



Written by [Dennis Behreandt](#) on April 23, 2018

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More Guns, Less Genocide

Dispersal of power through an armed, freedom-loving citizenry is a bulwark against the crimes of tyrants and despots.

From the print edition of The New American

Recent violence in schools, the death of innocents at the hands of murderous teens and young adults, has once again induced statisticians to enlist the gullible and beguiled in mass movements aimed at overthrowing gun ownership in America and even in calling for outright repeal of the Second Amendment.



Writing in the *New York Times*, columnist Bret Stephens has repeatedly called for the repeal of the Second Amendment, most recently on February 16, 2018 in the wake of the shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Miami, Florida. In that column, he referenced his earlier call for repeal following the terrorist shooting in Las Vegas.

“Americans who claim to be outraged by gun crimes should want to do something more than tinker at the margins of a legal regime that most of the developed world rightly considers nuts,” Stephens wrote on October 5, 2017. “They should want to change it fundamentally and permanently. There is only one way to do this: Repeal the Second Amendment.”

Stephens is far from alone in making such a dangerous and radical suggestion. In June 2016, David S. Cohen — who launches into his column by pronouncing, “I teach the Constitution for a living” — wrote in the pages of *Rolling Stone* magazine, “Sometimes we just have to acknowledge that the Founders and the Constitution are wrong. This is one of those times. We need to say loud and clear: The Second Amendment must be repealed.”

While it is stunningly outrageous to hear sentiment from someone who claims to teach the Constitution proclaiming that a portion of the Bill of Rights should be overturned, radical statisticians in this country and elsewhere have long sought to remove both the right to defend oneself and the means to do so from the ordinary citizen.

Even a former Supreme Court justice is calling for the Second Amendment to be overturned. Protesters “should demand a repeal of the Second Amendment,” former Justice John Paul Stevens wrote in a column for the *New York Times*.

The arguments made by those who want to end the right to bear arms never engage the ethics of self-defense. The right to life is intrinsic — it exists prior to government and thus is not granted by government. Since it is not granted by government, neither can government revoke it. Every person has a right to live and, consequently, a right to protect his or her own life in the event that it is threatened. By extension, this includes the right to use tools such as guns and knives to conduct that defense. This



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ethical and philosophical background is what lies behind the Supreme Court's majority opinion in *District of Columbia v. Heller* that "it has always been widely understood that the Second Amendment, like the First and Fourth Amendments, codified a *pre-existing* right."

Elaborating on this point, the majority in *Heller* continued: "The very text of the Second Amendment implicitly recognizes the pre-existence of the right and declares only that it 'shall not be infringed.' As we said in *United States v. Cruikshank*, 92 U. S. 542, 553 (1876), 'This is not a right granted by the Constitution. Neither is it in any manner dependent upon that instrument for its existence. The Second amendment declares that it shall not be infringed.'"

The statist decry this, but have no cogent argument against it. Instead, they argue their case, disingenuously, from a utilitarian rather than an ethical position. Society experiences gun crimes, they say. Thus, to reduce or prevent gun crimes, the simple solution is to remove all guns from society.

This is a seductively simple idea, but it is nonetheless deceptive at its base. Gun control, even outright confiscation, would not remove guns from society. All it would do is remove guns from the majority of law-abiding people. Plenty of firearms and other weapons would remain available, as other contraband does even now, on the black market. But worse, potentially, is the fact that government authorities would continue to have access to weapons of every type of sophistication and lethality.

In the absence of the Second Amendment, government would have a *de facto* monopoly on guns.

This obvious fact is overlooked by those who are easily manipulated by liberal demagoguery. And it's one that's embraced by those same demagogues. After all, the entire program of the organized political left wing is to build up the power of government as much as possible. Putting the majority of weaponry in the hands of government is an effective means of achieving that end. It's also a means of setting up the potential for catastrophic genocides and other unspeakable crimes against humanity by creating an unbalanced concentration of power that is pregnant with the possibility of misuse and abuse, something the bloody history of mankind's past atrocities amply demonstrates.

Power Gradients

A gradient is an increase or decrease in magnitude. Nature is full of gradients and life itself depends on them. As one example, a difference in ion concentrations across a membrane in biological systems creates a gradient that is necessary for the functioning of nerve cells. In engineering, as another example, our own power systems depend on gradients. Consider hydroelectric power: Water pressure across a dam is an example of a gradient.

