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From The Sunday Times

December 7, 2008

Think tank: If each of us carried a gun we could help to combat terrorism

Richard Munday

The firearms massacres that have periodically caused shock and horror around the world have been dwarfed by the Mumbai shootings, in which a handful of gunmen left some 500 people killed or wounded.

For anybody who still believed in it, the Mumbai shootings exposed the myth of "gun control". India had some of the strictest firearms laws in the world, going back to the Indian Arms Act of 1878, by which Britain had sought to prevent a recurrence of the Indian Mutiny.

The guns used in last week's Bombay massacre were all "prohibited weapons" under Indian law, just as they are in Britain. In this country we have seen the irrelevance of such bans (handgun crime, for instance, doubled here within five years of the prohibition of legal pistol ownership), but the largely drug-related nature of most extreme violence here has left most of us with a sheltered awareness of the threat. We have not yet faced a determined and broad-based attack.

The Mumbai massacre also exposed the myth that arming the police force guarantees security. Sebastian D'Souza, a picture editor on the Mumbai Mirror who took some of the dramatic pictures of the assault on the Chhatrapati Shivaji railway station, was angered to find India's armed police taking cover and apparently failing to engage the gunmen.

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In Britain we might recall the prolonged failure of armed police to contain the Hungerford killer, whose rampage lasted more than four hours, and who in the end shot himself. In Dunblane, too, it was the killer who ended his own

life: even at best, police response is almost always belated when gunmen are on the loose. One might think, too, of the McDonald's massacre in San Ysidro, California, in 1984, where the Swat team waited for their leader (who was held up in a traffic jam) while 21 unarmed diners were murdered.

Rhetoric about standing firm against terrorists aside, in Britain we have no more legal deterrent to prevent an armed assault than did the people of Mumbai, and individually we would be just as helpless as victims. The Mumbai massacre could happen in London tomorrow; but probably it could not have happened to Londoners 100 years ago.

In January 1909 two such anarchists, lately come from an attempt to blow up the president of France, tried to commit a robbery in north London, armed with automatic pistols. Edwardian Londoners, however, shot back – and the anarchists were pursued through the streets by a spontaneous hue-and-cry. The police, who could not find the key to their own gun cupboard, borrowed at least four pistols from passers-by, while other citizens armed with revolvers and shotguns preferred to use their weapons themselves to bring the assailants down.

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Today we are probably more shocked at the idea of so many ordinary Londoners carrying guns in the street than we are at the idea of an armed robbery. But the world of Conan Doyle's Dr Watson, pocketing his revolver before he walked the London streets, was real. The arming of the populace guaranteed rather than disturbed the peace.

That armed England existed within living memory; but it is now so alien to our expectations that it has become a foreign country. Our image of an armed society is conditioned instead by America: or by what we imagine we know about America. It is a skewed image, because (despite the Second Amendment) until recently in much of the US it has been illegal to bear arms outside the home or workplace; and therefore only people willing to defy the law have carried weapons.

In the past two decades the enactment of "right to carry" legislation in the majority of states, and the issue of permits for the carrying of concealed firearms to citizens of good repute, has brought a radical change. Opponents of the right to bear arms predicted that right to carry would cause blood to flow in the streets, but the reverse has been true: violent crime in America has plummeted.

There are exceptions: Virginia Tech, the site of the 2007 massacre of 32 people, was one local "gun-free zone" that forbade the bearing of arms even to those with a licence to carry.

In Britain we are not yet ready to recall the final liberty of the subject listed by William Blackstone in his Commentaries on the Laws of England as underpinning all others: "The right of having and using arms for self-preservation and defence." We would still not be ready to do so were the Mumbai massacre to happen in London tomorrow.

"Among the many misdeeds of British rule in India," Mahatma Gandhi said, "history will look upon the act depriving a whole nation of arms as the blackest." The Mumbai massacre is a bitter postscript to Gandhi's comment. D'Souza now laments his own helplessness in the face of the killers: "I only wish I had had a gun rather than a camera."

Richard Munday is the co-author and editor of Guns & Violence: The Debate Before Lord Cullen

HAVE YOUR SAY

When SECONDS count the police are only MINUTES away. There are more guns than people here but violent crime and murder is less than UK rural counties. 5% of citizens have concealed permits

Patrick Duffy, Cheyenne, Wyoming

My next door neighbor is from India. He said almost no one has access to guns and the police typically have access to nothing more than sticks.

