



GUN CONTROL: CONTROLLING THE GOVERNMENT'S GUNS

George Reisman

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When the words “Gun Control” are mentioned, almost everyone has been conditioned to believe that what must be meant is further restrictions on the individual’s Constitutional right to keep and bear arms. And thus again and again, the supporters of individual freedom are put on the defensive, trying to explain why the individual’s rights should not be further abridged.

Yet the objective meaning of the words “Gun Control” does not, by itself, imply any such further restrictions on individual rights. This becomes clear when one realizes that by far the largest number of guns and the biggest and most powerful guns, up to and including nuclear weapons mounted on ICBMs, are in the hands of the government. Guns stand behind every aspect of government, even behind its prohibition of such minor offenses as failing to put the requisite amount of money in a parking meter. They are essential to the government’s being able to impose its will, which is always backed ultimately by the threat of death to those who resist its will. The overwhelming focus of any serious program of gun control, therefore, must be on controlling and restricting the government’s use of its guns. Today’s practice of equating gun control with control exclusively over the guns of private citizens would be reasonable only if a half-ounce mouse represented a greater threat than an 800-pound gorilla.

As controls on the powers of government, the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights are implicitly gun controls. Future discussion of gun control must be carried on in this context. On every occasion on which statist urge gun control in the sense of depriving the individual citizen of his Constitutional right to keep and bear arms, defenders of individual freedom must seize the opportunity to urge additional restrictions on the use of the government’s guns. They must urge that in addition to such well-established principles as that the government is not to use its guns to abridge the freedoms of speech and press, it is also not to use its guns to abridge the freedoms of production and exchange, including the freedoms to charge and offer prices and wages that some people consider too high or too low, or to produce by methods to which environmentalists may object without being able to demonstrate harm to human beings. Gun control should immediately, by Executive Order, if necessary, be extended to stop the government’s use of its guns in acts of outright banditry in seizing substantial sums of cash from citizens who have not been convicted of any crime whatsoever, but whose cash is sought to help fund police department budgets. Each and every law, regulation, ruling, or decree under which the government is ready to use force against individual citizens who have not used force against others, is an instance requiring gun control—gun control against the government.

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