This last example is starkly illustrative. Consider the immense power stored as water pressure behind the Hoover Dam. There is much less pressure below the dam than above and behind the dam. Should the dam fail, anything at the bottom of the gradient would be wiped out.

This translates to the issue of gun control quite well. A strict government monopoly on guns creates a concentration of power of significant magnitude in the hands of government, while at the other side of the gradient is a defenseless majority that is almost entirely powerless. This creates a delicate and dangerous situation — any disruption threatens to cause a frightful dispersion of power down the gradient from the side of high concentration to the side of low concentration. When that happens in a socio-political context, massive crimes against humanity, including genocide and ethnic cleansing, are often the result.



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Sadly, history gives us many disturbing examples of this phenomenon.

The Armenian Genocide

“In view of the present situation the total extermination of the Armenian race has been decided by an imperial order.”

— Deputy Commander General and Minister of War Ismail Enver Pasha

Thus did the government of the Ottoman Empire, then controlled by a triumvirate of the so-called Young Turks that included Ismail Enver Pasha, decide to kill millions. The conditions that led to this order, and to the actual genocide of nearly two million innocents in Turkey, is a textbook case of the danger of an extreme power gradient.

The Ottoman Empire was established after the conquest of the Byzantine Empire and the fall of Constantinople at the hands of the Turks in 1453. This was something new and ominous in all of known history to that time. Constantinople was a great Christian city, its environs the heartland of a Christian empire of such long standing that its destruction was hardly something that could be contemplated. And yet, arrayed against it was a great army of Turks employing enormous cannons — the latest military technology — and against which the famous walls of the city would prove no defense.

The night before the final assault on the city, those who remained gathered in the great church of St. Sophia. It was to be the last Christian service to be held there. Some hours later, the next day, the last Byzantine emperor fell in battle, and the Turks captured the city and engaged in three days of plunder during which thousands were murdered. Fleeing the invaders, “A great multitude of Greeks took refuge in St. Sophia, hoping for safety there,” recounted historian A.A. Vasiliev in his two-volume *History of the Byzantine Empire*. “But the Turks broke in the entrance gate and poured into the church; they murdered and insulted the Greeks who were hiding there, without distinction of sex or age.”

The days of plunder, murder, and destruction reached throughout the great city. “According to the unanimous indication of the sources,” wrote Vasiliev, “the pillage of the city, as Muhammad had promised his soldiers, lasted for three days and three nights. The population was mercilessly murdered.”

So passed the empire of the Byzantines into the hands of the Muslim Turks. The Christian citizens of the now-lost great empire became *ahl al-dhimma* — “the people of dhimma,” within the realm of the new and immensely powerful Ottoman Empire.

This status is defined in Islamic law. “According to shari’a, tolerance of religions based on previous divine revelations was not a merit but a duty,” wrote Princeton University Middle East Studies scholar Bernard Lewis. “In the lands under Muslim rule, Islamic law required that Jews and Christians be allowed to practice their religions and run their own affairs, subject to certain disabilities.”

In the Ottoman Empire, this meant that Jews and Christians would be recognized as part of a system of subservient internal states. In his *History of the Arab Peoples*, the late Oxford historian Albert Hourani described the arrangement:

The various Jewish and Christian communities had a special position, because they paid the poll tax and had their own legal systems of personal law, and also because the government had to be assured of their loyalty. In the capital and the provinces, the government recognized a spiritual head of each



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community as having a certain legal jurisdiction and being responsible for collecting the *jizya* [the poll tax on every adult male] and maintaining order.

Still, as *dhimmis* and “second class citizens” of the empire, Jews and Christians fell under the many other restrictions required by Islamic law. These included, according to Bernard Lewis, “the wearing of distinguishing garments or badges, and a ban on bearing arms, riding horses, owning Muslim slaves, or overtopping Muslim buildings.”

The inability to be armed would prove destructive. As a result of this, early in the history of the Ottoman Empire, the conditions for a worsening power gradient between the Muslim ruling minority and their captive second-class citizens were created. The system of separate faith-based states within the empire, the so-called “millet” system, sufficed until the mid-19th century to moderate this gradient to a degree, keeping the empire relatively stable. But as European Christian states grew ever stronger in commerce, military affairs, and general influence, including in Russia, nationalist feeling, especially among the Christians of the Ottoman Empire — including the Armenians — grew. Combined with the loss of their European territories, the Turks of the Ottoman Empire felt increasingly under siege.

