

Indiana Jones & The Real World

"I'm very troubled ... at the fact so many people in the United States carry guns. It obviously contributes greatly to the crime problems we have ... gun laws should be

strengthened." So sayeth Indiana Jones, a.k.a. Harrison Ford, on location in Spain. And it is fair to say Ford's view is that of our intellectual and cultural elite.

But is it true? Is it really obvious that gun ownership and the carrying of concealed weapons by citizens "contributes greatly to the crime problems we have"? Where is the evidence?

It does not exist. Indeed, all the evidence refutes that notion so dramatically it is astonishing that folks like Harrison Ford, a man of the world, can still believe and spout such nonsense.

In 1995, Gary Kleck published in the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* of Northwestern Law School his now-famous paper, "Armed Resistance to Crime: The Prevalence and Nature of Self-Defense with a Gun." Among its unchallenged assertions:

- Law-abiding citizens use guns to defend themselves against criminals 2.5 million times a year or about 6,850 times every day.
- Of these 2.5 million self-defense uses of guns, more than 200,000 are by women defending themselves against sexual abuse. Often, a Saturday Night Special is a girl's best friend.
- 11 out of every 12 times citizens use their guns in self-defense, they merely brandish them or fire a warning shot.
- When citizens do fire, they shoot and kill twice as many criminals as do cops every year. But, while 2 percent of civilian shootings are of people mistaken for criminals, that is true of 11 percent of police shootings.

Publicized by the Gun Owners of America, these facts have been confirmed by scholar John Lott who has just published a book with Indiana Jones in mind: *The Bias Against Guns*. Its subtitle: "Why Almost Everything You've Heard about Gun Control is Wrong."

From the anecdotal evidence dug up by Lott, author of the previous best-seller, *More Guns, Less Crime*, burglars are more fearful of armed homeowners than of cops. A burglar in St. Louis colorfully explained why to authorities: "See, with the police, they goin' say, 'Come out with your hands up and don't do nothing foolish!' Okay, you still alive, but you goin' to jail. But you alive. You sneak into somebody's house and they wait 'til you get in the house and then they shoot you. ... See what I'm sayin'? You can't explain nothin' to nobody; you layin' down in there dead!"

Why do intelligent people believe armed citizens are less safe than unarmed ones? It seems to defy common sense. But Lott has discovered the reason. The media spike stories about the successful use of guns in self defense. To them it is simply not news.

Brandishing a gun stops crime 95 percent of the time, Lott learned. There are millions of such stories every year in communities all across the nation. Most often, the successful use of guns in self-defense occurs in high-crime urban neighborhoods. Why don't we read these stories? Because the media do not report them.

Going back through the *New York Times* of 2001, Lott found 50,745 words in 104 articles devoted to gun-crime sto-

ries. Only 163 words were about the successful use of guns in self defense.

The *Washington Post* had 46,884 words about crimes with guns, but only 953 words on the defensive use of guns. *USA Today* "contained 5,660 words on crimes committed with guns and zero words on examples of defensive gun use." To Big Media, bad news about guns is the only news worth reporting.

Being able to threaten a burglar or rapist with a gun is the most effective way to prevent crime in urban areas. Yet, city folks favor gun control. Why? Because they have been propagandized into believing their security lies not in having a gun but in gun control laws that disarm them but do nothing to disarm the criminals who prey upon them.

Going back through the ABC, CBS, and NBC shows for 2001, Lott found 190,000 words on gun crimes, but only 580 words devoted to one news broadcast about a cop who used his gun to stop a school shooting. Lott's chapter on the blind anti-gun bias in the press ("The Media on Guns") is itself worth the price of the book.

At journalism school, 40 years ago, we were taught, "The people have a right to know." And they have a right to know that the surest way to protect their families in high-crime areas is the possession of firearms. By concealing this truth, the media have made us all less secure.

After the horrific L.A. riots of 1992, gun sales soared, as did citizen demands for a right to carry concealed weapons. Thirty-five states have now enacted such laws, and the crime rate has correspondingly fallen, as has the incidence of "rampage killings" in these states. It is a provable fact: the better armed the citizenry, the fewer predator crimes they will endure.