I was robbed once while out of my home and I have caught burglars twice breaking in, held them for the police without resorting to shooting them.

Mike, Austin, USA

On the contrary: India is one of the most heavily armed nations in the world, and is suffering an epidemic of gun violence.
http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/5050/gun_control_india

Perry Logan, Austin, USA

Its about time the criminals in this country felt they themselves were taking a risk when attacking an innocent person. There are very few instances of legally held firearms in the UK being used to commit crime. Also, it would be nice if our shooters could actually train for the Olympics in the UK!

Paul Bickerdyke, Coventry, UK

I have been licensed to carry a concealed firearm in Florida since our state became the first in the United States to pass a "right to carry" law.
One evening, I used the mere fact that I was armed to discourage three young would-be muggers. Worked for me.

Fred, Miami, USA

You cannot compare the USA and the UK. The USA is awash with guns in comparison, as a result most of our crime is gunless. If we introduce guns into the domestic environment, then we will start resolving disputes with guns, as do Americans, with similar per capita statistics. The choice is ours.

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Alfred, Wessex, UK

Gun control is yet another aspect of personal freedoms being eroded and the encroachment of a state dependant population.

Will Lewis, Bath, UK

I prefer to have the option of self defense. Being unarmed and helpless in the face of attackers is not a fate I wish to share with our Indian brothers. I have a License to Carry Firearms that was issued by the county I live in here in Pennsylvania. I carry a gun everywhere I go.

Pete Mc Andrew, Bath, PA, USA

With all the people on here in favor of self defence with firearms. Stand up for the Second Amendment and tell the Brady's and the Rebecca Peters of the world to leave our guns alone! You guys in England need a good Grass roots movement to restore your gun rights. Refuse to be Victims!!

Eric Trantum, Bristol ,TN, USA

Bumper stickers in the USA have long stated: When guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns. Disturbingly true. I'd feel much safer if I knew most people were carrying guns and knew how and when to use them. None of the massacres in recent history would have resulted in so many deaths.

L.T. Sundquist, Hemet, USA

"I wouldn't feel safer among an armed populace."

I wouldn't feel safer among an UNarmed populace. We seem to be at loggerheads.

Chris, Jacksonville, FL, USA

As the saying goes ,when that moment of life or death may arise " better to be judged by twelve then carried by six"

Pat, Boca Raton,

100% Agree with you Richard, very true story, With no question of doubt if even a single victim had been armed inside Taj Mumbai even with a baby browning .25ACP, the number of casualties would have been lower atleast by 10

Saptarshi, Cockeysville, India / USA

U.S. citizens with concealed carry licenses are far less likely to commit crimes than citizens in general--this has been true every year since statistics were kept. And the National Academy of Science found no relationship between gun ownership and crime. Just showing a gun stops most crimes.

Claire, Los Angeles, CA, USA

There have been many examples of cowardly inactivity by police personnel during gun related incidents.

Strutting about with an MP5, means that you may be called upon to face up to and use it on a similarly armed adversary and not an unarmed civilian.

Jim, Bromley, Kent.

I wouldn't feel safer among an armed populace. Some people can be very jittery, or may take it upon themselves to act as judge, jury, and executioner. I would not travel on the underground in an 'armed' UK, I don't think it would prevent terrorism, but one jumpy person not liking the look of you...

Geoffrey French, Norfolk, UK

Don't just look at India ... what about African countries that when our food and medicine arrive are taken by the army and not provided to the starving and sick. EVERYONE at the the mercy of another must be allowed the right to defend themselves. This is people control - not gun control.

Randolph, Waterloo, USA

I find it amusing that Mr. Cleggan thinks that christians would not kill, considering the "Christians" of Ireland have been killing each other for many years, simply because they go to differerent churches

The "wild west" only existed in dime novels . London was FAR MORE dangerous at the time

bydand, Tucson, U.S.

Might i just add that while you point out the questionable usefulness of said 'armed police', i feel i must question how useful an armed populace would prove. It takes a certain type of person to fire a gun at a fellow human, i feel much safer with less firearms. Can't get a gun = Can't kill with 1.

James Pack, London, England

Thanks to the writer & all of our American "cousins" for pointing out the truth:

Legally armed citizens rarely commit crimes & prevent many more.

Criminals are on record saying they don't fear the Police but they DO fear an armed citizen.

We're not ALL placid "sheeple" this side of the Pond.

