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Mass domestic shootings now all too common

HERALD-WHIG VIEW: We praise those who save the lives they do but lament how troubling attacks have become

ELEMENTARY schools. College campuses. Churches. Military bases. Movie theaters. Health clinics. And now a center in California that helps children and adults with developmental disabilities.

It seems there's no place safe from mass shootings. We still don't know everything about what happened inside the sprawling Inland Regional Services center in San Bernardino on Wednesday morning.

We know that at least 14 people are dead and that at least 17 others were injured. We know that three people are to blame and that police shot at least two of them dead — one male, one female. We know they arrived in a dark-colored SUV, had explosive devices and entered the building carrying long guns.

We know that Inland Regional Services, the largest in California's network of 21 regional centers, is filled with

caseworkers who connect people with disabilities with the services they need. But we know the shooters zeroed in on a conference room where the San Bernardino County Public Health Department was hosting a holiday party.

We also know that this doesn't feel like the dozens — or, depending on your method for counting, hundreds — of other mass shootings in the United States in recent years.

This wasn't a lone, mentally disturbed gunman intent on wreaking havoc, which is something that — and this says nothing good about Americans — we've somehow come to grasp. But this was something else. Something scarier.

San Bernardino Police Chief Jarrod Burguan made that clear at a news conference Wednesday afternoon. The shooters, he said, "were dressed and equipped in

a way that indicates they were prepared. ... They came prepared to do what they did, as if they were on a mission. They came in with a purpose."

While the FBI was reluctant to call it terrorism, what happened at Inland Regional Services was terrifying. But so are all other mass shootings.

Sadly, for many Americans, these shootings, these acts of domestic terrorism, have become normal. Today, every school kid knows what "an active shooter situation" means. Employees do drills in drab office buildings so that they know what to do when and if the time comes.

We should be thankful that law enforcement, paramedics, hospitals and others reacted quickly, the way they have been trained after so many similar incidents across the country. They almost certainly saved lives. But it's still a troubling commentary on our times.



{ YOUR VIEWS }

Past presidents have erred on side of safety for nation

To The Herald-Whig:

Adam Geller's Nov. 22 article about Syrian refugees was interesting, but missed the true nature that is developing in America. Certainly, with hindsight, we can see that Roosevelt's internment camps and the barring of Jewish refugees into our country was not necessary. However, past presidents have always erred on the safety of our nation.

John Adams limited freedom of speech due to the possibility of a future war with France or Britain.

Abraham Lincoln suspended the right of habeas corpus. Sympathizers to the South were arrested. In many cases there was no evidence of any wrongdoing, yet they were imprisoned without a trial. U.S. Rep. Clement Vallandigham of Ohio was even deported to the Confederacy, while Gen. Ambrose Burnside was ordered to stop the publication of one edition of the World newspaper because of its pro-Copperhead philosophy.

In June 1942, two German-American citizens and six other Germans who were working in the U.S. were activated by the Nazi Party. Their mission was to attack various sites, like hydroelectric facilities, railroad stations and metal-producing plants. Thankfully, the U.S. Coast Guard stopped them.

During Operation Elster, a German sub dropped two officers off the coast of Maine. The men were supposed to gather information on the Manhattan Project and ultimately attempt to sabotage it and other targets. The two were caught before any real damage was done.

Would it be so hard to believe that there might be Germans who would pretend to be Jewish refugees, whose single purpose was to sabotage?

Our 1940s American intelligence community believed that a Japanese agent could steal a crop duster and fly it into the White House. There are several photos of American guards standing on the roof of the White House, defending the home from such a possible attack.

It is easy for Geller to overlook the reality of 1940s America to create a comparison with today.

In truth, we do not know what the enemy may come up with. Thus, hard decisions in times of war must be made.

Alas, we have an idealist as the current president. Sadly, terrorists don't care about ideals. Unless, he wants all of them in Washington D.C., we should examine very carefully who we are permitting in the United States.

Robin Anderson
Hannibal, Mo.

Political rhetoric can't stop the killing

Predictably, the killing rampage at a Colorado Springs Planned Parenthood facility has prompted a political scrimmage of the usual sort.

From the pro-choice front, we hear that pro-lifers and Republican rhetoric made the killer do it. Or, at least, they created an environment in which a deranged person might become unhinged.

From the pro-life trenches, we hear, There they go again, blaming the messenger, apparently referring to a series of undercover videos in which Planned Parenthood employees, including doctors, casually discussed collecting and delivering "fetal tissue," aka intact organs from pre-term babies, for medical research.

"No more baby parts," the alleged killer reportedly said upon his arrest after three people were fatally shot and nine others wounded.

Suspect Robert Lewis Dear, 57, has been consistently described in the media and by others as "deranged."

Meanwhile, the usual questions have kept us busy: Do we need more rational gun control? (Yes.) Are we doing enough about the mentally ill? (No.) Do we need to tame our



KATHLEEN PARKER

Washington Post

rhetoric? (Tricky.)

Whose voices would we stifle? (I'm making a list.) But, how?

Mostly, we want to understand what happened so that we can prevent the next incident. But in a free country, can we ever fully protect ourselves from the murderous intent of the truly insane, the drug addled, or a rage that topples reason?

What is murder's tipping point?

While responsible writers and commentators have avoided making a cause-and-effect argument, a consensus has congealed around the idea that though the rhetoric didn't cause the action, it contributed to it, probably.

Dear, in other words, either watched, read or heard about the videos in question, perhaps from Republican presidential

candidates and, being deranged, simply went ballistic.

The videos in question are certainly controversial, and accomplished what they were intended to do — to make vividly real the sometimes-brutal reality of abortion, though the vast majority of abortions are first-term. This is no consolation to people who morally object to terminating a pregnancy at any point in gestation, as we know from 40 years of divisive debate. To people who oppose abortion, exposing the casual harvesting of body parts was simply another layer of banality attached to the already horrific.

It isn't necessary to resort to hyperbole or inexactitude, as some have done, to bestir an ethical conundrum in many a moral mind. Even the liberally pro-choice Hillary Clinton described the videos as "disturbing" when she first became aware of them — and before she was schooled by her pro-choice supporters. Clinton did make an honorable recommendation to study fetal-tissue procurement from abortion across the board. This would eliminate some of the political jockeying and place the issue in the bioethical realm where

it belongs.

Meanwhile, as abhorrent as we find the shooter's actions, we should tread carefully in assigning broader blame. One man may have heard fiery rhetoric and decided to kill people, but 322 million other Americans went about their day as usual. The rationale we seek for mass killings may ultimately be elusive because a variety of variables are usually in play.

In time, perhaps the suspect will provide answers, which we can parse in search of helpful insights. So far, he's been unhelpful. Saying "no more baby parts" may suggest a motive, but it is also nonsensical. There will be more baby parts as long as there are abortions. By his comment alone, one suspects that Dear is either mentally incompetent, drunk, on drugs or off his meds, or all of the above.

Divining motivations, a provocative pastime to be sure, is probably best left to psychoanalysts and jurors as facts emerge. In the meantime, politicians and pundits would do well to resist the urge to contribute their own rhetoric to the dynamic. Speech may be free, but it ain't cheap.

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