Indiana Jones, say hello to John Lott. ■

War on Terror: Two Years In

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the Bush administration's prosecution of the war on terror has gone wrong, terribly wrong. The toppling of the Taliban

in Afghanistan was necessary—though the government we installed in Kabul is in dire straits. There was no alternative to destroying a regime that sheltered those who plotted the 9/11 attacks.

Iraq was another matter altogether. The Bush administration started this war even though Saddam Hussein had no real connections to Osama bin Laden and nothing to do with the World Trade Center attack. It was a war that had been dreamed of and agitated for in neoconservative think tanks and magazines for years before George W. Bush's election—a grand scheme to transform the Middle East, please Israel, show the Arabs who's boss, and provide an oil-fueled bonanza for American corporations. When Osama bin Laden struck on 9/11, the neocon intellectuals who had established a base of operations within the Pentagon came forth with their plan. "Attack Iraq," they proclaimed, as a well-practiced chorus. The op-ed pages filled with calls for "Iraqi liberation." Soon enough an Office of Special Plans was set up in the Pentagon to push phony "intelligence" about Saddam Hussein's links to Osama bin Laden and his purported weapons of mass destruction. These intelligence findings turned out, unsurprisingly, to be false. But the neocons got their war, which American soldiers fought courageously and effectively—though with only one major ally and against the wishes of the populations and governments of the democratic West that had stood with the United States for the past half century.

The results are now plain. As Harvard professor Jessica Stern succinctly put it

shortly after a truck bomb destroyed the UN offices in Baghdad: "America has taken a country that was not a terrorist threat and turned it into one."

However much the Iraqi people may have welcomed the demise of Saddam Hussein, they detest the foreign occupation of their country, the destruction of their infrastructure, the collapse of law and order in their streets, the loss of jobs. It is simply human nature for Iraqis to care more about the threat of their children being kidnapped on the way to school than the putative benefits an American-style democracy might conceivably bring in the distant future. One Iraqi political party estimates that 37,000 Iraqi civilians were killed in the war, a figure that, if half true, means that many thousands of relatives are interested in revenge. In the postwar chaos, American soldiers, ill-prepared for occupation duty and lacking sufficient manpower to pacify the country, have a choice between cringing in armored vehicles or becoming easy targets for resurgent terrorism. And newly recruited terrorists are reportedly streaming into Iraq from throughout the Arab world. Meanwhile, even as the occupying force in Iraq is stretched thin, the neocons agitate for more wars—against Syria, against Iran.

According to the administration's rhetoric, the war against Iraq was supposed to make Americans safer and to bring about a transformed Middle East. But it has galvanized al-Qaeda recruitment not only in the Arab world but as far away as Southeast Asia. It is hard to imagine how George W. Bush could have presented a

greater gift to Osama bin Laden.

The road map to peace between Israel and the Palestinians—initially a promising development—has stalled and may be terminally ill. The United States may have face the fact that Palestinian Prime Minister Abu Mazen is too weak to control the Palestinian factions and that Ariel Sharon has little real interest in a viable Palestinian state.

The results are an American Middle-East and anti-terror policy in total disarray—costing American taxpayers billions of dollars every month with no end in sight—anti-American sentiment in the Mideast rampant and escalating, and American soldiers as sitting ducks for any Muslim who wants to strike a blow against foreign occupation of Arab land.

To right the errors made by his administration, President Bush will have to clean house in his foreign policy establishment, root out those who pushed for these failed policies, and appoint sensible conservatives in their stead. As more and more Americans are coming to realize, the neoconservative project is a radical one, millenarian in style, based on the absurd belief that once Arab or Muslim regimes are smashed, Arab political culture will be transformed and desirable governments will automatically rise in their place. The roots of such error lie partially in the neocons' Trotskyist origins and a wide-eyed Wilsonian conviction that democracy is a universal panacea, tied together by a belief that the only thing Arabs understand is force. The result is a policy at once brutal and naïvely utopian, profoundly ill suited to the conduct of a great power.

The president has dug the United States into a deep hole. The next months will let the American people know whether he is the man to lead us out of it. ■