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The Las Vegas massacre the day after

By David Walsh

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The day after 59 people were shot and killed, and more than 525 wounded, at a Las Vegas, Nevada concert in the deadliest mass shooting in US history, authorities were still at a loss to explain the motives of the alleged gunman, 64-year-old Stephen Paddock.

US politicians and the American media are displaying their usual obtuseness and self-serving blindness in the face of this terrible tragedy, that has ruined hundreds, if not thousands of lives. There is no public figure who dares to trace this calamity to the extreme brutalization of American society, including a quarter-century of unending war and threats of even wider, bloodier conflicts, a society increasingly run by the military-intelligent apparatus.

President Donald Trump on Tuesday told the press that Paddock was “a sick man, a demented man. A lot of problems, I guess. We are looking into him very, very seriously”—whatever that might mean—“But we’re dealing with a very, very sick individual.” The know-nothing billionaire, as is his wont, chose to see the silver lining in the ghastly event, congratulating the Las Vegas police for how quickly they got to Paddock, who killed himself, describing the results of the mass murder as a “miracle ... They [the police] have done an amazing job.”

To this point, no message, letter or communication of any kind from Paddock has come to light. His brother, Eric Paddock, told the media that his brother had “No affiliation, no religion, no

politics. He never cared about any of that stuff. ... He was a guy who had money. He went on cruises and gambled.”

There are certainly peculiarities about Paddock’s “unmoored and highly unconventional life,” in the words of a *New York Times* account.

His father, Benjamin Hoskins Paddock, was a bank robber and on the FBI’s Most Wanted List from 1969 until his capture in 1977. His mother raised four boys on her own, and the family moved numerous times. Stephen Paddock attended California State University, Northridge and graduated with a degree in business administration in 1977. He worked as an Internal Revenue Service agent and later as an “internal auditor” for the predecessor of Lockheed Martin in the mid-1980s. He also owned and managed several buildings.

According to his brother, Paddock lived recently from high-stakes gambling. “The two brothers,” noted the *Times*, “had shared a real estate business for decades, refurbishing properties, the sale of which had left his brother with what he estimated was \$2 million. ‘He’s a multimillionaire,’ he said. ‘He helped me become affluent, he made me wealthy.’” Stephen Paddock had no criminal record, and lived in retirement communities in Florida and Nevada from 2013 to the time of the shooting.

Paddock carried out his killing spree with considerable care and preparation. He arrived at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino three days before he opened fire on the unsuspecting crowd at the Route 91 Harvest country music festival. He apparently brought more than 10 suitcases, some of them filled with weapons, into his suite. The *Washington Post* noted that “Paddock aroused no suspicion from hotel staff even as he brought in 23 guns, some of them with scopes. ... Officials recovered another 19 guns as well as thousands of rounds of ammunition and the chemical tannerite, an explosive, at Paddock’s home in Mesquite, Nev. They also found ammonium nitrate, a chemical that can be used in bombmaking, in Paddock’s vehicle.”

In addition, Paddock set up video cameras, including one placed in a food cart in the hallway outside his hotel room, to alert him to the arrival of police.

Boston’s Fox 24 television station posted photos Tuesday, obtained from police sources, of rifles on the floor of Paddock’s room. The *Post* commented, “The sound of gunfire captured on videos recorded during the massacre ... indicates that Paddock fired from the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino with at least one automatic weapon, or a semi-automatic rifle modified to fire like an automatic. One of the two images of rifles published by the station show an AR-15 type rifle with a bump or slide fire modification.”

All this horror, after decades of similar and mounting horrors, and not a single profound thought expressed in the American media.

The Democratic Party and the liberal media argue without conviction for gun control. This *Los Angeles Times* editorial is typical: “No motivation can possibly make such a barbaric act comprehensible, nor can it lessen the pain and grief that will be shared by hundreds of families. ... In the days ahead, some will argue—indeed, some have already argued—that this is not the

right time to talk about gun control or our armed-to-the-teeth culture, that it is too soon to dilute our grief with tawdry politics. But this is exactly the right time to denounce the scourge of gun violence. ... We may not be able to control the violent impulses of our fellow Americans, but we must limit the weapons available to them and we must better enforce the controls that we have.”

Fox News opened its website’s opinion columns to religious obscurantists such as Pastor Robert Jeffries, who saw the “heartbreaking tragedy” as an opportunity to put in a few words for belief in the after-life. “Although it [such a belief] in no way eliminates the pain of those who have lost loved ones and the anguish our nation is experiencing, the hope of heaven helps put our suffering in perspective. The pain we feel right now is very real, but the Bible assures us that it is also temporary.”

The victims were average people: a special education teacher from Manhattan Beach, California; a librarian and bus driver from Alberta, Canada; a home builder from Riverside, California; an employee at a design firm in Cambridge, Massachusetts; an emergency room nurse from Tennessee; a commercial fisherman from Anchorage, Alaska; a kindergarten teacher from Lancaster, California; a recreation employee for the city of Henderson, Nevada; a secretary at the Gallup-McKinley County Schools in New Mexico; a receptionist at a software company in Bakersfield, California; a youth wrestling coach from Shippensburg, Pennsylvania; a mechanic apprentice from British Columbia, Canada; and many more.

The victims whose identities have been made public were white or Hispanic, and the rescuers and medical personnel came from every background. That the shooter was a white male and that the scene was a country music festival provided the occasion for various representatives of the upper middle class to vent their reactionary views. Such commentators do what they can to divert attention away from the diseased character of the American capitalist order.

Undoubtedly expressing the views of a certain section of liberal-left public opinion, Hayley Geftman-Gold, a vice president and senior counsel of strategic transactions at CBS, wrote on Facebook that the concert goers got more or less what they deserved. Geftman-Gold wrote that she had no hope that such people “will ever do the right thing. I’m actually not even sympathetic bc [because] country music fans often are Republican gun toters.” CBS fired her after the comments were made public.

Joan Walsh of the *Nation*, a feminist and staunch Hillary Clinton supporter, attributed the tragedy to “the American male identification of guns as a symbol of freedom.” Barack Obama, she claimed, had used “these occasions ... to search for ways to prevent future tragedies,” without the slightest success, one might add, but “Trump did nothing of the kind.” Walsh concluded, “It’s hard to imagine this president, or this Congress, begin to unravel the connections they’ve woven between masculinity, power, guns, and violence.”

Racialist Shaun King, writing in the *Intercept*, used the opportunity to pontificate about “white privilege.” He observed that “Paddock, like the majority of mass shooters in this country, was a white American. And that simple fact changes absolutely everything about the way this horrible moment gets discussed in the media and the national discourse: Whiteness, somehow, protects men from being labeled terrorists.”

King asserted that “What we are witnessing is the blatant fact that white privilege protects even Stephen Paddock, an alleged mass murderer.” The columnist did not bother to refer to the lack of “white privilege” enjoyed by the overwhelming majority of the nearly 600 dead or wounded teachers, secretaries, construction workers and fishermen.