Simultaneously with the rise of nationalist feeling among the Armenians was a similar rise in nationalist feeling among the Turks. The situation grew volatile after the Ottoman Empire lost a war with Russia. By treaty in 1878, territories with large populations of Armenians were ceded to Russia. Those remaining in Ottoman districts were increasingly distrusted. The Turks afterward began to fear the rise of an Armenian Christian nationalist fifth column.

They weren’t entirely wrong. Though lacking rights, being generally dispersed, and losing large numbers to Russia, nonetheless two Armenian nationalist groups had arisen, the Hunchak Society and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, better known as the Dashnaks. To the Turks, both were terrorist groups. This was perhaps a justified designation. “Both societies espoused the use of violence to achieve Armenian political aims,” noted Oxford historian Eugene Rogan in his *The Fall of the Ottomans*. “They saw themselves as freedom fighters.”

Their activities proved to be destabilizing. The greater mass of Armenians had no way to protect themselves, and often had to pay “protection money” on top of taxes. Naturally, this contributed greatly to Armenian discontent, and some refused to pay the protection money, lighting the spark of bloodshed.

“The violence began in the Sasun region of southeastern Anatolia in the summer of 1894, when Kurdish nomads attacked Armenian villagers for refusing to make the traditional protection payments on top of their tax payments to Ottoman officials,” Rogan recounts. “Armenian activists took up the cause of the overtaxed Armenian peasants and encouraged their revolt.... The Ottoman government dispatched the Fourth Army, reinforced by a Kurdish cavalry regiment, in a bid to restore order. Thousands of Armenians were killed as a result.”

This led the Hunchaks to stage a march in protest in Istanbul. “They gave both the Ottoman government and all foreign embassies forty-eight hours’ advance notice and set out their demands, including the appointment of a Christian governor general to oversee reforms in eastern Anatolia and the right of Armenian villagers to bear arms to protect themselves against their well-armed Kurdish neighbors,” Rogan recounted.

After violence broke out in the capital during the march and 60 peaceful protesters were killed, the European powers protested and Ottoman ruler Abdulhamid agreed to reforms in six eastern provinces.



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News of this frightened and enraged the Muslim population of those provinces, setting the stage for extreme bloodletting. Rogan notes, "Within days of the sultan's decree, a new and far more lethal wave of massacres swept the towns and villages of central and eastern Anatolia. By February 1896, American missionaries estimated that no fewer than 37,000 Armenians had been killed and 300,000 left homeless."

This bloodshed was but a prelude to what was to come. Following the turn of the century, increasing warfare and internal strife led to Abdulhamid's overthrow in a coup led by the Young Turks. Originally believed by all parties in the empire to be liberals who promised a new age of freedom for all, hopes were soon dashed. The Young Turk triumvirate of Ismail Enver Pasha, Mehmed Talaat Pasha, and Ahmed Djemal Pasha ("pasha" being an honorary title given to military officers upon reaching the rank of major general) sought, during the hostilities of the First World War, to convert the Ottoman Empire into a Turkish ethnic state. Their hostile eye turned particularly to the Armenians, who they believed were probably conspiring with the Russians. The regime decided to act by murdering every Armenian.

Photo: AP Images

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An order sent by Talaat Pasha, the minister of the interior, on May 15, 1915 conveys the bloody decision of the regime:

It has been previously communicated that the government by the order of the Assembly (Jemiet) has decided to exterminate entirely all the Armenians living in Turkey. Those who oppose this order can no longer function as part of the government. Without regard to women, children and invalids, however tragic may be the means of transportation, an end must be put to their existence.

Implementation of this order proceeded along three avenues. First, able-bodied Armenian men were pressed into military service and sent to battlefields where they were to meet their deaths both at the hands of the enemy and from "friendly fire." Women, children, the aged, and others were to be deported to the deserts of Syria. Most were attacked and murdered along the way. A final segment was to be inducted into military labor to work to supply the Ottoman armies. One of the latter was Yervant Alexanian, whose special skills (he knew how to play the bugle and to sew) made him valuable enough for the Ottomans to keep around.

