Well, as we heard in the news earlier, the United States is still reeling from that awful shooting in Colorado that killed twelve people in the movie studio and wounded dozens more. It’s emerged that the gunman, James Holmes, bought six thousand rounds of ammunition over the internet, which rather highlights America’s relaxed gun laws, so why is it that, despite this and other shootings, weapons remain so freely available? Joining me to discuss this and to talk about the Olympics and much else is the American Ambassador in London, Louis Susman. Welcome Mr Ambassador.

Good morning, Andrew.

Let’s start talking about this awful event. America’s gun laws are kind of famous around the world for being more relaxed than almost anybody else’s. Do you think this may be the moment when that starts to re-enter the political debate? It’s been something that’s hard for American politicians at the sort of presidential level to talk about.
LOUIS SUSMAN:
Well I think first and foremost, we have to send our condolences to the families in this tragedy. President Obama has ordered all American flags in government buildings, including my embassy, to be flown at half mast. And it’s a tragedy, it’s a terrible tragedy. I think the second issue that we have to face is the fact that obviously this was a deranged person. He had no history of problems, but obviously he had a lot of problems. Now interject that with his ability to go and buy four guns legally at a gun store in America and be able to go and buy six thousand rounds, as you said, of ammunition on the internet, well you know what does that tell you? It tells you that our system, okay, the availability of ammunitions and guns could be improved. We have a very strong lobby that supports very strongly the second amendment - right to bear arms. We agree there’s a right to bear arms, but appropriate arms. I don’t think anyone needs an AK47, for example. So will it rise in this election year? I’m not sure. Will it continue to be a objective of President Obama to strengthen the laws especially on the internet? It’s for sure.

ANDREW MARR:
For sure. What about just the sheer level of violence in films and television shows and all the rest of it? It seems to be going on and we’re constantly told that’s got no relationship to how people behave in the real world, and yet you have to ask yourself when it comes to, you know, a Batman film, in this particular case, whether there may be some connection.

LOUIS SUSMAN:
Well first place, this is a global issue. This isn’t just an American issue.

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah, absolutely.

LOUIS SUSMAN:
But you know Batman, who came from comic books in my era, I’m sure when we looked at it Batman wasn’t the most violent thing you’ve ever seen in television and movies. People walking around, blowing everything up, enormous weaponry, etcetera, has to have an effect. On the same token, we have free speech and there’s a
balance between what you can do. But I think that there’s no question that it’s had an effect.

ANDREW MARR:
In the few days ahead, as the Ambassador you have the Republican contender Mitt Romney in town meeting all sorts of political leaders and going to the Olympics because he was of course the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics organiser, and you’ve got Michelle Obama. Do you have a sort of slight dance of who you’re having where? Is it awkward? Do you have to avoid them meeting up? How does it work?

LOUIS SUSMAN:
Well it isn’t awkward at all. First and foremost, we are thrilled that the First Lady is leading our delegation.

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

LOUIS SUSMAN:
She is immensely popular here in London, as you know.

ANDREW MARR:
She is.

LOUIS SUSMAN:
She and the Queen have become quite close and good friends. And she will be a fantastic representative for us all through the Olympics. Governor Romney, as you said, was former head, he’s an American, I believe his wife has a horse in the equestrian part of it, and I’m thrilled he’s coming. It’s delightful and it’s important that all Americans come and enjoy this great event.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay, so you don’t have to keep them apart or anything?

LOUIS SUSMAN:
ANDREW MARR:
Talking about the American presidential race, it’s clear that the money question is big again. Now last time round, Obama, working with people like yourself, slightly changed the rules and raised a huge amount of money. Now Mitt Romney seems to be outspending him. Is this a sort of financial arms race that he’s started and can’t win?

LOUIS SUSMAN:
Well first place, I never try to correct Andrew Marr, but I don’t think he’s outspending him yet; he’s outraising him at this point.

ANDREW MARR:
Outraising him, alright.

LOUIS SUSMAN:
And the reason, if you look at the raising, is because the Supreme Court issued a case that said - it’s called Citizens Versus United - which has allowed these superpacts for people to give unlimited amount of money, with not disclosing who they are, and spend it as long as they aren’t in coordination with the candidate on the candidate’s behalf. That has never happened before. It has opened a new Pandora’s box of fundraising that more wealthy individuals can affect the election. So taking that into account, that’s been the difference. In terms of traditional fundraising, both in contributions and the internet, the President has outraised Governor Romney at this point.

ANDREW MARR:
The other huge story in the world at the moment, of course, is Syria. Is there a sense … Do you think America has a sense of frustrated impotence about being held back from intervening more, or do you think that the fear about what might follow Assad reins in the West?

LOUIS SUSMAN:
I don’t think the fear is a factor at this point. Better the devil you know than you don’t
know. But I think that all of us feel, every country, with the exception at this moment of potentially Russia and China, feels that what’s going on in Syria is a horrible situation - the loss of lives, it’s obviously a civil war. And while I don’t think that there’s any appetite in my country at this moment for military intervention. I think non-lethal weapon… non-lethal aid is being given and we’re being as supportive as we can, and quite frankly both President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton have said that he must go.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay. Ambassador, thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.

LOUIS SUSMAN:
Well thanks for having me, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS