

A WORLD IN MOTION



P1 | UNITED STATES

The latest mass shooting incident in Las Vegas has again sparked the controversial gun control debate in the US.

P2 | SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi's recent geopolitical moves, including deals with Russia, position it to possibly take over as the primary influencing power in the Middle East.

P3 | TURKEY

A consular row between Turkey and the US is the latest in a string of diplomatic issues that have seen the two nations' relationships deteriorate.

P4 | PROJECTS

EAGLE'S WINGS—Supporting a Chinese missionary couple working in South Asia.



THE NUMBERS: GUNS IN THE UNITED STATES



489

The number of people injured in the Las Vegas mass shooting (58 killed)



300 million +

The number of privately-owned guns in the US (42% of world figures)



66%

The percentage of US gun owners who own multiple guns (29% own 5+ guns)



1871

The year the National Rifle Association (NRA) was founded

THE COMPLEX AND DIVISIVE ISSUE OF GUN CONTROL



By Donnelly McClelland

America's most powerful gun-rights lobbying group has claimed "nothing could have been done" to prevent the mass shooting in Las Vegas in which 58 people were killed and more than 480 injured. In the aftermath of the shooting perpetrated by a 64-year-old former accountant, many have called on politicians to seize on the movement to demand tougher restrictions on guns. *(The Independent)*

[Note: The belief that nothing could have been done to stop the shooting has been expressed by many on the political 'left', not only those in favour of gun rights.]

A complex and divisive issue

There is no denying that the issue of guns and gun violence in America is a complex and divisive issue. A Pew Centre Research article in June 2017 states: "As a nation, the US has a deep and enduring connection to guns. Integrated into the fabric of American society since the country's earliest days, guns remain a point of pride for many Americans. Whether for hunting, sport shooting or personal protection, most gun owners count the right to bear arms as central to their freedom. At the same time, the results of gun-related violence have shaken the nation, and debates over gun policy remain sharply polarised."

Much has been written in the aftermath of mass shootings in America regarding motivations and the role of mental health. But the matter of gun control regulations continues to elude and divide. Debate surrounding the effectiveness of legislation in curbing gun violence has raged on both sides of the

political divide. Many prominent figures were accused of 'politicising' the most recent shooting in Las Vegas, and political 'mud-slinging' abounded.

The political divide

The Pew Centre Research survey, conducted in March/April 2017, indicates that 44% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents are gun owners, compared with 20% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents. According to the survey, there is also a partisan divide on views of gun policy: for example, Republican gun owners are more resistant than Democratic gun owners to a database that tracks gun sales and to a ban on assault-style weapons and high-capacity magazines.

This same survey demonstrated that substantial majorities of both Democrats and Republicans favour preventing the mentally ill from purchasing guns, banning gun purchases by people on 'no fly' lists and the requirement of background checks for private sales and at gun shows. Yet Congress continues to maintain current gun policies. There are two possible reasons for this: firstly, gun rights advocates are much more politically active than gun regulation advocates, and secondly, gun rights advocates are much more likely to view gun policy as an important voting issue. In light of this, many liberal groups have questioned the role of the lobby group, the National Rifle Association (NRA).

How powerful is the NRA?

Research shows that gun rights groups have been more effective than gun regulation groups in exercising their First Amendment right to lobby the government. The NRA is a powerful political force, not simply due to the direct funding of legislators, but by means of political ads on TV, direct mail campaigns or efforts to mobilise their membership on Election Day.

Lee Drutman, a senior fellow at the think tank New America and a Vox contributing writer, maintains that the NRA has the ability to mobilise and excite huge numbers of voters. "The way you rise up in Republican politics is by supporting gun rights

NEWS HEADLINES



Liberians have voted in large numbers in the first election run entirely by the country's institutions and security forces since the civil war. The election is to choose a successor to Africa's first elected female president and Nobel Peace laureate Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Ex-football star George Weah and Vice-President Joseph Boakai are the main contenders in the race to succeed her. Liberia, founded by freed US slaves in the 19th Century, has not had a smooth transfer of power in 73 years.



The White House ruled out talks with North Korea except to discuss the fate of

Americans held there, again appearing to rebuke Secretary of State Rex Tillerson who said Washington was directly communicating with Pyongyang on its nuclear and missile programmes.



The **Spanish** government has rejected a statement of independence signed by Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont and dismissed calls for mediation. Catalonia's regional leader opened the door to a unilateral declaration of independence from Spain on Sunday 1 October, after voters defied a violent police crackdown and, according to regional officials, voted 90% in favour of breaking away.

issues, and you do that because there are a lot of Republican voters in the coalition who care very deeply about gun rights," Drutman says.

According to a variety of sources, the NRA publicly grades members of Congress from A to F on their perceived friendliness to gun rights. Those ratings can have a serious effect on poll numbers and even cost pro-gun control candidates a seat.