In his memoir, *Forced Into Genocide*, Yervant recalled what happened to him and his family:

I was officially enlisted into the Ottoman Army on June 10, 1915, just weeks before my family was forcibly made to take the road of deportation. As they marched to their death, I began a new life in the workshop of the twenty-seventh *Kolordu* (Army Corps) of the Ottoman army.... I received permission from the barracks to accompany my family as far as the farthest outskirts of town.... After spending one night under the stars, the next morning the policemen escorting the caravan woke everyone up and ordered them to march.... The moment of parting had now arrived.... It was now my turn [to say goodbye]. First, Shushan ... embraced me and thanked me for defending her when the Turkish boys had attacked us many years earlier. For a moment, she and I looked into each other's eyes, and in our innocent minds, imagined all the things that may have been.... Then my mother approached me. Tears streaming down her cheeks, she kissed both of my eyes, caressed my head, and said "Good-by my son, take good care of yourself." I was filled with the desire to do something to whisk her away from the situation, or to go with her to protect her. But what could I



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do?... And then, while I watched, the caravan scaled the Kartashlar Yokush Hill, their Golgotha, and disappeared from view. How can I ever forget that last glimpse I caught of them? After all these years, it had come to this.

Yervant lost 51 members of his family in the genocide. Total numbers vary, of course, but University of Hawaii historian R.J. Rummel has done more than nearly anyone else to document the history of genocide, and he reports the total number killed by the purge in Turkey to be 1,883,000 — deaths that could have been avoided if there had not been a disparity in power between the Ottoman Turks and their unfortunate victims.

Cambodia

Never has there been a century as bloody as the 20th, at least so far. In each case, the genocides perpetrated by tyrants were made possible by a power gradient, with all the power of government and its arms and armaments concentrated in the hands of a few elite madmen and their followers and arrayed against a helpless, disarmed majority. So it was in the Cambodia of the Khmer Rouge.

From the mid-1960s, Cambodia had been the locus of more concentrated and bloodthirsty government power than anywhere else on Earth. The prince and ruler, Sihanouk, had been deposed, replaced by General Lon Nol, something of an anti-communist, but terribly bloodthirsty in his own right. Sihanouk had joined forces with the Khmer Rouge, lending them greater authority. These were in league with the communists from Hanoi. And pointed at this horrible mixture was the might of the U.S. Air Force. In the middle were the powerless majority. The power gradient was steep, the outcome terrifying. Many thousands died at the hands of Lon Nol's soldiers, under the guns of the communists, or as unintended victims of the massive tonnage of bombs dropped from the sky above.

The disaster can be traced to the 19th century. In 1863, in an agreement with King Norodom of Cambodia, that nation fell under a French protectorate. By 1887, France controlled the entire region, known as French Indochina, comprised of the northern and southern regions of Vietnam, Cambodia, and — added in 1893 — Laos.

The later history of this region is one of intense warfare, bloodshed, and tears. Much documentation has, as a result, been lost. What is known, however, is that those living under French rule in the region were not allowed to have guns, unless they had become naturalized French citizens.

Writing for Colorado's Independence Institute, Tien Thuy Dinh, a researcher with the organization, noted that during the colonial period in French Indochina, guns were prohibited. He provided an overview of Vietnam's gun-control laws, showing the extent of the gun ban by the French.

In 1925, Tien Thuy Dinh recounted, a group of Vietnamese citizens delivered "The Wish List of the Vietnamese People" to the governor-general of Indochina, then Alexandre Varenne. The document asked for the governor-general to grant freedom to the region's citizens, including the "freedom to bear firearms for hunting or for defense of one's possessions against the raids of bandits."

This was certainly a request that would not be granted. According to the *Washington Post*, the French implemented gun laws in France proper in 1939. If the French government could move in the direction of restricting gun ownership in France itself in less than a generation, what hope for an alternative policy was there for the colonies?

The long legacy of gun restrictions that started in French Indochina left average Cambodians



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defenseless as the carnage of the late 1960s turned into the ruthless genocide of the 1970s. “Had the Cambodian civilians of the 1970s been as well-armed as American civilians are, it is far from obvious that the Khmer Rouges, whose army numbered less than one hundred thousand troops, could have murdered as many as they did,” noted Daniel D. Polsby and Don B. Kates, Jr. in the *Washington University Law Review* in 1997.