Mike, Whitehaven, England

I was a crime victim and now carry a gun. In Virginia getting a carry permit requires certification of training, paying a \$50 fee, and waiting for an FBI fingerprint and background check. You cannot carry into a school, airport, other government building or establishments where alcohol is served.

Ed, Fairfax, Virginia, USA

This is the best article on private possession of guns I have seen in a while. A free and open society has nothing to fear from gun ownership by civilized and law abiding citizens. On the contrary, it these citizens who are final guarantors of any society's freedom in the first place

Joshua, New Orleans, USA

The reason I carry a gun, is because a Policeman is too heavy.

Jas, Elkhart, USA

i think letting people carry guns would be good. the state of texas as an example, everyone can carry a gun, and their crime rate isn't worse than anywhere else. i think they should be registered to the poeple that carry them, remember, some states do not require people to even register their guns

nick, rancho murieta,

The right to defend yourself should never be anyone's decision but your own, and by extension, the methods and tools for self-defense should neither be restricted nor too heavily taxed upon. Governments, however, fear an armed populace, since armed populaces will overthrow them if the need arises.

Clint, Peoria, USA

The 2 policemen were taking cover at CST because they had just a single .303 rifle (single shot) between them, while each of the terrorist had an AK-47s (automatic). The policemen even had to run under fire to get that single rifle, because they carried only wooden sticks with them.

Ankit, Gandhinagar, India

Here in the good ol' U.S.A. our illustrious Supreme Court has ruled that the police DO NOT have a duty to protect citizens, or should I say subjects. They are nothing but armed historians. There to investigate what happened when they weren't around.

Mike, San Antonio, TX, USA

What riles me up is that Brits keep pointing at the US as their excuse to HAVE gun control. What they don't realize is that the majority of crimes in the US are in the places where they have strict gun control laws just like in the UK (eg. Chicago, Washington DC, etc.). Google Kennesaw, Georgia.

Nick, San Antonio, Texas

I think most terrorists acts can be prevented if the state has an active police force and a properly functioning judiciary. In India neither exist, and till then not only can terrorist activities be prevented but people with guns may exacerbate the communalism prevalent in Indian society.

Neil, Raleigh, USA

Concerning European gun control law:

It strikes me as being a hand-me-down from the past. I think it's a hold-over of the first aristocratic principle: First, above all, protect your job.

I've never been outside of the US, but this is how it strikes me. It's getting that way here...

Thomas Gentry, Las Vegas, NV, USA

Just because one person has a gun does not justify that everyone else should have one to balance the equation. Get to the root of the problem. There are many social problems that need to be fixed in western society; giving people firearms does not help one of them.

johnny, Waterloo, Canada

'An unarmed people is an enslaved people'.

"A disarmed people is a conquered people".

I chose not to be enslaved or conquered.

Peter Courtenay Stephens, Gloucester, U.S.A.

The majority of messages here are eminently logical, reasonable, fair and so on, but this is not what counts. UK "gun control" has never been based on rational evidence & argument, but is based on distrust of the people and a desire for them not to look after themselves but to depend on authority.

Malcolm Stevas, Exeter,

Name Withheld, you are correct that the commandment "Thou shall not kill" is correctly interpreted as "You shall not murder." Defending yourself or others with deadly force is not murder.

Another saying we have here in the states is "I carry a gun because I cannot carry a policeman."

Blake, Krugerville, Texas, U.S.

Well-said, sir.

Now your job is to convince the political types who believe they know what is best for their constituents.

Good luck with that task.

Leon Jester, Roanoke, VA, USA

The first casualty of anti-gun legislation is logic. The reason Canada has less crime than the U.S. is demographic, not because of gun laws. Persons who want to kill lots of people will use bombs or other means if they can't get a gun. How did people kill before guns were invented?

Leonard, Tampa, Fla., USA

Although the circumstances for it are appalling, it is refreshing to see such a nice bit of logic from our friends "across the pond." It is not the person who will do everything required to get a permit to carry a gun lawfully that is to be feared; it is he who carries one regardless.

Stu Chisholm, Roseville, MI, USA

Throughout western history, starting with the Greeks, free men have been armed and slaves (or second-class citizens in a multi-class society) have been disarmed.

I legally carry a concealed firearm for self defense; I'll probably never need it, but under some circumstances it could save my life.

Bill Carson, Denver, USA

Think about it like this, a man who is permitted to carry a concealed weapon, is in fact following the law. The government has his finger prints and so forth.

