

White nationalism and gun violence are two sides of the same coin

The right of a people to bear arms should not be more important than the right to live in peace

ADAM JEFFERS

As US President Donald Trump flew into Ohio and Texas this week, protesters lined the streets outside the venues where he was meeting survivors and families of victims of two shootings that claimed 31 lives in less than 24 hours.

Many held placards condemning his rhetoric for fuelling the hate behind the attacks and his failure to introduce better gun controls. One sign in Dayton simply read: "You are why."

These demonstrators have been joined by a phalanx of politicians and public officials in a chorus growing ever louder over these twin evils in American society. For while the US has long wrangled over gun ownership laws, the shootings have brought into sharp focus the nation's failure to tackle white supremacy.

The 21-year-old white male accused of killing 22 people in a Walmart supermarket in El Paso on the Mexican border allegedly wrote a manifesto filled with white supremacist language and hate aimed at the Hispanic community. Meanwhile the alleged perpetrator of the nine fatalities in Dayton, Ohio, a 24-year-old white male, was reportedly obsessed with violent ideologies.

Yet even as Mr Trump called for the country to "condemn racism, bigotry and white supremacy" in the wake of the attacks, he

followed that by saying: "Mental illness and hatred pull the trigger. Not the gun", drawing condemnation from mental health experts and accusations that he was making excuses for violent criminal behaviour, without any psychiatric evidence to back them up. And instead of supporting gun control measures proposed by Congress, he has instead suggested reforms of mental health laws and blamed video games for glorifying violence.

Mass shootings threaten to turn the country into a 21st century powder keg. In the past few months, the nation has been shaken to its core by gun massacres from Sebring, Florida, to Gilroy, California, bringing the total number of mass shootings in the country to more than one per day. The last time mass shootings reached such a frequency was 2016, which saw 382 incidents.

Gun ownership is enshrined in the Constitution, a legacy rooted in the very foundations of the US.

Gun violence dates back to the Civil War; one of the founding fathers of the nation, Alexander Hamilton, was himself killed in a duel to the death with his political rival Aaron Burr in 1804. Texas law today still permits the open carrying of a handgun and allows two individuals to go toe-to-toe and settle their differences in a street fight. Since the violence and exploitation of the natives who first inhabited



People hold a candlelight vigil for victims of the terrorist attack at El Paso in Texas.

American soil, one might question whether our motto should actually be "in guns we trust".

As the nation and the world watch the growing number of mass shootings with alarm,

Foreign powers will keep vying for dominance

CON COUGHLIN

The most challenging part of the US-led coalition's involvement in the Syrian conflict was supposed to be the military campaign to defeat ISIS's so-called caliphate. Instead, now that ISIS has been defeated and the caliphate no longer exists, dealing with the many issues that have arisen in the aftermath of its demise is proving to be no less difficult.

For, as Syria's bitter civil war nears its endgame, with regime forces attempting to defeat the last remaining pockets of rebel resistance in Idlib province, the country is now becoming a battlefield in a wider struggle between rival powers, one that could lead to significant changes to the global landscape.

At the heart of this powerplay lies Washington's determination to ensure the protection of pro-Western groups, such as the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which did the lion's share of the fighting against the caliphate. To this end, Washington is trying to set up a "buffer zone" that will afford protection to the Kurdish border region between Turkey and regime-controlled Syria.

The American initiative, though, is being challenged by Ankara, which remains deeply suspicious of any arrangement that allows the Kurds to run their own affairs, as well as by Bashar Al Assad's regime, which remains determined to reclaim control of the entire country.

Tensions over the Kurds' predicament came to the fore this week when Mark Esper, the new



The US is wary of making the same mistakes in Syria as it did in Iraq more than a decade ago.

US defence secretary, issued a blunt warning against any attempt by Turkey to launch a military incursion against Turkish-held areas. He told Ankara that any such move would be "unacceptable", and that the US would resist any Turkish invasion of northern Syria.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has warned repeatedly that his country is preparing for a military offensive in Syria against the People's Protection Units, the Kurdish militia known as the YPG, which has received US backing as the main Kurdish

element in the SDF.

The prospect of a direct confrontation between the US and Turkey has been averted after the two sides agreed to establish a joint operations centre to coordinate the running of a buffer zone for the Kurds in north-eastern Syria.

Yet, significant differences remain about the size and administration of the zone, with the Turks continuing to insist that it should be 32 kilometres deep in order to address their security concerns, while the Americans believe it should be no larger than

12km. Nor has any agreement been reached on how security is to be maintained in the proposed area, which will also be used as a "peace corridor" to allow displaced Syrians to return to their country.

The US is opposed to Turkey having responsibility for the zone because of fears they will use their military presence to confront the Kurds. But Washington has made little progress with its diplomatic efforts to persuade European and other international partners to take on the mission – yet another shameful example

of the Europeans trying to wash their hands of their involvement in the conflict.

The situation on the ground is further complicated by the double standards Turkey has demonstrated through its dealings with both Moscow and Washington in recent weeks.

Despite the Trump administration's anger over Ankara's recent deal with Moscow to buy S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems, which raises some serious questions about Turkey's continued membership of the Nato alliance, the US relies heavily on the use

While the war against ISIS has been won, the struggle for post-conflict Syria is set to continue for some time to come