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An Unintended Consequence of Gun Control

by Benedict D. LaRosa

Gun control laws, like all ill-advised measures, have unintended, often unfortunate, consequences. This is especially true in the post-9/11 environment,

Recently, Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge upgraded the nation's alert status because of credible intelligence that several financial buildings in New York City; Newark, New Jersey; and Washington, D.C. — including the building housing the New York Stock Exchange — are intended terrorist targets. Immediately, heavily armed, submachine-gun-toting government agents surrounded the buildings — five in all — and tightened security in the area. Police closed streets, rerouted traffic, established checkpoints, and searched vehicles in the vicinity.

What about other potential targets? While federal, state, and local police were guarding these buildings, who was guarding the thousands of other potential targets throughout the United States? How long can this level of security be maintained at these five buildings? What if the terrorists wait until the extra security is removed, and then act? What if they strike at unguarded buildings somewhere else?

This is where the wisdom of our Founders comes into play. They advocated a nation-at-arms where everyone who wished would be armed. They went so far as to guarantee this right in the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. As men of wisdom, intelligence, and education, they knew that no one can always predict the type of threat the nation might face. So they prepared for every eventuality by providing not only for national and state military (and naval) forces, but also for an armed populace.

Why? Beyond the obvious need to counterbalance government gone awry, they understood that point defense is better than area defense. That is, a building, farm house, home, bridge, or road intersection is easier to defend with few people than is a collection of buildings, farm houses, or homes, or a wider geographic area. Since national and state forces are, by their very nature and numbers, insufficient to provide point defense of all such structures and places, it stands to reason that the owners or inhabitants of these structures and places would be in a better position to guard and defend them. Besides, they would have a vested interest in doing so. The

national and state forces would then be free to conduct offensive operations to subdue any hostile force rather than scatter its limited resources throughout the country attempting to defend inadequately everyone's home or business. A potential enemy would also be faced with defeating several layers of defenders and suffering the continued resistance of the populace if the organized forces were defeated, as in Iraq today.

However, gun control has made point defense of every possible target difficult if not impossible. If citizens were free to procure whatever firearms they desired without interference from government, as they should be, then the owners and occupiers of homes and businesses could provide their own high level of security using whatever weapons they considered appropriate, such as submachine guns. Government forces could then concentrate their limited resources in manpower, funds, and equipment to seek out and destroy the terrorists without having to worry about guarding every possible static structure a terrorist might attack.

We have ample evidence of how successful point defense by owners and inhabitants can be. During the Los Angeles riots of 1992, following the acquittal of the policemen charged with beating Rodney King, the National Guard and police refused to engage the looters and rioters. But several merchants — mostly Korean — used semi-automatic “assault rifles” with high-capacity magazines to successfully fend them off and saved their businesses. In 1999, a man armed with a handgun took three hostages at a shooting range in San Mateo, California. An employee took a gun from the range and shot the gunman, freeing the hostages. According to the National Survey on Private Ownership and Use of Firearms funded by the Clinton Justice Department, between 1.5 and 3 million people in the United States use a firearm to defend themselves and others every year. Point defense by armed citizens works very well.

Instead of hamstringing people with a myriad of gun-control measures, governments at all levels should encourage them to arm and train themselves. Funds for homeland security would thus be better spent, American military and security forces relieved of an impossible task, and homeland security enhanced.

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