

At a Christmas party yesterday, apropos of a certain #, somebody said "But the Palestinians have the right to bear arms! It's essential to their dignity!" I replied, "In 1945 we denied the Japanese & West Germans the right to bear arms, & they managed dignity nicely without arms."....Just how important is the dignity factor in "national sovereignty," "the right of a people to self-determination"? As you can see, the question has gotten to me....

1 What's the relationship between the citizen's arms-right & the nation's? We weary of the hoary arguments endlessly trotted out by the National Rifle Association in favor of **individual sovereignty**: a guy's gotta be prepared to defend himself & his family against criminals, & to participate in the repulsion of invasion, & to overthrow an unjust government. But dramatic flourish is no substitute for hard fact: owning a gun is more apt to be bad news for you & yours than good news, vis-a-vis criminals. And the government would supply you with arms in case of invasion. And the U.S. history of citizen revolt--the Whiskey Rebellion, Harper's Ferry, Fort Sumter--is dismal, the prospects now even worse than in the past. No, IRA, come clean: your argument's bottom line is male ego, macho. (Not by purchase but by inheritance, I'm a gun-owner. But if the law forced me into being an ex-gun-owner, it would have no effect on my ego. Cheerfully, & with thanksgiving to God, I let the police & the military do the gun-toting for me.)

2 "Dignity" is Latin for Germanic-English "**worthiness**." If you don't got dignity, you ain't worth nothin'. You're worthless. So, since God & I are for everybody's having dignity, we treat everybody as having essential worth regardless of existential worth. And the other way 'round: Since everybody has creational worth, worth as a creature of God, we as individuals & societies should look to everybody's human dignity. (This assignment is so tough that it answers the question whether everybody in church on any given Sunday has something to repent of when the Confession of Sin comes 'round in the liturgy.)

3 Rights theory rests on deontology, ie moral-obligation theory. Society removes criminals' rights because, in society's eyes, criminals have failed to fulfil their moral obligations. (Lest society overdo this, we need, & have, criminals'-rights legal defense.) Ex-felons can never get a gun permit, never have restored to them "the right to bear arms." And the rest of us like it that way: we hold that this right is relative (ie given by God through society), not natural (ie directly given by God, & so "unalienable").

4 The individual's right to bear arms being alienable, does it not follow that a nation's arm-right is really only an arms-privilege, rightly removable, upon abuse, by a higher authority, viz a supernational (imperial) or international (federational) political entity? True, there's no automatic moral superiority in any such over-ruling authority. Eg, the ancient Middle Eastern empires were inferior to some of the nations they crushed, depriving them of their arms-privilege. But **the Bible** is a product of a people who found their highest dignity when arms-deprived. If the Palestinians can't find dignity without arms, there's something wrong with them neither Israel nor the rest of us can help. When I'm asked to find in my heart some sympathy for them, I look all around inside my heart & can find none. Of course I pray they'll stop the self-abuse of demanding what Israel cannot let them have, viz arms.

5 Why cannot Israel permit a sovereign (ie arms-bearing) Palestinian state? Because, as I said above, "ex-felons can never get a gun-permit": whenever weaponed, the Palestinians have tried to destroy Israel, & there's no evidence that, re-weaponed, they'd have a change of heart. Arms-less autonomy for the Palestinians? Israel has favored that since 1967. Sovereignty? Of course not. Think of the recent Palestinian pro-Saddam demonstrations!

6 **Self-esteem** is what you, a person or a people, have when your dignity is independent of your political fortunes. Though the British permanently deprived us of arms 2½ cs. ago, military impotence has not deprived us Scots of our dignity. And S.Carolina is doing OK in spite of Lincoln's depriving it of arms.