

# Rushing to Judgment on Bus Bomb

In rushing to judgment blaming Iran for a bus bombing in Bulgaria, Israeli officials and neocon writers cited the conventional wisdom about Iran's authorship of a bombing in Argentina in 1994. However, the investigation of that case was deeply compromised by political pressure, recalls Gareth Porter for Lobelog.

By Gareth Porter

Immediately after the terror bombing of a busload of Israeli youth in Burgas, Bulgaria, both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a "senior U.S. official" expressed certainty about Iran's responsibility. Since then, the White House has backed away from that position, after Bulgarian investigators warned against that assumption before the investigation is complete.

Similarly, it is generally assumed that Iran and Hezbollah were responsible for the terrorist bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires on July 18, 1994, because U.S. and Israeli officials, journalists and commentators have repeated that conclusion so often. It was the first reference made by those who were most eager to blame the Burgas bombing on Iran, such as Matthew Levitt and Jeffrey Goldberg.

But that terrorist bombing 18 years ago was not what it has come to appear by the constant drip of unsubstantiated journalistic and political references to it. The identification of that bombing as an Iranian operation should be regarded as a cautionary tale about the consequences of politics determining the results of a terrorist investigation.

The case made by the Argentine prosecutors that Iran and Hezbollah committed that 1994 terrorist bombing has long been cited as evidence that Iran is the world's premier terrorist state. But the Argentine case was fraudulent in its origins and produced a trail of false evidence in service of a frame-up. There is every reason to believe that the entire Argentine investigation was essentially a cover-up that protected the real perpetrators.

That is what I learned from my ten-month investigation in 2006-07 of the so-called AMIA bombing (the Spanish acronym for Argentine Israelite Mutual Association), the results of which were published in early 2008.

William Brencick, who was then chief of the political section at the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires and the primary Embassy contact for the investigation of the AMIA bombing, told me in an interview in June 2007 that the U.S. conviction

about Iranian culpability was based on what he called a “wall of assumptions”, a wall that obstructed an objective analysis of the case.

The first assumption was that it was a suicide bombing, and that such an operation pointed to Hezbollah, and therefore Iran. But the evidence produced to support that assumption was highly suspect. Of 200 initial eyewitnesses to the bombing, only one claimed to have seen the white Renault van that was supposed to have been the suicide car. And the testimony of that lone witness was contradicted by her sister, who said that she had seen only a black and yellow taxicab.

That is only the first of many indications that the official version of how the bombing went down was a tissue of lies. For example:

- The U.S. explosives expert sent soon after the bombing to analyze the crime scene found evidence suggesting that at least some of the explosives had been placed inside the community center, not in a car outside.
- The engine block of the alleged suicide car which police said led them to the arrest of the Shi’a used car salesman and chop shop owner who sold the car, was supposedly found in the rubble with its identification number clearly visible, something any serious bombing team, including Hezbollah, would have erased, unless it was intentionally left to lead to the desired result.
- Representatives of the Menem government twice offered large bribes to the used car dealer in custody to get him to finger others, including three police officials linked to a political rival of Menem. The judge whose bribe was videotaped and shown on Argentine television was eventually impeached.

Apart from an Argentine investigation that led down a false trail, there were serious problems with the motives attributed to Iran and Hezbollah for killing large numbers of Jewish citizens of Argentina. The official explanation was that Iran was taking revenge on the Menem government for having reneged, under pressure from the Clinton administration, on its agreements with Iran on nuclear cooperation.

But in fact, Argentina had only halted two of the three agreements reached in 1987 and 1988, as was revealed, ironically, in documents cited by the Argentine prosecutor’s report on the arrest warrant for Iranian officials dated October 2006 (unfortunately never made available in electronic form).

The documents showed that the Menem government was continuing to send 20 percent enriched uranium to Iran under the third agreement, and there were negotiations continuing both before and after the bombing to resume full nuclear cooperation.

As for Hezbollah, it was generally assumed that it wanted to avenge the Israeli killing of its “ally” Mustafa Dirani in May 1994. But when Hezbollah really wanted to take revenge against Israel, as it did after the Israeli massacre in Qana in 1996, it did not target civilians in a distant country with no relationship to the conflict with Israel; it openly attacked Israel with Katyusha rockets.

It is not clear yet who committed the latest terrorist bombing against Jewish civilians in Burgas, Bulgaria. But the sorry history of that Buenos Aires investigation should not be used to draw a premature conclusion about this matter or any other terrorist action.

