

The View Through the Holiday Gunsight

Written by Alex Baer

Monday, 24 December 2012 16:00

Well, let's see how far we've come in the national discussion on guns, so far: You've got NRA cheerleader and CEO Wayne LaPierre shooting off his mouth on talking head shows, saying a ban on high capacity weapons magazines will be done, basically, over his dead body.

If I were an unkind sort, I'd be sorely tempted to say, "Works for me."

Good thing I'm not -- I'm not even one of the grinchies "making war" on Christmas, as religious believers usually phrase their accusations.

It's true I no longer subscribe to such notions, having become confused why it is the birth of a people's savior is celebrated with such shows of avarice, greed, and conspicuous consumption -- especially as that infant would grow and that savior later be quoted saying, *give away all your possessions and follow me*

You might even remember, as I do, those repeated warnings regarding the difficulty of camels trying to pass through the eye of a needle, in relation to the rich. And, as much as I think religion is a private matter best kept out of the public square, I am not trying to lay down a sheet of freezing rain on anyone's parade route, nor do anything rude to anyone's eggnog.

Go -- enjoy, be happy. Life is short -- as short as a roulette spin or a toss of the dice, as we are constantly being reminded these days. Case in point: By now, you've heard about the Webster, New York firefighters responding to a house blaze, and being picked off, one by one, by a man whose motives so far remain unknown.

The count here, *this* time out: two dead, two injured. The gunman was found dead, although there is some confusion whether it was by his own hand or via police.

Why would anyone shoot at one of the bravest and most selfless groups of humans on the planet -- first responders, those who scatter themselves into emergencies to help others -- is anyone's guess. Of course, we'll keep getting lots of practice guessing, just as we are right now about the kids and adults lost in Connecticut.

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Meanwhile, Wayne LaPierre believes the answer is to have armed officers in schools -- to have a good guy with a gun ready to stop a bad guy with a gun. Lots of people probably heard that and said, right straight out, *You're damn right*.

These are the people who scare me more than shooters who've snapped, ready to cut their umbilical to Earth. There are many magnitudes more people who think LaPierre right than there are solo shooters at any given time. I'd just as soon play the better odds, and NOT provide shooters the temptation to defeat that attempted safety feature and make a name for himself.

I say "he" as there are very, very few female shooters who partake in such rampages. Hereabouts, most shooters are white Christian males. Someday, there may be an outbreak of left-leaning agnostic women, but I think those odds go beyond rare.

Men of one religious subset, more likely to go berserk with firearms than members of any other group: It makes one wonder what is going on there. Put me down for at least a few questions there.

But, back to the NRA solution: Let's keep assault weapons available to all, keep those multi-round magazines coming, and let's put official, designated shooters in all the schools -- they can be used as targets for armed predators who've lost their minds.

I would imagine Wayne LaPierre has never been in a firefight. He has no sense whatever -- (yes, I should stop right there) -- regarding the collateral damage that could be caused by an in-school, old-West-style shoot-out, with children scattering this way and that.

One more gun blazing away in school corridors just doubles the kids' terror, wouldn't you say? It certainly increases the number of directions from which children must duck -- and that's not counting the angles of ricochets. And here, I will also say: *And who knows by what factor the body count goes up during an in-school draw-down?*

LaPierre's suggestion reminds me of an earlier plague of madness, a cold war philosophy called MAD -- Mutual Assured Destruction -- plans which dealt death as lightly as the Grim Reaper

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might shuffle cards and deal hands of pinochle.

It calls to mind an Op-Ed cartoon spotted somewhere: It said, when a child is hit by a rock, the solution is *NOT* to make sure every child has plenty of rocks.

Most people of faith would also tell you that turning the other cheek is no solution, either -- not in the real world. Yes: The world often seems filled, at times like these, with far too many dichotomies and ironic dilemmas to keep count.

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It's nice to see toys and games are pouring into Newtown for kids as everyone there tries to rescue some measure of the holiday. As good as those acts are, I wonder what it would take to have the same generosity and outpouring flow, beforehand, and have people contribute a little something to help avoid one of these tragedies in the first place.

