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Both 'sides of the pond' discuss gun control reform

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US President Obama, with Vice President Joe Biden by his side, delivers a speech on gun control in the wake of the Sandy Hook massacre. Photo: Ron Sachs/CNP/Corbis

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LA VIE JOLIE

The Connecticut shooting which left 20 children and six adults dead at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown could ultimately lead to tighter gun control in the US.

Twenty-year-old Adam Lanza shot his mother in her bed before driving to Sandy Hook Elementary School armed with semi-automatic rifles and handguns. He then fatally shot two first grade classrooms of six and seven-year olds and several staff members, before turning the gun on himself.

Within hours of the news spreading across social networks, newswires and TV broadcasters, there were calls from gun control lobbyists and politicians alike to tighten gun laws.

The White House announced last week that Vice President Joe Biden is to lead the gun control task force, which will propose new gun control policies in the wake of the shootings.

Meanwhile, amidst talks from both sides of the pond about gun reform, there have been reports of gun 'buy back' programmes across the US where citizens are handing their guns to police departments in a huge gesture of solidarity to Sandy Hook victims.

Even the country's biggest pro-gun lobbying group, the National Rifle Association kept unusually quiet in the immediate wake of Sandy Hook and released a statement a week after the shooting, in which it promised to 'offer meaningful contributions to help make sure this never happens again.'

The shootings are the fourth gun-related massacre to take place during President Barack Obama's presidency.

In an emotional speech given at an interfaith vigil in Newtown just days after the attack, President Obama gave strong hints that he was considering some sort of gun law and promised to use "whatever power this office holds" to prevent more tragedies.

"No single law, no set of laws can eliminate evil from the world or prevent every senseless act of violence in our society, but that can't be an excuse for inaction. Surely we can do better than this," he said.

James Cooke, former Scotland Yard officer with over 30 years experience in gun and knife crime, described the shootings as "a horrendous corner-turning event" which he believes could lead to tighter gun laws.

"I do not see Americans voting for no guns at all — it's in their constitution of which they are immensely proud," he told *The Positive*. "But there are masses that can be done without banning firearms completely."

The main issue, he said, is the use and volume of "high-powered automatic weaponry" which enables citizens to fire dozens of rounds rather than just one or two.

In addition to having no restrictions on the amount of guns a person can own, it is relatively easy to buy ammunition. There is also a dearth of joined-up services from police departments, as well as the lack of decent mental health services to monitor 'at risk' people. America's gun policies seem poised for change.

"My strong belief is that automatic weapons should be confined to gun ranges only and locked up in safe storage rather than being kept at home," said Cooke. "It should be harder to buy ammunition, too. And mental health is also a huge issue. The weapon is just a tool for a person's behaviour. If this isn't looked into at the same time as tighter gun controls, we're going to have a problem," he added.

Yet Cooke is convinced that the shootings will be the turning point for reform and ultimately, a safer America.

"This is going to have deep repercussions," he said. "The emotional impact on the massacre of so many infants will motivate people into action."

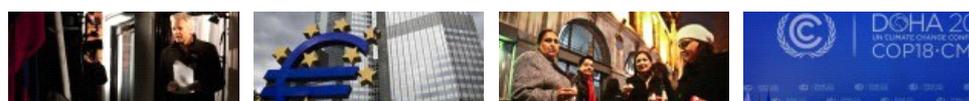
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