

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

The Tucson Shootings

The Tucson Shootings

January 9, 2011

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. This week I watched two news-talk shows. "Meet the Press" and "Face the Nation" focused on the Tucson shootings.

The politicians on these news panels---big players in the national political arena---were unanimous in their opinion about why this travesty took place. I was surprised by their laying blame on America's strident and vitriolic political culture. They also blamed the media for harping on the politicians' invective. The panelists agreed that these two situations were creating a dangerously discordant and divided America.

It was clear the panelists were unsettled. A fellow politician had been the victim of the assaults. Yet the politicians were blaming politicians for creating the culture that led to the shootings.

Parts of the discussions were about the *increasing* realization that they, their staffs, and bystanders to their public appearances were not safe from constituents who had decided to voice their opinions with bullets. I sensed from one panel that this fact was finally starting to sink-in, that their once open meetings with voters had passed a Rubicon of glad-handing to not-so-glad-handing.

The politicians on these programs should have acknowledged this important fact: Many of the killings at PTA meetings, political gatherings, and fast-food places over the past decade have had nothing to do with a people who are stoked by the media. They have had to do with fringes of our human population who have always been around, deranged and socially-blind to the consequences of their unhinged nihilism.

The panel members---again, big-time politicians---are perplexed. They have cancelled deliberations on the health care act that was scheduled for next week. Their itineraries for governing America are being interrupted.

As they go about garnering votes and pork, they are beginning to understand they may find themselves in the cross-hairs of a gun that is held by a loser-in-life. They now know they may be open game, that assassination is no longer an abstract notion.

We have been on this road for many years. But we have been able to push it aside. The occasional aberration into wanton slaying makes the news for a few nights, and we then settle into "American Idol."

However, a more conscious and uneasy disposition is creeping into our psyches. It is happening slowly, but it is happening, especially with public officials. While watching these programs, I could see it in their faces and hear it in their words. It seemed to me they were disconcerted about the ease in which one lone man had so easily laid waste to one of their colleagues---a beloved and respected politico---as well as others at the meeting. I could have misread what they were thinking. But I sensed that while their overt expressions tried to mask uneasiness, their

countenances told otherwise. For one of the few times in my life, I felt sorry for national politicians.

The gradual buildup of awareness of politicians' vulnerability to admittedly rare acts of sick and/or depraved murder is not restricted to public people. Bosses of disgruntled employees have come under the gun. Diners at fast-food eateries have been shot by dissatisfied diners. People filling their tanks at service stations have been murdered by sociopathic snipers.

These Sunday panels and the genuine worry of the members sparked a thought about some passages in a book I wrote called *2084 and Beyond*. The book is a look into our future...assuming we do not alter our ways.

Here is a passage from Chapter 7. (I've altered the last paragraph because its full inclusion would assume you have read previous chapters.):

Frightened Societies

Toward the middle of the 21st century, many humans, especially those living in urban areas, began to suffer a common fear. They succumbed to a semiconscious, mass fright called the Drugstore Terrorist Syndrome, named after a man who visited several drugstores and doctored bottles of medicine with poison. The syndrome entered the picture when more than one innocent person discovered a trip to the drugstore might not be therapeutic. The result of these assaults was death or severe illness for those who were the unlucky victims of their own innocent headaches and the irrationality of the killer who had a bad day at the office.

The Drugstore Terrorist Syndrome became a catch-all phrase for other kinds of attacks, such as sniper shootings and subway assaults. The effect of this syndrome was the inculcation into peoples' minds of a subtle, yet ever-present fear of engaging their society. Faced with the prospect of dodging a sniper's bullet, they became reluctant to go shopping, take the train to work, go to the bank, attend a PTA meeting or political rally, show up for a college class lecture, or drive to a restaurant. Reasonably enough, to civilians not receiving hazardous duty pay, these tasks became burdensome to their spirit.

In most cities it was simply unsafe to be outside at night. A common lament was, "We [are] scared every night. They will kill you for everything." ...Or for nothing.

The emerging milieu was contrary to the humans' gregarious nature and their need for social engagement with other people. If the syndrome were related only to drugstores, it would not have become a pervasive problem; caps on medicine bottles had been designed to detect any tampering. Unfortunately for the human race, the Drugstore Terrorist Syndrome encompassed many other well-founded fears.

