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Good guys with guns: Former Interpol chief Ron Noble on the Westgate Mall mass shooting

David Kopel

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One of the differences between moderate advocates of gun control and prohibitionists is in their attitudes toward self-defense. The former are willing to recognize that defensive arms in the right hands can be socially beneficial. The latter deny that firearms do in fact save lives. A good example is Katie Couric's new TV special "Under the Gun." In that program, Matt Lauer states: "There is a very common expression out there that 'The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is to have a good guy with a gun.'" Couric answers, "Most public health experts and gun safety experts say that it is just a specious argument."

The unnamed "experts" on whom Couric relies are apparently not expert at reading newspapers. Literally, a good guy with a gun is not the "only" way that armed criminals are stopped. But it is an important way, including in mass shootings. As I detailed in a 2015 study for the Cato Institute:

Over the last 25 years, there have been at least 10 cases in which armed persons have stopped incipient mass murder: a Shoney's restaurant in Alabama (1991); Pearl High School in Mississippi (1997); a middle school dance in Edinboro, Pennsylvania (1998); Appalachian School of Law in Virginia (2002); Trolley Square Mall in Salt Lake City (2007); New Life Church in Colorado (2007); Players Bar and Grill in Nevada (2008); Sullivan Central High School in Tennessee (2010); Clackamas Mall in Oregon (2012; three days before Newtown); Mayan Palace Theater in San Antonio (2012; three days after Newtown); and Sister Marie Lenahan Wellness Center in Darby, Pennsylvania (2014).

Some of these cases are discussed in Eugene Volokh's post "Do citizens (not police officers) with guns ever stop mass shootings?"

Now, Ronald K. Noble, former secretary-general of Interpol, is weighing in on the issue. During the first Clinton administration, from 1993 to 1996, Noble served as assistant secretary and then undersecretary for enforcement at the Treasury Department. This made him the direct supervisor of the main federal gun control agency, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. As such, he played a major role in the Clinton administration's very aggressive gun control program. This included changing BATF licensing practices for Federal Firearms Licensees to deny the majority of them license renewal.

After that, he returned to teaching law at New York University. In the fall 1998 semester, he and I co-taught NYU's "Gun Control and Gun Rights" seminar. The usual co-teacher, James Jacobs,

was on sabbatical, so I was enlisted to substitute for him in providing a “pro-gun” balance to Noble’s views. In 2000, Noble was elected secretary-general of Interpol, the first non-European ever to hold the post. Noble went on to serve three terms as secretary-general, leaving in 2014. He now runs a global security consulting firm based in Dubai, RKN Global DWC LLC.

As Noble explains, his 14 years of close involvement in global counterterrorism changed his perspective on gun control. This week, he has published a video about the 2013 mass shootings at the Westgate Mall in Nairobi. The video, “[Armed Citizens Can Help Stop Terrorist Massacres Like Nairobi and Paris](#),” shows graphic footage of the attack and of the response of armed citizens. During the lengthy and well-planned attack, more than 60 innocent people were murdered. As Noble explains, the death count would have been hundreds more if not for the armed citizens who intervened. As Noble puts it, “This is not an American argument, nor a political argument. In these horrific situations, law-abiding armed citizens have helped protect others and literally saved lives, and the world should be made aware of this reality. . . . In the hands of law-abiding citizens, guns can and do save lives.”

Noble still favors a variety of non-prohibitory gun regulations that I do not. Yet the global question is not about the exact scope of Second Amendment rights in the United States. In Europe, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and the United States, mass shootings have become all too common. The perpetrators may be terrorists, gangs or people with mental illness. (The last category overlaps significantly with the first two categories.) The global question is about reducing the number of innocent people who are murdered. Among the important steps in saving lives is acknowledging that victims of mass attacks are necessarily their own first responders. As Westgate Mall demonstrated, when innocent victims have the tools of defense, innocent lives are saved.

David Kopel is Research Director, Independence Institute, Denver; Associate Policy Analyst, Cato Institute, D.C; and Adjunct professor, Denver University, Sturm College of Law. He is author of 17 books and 100 scholarly journal articles. Kopel is an NRA-certified safety instructor. The Independence Institute has received NRA contributions.