

## GUN CONTROL AFTER ORLANDO

Friday

June 24, 2016

By now, we've all heard about the tragedy which unfolded at the Pulse Nightclub, just outside of Orlando, Florida. A lone gunman walked inside and opened fire, killing 49 and wounding 53 more. As if mass murder wasn't bad enough, he added religion and terrorism to the mix. The end result was one of the worst individual hate crimes ever committed in this country, with ripple effects which are still spreading throughout the country. One of these is the continued debate over stricter gun control laws, and what makes this issue so difficult is the knowledge that, on the surface, some of what's being asked actually makes sense, but when you look beneath the surface with an eye towards the future, you start to realize the seriousness of what we're being asked to do.

Not being allowed to sell to someone on the "Terror Watch List" or "No-Fly List" sounds like a good idea. After all, if a convicted felon can't even possess a firearm, why should a suspected terrorist, or someone who's not even allowed to get on an airplane, be permitted to legally purchase a gun, but then you realize the most important difference between the two. Convicted felons have went through a process in which they were at least given the illusion of due process, one in which they were convicted, either through a plea or a trial. Convicted felons have the right to appeal their conviction, and if they can't afford legal representation, at any stage of the proceedings, they can usually get one appointed to represent them, even if their competency does leave a lot to be desired. People on the Terror Watch List or No-Fly List, however, enjoy no such rights.

If we're being completely honest with each other, then we realize that we've all known someone who's been uncomfortable being around a devout Muslim. I think that part of this has to do with the level of commitment required to be a Muslim. You look at your stereotypical Muslim, and you see an almost militaristic, highly disciplined attitude from them towards their faith. Like clockwork, they pray 5 times a day, every day, facing East and singing in a language we can't understand. They believe in covering their women from head to toe, in not allowing their women to speak up against their men, to hold office, and in some instances, to even attend school. Hollywood seems to intentionally perpetuate these stereotypes by continually shooting the Muslim as the terrorist, praying to their God as they blow themselves, and plenty of innocent women and children, up in a massive explosion. To make matters worse, our stereotypes are completely accurate. Visit any country in the Middle East, and this is exactly what you'll find. People using Islam as an excuse to carry out acts of violence, whether it's killing a homosexual or seeking martyrdom.

This isn't to say that everyone who's interested in the religion of Islam intends to use their religious beliefs to justify acts of violence, let alone terrorism. The vast majority of Muslims have absolutely no interest or desire to do either, and are content to "live and let live," but at the same time, it's no wonder that so many non-Muslims find themselves concerned anytime they hear of someone returning from an area we know to be a training ground for terrorist acts. And when someone feels uncomfortable with a Muslim, all it takes is a phone call to your local FBI, and the next thing you know, the subject of your call is on the "Terror Watch List" and/or the "No-Fly List."

Keep in mind that these lists aren't generated after a series of checks and balances, governed by rights designed to protect the suspected, appeals to guarantee those rights, etc. All it takes is someone's belief that you're up to no good, and you're on the list, so it's no wonder that so many people are staunchly opposed to using this list as a basis for denying them their right to purchase or own a firearm. And what happens when some unethical people start using this list as a means to keep weapons out of the hands of those who like to exercise their rights to freedom of speech, speaking up, either against the government or the corrupt politicians running the government? Before you know it, the government has added to this list all of the "political dissidents" it sought to suppress, but couldn't.

My grandmother always used to tell me that "an ounce of prevention's worth a pound of cure." While I certainly agree with trying to keep certain weapons out of the hands of certain people, I don't agree with using a Terror Watch List or No-Fly List as justification for expanding the list of people who can't possess a firearm. At the same time, I do think these lists could serve a purpose. If someone on the list seeks to purchase certain firearms, then an alert should be sent out to a government agency, which could then be followed up by a personal visit with the intended purchaser. It would then be up to this agent to determine whether or not to allow the purchase to go through, and if not, to provide ample justification, after which time the person seeking to make the purchase could file an appeal.

As a convicted felon currently serving time in prison, I can tell you from personal knowledge that there's one group of people who'd very much like to see stricter gun control laws passed: your local neighborhood thug. You see, the simple fact of the matter is that gun control laws are much like locks: they're only going to keep honest people honest. Criminals have already proven that they're under no obligation to follow the rules and regulations of society, so do you really think they're going to refrain from buying a gun on the black market because it's illegal? Gun control simply means that the price of ownership is higher, and fewer of their victims will have guns to protect themselves.

After the massacre at the Pulse Nightclub, we're once again discussing stricter gun control laws. Everyone in support is arguing that the number of gun deaths have skyrocketed, and continue to climb, but you have to ask yourself, is gun control really the answer? Gun control was completely unheard of in the days of the Wild West. It seemed that everyone had a gun, even the little old lady coming home from church, yet I can't think of a single incident in which someone walked into a bar and started shooting everyone in sight just because of their sexual orientation or because they simply had a bad day. We point to rising gun violence as justification for stricter gun control laws, but the simple fact of the matter is that I'll take someone coming at me with a gun any day over suicide bombs going off every day of the week. Perhaps our attention would be better spent trying to identify the people ready, willing and able to carry out such acts of violence. From what I can tell, in almost every single situation, there were warning signs, clear to all, and in many cases, the authorities had even been apprised, only to drop the ball.

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