Meanwhile: Yes, it is good to know there are still people who are willing to try to help, after the fact. The expression, "Too little, too late," comes to mind, except that it now applies to all of us, everywhere. These horrors keep proving such tragedies can happen anywhere, that no-one's immune. *It all seems too little, it all seems too late.*

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Maybe you've heard about this next news item, too. I had to shake my head a few times, and re-read it more than once, then break it down into component capsules and bullet points for the info to penetrate my thick head:

- The AR-15 is the nation's most popular semi-automatic rifle.
- The AR-15 is similar to the weapon used in the Newtown shootings.
- There is a company that calls itself the world's largest arms supplier, Brownells.
- Brownells reports that it sold three-and-a-half years worth of AR-15 ammunition

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magazines in 72 hours.

- And, a Denver gun show had all its AR-15 ammunition sell out within an hour this very weekend.

So much for the *Peace-on-Earth* lobby.

Apparently, all those well-armed gun owners ended up *still* being terrified -- feverish and frightened they'd lose their right to buy multi-round magazines, fearful they might run short on ammunition.

It's interesting to note how much human behavior is driven by fear -- disturbing, but interesting all the same. Like, how it is there's always a big run on guns right after a killing rampage makes headlines. The copycat, "celebrity" weapon, or associative element is as bothering to contemplate, for many, as is the fear of missing out on *having one of those same guns for myself, for my own collection, for my own private armory..*

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One usual response: *You'll wish you had weapons and ammo when the end times come.* Maybe so, but, you know what? If weapons are so desperately needed in that horrible new world, it really won't be worth living in.

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I understand Wal-Mart is the nation's largest seller of guns and ammo. It's unreasonable to suspect this will be added to their long list of offenses against Americans, seeing as how most Americans are clueless Wal-Mart's *ever* done anything morally regrettable.

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It's easy to drift around in discussions that touch on so much American fabric and make-up, from fringes to touchstones. I am, of course, nuts for contemplating this subject at all -- not once, but twice.

In this holiday season, people are frantically clamoring for "celebrity" weapons in the news headlines, emptying the shelves of gun stores, driving up online prices of all related wares. It's almost like it were Black Friday again. (In another era, I'd ask for a commemorative armband, in order to properly display my grief.)

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Can't quite shake another editorial cartoon, one quite properly grim: Side by side, two panels, showing a schoolroom, and a cemetery with all the headstones of children killed in shootings. The caption was direct: Where would you rather take a headcount?

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Another headline hammered at my head as it passed by: *More than 100 dead from guns since Sandy Hook.*

Now, I fully realize gun deaths make bigger headlines than car wrecks do anymore, but don't you think the number dying from gunshots has been more than a little excessive -- even for us and our violent society?

Venezuela, Brazil, and Mexico have more gun deaths than we do, some stats say, but nowhere else will you find as many guns for every 100 people as you will here, 88.9, with the runners-up being surprises: Yemen (54.8), Switzerland (45.7), and Finland (45.3).

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Number of gun deaths in Finland is 24, and about double that in Switzerland, at 57. In the U.S., we clock in at around 10,000 a year. Even so, we do not have the worst firearm murder rate, coming in at number 28, when you look at deaths per 100,000 people. Honduras, El Salvador, and Jamaica are all worse by percentage of population.

That's not all: We account for less than 5% of the world's population but have anywhere from a third to half of all the civilian-owned weapons in the whole world. Amazing, as mind-bogglers go.

Feeling hammered by stats or headlines yet? *Yeah, me, too.* I'm about ready to suggest we hit the bars and get a little hammered in that momentarily-uplifting way. It's easy to think we should give up trying to change anything or anyone's already-set mind, and simply lean back in our chairs, as George Carlin suggested long ago: Have no emotional stake in any of the outcomes. Just relax and enjoy the freak show.

It may be the best advice that's hardest of any to take.

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Japan sometimes has just two gun deaths a year. Imagine that.

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OK, a couple more wild swings here, as long as I'm daft enough to keep tilting at massive windmills: That Second Amendment right that everyone from Wayne LaPierre to regular old gun nuts all lean on is fine, so long as you care to boast of only half of the gun rights granted Americans.

The other half of the Second Amendment -- that inconvenient part that gun makers, gun enthusiasts, and NRA lobbyists wish would go away -- has to do with a well-regulated militia,

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and the right of all Americans to submit to the patriotic participation in such service.

Thing is, the last time we tried a mandatory conscription, during Vietnam, that particular draft blew icy cold in Americans' veins. Probably another reason we'd just as soon not exercise *all* of our Second Amendment rights.