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## America’s Twisted Notion of Freedom

In America, “freedom” now means the right to inflict harm on the community, whether it’s the freedom of Wall Street bankers to gamble recklessly, the freedom of the rich to shut factories and off-shore jobs or the freedom to swagger around with deadly weapons. That freedom has struck again in Colorado, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Well here we go again. Late in the evening of July 20, “[a masked gunman](#) entered a Colorado movie theater playing the new Batman movie and “opened fire killing at least 12 people and wounding 50.” The gunman was not a large anthropomorphized bat but rather a young white male, and he “was armed with a rifle, a shotgun and two handguns” all of which he had legally obtained.

This is nothing new in the Land Of The Free. Among the more notable victims of the nation’s love affair with deadly weapons have been Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, William McKinley, John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Ronald Reagan (wounded) and, of course, John Lennon.

Then there are the recent (and periodically ongoing) mass murders among the population at large: the Columbine High School shootings, the Beltway sniper incidents, the Virginia Tech massacre, and the 2011 Tucson killings. To this can

be added the daily shootings that occur in every city in the country. Taking the representative year of 2007, there were 31,224 deaths from gunshots with 17,352 of them (56 percent) being suicides. The numbers have, generally, been going up.

Those who stand against tightening up the nation's presently useless gun laws have a variety of arguments most of which are in good part delusional. Thus:

1. EXCUSE NUMBER ONE Guns don't kill people, people kill people.

a. It is certainly true that while sitting on a shelf, locked in a draw or carried in a holster, guns are inert pieces of machinery and, ultimately, it takes a finger to pull the trigger. Yet this fact is actually irrelevant. It's irrelevant because guns are not manufactured to stay on shelves, in draws or holsters. That inert status has nothing to do with why they exist. So, we can go on and ask:

b. Why are guns manufactured? Why do they exist? Primitive firearms were invented in China sometime in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. They were invented to be used in warfare, that is to kill and injure other people. As the technology spread westward, first into the Arab lands and then to Europe, the technology was improved, but its *raison d'être* (its reason for being) to kill and injure others stayed the same.

The only thing that has changed over time is that in certain lands, particularly the U.S., a monopoly on the possession of such weapons ceased to be held by the state and guns diffused into the population as a whole.

In the United States, this process of diffusion was allowed based on a peculiar interpretation of Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. That amendment says that the right of the citizens to bear arms shall not be infringed. But that statement forms a dependent clause in a sentence that links the right to bear arms to the maintenance of "a well regulated militia."

Apart from the National Guard, the modern U.S. does not maintain militias. And, most of the membership of the National Rifle Association (NRA), along with the other gun-toting tough guys walking the streets of (particularly) the middle and southern U.S., don't even belong to the National Guard.

c. The hard truth is that guns were originally invented, and still today are primarily made, to shoot people. Their other uses: in hunting, to shoot holes in paper targets, to blast clay projectiles out of the air for fun, are strictly secondary to their primary purpose.

d. So the argument that guns don't kill people is a-historical and something of a red herring. Guns are essentially our partners, intimate accessories if you

will, in what is most often criminal activity, facilitating the efficiency of acts of homicide, assault and suicide. At the rate we pursue these activities, we just couldn't maintain the modern level of mayhem without them.

2. EXCUSE NUMBER TWO Guns are most often used for self-defense.

a. If you go on the Web, you can find surveys that allege the use of guns for self-defense numbering in the millions of episodes per year. However, these surveys are often carried out by biased organizations and are methodologically flawed. They have, therefore, been demonstrated to be unreliable.

b. More reliable studies, conducted by unbiased sources such as Harvard University, have shown, among other things, that: very few criminals are shot by law-abiding citizens; most criminals are shot either by the police, or by other criminals; and firearms reported to have been used in self-defense are, most of the time, used against members of a family or erstwhile friends during arguments.

Along the same lines, the statement concerning the Colorado theater massacre issued by Luke O'Dell, a spokesman for the Rocky Mountain Gun Owners Association, reflected the misconception that the answer to gun violence is more guns:

"Potentially, if there had been a law-abiding citizen who had been able to carry [a gun] in the theater [in Colorado], it's possible that the death toll would have been less." One might more plausibly argue that if the shooter had not been able to procure a rifle, a shotgun and two handguns "to carry" into the theater, the death toll would have been zero.