Increasingly, a human, acting alone or in concert with a few people, would stake claim to infamy by wiping-out groups of people. The Tylenol bottle poisonings; the Tokyo subway sarin nerve gas attacks; the Oklahoma City bombing; the D.C./Virginia snipers; the Ohio freeway killings; the 9/11 attacks; the Anthrax mailings; the Madrid railway bombings; the London subway and bus attacks; the slaughter of Russian school children; the murder of Amish students;

and the massacre of Virginia Tech students were followed by attacks on amusement parks, gambling casinos, financial institutions, and shopping malls.¹

As the acts of these killers became more frequent, the killing or maiming of large populations by an individual began to take on the patina of the ordinary.² For some people, this Dodge City milieu became part of their daily lives, but at great cost to their psyches. It was an irony: Peaceful, nonviolent humans trying to exist in a dysfunctional culture that exhibited nonpeaceful, violent traits.

Beyond Frightened to Dangerous

I have written about gun control in other reports, so I will not dwell on the subject here because the issue goes way beyond who has a gun.

Rather, let's take these quotes from *2084 and Beyond* and expand them beyond the wannabe city mayor killer. Here's another quote from *2084 and Beyond* (again, I've edited to make it understandable for this report.):

Dangerous Societies

Initially, the humans who were bent on destroying other humans were small in number, such as the attacks cited above. Without question, these people were disruptive and caused considerable trauma to the societies they attacked. But overall, their aggression tool box contained a relatively modest inventory of gasses, rifles, and bombs.

However, this equation changed when weapons of mass destruction became available to *individuals and non-nation tribes*. Where once a madman (perhaps in concert with his fringe group) possessing a modest killing tool box could murder only a few people, this person could now kill thousands of people--all in one attack. I alter an earlier illustration in this book, shown as Figure 7-2.

At point A, thousands of years ago, the tools for destruction were limited; clubs, knives, spears, or bows and arrows could not kill many people. Later, at points B through Y, and during the humans' journey to closure, pistols, rifles, cannons, bazookas, flame throwers, grenades, TNT, machine guns, rockets, tanks, and other tools of the trade were added to the inventory of arsenals. The mayhem from these weapons was also limited because, even though quite deadly, their killing power was limited to a few hundred humans.

However, at point Z, a few humans--beyond the control of nation states--succeeded in gaining control of nuclear weapons, poisonous chemicals, and deadly viruses. Thus armed, they destroyed large parts of several cities containing thousands of humans. These killers did not care about their own lives. If they died as a result of their act, they had been taught they would be rewarded by their god to a place in heaven. Other killers were simply insane, having lost any touch with the concepts of morality and ethics.

¹ Phillip Rucker, "We Scared Every Night," *The Washington Post*, July 24, 2006, B2.

² An example of the Threshold Lowering Syndrome.

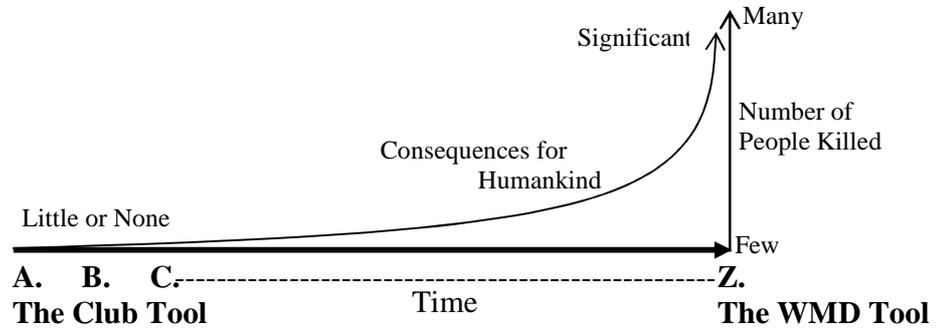


Figure 7-2. The Law of the Instrument in action.

I wrote those words several years ago and updated them with the inclusion of more recent killings. Other than my science fiction solutions in this book---which just might come about---I have no answers. It seems no one else does either.

I am sure of one thing. If some answers do not come forward, it is not going to get any better. As suggested in *2084 and Beyond*, it is only going to get worse. If any of my readers think otherwise, please offer your solutions to our society. Otherwise, join my funk.

With these happy thoughts, Happy New Year.

Your on the Street Reporter