We enjoy our right to have and to hold however many weapons we want, far more than we enjoy being told how and when and where we may use them, as the founders very clearly intended. So far, we Americans appear to enjoy being only half right in our sacred Second Amendment rights.

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Way back, the founders were worried that government might need forceful redirection now and then -- reminders that the government serves at the pleasure of the People, and not vice versa.

Given our country's extensive collection of war toys and our uber-militarized local police forces, the founders' intents are again pretty much shot -- no pun intended.

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For some convenient reasons, context always gets lost. In December 1791, when the Second Amendment was adopted, along with the rest of the Bill of Rights, the world was a vastly different place.

There were no assault rifles capable of withering rates of fire, with bullets fed rapidly from clips. There were muzzle loaders, muskets, and blunderbusses, which sometimes had as many as 12 steps to follow and complete in between attempted shots.

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In many cases, you'd have dealt with a village blacksmith in such matters, not slipped down to Wal-Mart for a crate of factory-made ammo and some production-line killing machines.

How did we go from the right to own a rifle or two while serving in the country's militia, and then going on to expand that into the right for each American to be a one-person war machine?

As always, where profit is to found as a motive, you have the culprit already well in hand. Certain people could make money and gain power from gun sales, so they did. The NRA's been tending both and baby-sitting them ever since.

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Interesting word, blunderbuss. As much as it sounds like it tries to describe some sort of mistake people make who are anxious to hop onto the busses of weapons bliss, it's really not.

It traces its lineage back to Dutch origins, with *donder* meaning *thunder*, and *bus*, meaning *pipe*. As peculiar as a *thunder-pipe* is, it's odd noting that a couple of Santa's reindeer have been through the naming mill more than once.

Donner was once *Donder* or *Dunder*. *Blitzen* was once *Blixem*. Given the American fascination for loud sounds, fury, and power, I'm surprised the entire cast of Santa's flight crew hasn't been renamed -- to now include

Thunder
and
Blitzem

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Any minute now, I expect some hyperventilating, evangelical gun enthusiast will market the latest seasonal, ornamental trimming -- *Santa Claus and the Nine Reindeer of the Apocalypse*.

If not that, there's probably a new rehash of *Scrooge* out by now, featuring the Grenades and Assault Weapons of Christmases Past, amidst labor practices that encouraged unions to boom.

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If you listen, you can hear the holiday gears grinding down at the NRA:

Vixen had to go -- too sexually suggestive, you know -- and is called Vampire now. Dancer and Prancer are out, you kidding me? □ Our members are homophobes, so those two will be known as Crusher and Masher from now on. Cupid sounds way too wussy, so we'll beef that one up to be Lightning from now on. □ We're taking Comet under advisement and running the focus groups now.

Dasher's already been renamed Basher, and Rudolph will either be H-Bomb or Valkyrie. We're still not sure about that red nose or his boss's red suit -- lots of our members still think that's the color of them old commie suits. □ And, this whole socialist-style tradition of everyone getting many gifts from the authority figure is getting a second look, too...

Just like with the Second Amendment -- you have to update to keep up with the times, if you want to stay one step ahead of everyone else.

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Christmas bonus for gun and ammo dealers:

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18563_162-57560664/as-nra-is-criticized-on-shooting-response-bullets-sell/

and: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/newtown-massacre-us-races-to-stock-up-on-weapons-ahead-of-potential-new-federal-ban-8427976.html>

and: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/23/worlds-largest-firearms-supplier-sells-3-half-years-worth-ar15-clips-3-days_n_2356286.html

More gun lunacy:

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/12/24/webster-new-york-firefighter-shot/1788917/>

and: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/21/us-shooting-deaths-sandy-hook_n_2348466.html

NRA says no, No, and NO:

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/12/24/167962295/video-nras-lapierre-says-no-to-ban-on-large-capacity-magazines>

Toy flood: <http://www.npr.org/2012/12/24/167934496/toy-donations-pour-into-newtown-for-the-holidays>

MADness: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutual_assured_destruction

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Gun deaths by country:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2012/jul/22/gun-homicides-ownership-world-list>

In Japan: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/07/a-land-without-guns-how-japan-has-virtually-eliminated-shooting-deaths/260189/>

Second Amendment:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution

Blunderbuss: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blunderbuss>

Reindeer names: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Claus's_reindeer