

The easy availability of military-style guns designed expressly to kill human beings cannot go on in the wake of the slaughter of school children by gunfire

The slaughter of children in a Connecticut school was an unthinkable tragedy, unthinkable in that the minds of most people, even after knowing it happened, cannot fathom an evil so profound.

There was a time in America, and it wasn't that long ago, when such an evil was truly unthinkable, unthinkable in that no one could imagine that a person would enter a school and murder 20 girls and boys 6 and 7 years old, along with teachers and a principal, with military-style firearms.

Just as unimaginable would have been mass shooting murders in a shopping mall, movie theater, college campus and temple, other recent tragedies that have no parallel in two centuries of American history.

What has changed that has made the unthinkable a repeated reality? That question will have to be answered if there is to be an effective response to President Obama's declaration at a mournful gathering in Newtown, Conn., Sunday: "These tragedies must end."

Impossible to ignore in seeking the answer is the overwhelming presence of guns. It is safe to say there have never been more guns in private hands in America than there are now.

One sure way to make money in the lean recession years has been to produce and sell guns. Gun manufacturers are rolling in profits. Guns are such hot-selling merchandise that unexpected retailers are getting in on the action. Large-caliber semi-automatic pistols and assault-type rifles can now be purchased at Walmart and at the same chain sporting goods stores where parents buy their children's soccer supplies.

The American gun boom has not lifted sales of traditional sporting arms, which have been affected by declining numbers of hunters. The new best-sellers are firearms designed expressly to kill human beings—semi-automatic pistols and rifles with large-capacity magazines. The rifles are semi-automatic copies of the M-16 and M-4 assault weapons carried by American soldiers, the only significant difference being that they cannot, unless modified, operate in a fully automatic mode. (Not as popular but also for sale by retailers are knock-offs of the assault rifle used in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars to kill American soldiers, the AK-47.)

The Connecticut child killer was armed with three weapons readily available from stores all over the U.S.—10mm Glock and 9mm Sig Sauer pistols and a semi-automatic Bushmaster rifle that is a civilian version of the M-16. The children were all killed with the rifle, using 30-shot

'These tragedies must end'

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magazines holding 5.56mm rounds designed for military use to inflict catastrophic damage to the bodies they enter. The medical examiner reported that each child was shot multiple times, by as many as 11 bullets.

The flying-off-the-shelves appeal of guns has the look of fad stoked by such celebrated gun-lobby victories as concealed-carry and home-defense laws. (For those seeking to make a fashion statement, pistols are now available in colors, including pink.)

Most of these guns will never be used to kill anyone, but some surely will be, as appalling American gun-death statistics make clear. Nicholas D. Kristof expressed the numbers this way in the New York Times: "More Americans die in gun homicides and suicides in six months than have died in the last 25 years in every terrorist attack and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq combined."

The notion that guns cannot be regulated without violating the Bill of Rights may be accepted as gospel by lawmakers and others who have drunk the Kool-Aid dispensed by the all-powerful American gun lobby, but that doesn't make it anything more than nonsense.

Guns with large-capacity magazines should be banned. They have no relevance to hunting, target shooting, personal defense or the Second Amendment; they just facilitate slaughter by gunfire. There should be more stringent restrictions on buying guns to at least make a credible attempt to keep them out of the hands of the next mentally sick mass murderer.

Evil doers and lunatics have always been with us. So what has changed? The saturation of Americans society with guns designed to kills humans is new.

Connect the dots.