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REASONABLE LIMITS ON WEAPONS

With the anniversary of the Newtown Massacre fresh on our minds it is an appropriate time to consider what if anything we can do as a society to prevent such tragic events in the future. Too often rational and thoughtful discussion about guns in America evokes a strong emotional response between some who would ban all weapons and those who resist restrictions of any kind. Let me share some thoughts based on my 30 year career in the FBI, in which I dealt with quite a few tragic incidents. As a young FBI agent in the 1970's engaged in responding to bank robberies and arresting dangerous fugitives, I was never concerned that any of the individuals I was trying to apprehend would be carrying assault type weapons. Still, no individual was prevented from owning and using a wide range of rifles, shotguns, and handguns for hunting, target shooting, collecting, or home protection. Gun ownership was actually more prevalent then. Today the widespread proliferation of weapons designed for the battlefield has me deeply concerned for both the innocent victims of these shooters and the responding law enforcement officers who must confront the shooters. The issue is not a technical one, whether these weapons are automatic or semi-automatic, rather the main concern is the capacity to continually fire as many as 30 rounds or more in as many seconds or less without reloading, and then being able to reload an additional lethal magazine in mere seconds more. Such battlefield assault type weapons are designed for one purpose only, killing people. I do not believe they have any essential hunting or home protection use.

While in the FBI I participated in a major national school shooting conference. Our goal was to identify the common personality attributes of school shooters so that we could try to intervene before they engaged in violence. We were able to identify several common attributes. Unfortunately, for every such individual that becomes violent, there are dozens, if not hundreds, of individuals with the same

personality attributes who will never become violent. How then do we determine which ones will ultimately kill? The answer is that we cannot accurately do so in most cases. So what can we do as a society? More effective mental health services should certainly be part of the mix. Examining the influence of violent video games and movies might also help, or ceasing to print the names of attention seeking shooters following these incidents. We could also strengthen background checks and close gun show loop holes for a start. In addition, we know that many mass shooters are able to inflict wide spread carnage with high powered battlefield assault type weapons. I believe in the Second Amendment but I also believe there are reasonable controls that can be instituted that do not meaningfully diminish that right.

Individual freedom is our right as Americans, but why not have some reasonable restrictions on the future sale of assault type weapons and large capacity magazines? We cannot and should not confiscate weapons already owned by individuals, but we can begin the long process of making such lethal weapons less available to disturbed individuals in the future. Can we stop all of these tragic events? Probably not. But looking at the young faces of the children killed in Connecticut should give us the courage to try to do something positive.

Some are concerned that any new weapon restrictions will open the door for future gun confiscations. With that in mind, it's important we reinforce and validate larger Second Amendment rights; but can we not also undertake some rational steps to stem the proliferation of such highly lethal weapons?

We live in a complex society and we have many troubled individuals among us, often unable or uninterested in getting help. We will never be able reach all of them before they become violent. We also have a long history of gun ownership and most gun owners are responsible and law abiding. Yes, guns don't kill, people do; we have heard it all before. Homicide is as old as mankind and cannot be totally prevented, and there are many means other than guns to kill. Yet, we know that assault type weapons are often a common factor in mass killings. We should have the courage to take reasonable steps to limit their proliferation and

accessibility, and try in a rational way to limit the mass killing capability available to the troubled individuals among us.

Gary Noesner

Chief, FBI Crisis Negotiation Unit (retired)

Moneta, Virginia