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## America's 80 million potential snipers

By Timothy Wheeler

October 20, 2002

As fear grips residents of Virginia and Maryland over the latest sniper murders, gun-control groups see the opportunity to advance their agenda. Never shy about exploiting public horrors, they now clamor for stricter controls on the latest politically incorrect gun: the sporting rifle.

Working to portray weekend target shooters as sharing the spirit of the killer, the Violence Policy Center lays out on its Web site a jeremiad against a "sniper culture." This group is apparently made up of anyone who owns or reads hobby magazines about target rifles chambered for military ammunition. Physicians for Social Responsibility chimes in with a general-purpose condemnation of all firearms, especially those that shoot the popular .223 caliber round. In fact, Physicians for Social Responsibility's Web site breathlessly informs us, .223 bullets are "highly lethal bullets that cause extreme internal damage." Well, yes. Any bullet causes too much damage when used by a vicious murderer on an innocent victim.

The .223 is one in a long line of military cartridges adopted for civilian use. Along with the .308 rifle cartridge and the .45 caliber and 9 millimeter pistol cartridges, it is seen on target ranges every weekend. Since these are all arguably high-power, tissue-damaging military bullets, just about all of America's 80 million gun owners are potential snipers, according to the gun banners' logic.

It was inevitable that those who want to ban guns would finally get around to rifles used for hunting and target shooting. Remember "assault weapons"? These hobbyist and collector guns shoot one bullet at a time, as do any other legal firearms. But their black metal and plastic military look made them an easy target for gun control demagogues. Hence the assault-weapon bans of the 1990s.

And how about "pocket rockets" and "junk guns"? The clunky assault weapons were too big and powerful, the gun banners said. But these compact handguns were too little and easily concealed. So they, too, had to be demonized. This deception paved the way for several state laws further restricting citizens' access to guns suitable for self-defense.

So far the Violence Policy Center and Physicians for Social Responsibility have not produced a list of guns they do approve of. Or perhaps they don't approve of any, and would like to ban them all. If so, why can't they be honest and state their true goal of a total gun ban, once and for all?



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BRIDAL SHOW  
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San Diego Concert  
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The answer comes from the gun banners themselves. In a letter to *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, public health gun grabber Dr. Jeremiah Barondess and his colleagues in New York City wrote that ideally all handguns would be banned, but such a ban was not yet politically feasible.

The writers therefore proposed a raft of lesser restrictions, all of which would make owning guns more difficult for average Americans.

The Violence Policy Center's own Tom Diaz all but admitted on National Public Radio's "Fresh Air," on Jan. 20, 1999 that such half-measures are only steps to the big prize – a total ban. UCLA law professor Eugene Volokh's blog dated Sept. 17, 2002 quotes Diaz as advocating that the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms regulate firearms out of existence. As Diaz puts it, "certainly [BATF] would not allow semi-automatic assault weapons to be manufactured and sold, and we believe that, ultimately, handguns would be phased out through such an agency."

None of this is to suggest that there can be no reasonable limitations on gun ownership. Convicted violent felons and the seriously mentally disturbed are reasonably prohibited from having guns. But groups like Violence Policy Center and PSR have left no doubt that they want to disarm America. When they try to tar good citizens as potential serial killers because they own target rifles, we know they are guilty of their own crime-character assassination.

The Washington-area sniper will be caught and imprisoned. Life will return to normal. We will come to view this harrowing episode for what it is – an isolated, bizarre crime in the life of a great and good nation. The lesson we should surely not take is that the sniper is even remotely akin to the average American gun owner.

*Wheeler, a physician, is director of Doctors for Responsible Gun Ownership, a project of the Claremont Institute. ([www.claremont.org](http://www.claremont.org))*

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