

Practical Aspects of Gun Control, Part 5

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Having reviewed the cultural, historical, and moral aspects of gun control, we turn now in this edition to the technological aspect.

4 The Technological Aspect

Some prominent members of the media are opposed to the Second Amendment on the grounds that modern guns (so they claim) are too dangerous; that the Second Amendment logically only applies to muzzle-loading single shot muskets of the type commonly in use at the time of the adoption of the Constitution. What they seem unable to understand (or are unwilling to admit they understand) is that the modern semi-automatic pistol or rifle is nothing more than the 21st century equivalent of the Brown Bess musket, just as the daily newspaper, radio, TV, and the internet are nothing more than 21st century equivalents of the weekly newspaper and handbill. If the members of the media claim it is logical for gun owners to be limited to 10-round magazines, it is equally logical that TV news shows be limited to 10 minutes per day and newspapers to 10 pages. If the citizens are to be limited on a logical basis to purchasing one gun per month, there is no reason why *The New York Times* cannot logically be limited to publishing one day per month, and the TV networks likewise limited to broadcasting once per month. If we are to have logical background checks on anyone who seeks to buy a gun, there is no logical reason why we should not impose background checks on every reporter, editor, publisher, writer, broadcaster, advertiser, and producer. If gun owners are to be logically forced to put trigger locks on their guns, and keep ammunition stored separately in their own homes in order to prevent "accidental discharge", there is no logical reason why a government employee cannot be deployed to lock down all newspaper, radio, and TV productions until the intended material is reviewed in order to prevent "accidental disclosure of inconvenient facts". In short, if the rights of the people are to be denied simply due to the advance of technology, it is evident that every right could logically be so limited. This may be a good way for the people to obtain a more "responsible" media: demand a plan to regulate it the same as the Second Amendment. Let us see if our illustrious First Amendment advocates are willing to be restricted to the same extent as the Second Amendment advocates they are so quick to demonize.

But that is not the only technological aspect to be considered. If we look back at the long development of the firearm, we see a steady progression in its improvements [1]. Here is a quick summary of the advance of firearms technology:

- 1249: The first description of gunpowder in Europe (which we would now call blackpowder).
- 1346: Cannon were used by the English at the Battle of Crecy.
- 1381: The first cannon that could be deployed by a single person (town of Augsburg).
- 1418: Mortars were used at the Battle of Cherbourg.
- 1460: The first matchlock rifle was invented.
- 1586: The first paper cartridges invented.
- 1610: The first magazine-fed rifle was invented.
- 1690: The first "revolving" pistol was invented (the barrels revolved instead of the cylinder).
- 1730: The first breech-loading rifles were invented.
- 1774: The percussion cap method of ignition was invented (i.e., first use of self-priming cartridges).
- 1830: The double-barrel sporting shotgun in popular use.
- 1835: The modern 6-shot revolver was invented.
- 1840: The combined self-priming cartridge was invented.
- 1845: The first magazine-fed pistol was invented.

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- 1860: The lever-action rifle was invented.
- 1862: Invention of the belt-fed rapid-fire gun (Gatting).
- 1866: Gun-cotton (which we now call gunpowder or smokeless powder) was invented.
- 1884: Invention of the first full-automatic belt-fed machine gun.
- 1885: The first semi-automatic rifle with detachable magazine was invented (Mannlicher).
- 1886: The first bolt-action rifle with a detachable magazine was invented.
- 1895: The automatic repeating rifle (full-automatic machine gun) invented.
- 1902: The semi-automatic shotgun was invented.
- 1918: The hand-held full-automatic machine gun (Thompson) was invented.

It is not necessary to go any further. All the common firearms now in production are simply improvements and variations on these; including those for greater safety or for a variety of calibers. The famous AK-47, M-1, M-14 and M-16 semi- and selective-fire types were not invented until the middle decades of the 20th century. The important thing to remember is that all the guns that are now so feared by governments are based on technology that is over one hundred years old; comparable to being afraid of telephones, washing machines, and toasters. Secondly, anyone with a machine shop capable of 1920's accuracy and tolerances can build as many machine-guns (and all lesser types) as necessary. If drug dealers can build ocean-going submarines to smuggle cocaine into the U. S., it does not take much imagination to see that a similar thing can be done with clandestine production of guns, should the government attempt to regulate the current legal ones out of existence.

[1] W. W. Greener, *The Gun and Its Development*, London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1910