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Before Orlando, Omar Mateen Worked for Human Rights Abusers

By Phyllis Bennis
June 15, 2016



How do we even talk about the horrific killings in Orlando, which left at least 50 LGBTQ revelers dead and more than 50 more injured in the middle of pride month? First we mourn. Then

we rage. Then we hug our loved ones, especially our LGBTQ friends, comrades, and family members.

Then we look again, and we see the horror — that this murderer was licensed to carry guns and had no trouble buying incredibly powerful military-style weapons. So casually. So legally. So common, across our country. That's when we start to rage again.

More troubling still, Omar Mateen worked for a company that was perpetrating systemic violence against vulnerable people long before he took up arms against his LGBTQ neighbors. For nine years Mateen worked for G4S Security, a British-based corporation that contracts with the U.S. and Israeli governments for work that often violates human rights on a massive scale.

G4S, which brags about having 600 staffers on the southern border, has contracts with U.S. immigration authorities to detain and deport people back to Mexico, as well as to run private juvenile detention facilities. In Israel, meanwhile, G4S profits from providing equipment and services in Israeli prisons and interrogation centers where Palestinians are routinely tortured. It's also involved in running Israeli military checkpoints in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Incidentally, G4S is the company that trained Mateen to work as an armed security guard, which licensed him to carry and use weapons. And although his coworkers told supervisors that Mateen "frequently made homophobic and racial comments," the company did nothing. It kept him on board — and kept him armed.

Should this company continue to profit from multi-million-dollar contracts with the U.S. government?

Since 2012, there's been a major campaign against G4S, resulting in decisions by major mainstream institutions — like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Methodist Church, numerous European universities, important charities in South Africa and the Netherlands, UN agencies in the Middle East, and more — to divest from G4S holdings, or to cancel or not renew service contracts. G4S is profiting from exactly the kind of anti-Arab and anti-Latino racism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia that are all on the rise in the U.S. right now.

If the early reports are accurate, G4S's long-serving employee is responsible for the worst mass shooting in *modern* U.S. history.

And here let's continue to be careful with our numbers. As my IPS colleague Karen Dolan and others have been pointing out, our nation's origins are grounded in genocide and slavery. Earlier history has to take into account things like the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee, when between 150 and 300 children, women, and men were gunned down. That mass shooting is part of our history, too.

But our nation's history also includes the great movements that have risen against war, racism, sexism, homophobia, and more. The party at Orlando's Pulse club was part of a month-long Gay Pride celebration rooted in the extraordinary movement that grew out of the 1969 Stonewall revolt, when bar patrons fought back against police brutality toward gay men and lesbians.

June 12, the night of the massacre, happened to be Latin Night at the Pulse. Reverend William Barber, a leader of the Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina, reminded me that June 12 is also the anniversary of the 1963 Mississippi assassination of the great civil rights leader Medgar Evers.

One more link between our movements — from Stonewall to Orlando, and Mississippi to Palestine.