If a man shows he has a Concealed Pistol License, it tells the police that he is a law abiding citizen, who is not a felon.

Layne, Michigan, USA

It's simple: an armed society is a polite society. Would you run the risk of upsetting someone or so eagerly act belligerently or use foul language or possibly push or shove them if you thought they were armed? No, you'd behave like a decently.

Vilmar, Spring Hill, usa

Richard Munday's commentary is a refreshing dose of reality. Gun control is a failed public policy and actually makes the situation worse. Only law abiding citizens obey guns control laws. Criminals do not. Criminal behavior is enabled by anti-gun laws.

John Fredrickson, Washington, DC, USA

As a police officer for over 20yrs I can tell you from personal experience that removing firearms from law abiding citizens has zero effect on crime. As I work in area where firearm ownership is ok we occasionally run into criminals from Chicago who are amazed that the citizens have guns and defend

Dan, Rockford, USA

Why carry a gun? Because a policeman is too heavy! The law abiding citizen is highly unlikely to commit a crime with his firearm, and the statistics from states with shall issue concealed carry laws in the USA shows that to be true. Criminals don't obey any laws.

Larry, Billings, Montana, USA

The American Revolution was nothing less than the forcible restoration of the English Bill of Rights of 1689. The U.S. Constitution and the 2nd Amendment secures the rights that the English Monarchy discarded. Put English Law BACK into England! Do it now, before it's too late!!

Steve , Tucson, Arizona, USA

There are about one million peace officers and six million citizens that are licensed to carry concealed handguns in the United States. Countless aggressions have been thwarted without gunfire by licensed citizens when peace officers have not been present. I have one such personal experience.

Larry Boros, Mentor, Ohio, USA

Look up the shootings in the US where armed citizens resisted. They have one or two victims, not 15, 30 or 500. Colorado Springs church. Appalachian law school, etc.

When seconds count, the police are only minutes away.

Kevin, Minneapolis suburbs, USA

There is little evidence that gun control reduces crime or makes society any safer. In fact there is far more evidence that the reverse is true. Unfortunately, we honest citizens will never be allowed the option to effectively defend ourselves in the UK because our Government does not trust us.

Martin Lewis, Swansea, Wales

This may come as a surprise but Canada's has always had concealed carry. We're a May Issue nation. That said, getting a permit is next to impossible which pretty much negates concealed carry's purpose.

Phil, Toronto, Canada

I carry a firearm because I'm too tired to run, and too old to take a beating.

Joel, mount hope, USA

When someone ask why I carry a gun, I tell them because a police officer is too heavy. Police solve crime, they can't be on every street corner to prevent it. Even in Britain with your Big Brother camera system; they can only take a picture of your attacker -- after the fact.

Chuck, Boston, USA

"This year will go down in history! For the first time, a civilized nation has full gun registration! Our streets will be safer, our police more efficient, and the world will follow our lead into the future!"

Chancellor Adolf Hitler of Germany

David Brown, Des Moines, Iowa, USA

Well said. I am a retiree and approaching 60 years old. I carry a legally concealed handgun everyday and everywhere permitted. No government has the right to disarm me and prevent me from protecting myself and my loved ones. I have never had to fire a weapon in self defense, but I will if I have to.

Deckert, Golden, Colorado, USA

To JC, Ireland: I wouldn't call Vermont with its low homicide rate and low crime rate a "failed state." As to being Christian, the commandment, when properly translated, is against murder, not killing. And yes, there is a distinction between the two. Not defending innocents is murder in my mind.

Name Withheld, Londonderry, Vermont

Thank God we have the Second Amendment in the States.

Nothing changes human nature, and if enough good people are armed and willing to act in extremis, the calculus for these barbaric acts changes--and not to the advantage of the criminal or terrorist.

Israel recognized this long ago.

Thomas Casey, Buffalo WY, USA

"The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government." - Thomas Jefferson

Cecil, Easley, SC, USA

JC, there's nothing moral or virtuous about choosing to remain helpless. Carrying a firearm and using it responsibly is a far better testament to someone's character than abdicating their responsibility defend themselves so that they don't have to make difficult choices.

Jesse, Portland, USA

When terrorists or armed criminals strike British citizens have been left defenceless by a succession of gun control happy governments. Outlaws will always have guns because they are by definition outside the law. Law abiding citizens have no recourse to arms to defend themselves.

