

The Forensic Forum®

The Tucson Incident – America’s Ticking Time Bombs

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In the wake of the attempted assassination of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords (Rep. AZ), and the murder and wounding of nearly twenty people including a federal judge and a nine year old child; politicians, media pundits and talk show political hosts have taken to the airwaves to decry this horrendous incident. Politicians, news anchors and talk show personalities ask why this senseless shooting incident happened.

Rather than pausing to reflect upon the question they have posed, some of the aforementioned have chosen to barrage viewers and listeners of local and national news outlets with the same incessant political posturing and assignments of blame that may have created the some of the pressures that precipitated this incident.

If certain high-profile politicians and television and radio personalities are truly sincere in their desire to attempt to reconcile in part why 22-year old Jared Loughner chose that particular moment to shoot his congressional representative and the citizens who had gathered to meet her, they need to look no further than the closest mirror.

Law enforcement, forensic and legal authorities are involved in piecing together this heinous crime to insure that Jared Loughner acted alone. A psychological investigation into his personality may ultimately reveal the profile of a deranged person who has been presenting with symptoms of psychotic behavior for some time. Based upon the snippets of information being provided by those who had contact with the psychologically unstable young man, there is little doubt that Loughner presented with sufficient physical, communication, behavioral and psychological cues to have warranted an investigation and involuntary mental health commitment intervention.

While I could easily opine on the woefully inadequate state of our nation’s mental health system and our local intervention programs, that is not the focus of this article. That is a given fact and subject for a subsequent article. Instead, I will offer that after watching several days of some embarrassing reporting on this tragedy, many of the politicians, political pundits and media personalities who have offered their opinions as to why this incident happened just do not understand the underlying issues.

The murderous havoc that Jared Loughner perpetrated can mostly be explained and perhaps largely mitigated by the fact that he is most likely mentally disturbed and

psychotic. However, the fact that his apparent obsessive focus upon a politician as a potential source of his emotional/psychological “pain” cannot be deflected or redirected as an unrelated anomaly. Nor has there been any credible evidence presented that he was some sort of right/left leaning political extremist. Instead, let me opine that Jared Loughner was one of America’s “ticking time bombs” whose timed fuse was eventually ignited by a series of internal and external stimuli.

As a former police officer, detective and now a forensic criminologist specializing in crimes of violence – many of which are perpetrated by mentally disturbed people, I have often thought of myself as a bomb technician. Like other police officers, I spent my career diffusing suicidal and mentally disturbed “human bombs” before they could hurt themselves or others. Now I spent my time investigating how these bombs are manufactured and why they “explode.”

I ask you to consider that America is populated by an increasing number of human ticking time bombs. The majority of these bombs I identify are those people who present with intermediate to severe mental health problems such as Jared Loughner. With the exception of the scope of the crime in Tucson, we have experienced the scenario of the isolated, mentally ill and manically focused assassin. Our world’s political and social history is littered with the successful or attempted assassinations of Presidents, religious and iconic social figures. In the immediate case, the damage was just as serious and its victims more diverse.

The mentally disturbed bomb employs a lit fuse and is usually visible to those around them. The fuse takes a while to burn before the bomb explodes. The mentally unstable bomb generally provides warnings of its pending explosion. Such is the case with Jared Loughner, where people who knew him have now come forward to state that they were not only aware of his mental illness and pent up rage, but were concerned for their safety.

The problem is that although human bombs like Loughner can often be identified, observers rarely call a bomb technician so the bomb can be isolated and defused. Worse case scenarios involve timely notification, but a technician who is either unwilling or unable to intercede. This may ultimately prove to be part of the case with law enforcement and mental health authorities in Tucson.

Now and more disturbingly, the American culture has created a new human time bomb. This bomb has been “manufactured” by a group of irresponsible leaders found within the political, corporate and media communities. I identify these human time bombs as those who come from the ranks of normal American citizens experiencing the extreme stresses of living in a society, and in a corporate and political environment that they feel has become unstable and which has betrayed them. These bombs generally do not require a lit fuse to ignite, instead like a land mine; they employ a “pressure plate.” I believe that some of

these hidden human time bombs will explode in ways that will ultimately tear at the fabric of American society.

It is relatively easy to dismiss the assassinations, murders and other violent crimes committed by the “crazies” in our society. We know that the insane or mentally disturbed occasionally explode, often harming themselves and occasionally harming others. However, violent crimes acutely committed by normal American citizens under intense emotional and economic pressure are far more disconcerting. It is my sincere belief that we are quickly heading in this direction. But why is this happening?

In some ways America is changing for the worse. Those people with some degree of political or social cultural knowledge and experience cannot deny this. While the historic (and sometimes corrupt) political and corporate culture in America may not have changed since the time our Founding Fathers established this democratic nation; the media has made astronomical changes.

The advent of the FOX/CNN 24-hour style news format, the Internet, smart phones, blogs and “tweets” provide us with no respite from sensational radio/TV talk shows and media personalities. These sources of information can incessantly and mercilessly barrage us with news, information and opinions that are disconcerting, depressing and often shocking to the conscious.

Allow me to paint a picture of America’s new landscape. Millions of formerly productive citizens have lost, or are in the process of losing, their jobs and their homes. We have 12-14% national unemployment rate and even higher unemployment in some areas of our country. Military personnel who are facing their third and fourth deployments to war zones are intensely aware that each time they deploy, their personal survival ratios dwindle. Military personnel and their families bear an extreme burden in payment for the freedoms and conveniences some of us at home take for granted and squander. Military suicides have never been higher.

