Chapter 1: Why Armed Resistance?

The Biggest Killer
War was not the Twentieth Century’s biggest killer. Tyranny was. The contest wasn’t even close. Hard to believe? Look at the numbers.

Comparing the death toll
Professor Rudolph J. Rummel, of the Political Science Department, University of Hawaii, has made an extensive study of both wartime and peacetime deaths by government action during the Twentieth Century. His findings are summarized in the following table.

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<th>Cause</th>
<th>Total (Millions)</th>
<th>Average per 100,000 Population</th>
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“Government” killings include those persons killed by government officials, or with government acquiescence in the killing by others. Those categorized as government killings in the table specifically exclude execution for criminal acts (murder, rape, spying, treason, kidnapping, etc.). The government killings counted in the table also do not include those killed by police in riots or other conflict events, nor those killed in bombing of urban targets or through enemy siege or embargo. That is, those counted as government killings include only official terror, pogroms, genocide, and similar actions.

Professor Rummel’s data are complete only up to 1990. The figures quoted in the table do not include war deaths in the former Yugoslavia, in Afghanistan and Iraq. Nor do they include the non-war but government-inspired massacres in Rwanda and in certain of the successor states of the former Soviet Union. Adding these numbers in, however, would not change the overall picture significantly.

While the figures in the table cannot be precise, especially for peacetime deaths in totalitarian countries, the results are so clear-cut that any likely errors do not change the overall picture. Deaths at the hands of governments, in peacetime, totaled over three times as many as all war deaths in the same period. Moreover, the peacetime deaths presented in the table may be underestimates. For instance, Professor Rummel utilized the best figures available in the 1980s regarding deaths through government terror in Communist China, which came to about 60 million. More recent information indicates the toll may have been as many as 80 million. Hence the disparity between deaths through war and deaths through peacetime government action may be even greater than it appears from the table.

Gun Control and Genocide

But how were tyrannical governments able to carry out such massive killings? After all, government officials are always a tiny minority of the population. How were these officials able to kill many times their own number? Jay Simkin, Aaron Zelman and Alan M. Rice, writing for Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership, offer a very simple answer: the victims were disarmed first. In their study, Mr. Simkin and his fellow researchers have specifically investigated the most significant cases of genocide since 1900, and determined the then-existing laws regarding ownership of firearms. A brief summary of their findings is as follows.
Turkey
The Turkish massacre of Armenians from 1915 – 1917, which results in some 1,150,000 deaths, was preceded by a gun control law imposed in 1911. ...

Soviet Union
The Bolsheviks imposed their first gun control laws in 1918, during the civil war. In August of 1918, a law was passed requiring registration of all firearms, ammunition, and sabres. Of course, gun registration is always followed by gun confiscation. The only reason for a government to register the firearms of honest people is to know where they are, so they can be confiscated later. The other shoe fell in October 1918, when the registration certificates were revoked and ownership of firearms banned. In 1922 the various gun control laws of the civil war era were incorporated into the Criminal Code. Unauthorized possession of a firearm was punishable by hard labor. By 1929, when Stalin began his various genocidal campaigns, the population was completely disarmed. Only the police and the army had any weapons. According to Professor Rummel, over fifty million people were killed in the resulting genocide. This number doesn’t include those deported from the nations of Eastern Europe to Siberia after the Soviet occupation of those countries. At least 1.2 million Poles, and about 127,000 in total from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were deported. Of these, a third to half died on the way or in the labor camps. The total killings exceeded those of the Nazis when they occupied the same territories. ...

Germany
The Weimar Republic, in 1919, confiscated all firearms. In 1928, the firearms ban was relaxed. A law was passed licensing firearms dealers, and establishing a system of permits to purchase firearms and ammunition. As a result of this law, the police had lists of everyone legally owning firearms (of course, criminals, Nazis, and Communists didn’t register their firearms). When Hitler came to power, these lists were used to disarm all opposition to the government, particularly Jews. The Nazi gun law of 1938 essentially banned all private ownership of firearms. However, it specifically exempted from its ban police and military units, the SA (Stormtroopers) and the SS (Blackshirts). That is, government officials and Nazi thugs were allowed weapons; no one else was. ...

Communist China
After their takeover in 1949, the Chinese Communists imposed a gun control law in 1957 that prohibited the unauthorized manufacture, purchase, or possession of firearms or ammunition. When the Red Guards began their government–sponsored campaign of terror in the 1960s, the people had no weapons with which to oppose them. The death toll was (as noted above) possibly as high as eighty million.

Uganda
In 1955, the British had passed a gun control law restricting firearms ownership. After Uganda achieved its independence, a slightly modified version of that law was passed in 1970. This law required a government license to purchase or possess firearms or ammunition. It also authorized the “chief
licensing officer” of each district to deny or cancel licenses without cause and without appeal. Idi Amin seized power in 1971. He first purged the army of the followers of ousted President Obote. An army numbering no more than 25,000 men, supplemented by a secret police numbering 3,000, then killed some 3000,000 Ugandans and oppressed a population of thirteen million....

**Cambodia**

...More than a third of Cambodia’s 7 million people were killed by the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979. Gun control in Cambodia dated back to a 1938 Royal Order, which remained in effect after Cambodia achieved independence in 1953. The Khmer Rouge won the civil war that started in 1970, and seized power. After that, the Khmer Rouge administrators and troops would enter a village, and tell the villagers that they didn’t need firearms any longer, since the troops were there to protect them. When the few people who had licensed arms, and whatever number had unlicensed arms, surrendered their weapons, the Khmer Rouge then herded the villagers out of their homes into the “killing fields.” ...

**Afghanistan**

If gun control is the prelude to genocide, is an armed citizenry proof against genocide? Afghanistan provides one example to answer that question. Afghanistan is the genocide that didn’t happen. The Afghan Penal Code of 1976 had only one article regarding firearms. Other than that, the possession of firearms and ammunition was completely unrestricted.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, in 1979, could have resulted in the same kind of genocide that had been visited on Eastern Europe after it was occupied by the Soviets. It didn’t, because Afghans were armed to the teeth. ...

The evidence is clear. Genocide is impossible when the victims are armed and able to resist. Disarming a population is always the first step to genocide. Gun registration is always the first step to gun confiscation. Moreover, the experience of Germany and Cambodia shows that the government that does the disarming may not be the government that commits the genocide. Once a “decent” government has disarmed the people, on whatever pretext, the way is open for a tyrannical government to oppress them. The Hitlers and the Pol Pots succeed only because the people have previously been disarmed.

...

As Joseph Story wrote, “One of the ordinary modes, by which tyrants accomplish their purposes without resistance, is by disarming the people, and making it an offense to keep arms.” History bears him out.

*All text taken from “Resistance to Tyranny” by Joseph P. Martino, © 2010*