

School shooting in Connecticut leaves 27 dead, including 20 children

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A gunman walked into an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut on Friday morning and opened fire, killing 26, including 20 young children. The shooter was also found dead inside the school of a self-inflicted gunshot.

The horrific event took place at Sandy Hook Elementary, a K-4 school for five- to ten-year-old students. The massacre was the worst in the US since the 2007 rampage at Virginia Tech University, which left 33 dead. The killings follow by less than five months the shooting rampage at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, where 12 were killed and 58 injured.

Newtown, a small, affluent New England town about 80 miles northeast of New York City, has been ranked as one of the safest places to live in America. The community attracts families who want to send their children to the town's well-regarded public schools. Residents, shocked and in mourning, expressed disbelief that this type of tragedy could take place in their town.

The shooter has been tentatively identified by law enforcement officials as 20-year-old Adam Lanza. There was initially some confusion about his identity, as he was carrying the identification of his brother, Ryan Lanza, 24, of Hoboken, New Jersey. Ryan Lanza reportedly told authorities that his brother had a history of mental health issues. The elder brother is not a suspect.

Shortly after 9:30 a.m. Friday morning, local police received a call from Sandy Hook Elementary where the rampage was under way. According to a Connecticut State Police news briefing, the shootings took place in two rooms in a single section of the school.

The *Hartford Courant* reported that one entire classroom of children was unaccounted for. Eighteen children were pronounced dead at the scene and two died after being transported to the hospital. One wounded victim remained hospitalized as of Friday evening.

Children, who huddled in the corners of classrooms, reported hearing loud booms. Survivors escaped the carnage in groups—holding hands, many crying—escorted from the school by teachers. Students reported that they were told to cover their eyes and not look around, apparently in an effort to prevent them from seeing the dead and wounded.

Six adults were killed, although not necessarily all at Sandy Hook. The school principal, Dawn Hochsprung, was shot and killed at the school. According to a law enforcement official not authorized to speak publicly, kindergarten teacher Nancy Lanza, 52, the shooter's mother, was among the victims. The body of an as yet unnamed adult male was found at

the Newtown home owned by Nancy and Peter Lanza, Adam and Ryan Lanza's father.

At least three weapons were recovered at the school shooting scene, including a .223-caliber assault rifle from the back of a car and two semiautomatic handguns found near Lanza's body. Witnesses reported that some 100 shots or so were fired.

"It's not a simplistic scene," police spokesman Vance commented. "We will be here through the night, through the weekend. There is a great deal of work that has to be done." He reported that the murder scene was so gruesome that first responders were provided counseling. "This was a tragic, horrific scene they encountered," he said.

However, virtually nothing in the way of explanation has been offered in the nonstop media coverage of the shootings, or in the various comments of police and government officials, who uniformly term the deadly chain of events as "inexplicable" and "senseless".

President Barack Obama made a brief statement from the White House Friday afternoon. "We've endured too many of these tragedies in the past few years," he said. "And each time I learn the news I react not as a president, but as anybody else would—as a parent." He made no effort to account for the events, which his own comment acknowledged were a persistent feature of American life.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan's comments proceeded along similar lines: "School shootings are always incomprehensible and horrific tragedies," he said. "But words fail to describe today's heartbreaking and savage attack at Sandy Hook Elementary School."

What intellectual bankruptcy! No US government official or media personality has the mental capacity or courage to ask why these horrible tragedies occur in America with such heartbreaking predictability. The public has barely adjusted itself to one horror when the next one takes place. Even as the media reports Friday's incident, everyone knows that it is only a matter of time before the next atrocity.

Details of the tragic events in Connecticut are still emerging. In particular, little is known about what could have driven the shooter to plan and carry out such an atrocity. But statements to the effect that such tragedies are *always incomprehensible* block any examination of the processes that make possible such an antisocial explosion.

Whatever the immediate personal circumstances of each perpetrator, and such circumstances—psychological alienation, mental illness—of course play a role, the regularity of these mass killings expresses the profound sickness of American society, afflicted by social tensions that can find no progressive outlet.

The same figures that speak of "inexplicable tragedies" preside over extreme levels of violence both at home and abroad. Obama is the first US president to openly claim the right to select and order assassinations, including of US citizens. The ruling elite prosecutes an unending series of wars and military invasions, with hundreds of billions of dollars going to the giant killing machine. How could *any* expression of violence in America today be entirely "incomprehensible"?

At home, the American population is subjected to a culture of violence, not only in the form of police shootings and brutality, but an assault on democratic rights. While the financial elite continues to amass record profits, growing numbers of working families are plunged into poverty.

On the surface, such social tensions do not seem to be part of the reality of a town like Newtown, Connecticut, but they found terrible expression there Friday.

James Dietter, 26, lives in the neighborhood where one of the victims was found. His mother works in the school system. Dietter told the *Hartford Courant*. "This is the idyllic New England hamlet... there was a bit of a magical insulation or feeling that tragedy won't happen here. Now it has, and, unfortunately, I think it is going to define this town."

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