Heads of households who have lost their jobs, their health insurance, their investments and their homes find themselves under extreme external economic pressure. When this burden is combined with volatile internal pressures such as feelings of personal failure, frustration, depression, despair, helplessness and hopelessness, these citizens may suddenly explode. Some murder their terminally infirmed spouses and burn their foreclosed homes to the ground as they commit suicide, as was recently the case near San Diego, CA.

Rather than championing people with unique combinations of honesty, ethics, self-sacrifice and leadership as our role models, some printed and electronic media instead chose to celebrate the lives of dysfunctional movie stars, athletes of questionable character and reality TV personalities who bring nothing to the table of American culture. It is becoming

increasingly difficult for the average responsible American adult searching for the meaning of life, or the parent seeking a role model example for their children to find one.

We are confounded and embarrassed by the lack of positive context in our once meaningful society. We sadly recall that the simple word “America” that once used to mean something good to citizens of the world has become devalued and even despised.

A number of this nation’s most prominent politicians are focused upon creating a two-tiered “rich vs. poor” society that seeks to diminish our middle class. Hard working, educated citizens and small business owners feel disenfranchised and unreasonably burdened by excessive taxation without representation.

Certain self-serving politicians empower and enable a rapidly emerging and growing government dependent “entitlement class.” This new classification is comprised of those citizens who are mostly lacking in education, marketable job skills, or legal documentation.

Rather than role modeling self-sacrifice in times of economic woe, some of our nation’s political leaders instead serve themselves by creating separate work, health and retirement benefits which are far superior to those they serve. Some politicians have come to believe they are the aristocratic ruling elite and not the servants of the people. Their bi-partisan actions have not only bankrupted this generation, but have insured that future generations of Americans will share our fate. This is the tragic demise of what was once touted as “The Greatest Generation.” Many of those who fought and sacrificed to create the generations of success and role-modeling world leadership we formerly enjoyed are now bankrupt, heartbroken and teary-eyed.

What the media and political ideologues apparently do not understand is that there is a growing population of Americans who are no longer functioning normally as citizens. These are our friends, neighbors and co-workers who see their lives and futures crumbling down around them. Our homes which we once believed were part of our investments have been so devalued that many are not worth the value of the outstanding mortgage. In many cases, our efforts to work with the banks to modify loan payments have proven fruitless because many banks do not care if we lose our homes because the government will bail them out. Once proud home owners simply walk away from their dream homes, or move into someone else’s shattered dream home. Retirement accounts for retirees have become exhausted. Many Americans care for a seriously ill child, spouse or an aging and infirmed parent while health care costs continue to spiral out of control.

Many productive, hard-working, ethical and patriotic Americans are bewildered and overwhelmed by the sheer weight of our nation’s problems, which now have become our own. Many have little confidence in our political and corporate leaders to address what is wrong with our country and see no hope for the future. This is the face of transition of our

once healthy society and the mechanism of our nation's human ticking time bombs. These are the external forces that are placed on the pressure plates of our human time bombs.

America's ticking time bombs are not as readily identified as the Jared Loughner's in our midst. These bombs exist just beneath the surface in every city and town in our country. They are found in all tiers of our society and cross all racial, political and religious lines.

To all of the posturing political ideologues and the self-absorbed media personalities who seek to dismiss the Tucson tragedy as the work of a lone and insane person, let me say this to you - America's human ticking time bombs do not care what *you* believe. They only care about what *they* believe.

Not everyone among us understands - or is able to cognitively process - that the angry and aggressive metaphors that some politicians and media personalities use on a daily basis are in fact only "harmless" words and symbols. That this simple fact is apparently lost on these supposedly educated and informed groups is truly disturbing. These personalities are certainly not America's best and brightest as they self-purport to be.

So where does this leave us and how does this information seek to answer the obvious question: How can we as a nation diffuse the majority of human bombs walking around or buried within our communities?

My first suggestion is that the most visible and powerful leaders in our government, in the corporate community and within the media stop to consider that their words and decisions ultimately affect Americans in ways that they cannot possibly imagine and rarely see from their isolated positions of wealth and power. The overwhelming majority of Americans are not like them and it is nearly impossible for us to convey the real context of our lives in ways they can comprehend or appreciate. We live "here" and they are merely occasional visitors observing our pain and suffering. To those that have chosen to continue to self-promote through division of the American people, I say stop your vitriolic political rhetoric. We have had enough!

Next, our political and corporate leaders need to sincerely commit themselves to doing the right thing instead of the politically expedient thing. They need to quit manipulating the American people. Instead, they should focus their efforts to pull out all the stops in getting our nation back on the right track. Most Americans are creative, resourceful and whole. We know how to sacrifice, have been sacrificing and are prepared within reason to sacrifice more. But we are not willing to be manipulated by cowardly politicians with a self-serving political agenda. To them I say your unethical and corrupt actions must stop immediately.

While it is true that Jared Loughner could have exploded anywhere and at any time, he did not. Instead, he deliberately selected Congresswoman Giffords and had planned for her assassination. When he did explode, not only was the congresswoman severely injured, but



a number of other good Americans including a federal judge and a young child were killed and injured by the shrapnel of his rage.

How many of us are willing to stand idly and be the next innocent victim of America's next ticking time bomb when it explodes? Not me! If you agree, let your voices, letters and emails to those who you feel share some responsibility in the manufacture of these human time bombs hear you. Help diffuse these bombs now before it's too late. America and Americans are better than this.

Finally, remember that every day, everyone you meet is battling something.

Do the right thing!

About the Author

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