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## **Some Reflections on the Right to Bear Arms, Part 2**

**by Richard M. Ebeling**

Many have been surprised by the lack of resistance by the European Jews who were killed by the millions in the Nazi concentration and death camps during the Second World War. For the most part, with a seemingly peculiar fatalism, they calmly went to their deaths with bullets to the back of the head or in gas chambers. Yet when some of the people were able to gain access to weapons, they did resist, even when they knew the end would be the same. The following is from historian John Toland's biography of Adolf Hitler, in reference to the resistance of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943:

“Of the 380,000 Jews crowded into the Warsaw ghetto, all but 70,000 had been deported to the killing centers in an operation devoid of resistance. By this time, however, those left behind had come to the realization that deportation meant death. With this in mind, Jewish political parties within the ghetto finally resolved their differences and banded together to resist further shipments with force.... At three in the morning of April 9, 1943, more than 2000 Waffen SS infantryman — accompanied by tanks, flame throwers and dynamite squads — invaded the ghetto, expecting an easy conquest, only to be met by determined fire from 1500 fighters armed with weapons smuggled into the ghetto over a long period: several light machine guns, hand grenades, a hundred or so rifles and carbines, several hundred pistols and revolvers, and Molotov cocktails. Himmler had expected the action to take three days but by nightfall his forces had to withdraw. The one-sided battle continued day after day to the bewilderment of the SS commander, General Jürgen Stroop, who could not understand why ‘this trash and subhumanity’ refused to abandon a hopeless cause. He reported that, although his men had initially captured ‘considerable numbers of Jews, who are cowards by nature,’ it was becoming more and more difficult. ‘Over and over again new battle groups consisting of twenty or thirty Jewish men, accompanied by a corresponding number of women, kindled new resistance.’ The women, he noted, had the disconcerting habit of suddenly hurling grenades they had hidden in their bloomers....”

“The Jews, he reported, remained in the burning buildings until the last possible moment before jumping from the upper stories to the street. ‘With their bones broken, they still tried to crawl across the street into buildings which had not yet been set on fire.... Despite the danger of being burned alive the Jews and bandits often preferred to return into the flames rather than risk being caught by us.’ ... For exactly four weeks the little Jewish army had held off superior, well-armed forces until almost the last man was killed or wounded.”

In the end the Germans had to commit thousands of military personnel and in fact destroy an entire part of Warsaw to bring the Jewish ghetto resistance to an end.

What if not only the Jewish population but the majority of all the “undesirable” individuals and groups in Germany and the occupied countries of Europe had been armed, with the Nazi government unable to know who had weapons, what types, and with what quantity of ammunition? It would be an interesting study in World War II history to compare private gun ownership in various parts of Europe and the degree and intensity of resistance by the local people to German occupation.

### **Revolts against tyranny**

In the early years of the Bolshevik takeover in Russia there were numerous revolts by the peasantry against Communist policies to collectivize the land or seize their crops as in-kind taxes. What made this resistance possible for many years was the fact that in the countryside the vast majority of the rural population owned and knew how to use hunting rifles and other weapons of various kinds.

And acquisition of firearms during the Second World War as part of the partisan movement against the German invasion of the Soviet Union enabled active, armed resistance by Lithuanian and Ukrainian nationalist guerrillas against Soviet reoccupation of their countries to continue in the forests of Lithuania and western Ukraine well into the early 1950s.

It is hard to imagine how the people of the 13 colonies could have ever obtained their independence from Great Britain at the end of the 18th century if the local population had not been “armed and dangerous.” It is worth recalling Patrick Henry’s words in arguing for resistance against British control before the king’s armed forces could disarm the colonists:

“They tell us ... that we are weak — unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? ... Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be

stationed in every house? ... Three million people, armed in the holy cause of liberty ... are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us.”

The taking up of arms is a last resort, not a first, against the intrusions and oppressions of government. Once started, revolutions and rebellions can have consequences no one can foretell, and final outcomes are sometimes worse than the grievance against which resistance was first offered. But there are times “in the course of human events” when men must risk the final measure to preserve or restore the liberty that government threatens or has taken away. The likelihood that government will feel secure in undertaking infringements on the freedoms of Americans would be diminished if it knew that any systematic invasion of people’s life, liberty, and property might meet armed resistance by both the victim and those in the surrounding areas who came to his aid because of the concern that their own liberty might be the next to be violated.

Though it may seem harsh and insensitive, when I read the advocates of gun control pointing to incidents of private acts of violence against children, I think to myself, How many more tens of thousands of children were killed around the world in the last century by governments? And how many of those children, victims of government-armed violence, might have been saved if their families and neighbors had possessed the right to bear arms against political aggressors? How many children have been saved because their families have had weapons for self-defense against private violators of life and property? And how many could have been saved from private aggressors if more families had owned guns?

### **Guns and American liberty**

Nor should Americans be intimidated by the argument that virtually all other “civilized” countries either prohibit or severely restrict the ownership and the use of firearms in general and handguns in particular. America has been a free and prosperous land precisely because of the fact that as a nation we have chosen to follow political and economic avenues different from those followed by other countries around the world. As a people, we have swum against the tide of collectivism, socialism, and welfare statism to a greater degree, for the most part, than have our western European cousins. As a result, in many areas of life we have remained freer, especially in our market activities, than they. The fact that other peoples in other lands chose to follow foolish paths leading to disastrous outcomes, does not mean that we should follow in their footsteps.

America was born in revolt against the ideas of the “old world”: the politics of monarchy, the economics of mercantilism, and the culture of hereditary class and caste. America heralded the

politics of representative, constitutional government, the economics of the free market, and the culture of individualism under equality before the law. It made America great.

If in more recent times there has been an “American disease,” it has been our all-too-willing receptivity to the European virus of political paternalism, welfare redistributism, economic regulation and planning, and the passive acceptance of government control over social affairs.

We need not and indeed should not fall victim to one more of the European ailments: the disarming of the people under the dangerous notion that the private citizenry cannot be trusted and should not be allowed to have the means of self-defense against potential private and political aggressors in society. Let us stand apart once more and not fall prey to the false idea that somehow our European cousins are more enlightened or advanced than we on the matters of gun ownership and control. They are not.

Instead let us remember and stay loyal to the sentiment of James Madison, the father of the U.S. Constitution, who praised his fellow countrymen when he said, “Americans [have] the right and advantage of being armed — unlike citizens of other countries whose governments are afraid to trust the people with arms.”

Let us remain worthy of Madison’s confidence in the American people and defend the Second Amendment of the Constitution upon which part of that confidence was based.

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