Gerald Gilleson, Exeter, UK

".....even at best, police response is almost always belated when gunmen are on the loose."

Here in the States we say: When seconds count, the police are just minutes away.

Terry, Denver,CO, USA

Well said!!!

I wish you luck convincing your countrymen, though - they seem to have bought the lie that gun control = safety hook, line, and sinker.

Mike M., Scappoose, OR, USA

Sophie, by 'casual shootings' do you mean shootings over something minor, eg pub fights? In US states where they brought in 'shall-issue' gun permits, gun-control organisations campaigned

against them claiming that there would be many such shootings. As it turned out, they were completely wrong.

Tony, Brisbane, Australia

I am overjoyed!!! Someone from outside the states that portrays gun ownership as a responsibility to citizenship rather than the realm of fat drunk cowboys trying to prove their manhood.

Discourse... Honest discourse not political correctness is needed on this subject around the globe.

Tony Miller, Rutland Ma, USA

One year ago, a heavily armed terrorist entered the crowded main chapel of the New Life Church in Colorado and opened fire. Before he could harm anyone, a parishioner shot him multiple times with her legally-carried handgun. The whole thing was over in a matter of seconds.

Nelson Clayton, Sandy, Utah, USA

At the 1966 Texas Uni Tower civilian armed response hindered the gunman. At Appalachian Law School in 2002 two armed students apprehended the triple killer, cutting short a massacre. 1909 Londoners were not trained: today's American permit-holders learn the law, gun-handling and conflict avoidance.

David, London,

As a police officer and SWAT team member who has served for the past 22 years, my opinion is that the writer is absolutely correct. Well written.

The "wild wild west" in America is also forgotten or skewed. Crime was actually much lower than in modern times when nearly all Americans were armed.

Chuck Haggard, Topeka, KS, USA

How can ANY country that claims to be civilised deny its citizens the right to self defence and LIFE!

Here in the UK the right to self defence is denied and the police keep it that way, thus ensuring the safety of thieves muggers and rapists etc.

train2survive and stay alive!

Chas, Glasgow, Scotland

Here in the States, Vermont is one of only two states that allow a person to carry a concealed weapon without a permit. And yet Vermont has one of the lowest homicide rates in the country: 1.9 per 100,000.

Jeff, Wells, US

There is no proof that gunownership causes crime, there is however proof that banning guns doesn't prevent gun crime. You are correct saying the police can't be everywhere at once, why should that mean that a person cannot defend themselves ?

Keith Barrett, manchester, uk

Disarming the law-abiding has never been a crime control measure, it is a control mechanism imposed on the people by an authoritarian political class. As Mr Munday has explained in this and other articles, gun bans are a godsend to criminals..

RufusJ, Gateshead, UK

' When you outlaw fire-arms the only people left with fire-arms are outlaws' is so true! Five years after the UK ban handgun crime doubled! In the wake of Dunblane, Cullen stated that the evidence was there for some time to revoke the killers FAC, but why this was not done has never been answered.

Ian, London,

There is a name for places where gun ownership is unregulated, and all can arm themselves: they are called "failed states".

NOT carrying a gun is a MORAL choice; it seems ironic that folks seems to think they can be allowed to kill yet still be "Christian".

JC, Cleggan, Ireland

There are many of us in the serene and calm communities that can handle gun(s) quite well; thank you very much. However, there is a segment of the population that believes that guns are for military and police only. Hee! Hee! These fellows keep shooting themselves in the leg! Self defense is sin!

Steven, Los Angeles, USA

We have guns to rebel against our government when it becomes oppressive. People like to avoid thinking about what this really means; we have guns to kill police and soldiers. No one dares proclaim this, out of fear. Is that not the definition of tyranny?

James, Morgan,

Police response is around 5 minutes; they still couldn't have helped everyone in those events, or even most of the victims. The fact is, the police cannot be everywhere at once. An armed populace, however, can.

Brian, Omaha, U.S.

Indeed, Adrian. The problem is that there are two categories of gun crime - terrorism, such as Mumbai, where civilian arms might have been useful, but far more prevalent are more casual shootings, which the anti-gun legislation aims to prevent.

Sophie, Aberystwyth,

Virginia Tech, Columbine, Ecole Polytechnique, Hungerford, Tasmanian, San Ysidro & Mumbai massacres were all police failures. The police waited too long, did not actively intervene, were poorly trained and in most cases poorly armed. Arm the citizenry perhaps but train the police first.

adrian, melbourne, australia

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