

## **America: March 27, 2023**

It sickens me, and it breaks my heart, to think these thoughts, to write these words.

Following the latest slaughter of children and teachers in another American school, it is clear to me that we have one choice: we must immediately invest in security systems to cover the perimeter and insides of every school in America, and have heavily armed, trained police in every school, every moment that they are open.

This is not the world I had hoped we would all be living in, this is not the world I want to live in, this is not the world I hoped might result from spending my adult life working in the fields of violence prevention and building peaceful communities. This is an acknowledgement of the reality of the world we have created, a country where anyone who wishes can acquire any number and kind of guns they wish. This is, I guess, what we Americans believe Freedom looks like.

My wife is a volunteer reading tutor in our local elementary school. Twice a week I walk over there with her and leave her with a feeling of terror and dread in spite of, actually because of, the beautiful children and incredible teachers and staff in that school. Twice a week I go back to pick her up, feeling a sense of relief that, at least for that day, the slaughter did not happen here.

It is true that nowhere is safe in these United States from the potential of people with guns coming in and killing whoever they wish, whoever they see. There have been, and will be, more mass slaughters in grocery stores, houses of worship, and shopping malls. It could be argued that we need airtight security in each of these places, in all places, but I believe that schools present a different, more definite target.

I do not claim to understand the psychology of the individuals that end up committing these unspeakable acts, but whether it is an act of public suicide, a terrible response to perceived disrespect during childhood, violent video games and media, or who knows what else, it is clear that slaughters of children and adults in American schools will continue to happen. It is not a question of if, but of where and when, and who will be the next to die.

Unlike in Uvalde, the police response to the latest slaughter of children in Tennessee was swift and has been heralded as near perfect; and yet, three beautiful children, and three adults lay dead, as well as the person who killed them. I thank the police who through their bravery and skill limited the number of people who had to die this time, but we have to do more: we must immediately invest in security systems to cover the perimeter and insides of every school in America, and have heavily armed, trained police in every school, every moment that they are open.

I recognize that many people, beginning with me, will hate the thought of making our schools into armed fortresses; I believe that as terrible a choice it is, it is the only choice available to us in America in 2023. I also recognize that this will be an enormously expensive undertaking; just as we tax the sale of automobiles and gasoline to pay for the roads we drive on, I suggest we tax the sales of weapons and ammunition to safeguard children, teachers and staff in our schools. This suggestion is in no way meant to penalize or blame gun owners, but rather to acknowledge their obligation to protect our children and schools, just as drivers through taxes paid help to assure that we have safe and usable roads to drive on.

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