The Pew Centre states the following: "Overall, 19% of all US gun owners say they belong to the NRA. And, among Republicans, conservatives have significantly higher rates of membership – 28% vs. 17% of moderate or liberal Republicans."

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

In the wake of the Las Vegas shooting, those who oppose stricter gun control laws have been widely criticised, especially by liberal media sources. And from a US Christian perspective, the issue is clearly a complex grey area with many different voices expressing diverse opinions.

But is there something more to the issue than just the question of gun control? Mike Burnard, director of INcontext International, writes the following: "While fiercely opposing the current gun laws in the US, the entertainment industry

and news media have continued to glorify violence and, in doing so, have created a fertile ground for violence to continue. Amazingly, some of the same people who fiercely oppose the gun control bill are also the same people who direct Hollywood movies with explicit violence and gun fights. If this link is ignored, legal solutions will be futile." He suggests that the Las Vegas shooting (and others like it) was the result of "a combination of violent industries, corrupt societies and apathetic communities... the prevention of future tragedies will depend on 'bottom-up' solutions more than on just changing 'top-down' legalities." [This will be explored further in an upcoming perspective from INcontext.]

One of INcontext's partners in the US commented on what he sees as being the root of the matter – beyond issues of weapons used in violent acts (such as guns, knives, bombs or cars), he says that the problem lies in the heart of man without Christ. For the Christian, this needs to be addressed as well as matters of gun control.

PRAY > For the government to seek the Lord's wisdom in dealing with complex issues > For believers to be instruments of change and reconciliation > For communities to seek lasting solutions through a unified approach

DEVELOPING SAUDI AND RUSSIAN RELATIONS



By Andrew Richards

Russia and Saudi Arabia have clinched a number of lucrative deals as King Salman paid the first official visit to Russia by a Saudi monarch. Reports say the deals range from an arms deal worth \$3bn (£2.3bn) to a \$1bn energy investment fund. The king said the world's two top oil exporters would continue to collaborate to stabilise oil markets. However, the agenda also included issues on which the two sides deeply differ, including the war in Syria. Both sides are involved in the conflict, but on opposing sides. (*BBC News*)

Saudi's growing influence

Saudi's recent geopolitical moves position it to possibly take over as the primary influencing power in the Middle East. Israel has thus far been at the epicentre of shaping the future of the Middle East – its alliances with Europe and the US, together with various Arab states, have played a key role in the region. The Palestinian question for one speaks for itself, but add the Iranian threat and a nuclear arms race, and Israel is probably the one country known in every household throughout the Middle East. But now enter Saudi Arabia, which is quickly becoming the most armed country in the region, and with its ambitious

"Vision 2030", the Sunni kingdom could not only shape the future of the Middle East but could also spell the end of Islam.

The Russian connection

King Salman's visit to Russia has been described as "historic" in that it was the first ever visit by a sitting Saudi monarch. But even more than that, the king's visit to Russia is a strategic move in courting the friend of its enemies. Russia could be considered an enemy, because of its backing of the Assad regime in Syria and Iran's fighting in Yemen – both of whom are in opposition to Saudi Arabia's forces in Syria and Yemen.

The Saudis know that Russia sold military equipment to Iran, and they could be courting the Russians in a bid to undermine the Russia-Iran arms sales. Iran is currently under international sanctions, including the purchasing of missiles, and if not for Russia, the Iranians would be left without the ability to either attack others or defend itself. In 2016, Iran began negotiations with Russia for a possible \$10bn arms deal that includes the purchasing of tanks, planes and helicopters. It appears Iran is arming itself for war.

The Iranian trigger

The Saudi government has also been in negotiations with the US to purchase the now infamous THAAD missile defence system (infamous because of the controversy surrounding their supply thereof to South Korea, despite China and Russia's objections). After signing various arms deals with Russia, including the purchase of S400 missiles (the same ones Russia supplied to Iran), the Trump administration agreed to sell the THAAD system, with up to 360 missiles, to Saudi Arabia. The arming of Saudi Arabia is a way for

NEWS HEADLINES



Iraqi forces announced they had captured Islamic State's last stronghold in northern Iraq, leaving the militant group holed up near the Syrian border as its self-proclaimed "caliphate" shrinks further. The town of Hawija and the surrounding areas fell in an offensive by US-backed Iraqi government troops and Iranian-trained and armed Shi'ite paramilitary groups known as Popular Mobilisation.



Syria is in the throes of its worst fighting since the battle for eastern Aleppo last year, with heavy air strikes causing hundreds of civilian casualties, aid agencies said. Russia and a US-led coalition are carrying out separate air strikes in Syria ostensibly aimed at defeating Islamic State militants. September was the deadliest month of 2017 for civilians with daily reports of attacks on residential areas.



