



**RESEARCH PACKET**

# **POLITICS COUNCIL**

## Should British Police Officers Be Armed With Guns?

More than 90 percent of British police do not carry guns, a policy felt acutely during the recent terror attack in London and the earlier March attack outside the Parliament.

The first two officers arrived at London Bridge within two minutes of the emergency call and being unarmed with guns, tackled the killers. However, the terrorists were able to escape and continue stabbing civilians until being gunned down by other armed officers.

This is a common scenario, lamented an anonymous police officer in an op-ed, who said he had changed his mind over his twenty years as a police officer to supporting firearms for law enforcement.

Britain's law enforcement rely mostly on handcuffs, mace, stun-guns, batons, and similar tools to fight crime.

The rationale behind the scarcity of guns is that armed police would send a violent message to communities and would cause problems, not solve them.

Britain's intelligence agency had warned in 2014, long before this year's March attack, that a terrorist attack in the United Kingdom was "highly likely."

## London Bridge Attack: Why Most U.K. Police Don't Carry Guns

The London Bridge attack and a similar one in March near the heart of Britain's democracy may have been shocking, but authorities have known for years that such incidents were coming.

And yet more than 90 percent of the capital's police officers carry out their daily duties without a gun. Most rely on other tools to keep their city safe: canisters of mace, handcuffs, batons and occasionally stun-guns.

The Metropolitan Police, which covers most of London, was founded in 1829 on the principle of "policing by consent" rather than by force. Giving everyday police officers guns sends the wrong message to communities, so this thinking goes, and can actually cause more problems than it solves.

Although there are higher numbers of armed police guarding Parliament, the attacker who rushed its gates in March was shot dead by a relatively rare member of the country's security forces — one who had been trained to use a firearm.

Some of these gun-wielding officers patrol the city in pairs, others are members of crack response teams — units dressed in body-armor, helmets and carrying long rifles — who are called to the scene of violent incidents like these. In most instances, they don't use their weapons.

In the year up to March 2016, police in England and Wales only fired seven bullets. (Although these government figures do not include accidental shots, shooting out tires, or killing dangerous or injured animals.) These officers fatally shot just five people during that period, according to British charity Inquest, which helps families after police-related deaths.

In August, when a teenager suffering an episode of paranoid schizophrenia killed an American tourist in a busy London street, armed police rushed to the scene but not a single bullet was fired. They were able to subdue the attacker, Zakaria Bulhan, using a stun-gun. And no one else, but 64-year-old American Darlene Horton, who had already been stabbed to death, was hurt.

The Metropolitan Police carried out some 3,300 deployments involving firearms in 2016. They didn't fire a single shot at a suspect.

It's a world away from the United States, where cops killed 1,092 people in 2016, according to figures compiled by The Guardian.

Of course it's easier for police to remain unarmed if civilians do the same. Out of every 100 people in Britain, fewer than four of them owns a firearm, according to GunPolicy.org, a project run by Australia's University of Sydney. In the U.S. there is more than one gun per person.

While shootings involving police are relatively common in the U.S., authorities in Britain say they review each one with painstaking diligence. Every time a British police officer shoots and injures or kills someone, it is automatically referred to an separate watchdog called the Independent Police Complaints Commission, or IPCC.

Although the officer who shot the London Bridge Attack's assailant has been branded a hero, they too will likely be referred to the IPCC, although that doesn't mean there will be a full investigation.

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## America and Guns

The Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution states: “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” Supreme Court rulings, citing this amendment, have upheld the right of states to regulate firearms. However, in a 2008 decision (District of Columbia v. Heller) confirming an individual right to keep and bear arms, the court struck down Washington, D.C., laws that banned handguns and required those in the home to be locked or disassembled.

A number of gun advocates consider ownership a birthright and an essential part of America’s heritage. The United States, with less than 5 percent of the world’s population, has about 35–50 percent of the world’s civilian-owned guns, according to

a 2007 report by the Switzerland-based Small Arms Survey. It ranks number one in firearms per capita. The United States also has the highest homicide-by-firearm rate among the world's most developed nations.

But many gun-rights proponents say these statistics do not indicate a cause-and-effect relationship and note that the rates of gun homicide and other gun crimes in the United States have dropped since highs in the early 1990s.

Federal law sets the minimum standards for firearm regulation in the United States, but individual states have their own laws, some of which provide further restrictions, others which are more lenient. Some states, including Idaho, Alaska, and Kansas, have passed laws designed to circumvent federal policies, but the Constitution (Article VI, Paragraph 2) establishes the supremacy of federal law.

The Gun Control Act of 1968 prohibited the sale of firearms to several categories of individuals, including persons under 18 years of age, those with criminal records, the mentally disabled, unlawful aliens, dishonorably discharged military personnel, and others. In 1993, the law was amended by the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, which mandated background checks for all unlicensed persons purchasing a firearm from a federally licensed dealer.

In January 2016, President Obama issued a package of executive actions designed to decrease gun violence, notably a measure to require dealers selling firearms at gun shows or online to obtain federal licenses and, in turn, conduct background checks of prospective buyers. Gun-control advocates hope these steps will help close existing legal loopholes that have allowed violent criminals and others to purchase weapons without FBI screening.

Additionally, he proposed new funding to hire hundreds more federal law-enforcement agents, and budgeting \$500 million to expand access to mental health care. (Suicides, many by individuals with undiagnosed mental illnesses, account for about 60 percent of gun deaths.) The president said he was compelled to move on this issue under his own authority because Congress had failed to pass "common-sense gun safety reforms."

As of 2016, there were no federal laws banning semiautomatic assault weapons, military-style .50 caliber rifles, handguns, or large-capacity ammunition magazines, which can increase the potential lethality of a given firearm. There was a federal prohibition on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines between 1994 and 2004, but Congress allowed these restrictions to expire.

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## THOUGHTS TO PONDER ON

- Is the United States of America (USA) ready for looser Gun-Control laws? What maybe the best case and worst case scenarios that arise from the passing of this bill? Is it what America truly needs in the face of terrorist dangers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?
- What differs USA from the United Kingdom (UK) in terms of gun-control laws? Is it acceptable or unacceptable to use UK as a viable example in this case?
- If USA should tighten gun control laws based on its history of mass shootings, what may be the acceptable option to increase the nation's security?
- If USA were to loosen gun-control laws, what is the best model for regulation?