Even though their victims were already largely unarmed due to decades of gun-control measures, the Khmer Rouge took pains to make sure of the fact. The “Khmer Rouge leadership wanted to make sure and took the extraordinary precaution of a nationwide house-to-house, hut-to-hut search to confirm that the country was indeed defenseless,” noted Polsby and Kates.

Rather incredibly, the initial result of the Khmer Rouge takeover was the expulsion of people from the cities. Phnom Penh was depopulated because the Khmer Rouge believed it was corrupt and in need of cleansing. They “ordered everyone out of the city at gunpoint. In this and in all newly occupied cities and towns, the order to evacuate was implacable. Everyone. All 2 million to almost 3 million in the capital, and in the days following perhaps 200,000 in Battambang, 130,000 in Svay Rieng, 60,000 in Kompong Chhnang, 60,000 in Kompong Speu, 50,000 in Siem Reap, and so on,” recounted R.J. Rummel of the dreadful event.

No longer would there be a “corrupt” city elite. Everyone — assuming they lived, of course — would labor, communally, in the fields. Still many, many were enemies of the people. These would need to die. But perhaps death was a liberation, horrible as that may seem. A common slogan heard throughout Pol Pot’s Cambodian death regime was, “Losing you is not a loss, and keeping you is no specific gain.” Life had no value. Torture was common, as was cannibalism. Anyone could be killed for almost any reason. Cattle were treated better than people. Indeed, “On occasion,” recounts the French scholar Jean-Louis Margolin in *The Black Book of Communism*, “the Khmer Rouge really did put into practice their constantly repeated threat to use human bodies as fertilizer for the rice fields. ‘Men and women were often killed to make fertilizer. They were buried in mass graves located near the crop fields, particularly where manioc was being grown. Often when you pulled out the manioc roots you would pull up a human bone that the roots had grown down into.’”

The macabre behavior in Cambodia is too gruesome to recount in detail. In total, according to Rummel, more than two million people, out of a population of probably a little more than seven million, died in what he termed “the hell state” of Cambodia.

Concentrates and Dispersions

“Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun,” said the tyrant and mass murderer Mao Tse-tung. “All things grow out of the barrel of a gun.”

Concentrating power in the hands of the state, anywhere it happened in the 20th century, created extreme power gradients, with those on the disempowered side of the gradient facing extermination. The communists were the greatest concentrators of power, as alluded to by Mao. The Chinese communists he led killed more than 76 million, according to Rummel’s count. That number may even be conservative.

Mao was only putting into practice what he saw the Soviets had perfected. They killed nearly as many. “Probably almost 62 million people, nearly 54,800,000 of them citizens, have been murdered by the



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Communist Party — the government — of the Soviet Union,” Rummel wrote in his *Death by Government*.

All these people, innocents murdered, *were defenseless* in the face of overwhelming government power.

The Nazis, oddly enough, provide us with a counterpoint — their behavior toward a well-armed populace. The Nazis killed everyone they viewed as undesirable or as enemies of their regime, murdering millions of Jews and others. Meanwhile, they sought to create a larger Germany, and to unify ethnically German regions of Central and Eastern Europe. Not surprisingly, then, one of the nations they coveted was Switzerland, a nation that seemingly would have been an easy target for Hitler’s forces. Crucially, however, Switzerland was never invaded. The reason, at least in part, was because the tiny mountain nation was individually well armed.

Nonetheless, the Swiss position in the first years of World War II could not have been more precarious. France had fallen, and skilled and hardened German forces were poised everywhere near the Swiss frontier. For their part, the Swiss army — commanded by General Henry Guisan, one of the era’s best leaders — was heavily outclassed and outnumbered. The Germans, meanwhile, were planning “Operation Tannenbaum,” the invasion of Switzerland. The invasion plans were also being coordinated with the Italians. The Germans thought they might be able to defeat the Swiss militarily in two or three days, depending on the forces used.

But they never invaded. As to why, opinions vary, and each reason has some validity. Hitler at one point forbade it, thinking there was no advantage in gaining the country. After the fall of France, a shocked and frightened Switzerland was more willing to engage in diplomacy, perhaps influencing Hitler’s decision. Still, the Swiss army was not insignificant, and, more importantly, the Swiss people were armed and certainly would be willing to fight back from their mountains. The Reich likely couldn’t spare the time and forces for a fight with the Swiss, either, given the impending invasion of Russia.

