

A Unification Position on Gun Control

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The Unification movement has an ambivalent relationship to guns and violence. On the one hand, Rev. Sun Myung Moon defined himself a “Peace-Loving Global Citizen,” stated he had tried everything except being a soldier because he never wanted to kill anyone, and dedicated his ministry to the reconciliation of former enemies. On the other hand, at the height of the Cold War, he warned that if “North Korea provokes a war against the South Korean people,” his followers would organize a “Unification Crusade Army” and “take part in the war as a supporting force to defend both Korea and the free world.”



Unification movement-owned factories in Korea manufactured M-1 rifles and the Vulcan Cannon. During the 1980s, the movement-funded Washington Times supported intermediate-range missiles in Europe, SDI (i.e., the militarization of space), and violent revolt of the Nicaraguan Contras. More recently, Kook Jin Moon, the owner of Kahr Arms, a successful gun manufacturer, claimed, “In the Kingdom of Heaven, all people would...bear arms.” Abel, he said, should never have let himself be killed by Cain but instead used his creativity “to develop a weapon.”

Given its ambivalent relationship to guns and violence, does Unificationism have a word to contribute to the acrimonious and divisive gun control debate in the post-Columbine, post-Virginia Tech, post-Gabby Giffords, post-Aurora, post-Sandy-Hook era?

Some Unificationists maintain there should be no restrictions on gun ownership or usage. In his “Freedom Society” talks, Kook Jin Moon argues that the Swiss militia system best approximates Rev. Moon’s vision of “Peace Kingdom Police.” Everyone has their full-time job and career with all able-bodied male citizens keeping fully automatic firearms at home.

However, it bears mentioning that these arms are government-issued and Swiss citizens are not permitted to keep ammunition for them, it being stored in government arsenals. Until 2007, militia members were allowed a small emergency supply of ammo but it had to be kept in a sealed box and was subject to regular inspections to ensure no unauthorized use had taken place. In 2007, the distribution of ammunition stopped and militia were required to return what ammo they had. Apart from the heavily regulated militia, Swiss gun laws are considered to be restrictive. Gun purchases require a valid weapon acquisition permit and have to be registered.

In his “Strong Korea” speeches, Kook Jin Moon singles out Israel as a democracy that has chosen “strength over weakness.” He states, “They have developed a culture where they can mobilize and maintain a very strong military force to preserve their independence.” Yet Israel’s gun control laws are, if anything, more stringent than Switzerland. In Israel, it is forbidden to own any kind of firearm, including air pistols and rifles, without a firearms license. In addition, honorably discharged military officers, ex-special forces, retired police, full-time jewelry dealers or handlers of large sums of money, civil guard volunteers, and residents of militarily strategic buffer zones considered essential to state security are eligible for licenses allowing them to possess only one handgun. Licensed hunters may possess one shotgun. Licenses, which include passing a weapons training course, are required and must be renewed every three years. In short, gun ownership in Israel is considered a privilege and not a right.

The situations of Switzerland and Israel suggest that gun control measures are not inconsistent with either democratic governance or a strong national defense.

The United States is an anomaly among developed nations in terms of its lax gun possession laws. Still, it would be a mistake to assume there is little or no legislation on the books. The National Rifle Association (NRA) reports 20,000 gun

laws nationwide and the American Journal of Preventive Medicine notes 300 federal and state laws regarding the manufacture, design, sale, purchase, or possession of guns.

Federal gun control measures commenced with the National Firearms Act (1934) passed in response to the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. It imposed an excise tax and mandated that "gangster weapons" such as machine guns and sawed-off shotguns be registered.

The Gun Control Act of 1968, enacted in response to the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr., broadly regulated the firearms industry through limits on interstate commerce. It required that dealers be licensed and banned sales to several categories of individuals including convicted criminals, addicts, illegal aliens, and the mentally defective. It also mandated that guns carry serial numbers and implemented a tracking system.

The Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990 made it illegal for an armed citizen to pass within 1,000 feet of any K-12 school in the country, and the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993 created a national background check system to prevent firearms sales to "prohibited" persons. A 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban was in force for ten years but allowed to expire in 2004.

Current agitation over gun control in the U.S. has followed the spate of mass-shootings over the past decade-and-a-half, particularly last December's Sandy Hook Elementary School murder of twenty school children and six adults as well as the perpetrator and his mother. Several states adopted stronger gun control measures, but a bi-partisan Senate bill which would have expanded background checks to gun shows, of which there are an estimated 5,000 annually in the United States, failed.

What, then, is or should be a Unification position on gun control? I suggest four principles should guide Unification thinking on this subject:

1. Transcendence. Unificationism is a religious worldview. It is not to be identified fully with any existing national ideology. Unificationists should give their allegiance, love, and service to their nations of origin or adoption. However, they cannot be held captive to particular formulations on any issue, including gun control. Our ultimate loyalty is to the Creator and all humankind. American Unificationists who absolutize the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution or portions of it (i.e., the right to keep and bear arms) are guilty of idolatry.

2. Individual Liberty. Unificationism places the highest value on individual freedom. It teaches, for example, that God Almighty will not interfere with human freedom even if persons choose or are tempted into unprincipled actions. It also holds that the dominant trend of history is humankind's "pursuit of freedom." With respect to gun control, Rev. Moon has repeatedly emphasized the right of individuals and societies to self-defense. In addition, Unificationism condemns political ideologies such as totalitarianism which deny human freedom and concentrate power in oligarchies or a single ruler. Despite their potential for harm, societies should be hesitant in denying citizens access to arms and wary of monopolies on weapons by ruling elites.

3. Public Responsibility. Unificationism teaches that humans are "connected" beings. As such, we exist and develop within a web of interpersonal relationships. These begin in the family and extend to the wider society. According to Rev. Moon, individuals are meant to serve the family, families to serve society, societies the nation, and nations the world. Unfortunately, few individuals or societies exemplify this "live for the sake of others" ethic. As a consequence, governments regulate behavior through systems of law. This is the rationale for gun control legislation.

4. A Higher Calling. Unificationists should be clear that weapons will not transform the human heart or the world. Like the law, armaments primarily exist to restrain evil. In the wrong hands, they further evil. Many Unificationists will make use of firearms for sporting or hunting purposes. Some will serve in the military or law enforcement. A few will make their living in gun manufacture or munitions industries. Other Unificationists will abjure violence entirely, seeking to "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks."

In a 1977 interview, Rev. Moon stated, "We are conquerors by love, conquerors by truth, but not by violence, not by weapons." Elsewhere, he cited the "army of Jesus" which "used no weapons, neither swords nor spears" but before whom the Roman Empire fell. Unification teaching upholds "voluntary surrender" or "natural subjugation" by means of sacrificial love. Firearms have their place, but this is the higher calling to which all Unificationists should aspire.

Dr. Michael Mickler's books include: Footprints of True Parents' Providence: The United States of America (2013) and 40 Years in America: An Intimate History of the Unification Movement, 1959-1999 (2000)