

Gun Culture

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

For a long time I have believed that the gun culture of the United States is dangerous and frankly stupid. So many people are killed by firearms going off accidentally or because they fall into the hands of children or madmen. Their easy availability is not just because they are a transportable and smugglable commodity, but also because there is a myth of American culture that claims that only by possessing guns were the American rebels able to defeat the British and gain independence. Even if that were so, and it is not, what might have been true 300 years ago is not necessarily the right answer for today. The NRA spends billions buying votes (as is the American way) to ensure that anti-gun legislation is blocked. Regardless of the massacres, casualties, abuses, and misuses, almost all attempts to restrict guns in the US fails. As a result its gun death statistics are the highest in the world per capita, and they insist on believing that guns help protect people.

The other lobby, of course, is the hunting lobby. I hate hunting. I think it is cruel. Shots often miss or injure without killing. Often enough an innocent bystander or passerby gets wounded or killed. But I know I will not convince anyone because I will be dismissed as a culturally inhibited Englishman corrupted by my upbringing and I will be only preaching to the "amen chorus". And yes, I do believe that the meat industry is cruel too and needs much tighter control. Frankly I'd like to see it banned altogether, but that's another argument.

However, all this depends on the police forces around the world being able to protect their citizens. If you live in the Wild West then, I agree, not having a gun would be crazy, even if it might not save your life, even if having a gun and being able to use it well meant that you were more likely to be a target yourself.

There has been a lot of debate about whether the police in the US and elsewhere are over-armed. But since crooks, drug dealers, and ordinary citizens can acquire the most sophisticated and powerful killing machines, it would be ridiculous and insane not to allow the police to be able to match the fire they come up against. We have all seen this week how the Islamic fanatics in Paris were so well armed that they could force the police into retreat by completely outgunning them. They were, thankfully, eventually cornered, outnumbered, and put out of their miserable lives.

What happened in Paris, however, has now led me to modify my opposition. What happens when the state does not protect its citizens? There have now been repeated murderous assaults on Jews in France and elsewhere. Isn't it time for them to be armed? It is the principle of the English philosopher Hobbes that we relinquish some of our freedoms to the state in exchange for its protection. Where they fail, the contract is void. Europe has a strong tradition of restricting individuals from having access to firearms, even the police under normal conditions. As a result its citizens are far less likely

to be killed. But if assaults on Jews are increasing in France, I believe those Jews who remain must be prepared to arm themselves.

Israel is a country where citizens have access to guns and where they are constantly under threat. Yet you might argue that having guns did not stop the massacre in Har Nof. But the proximity of civilian arms did help limit the damage. Had the Hyper Cacher store had armed protection, the initial assault might have been avoided. Clearly the French police have not done enough hitherto, despite the repeated assaults on Jewish targets. We must not be afraid of taking the initiative. If the French authorities object, they know that the answer is for them to do more to deal with the problem. Yet for all the fine words, we know they have abandoned area after area in France to Muslim self-control and have allowed the hatred to fester without response. This situation is now being repeated right across the European community. I would not want to be in France today without self-defense. And the instructions of the US State Department to Jews traveling to Europe not to show any outward signs of Jewish identity in public is simply crass appeasement, capitulation, and defeatism. Just as the refusal in Britain and the US to print the cover of this week's Charlie Hebdo uncensored, because it contains a cartoon of Mohammad, is a sign that we have lost the battle for freedom already.

We need a debate about the values of modern societies. Throughout the world what exacerbates alienation is a sense of inequality, financial and political. If one puts wealth and accumulation above providing a meaningful occupation, one will be breeding discontent. This is as true in western states as it is in eastern states. Even where there is a generous welfare system, this alienation festers. There has been a consistent governmental failure to find work, to create public infrastructure projects, or to use tools such as micro-lending to encourage the poor and unemployed to find some pride, regardless of color, religion, or race.

There is a constant flow of refugees and immigrants. In Europe every year some 300,000 come in from Muslim countries around the Mediterranean. In the US there are just as many illegals crossing the borders. Most are peaceful and want only to find a better life. But inevitably amongst them, as with all such waves in history, there are gangsters and fanatics. Most societies have failed to integrate immigrants or the socially deprived. The problems are both social and, increasingly, religious. Muslim countries send thousands of primitive, hate-mongering imams around the world to cater to the spiritual needs of these disadvantaged and vulnerable wanderers.

On one level a society is to be judged by how it treats its weakest and poorest citizens. The Left believes that only a strong welfare system can help solve the problems of inequality. The Right believes that only by encouraging people to take care of themselves and find ways of creating wealth can the poor and disadvantaged raise themselves out of their disadvantages.

To be fair, most western societies seek some sort of compromise between the two extremes. But clearly generous welfare in Europe has done nothing to ameliorate this. It is argued that American Muslims are less alienated than

European Muslims because they feel better integrated. But this is so in Europe too—those Muslims and other immigrant minorities who do well are better integrated. Those who are not are the breeders of violence. The European way has been to ignore the problem or simply throw money at it. Until this changes I see no alternative other than for us to strengthen our defenses. Because the jihadis are only showing that they can get more and better means of attacking what they regard as their eternal enemy.