A three-year-old girl has been named Kathmandu's next "living goddess" after her predecessor retired. Trishna Shakya has been named the new Kumari of **Nepal's** capital, continuing an ancient tradition that sees young girls worshipped as the living embodiment of the Hindu goddess Taleju. She was selected ahead of three other candidates after a 21-day process that included spending a night among heads of slaughtered goats and buffaloes.

the US to strengthen their biggest Arab ally in the Middle East, against the potential threat from Iran. Iran, known for its anti-American threats, has once again threatened the US with a missile attack if the Trump administration imposes new sanctions against Tehran. (Mr Trump is expected to declare that Iran is not in compliance with international agreements to curb its nuclear programme – which would lead to renewed sanctions.)

Could Iranian missiles ever reach the US mainland? The answer is no, but Iran could launch missile attacks against US bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE. Iran could also choose to attack Saudi Arabia, its Sunni enemy (especially because of its alliance with the US), or it could attack Israel (also a US ally), which it has already threatened by stating it would "wipe Israel off the map".

If Iran attacked Israel, the Jewish state would most certainly retaliate, with the possibility of using a nuclear weapon to neutralise the Iranian threat. But even if Israel did not use its nuclear arsenal, and only confronted Iran by conventional military means, it would throw the whole Middle East into another war due to various alliances, resulting in millions more refugees fleeing the region.

If Iran attacked Saudi Arabia, the US would certainly come to its defence, primarily by means of military arms support but probably not troops. Russia would likely back Iran financially and by means of arms, and thus would continue the 'never-ending' US-Russia fight (Afghanistan, Vietnam, East Ukraine, Yemen, Syria).

PRAY > For the Lord to work through these leaders of strategic nations, even if they don't acknowledge Him > For Muslims questioning their faith to find their answers and hope in Jesus

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Taking into consideration the outflow of the Arab Spring revolution (the war in Syria and the violent reign of the Islamic State), never has there been such a time where millions of Muslims are questioning their faith, with the harvest so ripe for the Kingdom of God. The region's troubles also represent a kingdom divided as Islam fights with itself, raising the possibility of a future without Islam as it crumbles from within.

Saudi Arabia arming itself with ballistic missiles from Russia and defensive missiles from the US is further proof that Islam is at a turning point. Saudi Arabia is preparing for war, and with war possibly looming in Northern Iraq against the Kurds, and with the ongoing wars in Yemen and Syria, a great Sunni-Shia (Saudi-Iran) clash would throw the Middle East into mayhem from which it would most likely not recover. Countless millions would flee to the West, and if the current refugee crisis is any indication of how ripe the harvest is, then the Church in the West would have no choice but to respond.

Reports out of Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria all claim that more and more converts are filling their churches. The Church should respond with a visionary approach whereby it can establish resources now to accommodate future converts if Islam falls. Islam, however, will not fall without a fight, and many more Christian martyrs will pay a price until the doors to the harvest are fully opened.

TURKEY-US RELATIONS DETERIORATE



By **Cherolyn Amery**

Turkey and the US have become embroiled in a consular row, mutually scaling back visa services. The American mission in Ankara said it had suspended all non-immigrant visa services in order to "reassess" Turkey's commitment to staff security. Turkey's embassy in Washington replied by suspending "all visa services". The latest spat began when a US consulate worker in Istanbul was held over suspected links to a cleric blamed for last year's failed coup in Turkey. Washington condemned the move as baseless and damaging to bilateral relations. (**BBC News**)

Deteriorating Turkey-US relations

According to Turkish officials, Metin Topuz (the Turkish citizen working for the US consulate in Istanbul) had links to the organisation of Fethullah Gulen, the religious leader and businessman

exiled to the US who supposedly masterminded the failed coup attempt in Turkey in 2016. Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul insists that Turkey has the right to prosecute a Turkish citizen for "acts carried out in Turkey", and that Topuz does not have diplomatic immunity. The Economist says, however, that the arrest was merely the "spark that lit the powder keg" of the latest diplomatic implosion between Turkey and the US, described as "the lowest point [in Turkey-US relations] in over four decades". On 21 September this year, US president Donald Trump said that the two countries were "close as we've ever been", but this appears to be far from reality.

From the Turkish perspective, the biggest issue is the refusal by the US to extradite Gulen back to Turkey for his alleged role in the coup attempt. Turkey has also been angered by the US support for Kurdish YPG forces in Syria, who Turkey says are an extension of the PKK (a banned group in Turkey).

From the US perspective, Turkey damaged bilateral relations by imprisoning US missionary-pastor Andrew Brunson after the failed coup attempt on charges of involvement with Gulen. Mr Trump has appealed to Turkey for his release, and 78 members of Congress signed a letter echoing the appeal, but neither have succeeded thus far. The US has also been unsettled by Turkey's actions in Syria, which have shifted to align more with the Russian-Iranian

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

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If you have any questions or comments relating to the articles in this publication or on the website, please feel free to contact us at any time.

