects the targets of US drone missile assassination strikes from a list supplied by the CIA and Pentagon. This takes place at meetings dubbed “Terror Tuesdays” by his staff. Thousands of civilians, and hundreds of children, have been massacred in these attacks, mainly in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and across North Africa.

Then there are the victims of US bombing campaigns in Iraq and Syria and the ongoing US military intervention in Afghanistan. On December 7, to cite one recent example, a US air strike on the Syrian town of Al Khan killed 36 civilians, including 20 children—the same number who died in the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut in December 2012. There were no tears from the US commander-in-chief over the incineration of Syrian first-graders.

The government Obama heads carries out flagrant attacks on children within the United States as well. Over the past week, Immigration and Customs Enforcement has begun arresting mothers and children fleeing violence in Central America who have sought refuge in the United States. At least 121 were seized in raids on their homes, with their deportations to Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras imminent.

Mothers and children alike were seeking to escape the threat of rape and death in their home countries, where the violence is perpetrated by drug gangs or US-backed right-wing military death squads. There is no question that the deportations, mounting into the thousands and tens of thousands in an election-year display of “toughness” at the US-Mexico border, will lead to the deaths of many children. No one should hold his breath waiting for Obama to shed tears over these innocent victims.

At one point in his remarks Tuesday, Obama compared the mass shootings at Newtown and Charleston and Umpqua Community College in Oregon to the daily death toll of violence in US urban areas, where many of the victims, accumulated in ones and twos but in far greater total numbers, are African-American.

He made no reference, however, to the wave of police murders of unarmed youth—white, Hispanic and African-American—which has become the focus of popular anger in the 16 months since the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. He made no mention of last week’s whitewash of the police execution of a 12-year-old Cleveland child, Tamir Rice.

This silence is a guilty one. The Obama Justice Department has repeatedly cleared killer cops through federal investigations that invariably find no civil rights violations, including in Cleveland. Another such whitewash is in progress in Chicago following a series of police killings of unarmed youth captured on cell

phone or dash-cam videos.

And while Obama argues that too-easy access to high-powered weaponry is a major factor in US gun deaths, his own administration has been pumping billions in military hardware into local police departments and overseeing military-style crackdowns on protests against police abuse in Ferguson and Baltimore.

As for the actual content of Obama's executive orders, they will have no effect on the escalating death toll in American schools, campuses, workplaces, homes and city streets. The proposed actions include expanded background checks on gun buyers and the promotion of safety triggers and other technical means to prevent accidental shootings.

Obama also proposed a token increase in spending on mental health programs and increased monitoring of mental health patients, an invasive expansion of state surveillance that was denounced by mental health advocacy organizations.

Neither restrictions on gun ownership nor mental health programs offer any genuine solution to the mounting death toll from civil violence in the United States, which now takes more than 30,000 victims a year from gunshots alone—half of those from self-inflicted wounds.

Obama offered no explanation for the rising frequency of mass shootings, the most-publicized aspect of this rising death toll. One recent study found that over the past 30 years, the amount of time between mass shootings has dropped from 200 days to only 64.

Friday marks the five-year anniversary of the killing of six people and near fatal wounding of Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. This has receded into memory, supplanted by the Aurora, Colorado movie theater massacre; the mass killing of first-graders at Sandy Hook; mass murders at UC Santa Barbara and Umpqua Community College; and massacres at a church in Charleston, South Carolina and a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has repeatedly pointed out that the root causes of such phenomena, whatever their individual peculiarities, must be found in the social environment that produces them, steeped in inequality, repression, alienation and the glorification of individualism. Most important—and unique to American society—is the fact that the United States has been engaged in nearly continuous warfare around the

world for the past quarter-century. No one under 30 today can remember a time when the US government was not engaged in killing people somewhere in the world.

The Obama administration, like its predecessor, has relentlessly worked to create a climate of fear in order to justify, in the name of the “war on terror,” successive wars of aggression abroad and the militarization of social life within the US. Tens of thousands of youth have been psychologically warped by their participation in neo-colonial wars of plunder and mass killing. This is the toxic context that produces eruptions of homicidal violence.

At one point in Obama's statement Tuesday, he declared, “The United States of America is not the only country on Earth with violent or dangerous people. We are not inherently more prone to violence. But we are the only advanced country on Earth that sees this kind of mass violence erupt with this kind of frequency. It doesn't happen in other advanced countries. It's not even close.”

It is certainly true that the American people “are not inherently more prone to violence.” But what about the American ruling class, the “we” for whom Obama actually speaks?

This parasitic elite is steeped in corruption, endlessly rapacious, terrified of any challenge to its global domination either from rival ruling classes or, above all, the great mass of working people in America.

The death toll from the wars of American imperialism—in the Middle East, the Balkans, Afghanistan, North Africa—is well into the millions. To these must be added the victims of militarism within the United States itself. American society is being poisoned by military violence.



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