### **Lobby Power**

It seems that it does not matter how many times these massacres take place; nothing is likely to change. Here is what an article, entitled "Still Little Interest In U.S. Gun Control" in the Philadelphia Inquirer of July 22, had to say: "Despite periodic mass shootings the political calculus seems locked down. Most Republicans adamantly oppose tighter gun controls, and most Democrats would prefer to focus on other issues."

Why so? The reason has to do with a very flawed aspect of our political system. Ours is a system that allows a relatively small number of citizens (in this case gun zealots) to form a special interest, or lobby group, that raises and distributes great amounts of money nationwide and, in some parts of the country, exercises strong voting influence.

These lobbies can hold crazy ideas that demonstrably harm society and make us

look like an insane nation to the rest of the world, but that doesn't matter either. The politicians will positively respond anyway to get money and electoral support. In this sense, we live in a land devoid of "national interest." There is only the interest of lobby groups and the politicians controlled by them.

Nor is this situation unique to the problem of the nation's gun laws and the power of the NRA. If we look at foreign policy, we see that similar lobbies skew policy with disastrous results. The Zionist lobby has the entire U.S. government head over heels in support of the basically racist state of Israel. And, this position does demonstrable harm to our standing throughout the Middle East and Muslim world.

It's crazy, but it has been going on for at least 65 years. The Cuban lobby of anti-Castro fanatics has intimidated Washington to blockade, sanction and otherwise isolate Cuba even though the rest of the world is content to trade and have normal relations with the island nation. Our politicians say they take this stand because the Cuban government is a communist dictatorship. So what? Do we have normal relations with China? Do we trade with Vietnam?

These politicians are obviously being less than truthful. They take the stand because they are bought and bullied by a bunch of well-organized, well-funded fanatics. The whole thing is crazy and has been going on since 1960.

There is simply something wrong with our political system. Too few people can command too much power in the name of relatively small minority groups. We need campaign finance reform and much more transparency when it comes to the operations of special interests.

We need shorter electoral periods and limits on how much it can cost to run for any office. We need honest and open regional and national debates on both domestic and foreign policies that affect large numbers of our citizens (whether those citizens know it or not).

And, last but not least, we need a rational rethinking of what the word "freedom" means.

Does "freedom" mean that just about anyone is free to carry weapons that potentially put the rest of us in danger? Free to carry weapons that are most often going to be used to shoot off the carrier's foot, or shoot someone he or she imagines is acting abnormally, or shoot a family member in a heated argument, or, in a fit of depression, to blow one's own brains out? Does it mean that people are free to carry weapons that they may decide to use in an episode of mass murder?

Does “freedom” mean that if you have a lot of money you can use it to corrupt the nation’s politicians so that they distort the positions and policies of government to such a degree that they cease to have any connection to common sense definitions of community or national interest?

Sadly, the answer is yes. That is actually what freedom has come to mean in the U.S. And these stupid definitions of “freedom” are slowly but surely undermining the body politic. There are no super heroes out there to save us: no Superman, no Batman, no Catwoman, and the like. There is just us.

And if we don’t find a way to, in essence, work our way free of the pseudo “freedoms” that are ruining our political system, no one else will. Things will simply get worse.

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## America: A Nation of Wildebeest

**Exclusive:** The slaughter of 12 moviegoers at the new Batman film in Aurora, Colorado, recalls other moments of horror known by names like Columbine, Virginia Tech, Tucson. But the repetition of such gun violence and the lack of a coherent response make Americans seem like a nation of Wildebeest, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Whenever some deranged gunman, armed with an assault rifle or some other combat weapon, slaughters young Americans at a college or a high school or a mall or, now, a movie theater I think of those documentaries showing Wildebeest on their migrations through crocodile-infested rivers.

In their frightened eyes, you can see that the herd knows that each crocodile will pick off an individual Wildebeest, flip it in the air, break its back and then drag it away to be devoured. But the herd still crashes through the river presumably with the understanding that most of them will survive. The Wildebeest may even be emotionally numbed to the fate of the unlucky ones.

In a way, that is what Americans have become. As we send our children off to

school or off to a party or off to the movies, we know instinctively that some of them may well die at the hands of some troubled person who has obtained a powerful weapon and has decided to avenge some imagined slight by murdering strangers.

Sometimes, the dead are in large numbers (like at the Aurora, Colorado, multiplex theater), but usually it's just one or two at a time. We just hope that it's not our kids.

