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Is there a way forward on gun violence?

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There is a wide variety of ideas and attitudes regarding gun violence within our country, just as there is on a number of other issues. However, protecting our children and reducing the number of ongoing incidents of gun violence is such a critical life issue that we must find a way forward. To many of us on the left, it seems so obvious. There is no reason for individuals to be in possession of military assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines. Gun and Second Amendment advocates believe the Constitution demands the formation of a militia to protect ourselves from our own government. Simply restating our different positions will not get us closer to a solution.

Kevin Williamson in an article in *The National Review* states the constitutional case fairly dramatically. He criticizes conservatives for bending to public pressure and agreeing that something must be done about assault weapons. It seems to Williamson that assault weapons are the most critical part of the Second Amendment. They make it possible for militias to operate effectively against government forces. He ridicules the notion that assault weapons provide no recreational function. For Williamson, this is obvious. They are not meant for recreational purposes. They are meant to provide the ability to initiate an insurrection against an unjust government.

I'm sure there is nothing any of us can say that would alter the beliefs of Kevin Williamson. Yet I do have a few thoughts I feel compelled to share. If one were to take up arms against our government, my understanding is that one would be guilty of treason. President Abraham Lincoln conducted a war against states that chose to secede from the union. Also, take a look at the country of 1776. Most of our country at that time was a dangerous frontier inhabited by Native Americans who were often hostile to the settlers. As the population moved westward, the idea of disarming settlers who had to protect themselves and their families from bands of Native Americans, outlaws and wild animals made no sense. None of those conditions exist today.

There was also a question of whether the new government would have much of a standing army during peacetime, and this suggested a need for citizens to have arms. In the Revolutionary War, we know soldiers were conscripted and brought their own guns to do battle with the British. Today, we have by far the largest military in the world, and spend an enormous amount to maintain a standing Army. Private armed-citizen militias are no longer needed to protect our country from foreign invaders. The conditions that may have once argued for such an armed citizenry no longer exist.

What then, is the reason for the maintenance of home-grown militias in our own age? The only possible reason involves fear and even hatred of government. It basically demonstrates an unwillingness to be a part of our democratic government. There actually is a lot more to our Constitution than the Second Amendment. Much of it exists to take away any need for armed insurrection. Has Williamson forgotten the checks and balance system built into our Constitution to prevent any part of the government from becoming too powerful? Has the fact that we regularly have the power to change our government at the ballot box been lost in a questionable adherence to one amendment? Could it perhaps be that those who promote such a military option for the citizenry do not want to accept the decisions made by the electorate? Are we seeing some indication of that in a continuing refusal among some to accept the fact that Barack Obama is the legitimate president of the United States?

I think those of us who believe that we must change in order to protect our children and ourselves must commit to pursue sensible gun legislation no matter how difficult it becomes. It won't happen easily, but it is now time for all of our citizens to decide what kind of country we want to live in. The majority of gun owners agree. We must listen to their legitimate concerns and craft legislation that truly protects the rights of legitimate gun owners for hunting, protection and recreation, as well as protecting the rights of all of us who want to live in a safer environment. Those who want to wage war against the United States don't fit into my equation, and I don't believe that is what the Second Amendment means. If it does, then we should change it. No constitution or law should be permitted to put the lives of its citizens, especially its children, in jeopardy.

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