Stephen Halbrook, whose work on the history of Swiss armed neutrality in World War II is indispensable, noted in *The Swiss and the Nazis* that Switzerland is and has been a porcupine bristling with small arms against outside invaders. It’s been that way for centuries. Once, famously, it defended itself with pikemen; by the 20th century, the pikemen had become among the world’s best marksmen.

“In Switzerland, not only was every able-bodied man enrolled in the militia army, even youngsters and old men were issued rifles,” Halbrook notes. “These latter were also encouraged to join *Ortswehr* units and wear an armband so that, under the terms of the Hague Convention, they would have rights as uniformed combatants if an invasion occurred. When the war broke out, as *Ortswehr* member Max Jufer remembers, older men and young boys alike shook their fists and exclaimed, ‘We shall hit them. We will kill seven before we are killed.’ If paratroopers came, Jufer was sure *Ortswehr* members would have picked them off in the air.”

It appears that the Nazis were aware of the potential for stout resistance from the Swiss. Brigadier General Bernhard von Lossberg was assigned to plan an alternative attack on Switzerland. According to Halbrook, Lossberg wrote that he expected strong resistance from the well-armed Swiss: “We recognized that the mountain-habitation and the freedom-loving character of the troops would make for stubborn resistance and probably also later small wars to contend with.”

Despite its seemingly precarious position in 1940, what saved the Swiss was the fact that, armed as it was throughout its civilian population, there was not a sufficient power gradient between the



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Wehrmacht and the intended victim. The power of the gun, dispersed throughout the Swiss population, prevented a Nazi success and the extension of their atrocities to yet another nation.

The history of the 20th century, more than any other, demonstrates that the weak are easily preyed upon by the strong. The dispersion of power, of which guns are a significant part, is essential in preventing deadly concentrations of political power.

None other than James Madison, who perhaps more than anyone else sought to eliminate power gradients in political organization, recognized this fact.

In *The Federalist*, No. 46, he framed what to him was a fantastical notion, imagining a scenario in which the federal government might someday have a standing army with the resources of the whole nation behind it, and might turn that army upon the states and the people. He argued that the people, if armed, would be able to resist.

“The state governments, with the people on their side, would be able to repel the danger,” he wrote. Against such an army, he continued, “would be opposed a militia ... with arms in their hands.” Unlike most other governments, who wouldn’t trust their people to be armed, Madison noted, the Americans bearing arms form “a barrier against the enterprises of ambition, more insurmountable than any which a simple government of any form can admit of.”

He also pointed out that the might of the British Empire had been turned against the colonies and, properly armed, the American people were able to defend themselves, and even win their freedom, against what was then the world’s preeminent superpower.

Madison was right, and the history of the preceding century demonstrates the accuracy of his insight, that an armed populace is an impediment to tyranny. He and the other Founders sought to create a system of constitutional government that was both limited in scope and had its powers, such as they were, dispersed among three branches, the remaining powers reserved to the states and the people. And the people were to be armed, not for hunting or for sport, but to ensure the continual dispersal of power.

Madison, Jefferson, and several of the other Founders knew that concentration of power, and a monopoly on weaponry in the hands of the state, was the recipe for tyranny. The enormous crimes of the past century prove they were right.

Concentrating political power, and granting government a monopoly on arms, is a most dangerous formula. In a century or so of what he termed “democide,” R.J. Rummel counted nearly 170 million people killed by their own governments.

Their deaths are a warning.

Photo: AP Images



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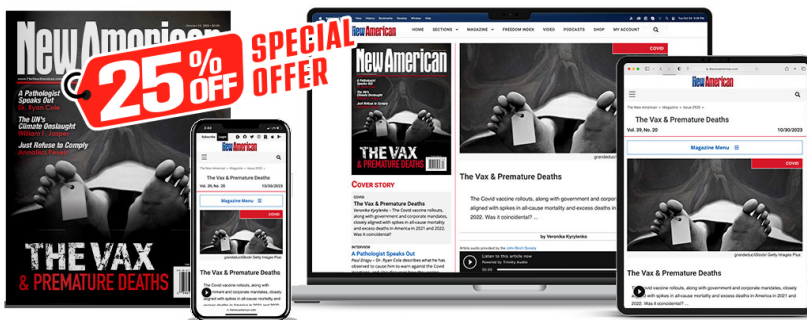
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