INcontext Team Details



Contact:

General - Mike:

Mobile - 0828657380

mike@incontextministries.org

AWIM - Andrew:

andrew@incontextministries.org

Communication & Prayer - Donnelly:

donnely@incontextministries.org

Seminars - Eric:

eric@incontextministries.org

Events - Hanlie:

hanlie@incontextministries.org

Projects - Gustav:

gustav@incontextministries.org

Travel /IT- Stefan:

stefan@incontextministries.org

Book orders - Beatrice:

lom@incontextministries.org



INcontext Banking Details

SOUTH AFRICA

Bank: ABSA

Name: INcontext

Cheque acc no: 4078983933

Branch: Durbanville (632 005)

agenda (Russia and Iran back the Syrian government, while the US backs Syrian opposition groups).

One of the key reasons why the Turkey-US relationship is so critical is that they are allies in NATO. There is a NATO base in Turkey that is used by the US, and the US has conducted operations against IS from within Turkey. The Economist writes that good relations between the two countries are in both of their interests, but with "leaders as impulsive and thin-skinned as Mr Trump and Mr Erdogan at the helm, nothing is certain".

Pivot towards Russia

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, the US would be deeply concerned about Turkey's seeming pivot towards Russia. In recent days, Turkish troops have coordinated with Russia in a joint operation into Syria, despite having been on opposite sides in the early years of the war. At a meeting between Russian president Vladimir Putin and Mr Erdogan in Ankara (the Turkish capital) on 28 September, Mr Putin "declared the right conditions now existed to end the [Syrian war]" (Aljazeera).

In 2016, Turkey and Russia agreed to restart a natural-gas pipeline project, and in September this year, Mr Erdogan signed a deal to purchase a Russian surface-to-air missile – something that, according to Carlotta Gall and Andrew Higgins of the New York Times, "[cemented] a recent rapprochement with Russia" but "flies in the face of cooperation within the NATO alliance". While the US and EU would like to keep Turkey from "entering Russia's sphere of influence", Turkey appears to have lost faith in its relationship with the West. Gall and Higgins report that "Mr Erdogan has expressed personal admiration for Mr Putin", and that he seems to have a "preference for the Russian model, with its sense of restoring a lost empire, returning Turkey to a more independent place in the world and rejecting Western democracy".

Friendship and cooperation between Turkey and Russia is not a natural state of affairs: for centuries, the two countries have been rivals in the Black Sea and the Caucasus region, and during the Cold War era, Turkey was strongly allied with the West in opposition of the Soviet Union. From a Russian perspective, however, any means of bringing about division within NATO would be advantageous to its own interests, including friendship with an old enemy.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Much has been written about Turkey's geopolitical significance and influence, as it straddles Europe, Asia and the Muslim world. On today's political chessboard, it remains a key player; not just in terms of influencing the power balance between the US and Russia or its role in the Syrian conflict, but also from the point of view that it is accommodating hundreds of thousands of refugees who could otherwise find their way to Europe and add to the tension already felt in those countries. Even though a visa dispute may seem like a small matter, Aljazeera's Diane Eastbrook writes that "[this recent diplomatic tension] has repercussions throughout Europe and the Middle East."

Within the strongly secular (yet increasingly Islamic) nation of Turkey, there is very little Christian presence. Churches are few, and Christian missionaries face multiple challenges and threats. The US sends an estimated 5,600 missionaries per year to Asia, many of them going via Turkey. The current visa restriction will impact those US missionaries who are already in Turkey (seeking to renew visas) and others wanting to enter Turkey as a mid-way stop before going further. Pray with us that the small Christian remnant would be strengthened, that they would be able to influence this key nation for good, and that missionary workers would be able to still travel in and through the country.

PRAY > For those in authority as they negotiate complex relationships > For Christian workers who may be negatively impacted by visa restrictions

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION



PROJECT EAGLE'S WINGS

Supporting a Chinese missionary couple working in South Asia

China remains one of the most strategic nations within a mission context. The biggest and longest revival in Christian history is slowly but surely transforming into a mission movement. This movement presents the global Church with one of the biggest opportunities of this generation. Chinese missionaries are now preparing to reach the unreached world with a life-changing message as their mandate and the Kingdom of God as their goal.

INcontext is privileged to partner with the House-Church movement in this ground-breaking endeavour of sending Chinese missionaries into the '10/40 window'. We have commissioned a Chinese missionary couple to South Asia and have committed to the leadership of the underground network and Nexus Mission to support this couple.

If you would like to contribute to the support of this couple, please make use of the INcontext bank details and use EaglesWings together with your email as reference.

For more information on this project, please contact our project department: gustav@incontextministries.org or visit our website [HERE](http://www.incontextinternational.org).