

 **ABOUT GUNS**
- SOME HISTORY
and
INFORMATION ON TERMS

Stephen L. Bakke  February 21, 2013



You have recently received 3 of my reports on the topic of the 2nd Amendment and gun control. Here's a recap of what I've concluded so far (refer to the reports dated February 1, 7 and 15, 2013 on my website in the "Policy and Political Commentary" tab):

- *Obama prefers quick reaction over careful study of the problem of mass violence;*
- *the Founders were reacting primarily to the threat of British tyranny and its intention to disarm the American Colonies;*
- *the Founders were also very sensitive to the right of general self defense;*
- *the term "militia" must be understood to represent an individual's right to bear arms, as well as more formal, hopefully temporary, joining together to form a military;*
- *there are in fact modern applications for establishing a "militia" (e.g. school security);*
- *recreational hunting can't be stretched into a modern interpretation of the intent of the 2nd Amendment;*
- *since the 2nd Amendment is part of the "unalienable" Bill of Rights which were "endowed by our creator," it is unlike another phrase in the "Constitution" and any elimination thereof would be a Constitutional war beyond imagine - it won't happen;*
- *embedded in all of what the Founders said and wrote seems to be a presumption of order and competence, achieved through rules, regulations, and limited controls - i.e. gun control of some kind isn't contrary to their intentions;*
- *after reviewing modern legal commentary, I find that they DON'T preclude some form of required training, control, and regulation;*
- *given the extreme comments by certain leaders of the gun control movement, some "paranoia" by gun enthusiasts can probably be understood and forgiven; and*
- *strong supporters of aggressive gun control include a very interesting cast of characters - some conventional progressives, some slightly (at least) unsavory politicians, and some very disgusting contemporary and historical characters.*

A Brief History of Firearms

Before I get any deeper, I have decided to educate myself more about guns themselves – to a degree I felt helpful in understanding the debate, but not in great depth at all.

First must come the discovery of gun powder which happened about 1000 AD, probably in China. The actual first written description of gun powder wasn't until 1242 AD. Early versions of guns were actually canons, made out of various materials such as stone and bamboo. Sizes varied and they typically used a stone as a projectile. Iron projectiles only came later after gunpowder became powerful enough to "push" a metal "bullet" which is relatively much heavier than stone. By the

1400s, the general appearance of the firearms became similar to modern rifles. Functionally, however, they had a long way to go.



Hand cannon from the Chinese Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)



Depiction of a musketeer (1608)

Future developments included (in no particular order) pistols, matchlocks, wheellocks, , flintlocks, percussion caps, and many other improvements in the “lock, stock, and barrel” mechanisms of firearms. Then came “rifling” technology, self-contained cartridges, Gatling guns and eventually “gas powered” semi-automatic and automatic weapons, and high tech machine guns. Names like Maxim, Whitney, Colt, Springfield, Henry, and Winchester became associated with firearms manufacturing.

The first true assault rifle was introduced during WWII by Germany. It was the first firearm which bridges the gap between long range rifles, machine guns, and short range sub-machine guns. It was more powerful and had longer range than a sub-machine gun, and could be switched back and forth from semi to full automatic operation. It was lighter than a machine gun and more compact than the longer traditional semi-automatic weapon.

Assault Weapons

Many people, apparently including some at CNN, believe the main distinguishing characteristic is that these are (using CNN’s words) “rifles capable of firing multiple rounds automatically.” **That describes an “automatic” weapon which has been totally banned in the U.S. for many years.** The current debate deals with rifles that will fire one bullet per “pull of the trigger.”

Senator Feinstein (D – Cal) has introduced a bill that seeks to ban “157 dangerous military style assault weapons” by name, and other guns that meet certain criteria or characteristics. Some of these “military characteristics” include: pistol grip or forward grip, grenade launcher (grenades are illegal), barrel shroud, threaded barrel, or folding, telescoping or detachable stock.



The New York Times describes an important distinguishing characteristic as one that makes the weapon more lethal. In reality, these characteristics are mostly cosmetic only. They may make the legislators feel good, but they generally just make the weapon look scary. **The same rifle, without the cosmetic changes, would usually be just as lethal! I believe the desire for quick, un-researched congressional action has left us in an embarrassing predicament – lack of useful, factual information.** In a later report I will discuss information about large capacity clips, which is a very different, but important part of this controversy.

In other words, the current definition of “assault rifle” is based on appearance, not on firepower, or on ability to maim or kill! What a waste of time!

Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclination, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence. –
John Adams (1770)

Some Introductory (and perhaps superficial) Gun Ownership Statistics

Preliminary to delving into much more analytical pursuits on this topic I thought a little introductory summary of gun ownership statistics would be interesting. Draw your own conclusions if this is helpful, standing on its own. This is from a Gallup poll.

- In 2011 47% of U.S. adults report that they have a gun in their home or elsewhere on their property. This is up dramatically from 2010 (41%) but only marginally higher than years since 1993. The percentages were in the “50s” in 1991 – 1993.
- For those claiming to be Republican, (or leaning that way), the percentage was up slightly to 53% in 2011, while the Democrat percentage spiked from 32 to 40% in 2011. I’m quite sure this is a combination of true increases combined with citizens becoming more comfortable self-reporting gun ownership.
- The percentage of women reporting gun ownership is up dramatically to 43%.
- Guns in households, by region: South, 54%; Midwest, 51%; West, 43%; East, 36%. All regions show solid recent increases.
- 46% of men personally own a gun, compared with 23% for women – overall, 34%.
- Middle-aged adults – those 35 to 54 – and adults with no college education are more likely than their counterparts to be gun owners.

Mallard Fillmore by Bruce Tinsley

