

Democrats Take the Lead in Attack on Democratic Rights

After Orlando massacre

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The campaign launched by Senate Democrats to ban gun purchases by anyone on the massive FBI terrorism “watch list” is the opening move in a broader attack on democratic rights.

Both the Obama administration and presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton have endorsed the effort led by Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut, who staged a 15-hour filibuster Tuesday and Wednesday, with the backing of most Senate Democrats, to force Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell to agree to a vote on two gun-related amendments to an appropriations bill currently before the Senate.

It is not clear whether the amendments will pass when they come to a vote, now scheduled for Monday, but there will be heavy pressure mounted through the media and by Obama and Clinton, perhaps joined in this effort by the presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

One amendment would ban gun purchases by anyone on the FBI’s terrorism watch list. The other would expand the current requirement that gun stores perform background checks on buyers to include gun shows, Internet sellers and other private sellers.

Using the FBI’s terrorism watch list as the basis for banning an otherwise legal activity—in this case, purchasing a gun—is clearly only a test run for using the watch list for other, even more anti-democratic purposes.

The same slogan endorsed enthusiastically by Hillary Clinton—“no fly, no buy”—will have many other applications. If people on the watch list, now denied the right to board an airplane, are then denied the right to buy a gun, what comes next? Should they be denied the right to vote? What about the right to use the Internet, or drive a car?

The logic is inexorable, and in the event of new tragedies on the scale of Orlando, such demands will inevitably arise, and will be taken up by various factions in the reactionary political establishment in the United States.

The FBI watch list is a huge database, estimated at 800,000 names, and including, among the many well-publicized errors, a Republican congressman and a four-year-old boy, both from northern California. There is no judicial review of the FBI operation, and no legal procedure for having one’s name removed from the list.

An ACLU-backed lawsuit against the Department of Homeland Security's "no-fly" list, a subset of the FBI database, has been dragging on in the federal courts for the past six years. Another such lawsuit, sponsored by Islamic-American groups, is in federal court in Virginia.

The vast majority of the names on the watch list are people "suspected" of links to terrorism, in most cases without meeting any justiciable standard, such as "probable cause," let alone proof "beyond a reasonable doubt."

Many, if not most, are Muslim Americans who were "nominated" for the list because they come from Syria, Iraq, Somalia or other countries ravaged by US-sponsored wars, or attend the same mosque as an Islamic extremist, or had bigoted neighbors who called the FBI over people wearing traditional Islamic dress.

As the *New York Times* admitted in an analysis Wednesday, "Tens of thousands of counterterrorism tips flow to the FBI each year. Some are legitimate. Others come from vengeful ex-spouses or people casting suspicion on Arab-Americans."

The 800,000 names compares to what FBI Director James Comey described as about 1,000 active investigations into alleged ISIS sympathizers in the United States, and the tiny handful of actual terrorist attacks by people claiming to be ISIS supporters—even if one includes an attack like that in Orlando, where the only apparent connection to ISIS was gunman Omar Mateen's 911 call after the bloodbath had already begun.

The statements by leading Democrats in support of the ban on gun purchases have been remarkably blunt in their anti-democratic thrust. Senator Dianne Feinstein, top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said the ban would apply to "known or suspected terrorists."

It is doubtful that any "known terrorists" are visiting US gun shops, passing the required background checks and having themselves recorded by store cameras. In any case, no new laws would be required to arrest them. As for "suspected terrorists," that category is infinitely flexible, depending on whose mind is responsible for forming the "suspicion" and what grounds are adduced for doing so.

In his remarks Thursday, after visiting Orlando for private meetings with families of the victims of the massacre at the Pulse gay night club, President Obama sounded the same theme, condemning the fact that "weapons of war" were freely available on America's streets.

There are more than a few ironies in this statement. Obama is, of course, the commander-in-chief of the US military-intelligence apparatus, which is responsible for the death, not of dozens, but of hundreds of thousands during Obama's tenure in the White House.

The AR-15 semi-automatic, which he condemned, is the civilian version of the same weapon that US soldiers use to mow down villagers in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is supplemented by weapons with far more firepower, such as the Apache helicopter gunships now unleashed on the Iraqi city of Fallujah by the Pentagon, at Obama's orders.

As for terrorists having access to weapons, it is the United States and its allies who have funneled arms into Islamic fundamentalist organizations in Libya and Syria, first as part of the war against the government of Muammar Gaddafi, and then as part of the proxy war against the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad.

And finally, no one in the official “debate,” Democrat or Republican, comments on what the proliferation of mass shootings says about the health of American society as a whole. The nearly 10,000 gun homicides a year represent a death toll greater than in many civil wars.

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