

Mass Murder: Our Wounded Humanity

United States: the most militarized country on Planet Earth

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Global Research, April 15, 2023

[Common Wonders](#) 12 April 2023

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

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Once again . . . once again . . . once again . . .

I'm sure you know what I'm referring to. Yeah, another — the latest (?) — [mass shooting](#) in the United States, this one at Old National Bank in Louisville, Kentucky, on April 10, two days ago as I write. Five killed, eight injured. The shooter, an employee of the bank, was killed in a shootout with police. Three officers were injured, including a rookie officer (ten days on the job), who was shot in the head and is struggling to survive. The gunman's weapon was a nice, reliable AR-15-style rifle, legally purchased at a local gun shop a week earlier.

That's the basic data.

Loved ones cry in stunned grief. People demand saner gun laws. The mayor of Louisville, "noting the enormous amount of blood needed to treat gunshot wounds . . . urged residents of Louisville to donate blood."

What will happen next, of course —in the larger context known as the United States of America —is nothing. Politics will harden, of course: voices will rise, protests will erupt, Republican legislators will stand tough against demands for gun control. And eventually another mass killing somewhere will grab the headlines.

And while yes, yes, yes, I believe that assault weapons should be banned and legislation should be enacted requiring background checks, I don't think legislative —superficial —efforts will begin to address the country's mass-shooting epidemic. The Louisville shooting was apparently [number 146](#) in the country this year ("mass shooting" defined as at least four people killed), with each one seen and reported as an isolated action by a violent loner. Nothing can begin to change until we dig into the national soul and find the connecting context.

[As I wrote](#) two weeks ago, in the wake of the Nashville shooting: “This is not simply a loner’s psychological flaw: the denial of full, or any, humanity —any spiritual value —to chosen others. It’s a phenomenon embedded in the social norm. We have enemies. We need them. We kill them.

“We go to war!”

And going to war means one thing above all else: dehumanization. While a loner’s mass shooting spree means dehumanizing the victims at a personal level, war means dehumanization at the national level. Every American citizen is expected to acknowledge the need to kill the enemy du jour: via bombs, via tanks, via torture, via radioactivity and whatever poison our weaponry leaves behind. Strategy is what matters. Dead bystanders —dead children —are collateral damage.

As [Peter Turchin](#) wrote a decade ago, in the wake of the killings at Sandy Hook Elementary School: “The reason we should be worried about rampages is because they are surface indicators of highly troubling negative trends working their way through deep levels of our society.”

He called the victims “canaries in a coal mine.” Their toll is rising. And not just at American schools and banks and churches and shopping malls, etc., etc., etc. The toll is rising around the planet. Humanity has organized itself politically in the context of us vs. them, and this context is expanding. As the world grows technologically more connected —oh, the irony —its need to “defend itself” from the other has grown more ferocious. As soon as it’s labeled “war,” the concept of defense has virtually nothing to do with understanding.

And the United States, the most militarized country on Planet Earth, is at the heart of it all, fighting its forever war against terror: continuing to bomb, torture and poison evil itself out of existence. The 2023 U.S. military budget is \$816.7 billion, with the 2024 budget likely to expand well beyond that. Karen Greenberg, director of the Center on National Security at Fordham University, puts it this way: “In fact, it now seems as if this country is moving at breakneck speed out of the era of Forever War and into what might be thought of as the era of [Eternal War](#).”

And let there be no mistake. The era of Eternal War includes America’s mass shootings. What the lost souls who commit them have access to, before they can go around the corner and buy an assault rifle, is the concept of dehumanization. Mass murder would not be possible without it.

Yeah, I know, when we go to war, it’s all done bureaucratically. It’s all classified. The enemy is determined, dehumanized and killed at the highest level of national government, blah blah. American citizens get to read about it in the newspaper, watch it on television, cheer (allegedly) and even protest, but the decision to kill is impersonal and “democratic.”

Well, too bad. War creates war, not peace —especially when the “tools of war” are so readily available. One reason we are apparently entering an era of Eternal War is that it’s accessible not just to the commander in chief but to every lost soul in the country. Everyone wants to feel empowered. And the seduction of war is that it seems like such a simple obvious solution: Choose the enemy, dehumanize it and kill it. Problem solved.

I blame the media: for mostly going along with the sham at the governmental level and for

failing to notice, let alone report on or analyze, the broken social context revealed by every individual mass shooting.

To paraphrase the mayor of Louisville, an enormous amount of understanding is needed to address, and ultimately prevent, gunshot wounds. We all need to donate what we can.

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Featured image: A Louisville Metro Police technician photographs bullet holes in the front glass of the Old National Bank building in Louisville, Ky., Monday, April 10, 2023. A shooting at the bank killed and wounded several people police said. The suspected shooter was also dead. (AP Photo/Timothy D. Easley)

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