We weep over the tragedy of strangers, but our secret thought is thank goodness it wasn't my son or daughter. We are like the Wildebeest continuing the migration hoping that at the next river it won't be our turn.

At such moments, it's also typical for news media pundits to wave their fingers at politicians for not having the "courage" to stop this mayhem by standing up to the ruthless National Rifle Association and its gun-obsessed fringe. But the harder truth is that the problem is not with America's politicians; it's with the American voters.

There have been politicians who have favored common-sense gun control, but most of them are now former politicians. Remember Michael Dukakis, the Democratic presidential nominee in 1988. He favored strong gun control, and his Republican rival, George H.W. Bush, clobbered him over the issue.

Bush accused Dukakis of wanting to disarm all private citizens. "That is not the American way," declared Bush at one campaign rally. "I feel just the opposite."

Some political observers believe that Dukakis's brave stand for gun control was a key factor in his landslide defeat. And, today, Dukakis is a punch line synonymous with "loser" while Bush is revered by Official Washington, recently honored with a flattering documentary on HBO.

Bush and other pro-gun Republican presidents then packed the U.S. Supreme Court with like-minded justices who reversed long-standing precedents and reinterpreted the Second Amendment as an individual right to bear arms, rather than a communal need to have a "well-regulated Militia."

There is merit to both sides of that argument. When the Second Amendment was adopted by the First Congress (and was then ratified in 1791), the young United States was a frontier nation where firearms also were important for hunting and for protection from such threats as outlaws, European rivals disputing America's boundaries, and Native Americans resisting encroachment into their lands.

But the Founders' real intent for the Second Amendment can be better understood from their actions in the Second Congress when the Militia Acts were passed,



mandating that every white man of military age must purchase a musket and other equipment. Black men were excluded from this provision.

In those early decades, the Second Amendment also wasn't regarded as a universal right. African-American slaves and even many free blacks were denied the right to own guns in Southern and border states under the so-called "Black Codes," laws largely affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision.

As the United States became more urban and even in some frontier towns of the Wild West laws were passed to reduce violence by placing restrictions on guns. During the Prohibition Era, when gangsters began using machineguns, the federal government stepped in with legislation to restrict these dangerous weapons.

However, the political tide began to turn in the 1980s as a resurgent Right saw a potent issue championing broader "gun rights." The National Rifle Association evolved from being mostly a gun club training young people in the safe use of firearms into a ruthless and feared political lobby.

The 1988 election with George H.W. Bush portraying Michael Dukakis as an un-American weakling for favoring gun control marked a turning point in the national debate, but Dukakis was far from alone as a politician whose career ended ignominiously because he crossed the NRA.

By the early 1990s, the anti-gun-control lobby was drawing populist support from right-wing "militias" who saw the violent standoffs at Ruby Ridge and Waco as signs of a massive federal (even global) conspiracy to disarm Americans. Right-wing radio talkers and pols recognized guns as another wedge issue to divide the nation.

Advocates for "common-sense gun laws" soon were reeling, as the NRA punched loophole after loophole in gun restrictions. Pro-gun politics also merged with the Right's larger strategy of undoing all kinds of federal regulations. In effect, the populist rhetoric of "gun rights" gave macho muscle to freeing Wall Street bankers to have the "freedom" to do whatever they wanted.

So, as the nation grieves the 12 dead moviegoers who were gunned down while watching the new Batman film as Aurora takes its place with Columbine, Virginia Tech, Tucson and other sites of infamous slaughters it's almost tiresome to see the various players reprise their predictable parts.

We have politicians offering prayers; celebrities expressing shock via Twitter; gun lobbyists blaming the latest deranged individual, not his weapons; and, yes, sanctimonious pundits lamenting the lack of "courage" among politicians (though many of the same pundits join in snickering whenever the name "Dukakis" is mentioned).

We also have the latest group of grieving families with that stunned look of disbelief in their eyes. The rest of us will join the candle-burning vigils and tear up over the stories of promising lives cut short. But privately we will thank goodness that the victims of this latest massacre (or the more numerous dead from the many daily examples of less-newsworthy gun violence) weren't our own children.

We know in our gut that it is really only a matter of luck. We are like the Wildebeest on migration, plunging into a crocodile-infested river hoping that we and our loved ones emerge on the other side.

**To read more of Robert Parry's writings, you can now order his last two books, *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, at the discount price of only \$16 for both. For details on the special offer, [click here.](#)]**

**Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](http://neckdeepbook.com). His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.**

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