**Freedom and Firepower**

In 2008 the Supreme Court, in a decision written by Antonin Scalia ruled that US citizens have the right to keep firearms in the home for self defense. The decision pointedly said, however, that “**Like most rights, the right secured by the second amendment is not unlimited. It is not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner and for whatever purpose**”.

We have a right to protect ourselves in our homes. But society has a right to regulate what kind of firepower an individual may have. One does not need a rocket propelled grenade or a Hellfire Missile to defend their home. Sport hunters do not require flame throwers or Abrams tanks to enjoy the outdoors.

This is how civilization works: activities that are potentially dangerous may be allowed but are regulated and controlled within reason to protect society at large. I have friends who like to go to a gun range on a weekend and shoot automatic rifles at targets. It is an activity that they enjoy; they are harming no one. But do you know what’s another fun thing to do on a weekend for a lot of people? Heroin. Drinking and driving fast. There are reasons we have speed limits and drug laws.

It is often said these days that assault weapons are so ubiquitous that there is simply no way to regulate or ban them. It is indeed a daunting prospect. Who would have thought, when I was a kid, that smoking would be banned in most public places? The difficulty is just that: a difficulty. An obstacle to be overcome. **The scope of the obstacle only illustrates the urgency to act and remove these weapons as thoroughly and quickly as possible**.

We still have laws against rape and sexual assault, despite the fact that every male in the US has a penis. No one would suggest that rape is inevitable, and that therefore we should give up on protecting its victims. While we can’t control who has a penis, or how they use it, society has the obligation to do what it can to protect those victims. And in the case of firearms, we have the collective capacity to regulate and control the distribution and availability of weaponry.

As gun rights activists point out, gun violence is a product of mental health issues. That is indisputable. We will never eliminate violence, of any kind. But we have the capacity to limit the firepower that a sick person can bring to bear on innocent civilians. It is the duty of an organized society to do just that. And it’s the duty of lawful citizens, and patriots of all stripes, to recognize that their rights are not absolute, and that if what gives them pleasure contributes to dangers faced by others, their **duty** is to recognize that and accept sensible limitations to those rights. Growing up, many of my neighbors were WWII veterans. One of them had an old Thompson machine gun that he’d kept after the war. It was a novelty he would sometimes show to us kids. He never loaded or shot it; that would have been unthinkable to him. He was a hunter, and a sportsman, and a patriot, who understood what the word meant.

So, to my neighbors who love their AR-15’s, I would ask: how many children, seniors and churchgoers have to die so that you can rapidly shoot a lot of rounds at paper targets at the range on weekends? And if you’re part of that cohort who is stockpiling those weapons in the event of a general uprising against a tyrannical government, which of your grandmothers or kindergartener cousins are you most willing to sacrifice so you can play soldier on the weekends? Because that’s what we’re really talking about. Your pleasure and fantasy vs. the actual lives of your neighbors and families.

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