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The Horror of Gun Control in Mumbai **by Benedict D. LaRosa**

As Ronald Reagan would say, “Here we go again!”

How many Rwanda, Columbine, Virginia Tech, Warsaw Ghetto, post-office, and other shootings do people have to endure before they face reality? How long does it take to learn a simple lesson: unarmed people are more vulnerable to terrorists, criminals, and crazed people than armed ones? Now the terrible toll in Mumbai: some 175 killed and several hundred others wounded.

The headlines in India and across the world should have read, “Terrorists and Gun Control Claim More Victims.” Instead, the complicity of the various Indian governments — national, state, and city — was ignored and their inability to protect the victims of that tragic event was barely questioned. The truth is that, except for a few policemen on the scene, all the victims were unarmed by public policy. India has among the strictest gun-control laws on Earth, which, according to gun-control advocates, should have made Mumbai one of the safest cities on the planet. So it shouldn’t surprise anyone with common sense or a historical perspective that disarmed citizens and visitors had no way of defending themselves and were, once again, the victims not only of terrorists, but of the misguided, immoral policy of their governments.

As Alexander the Great found out when he invaded India in 326 B.C., its people are keen fighters and weapon innovators. The British, India’s colonial ruler from 1757 to 1947, suppressed this martial tradition, disarmed the populace, and destroyed the domestic firearms industry to ensure their rule, particularly after the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857. The Indian Arms Act of 1878 forbade Indians to possess weapons, with the exception of those considered loyal. The law did not apply to Europeans who could, of course, possess and carry arms at their discretion.

The Indian subcontinent has been racked with strife since independence and the partition in 1947 between India and Pakistan. That may explain why the newly independent Indian government saw fit to keep the British gun-control laws in place for another 12 years before replacing them with similar measures of their own in 1959 and later years. Though not as severe as the British gun-control laws, suffice it to say India’s laws discourage the private possession of

firearms, making it nearly impossible for the average Indian to own or use guns, all under the pretext of crime control.

Yet such measures have not curtailed violence on the subcontinent. For example, following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 by two of her Sikh bodyguards, as many as 3,000 Sikhs died in four days of riots throughout the country. In 2002, a Muslim mob murdered 59 Hindus in a railway car at the Godhra railway station by first stoning them and then setting the railway car in which they traveled on fire. Gun control made those poor people easy victims. Had they been armed, would it have prevented the violence? No one knows, but at least they would have stood a better chance to survive.

As for the terrorist attack in Mumbai, can you imagine what would have happened to the terrorists, once they started shooting, if the people around them had not been prevented by their government from exercising their God-given right to keep and bear arms, but had instead been armed? Well, imagine being surrounded by hundreds of angry, frightened, armed people shooting back and fighting for their lives — a well-deserved nightmare for terrorists and criminals. A number of innocent people would surely have been killed and wounded anyway. After all, the terrorists had the element of surprise. But I doubt the number of dead and injured would have been so great. I can almost guarantee that far more than the 10 terrorists so far accounted for would have bitten the dust. More than 200 years ago, Thomas Jefferson quoted Cesare Beccaria, father of modern criminology:

The laws that forbid the carrying of arms ... disarm only those who are neither inclined nor determined to commit crime.... Such laws make things worse for the assaulted and better for the assailants; they serve to encourage rather than to prevent homicides, for an unarmed man may be attacked with greater confidence than an armed one.

India has no excuse. The father of Indian independence, Mohandas Gandhi, observed in 1927,

Among the many misdeeds of the British rule in India, history will look upon the act of depriving a whole nation of its arms as the blackest.

Let's hope the Indian government has learned its lesson and that there are no more Mumbais.

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