

Two Deadly Weapons

I own two deadly weapons.

One is a 38-special revolver.

The other is an automobile.

I am required by the state to register one of these and to qualify and be tested for a license to operate it. Most everyone seems to think such legal restrictions are essential and reasonable. Not so with the other.

Please do not jump to a wrong conclusion here. I am not against guns. As I said, I possess one myself; have owned others. I see nothing wrong with you owning one or more guns – just as you may own and drive all the cars you can afford.

Yet, I do see something very wrong with the claim that the United States Constitution, as amended, bestows upon all citizens the right to own guns and other deadly weapons without regard for the safety of their fellow men (and women, and children).

The (often misquoted) section in question reads:

“Amendment II.

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

What do you think? If the amendment had instead said that the people had a right to drive automobiles, would we need car inspections and driver’s licenses today? How about special taxes on gasoline? Would Ford and General Motors be pouring funds into groups and campaigns opposing mandatory seatbelts and crash standards?

There are two problems with the Second Amendment; the first has to do with how the word “Arms” ought to be understood. To the men who wrote the Constitution, “Arms” were one-shot pistols and muzzle-loading rifles (and swords?). If technological progress had stopped there, this article would not be necessary (or even comprehensible). Walking into a classroom and mowing down 22 little kids would be beyond impossible with a weapon that required a minute or so to reload.

So, how are we to interpret “Arms” in this murderously high-tech age? Do we claim that only antique firearms are protected by the Second? Or do we allow for expanding the definition to include ... what? Machine guns? Tanks? Grenades? If I lived near a commercial airport, could I have a Stinger launcher in my backyard, just in case an airliner gets too loud? Are ground-to-air missiles not covered by the Constitution? No? Then where shall the line be drawn between what are “arms” and what are not? And who shall draw it?

In truth, there is no need to argue these questions, because the other problem with the Second Amendment is that it is predicated on the existence of something that hasn’t existed for well over a hundred years.

A “militia” is a group of non-professional, citizen soldiers, called from their homes in a national emergency to defend the security of a state. A well-regulated militia would be one that has been trained and is overseen by a state government. In the days before the U.S. had a standing army or national guard capable of mounting a credible defense, the idea of a militia made some sense. Today, the idea is a silly fiction. There are no more militias!

And even if some gang of rowdies shooting off automatic weapons in the wilderness does call itself a “militia,” it most certainly is not “well regulated,” by a state or anyone else.

If something does not exist it cannot be “necessary.” If well-regulated militias do not exist, they cannot be necessary to our security. Therefore, the Second Amendment has become a false statement based on a false premise. We should not tolerate this blemish remaining on the finest document ever written.

Repeal the Second Amendment now!

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