

THE U.S. GUN INDUSTRY AND OTHERS UNKNOWN



***EVIDENCE DEBUNKING THE GUN INDUSTRY'S CLAIM
THAT OSAMA BIN LADEN GOT HIS 50 CALIBER
SNIPER RIFLES FROM THE U.S.
AFGHAN-AID PROGRAM***



Violence Policy Center

The Violence Policy Center is a national non-profit educational organization that conducts research and public education on firearms violence and provides information and analysis to policymakers, journalists, grassroots advocates, and the general public. The Center examines the role of firearms in America, analyzes trends and patterns in firearms violence, and works to develop policies to reduce gun-related death and injury.

This report was authored by VPC Senior Policy Analyst Tom Diaz.

This report was funded with the support of The David Bohnett Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, and The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Past studies released by the Violence Policy Center include:

- *John Ashcroft: Year One* (January 2002)
- *"A .22 for Christmas"—How the Gun Industry Designs and Markets Firearms for Children and Youth* (December 2001)
- *Kids in the Line of Fire: Children, Handguns, and Homicide* (November 2001)
- *Firearms Training for Jihad in America* (November 2001)
- *Unintended Consequences: Pro-Handgun Experts Prove That Handguns Are a Dangerous Choice For Self-Defense* (November 2001)
- *When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 1999 Homicide Data* (October 2001)
- *Voting from the Rooftops: How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, Other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles* (October 2001)
- *Shot Full of Holes: Deconstructing John Ashcroft's Second Amendment* (July 2001)
- *Hispanics and Firearms Violence* (May 2001)
- *Poisonous Pastime: The Health Risks of Target Ranges and Lead to Children, Families, and the Environment* (May 2001)
- *Where'd They Get Their Guns?—An Analysis of the Firearms Used in High-Profile Shootings, 1963 to 2001* (April 2001)
- *Every Handgun Is Aimed at You: The Case for Banning Handguns* (March 2001)
- *From Gun Games to Gun Stores: Why the Firearms Industry Wants Their Video Games on Your Child's Wish List* (December 2000)
- *Firearms Production in America, 1975-1997—A State-by-State Breakdown* (December 2000)
- *License to Kill III: The Texas Concealed Handgun Law's Legacy of Crime and Violence* (August 2000)
- *Guns For Felons: How the NRA Works to Rearm Criminals* (March 2000)
- *Where Did You Get That Statistic?—A Bibliography and Resource Guide For Advocates Working To Reduce Gun Death and Injury* (January 2000)
- *Cashing in on the New Millennium: How the Firearms Industry Exploits Y2K Fears to Sell More Guns* (December 1999)
- *One Shot, One Kill: Civilian Sales of Military Sniper Rifles* (May 1999)
- *Making a Killing: The Business of Guns in America* (January 1999)
- *Joe Camel with Feathers: How the NRA with Gun and Tobacco Industry Dollars Uses Its Eddie Eagle Program to Market Guns to Kids* (November 1997)
- *Cease Fire: A Comprehensive Strategy to Reduce Firearms Violence* (Revised, October 1997)

Violence Policy Center
1140 19th Street, NW
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036

202-822-8200 phone
202-822-8205 fax
www.vpc.org web

©February 2002
Violence Policy Center

Osama bin Laden Did Not Get His Barrett 50 Caliber M82A1 Sniper Rifles From the United States Government

A Violence Policy Center (VPC) report issued last October—*Voting from the Rooftops: How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles*—documented in detail how various terrorists and common criminals have obtained and used American-made 50 caliber sniper rifles.¹ [Please see Appendix for executive summary of *Voting from the Rooftops*.^a] Among them was the organization of Osama bin Laden, now known as Al Qaeda, which bought 25 of these powerful military anti-materiel sniping rifles in 1988 or 1989. The bin Laden transaction came to public light last February through the sworn testimony of a government witness, Essam al Ridi, in the trial of Al Qaeda terrorists convicted of bombing American embassies in Africa.

The manufacturer of the sniper rifles that bin Laden purchased, Barrett Firearms Manufacturing Inc., and its president claim in response to the VPC report that the bin Laden sniper rifle sale was part of the United States government's support for the mujahideen—Afghan freedom fighters who fought the Soviet occupiers of their country through the 1980s. In effect, Barrett says, don't blame us—we were just taking part in an official U.S. government transaction, doing what our country asked us to do. Barrett accused the VPC of knowingly suppressing this alleged fact in its report.

This red herring is a transparent attempt to change the subject by “answering” a charge that was never made. The VPC never accused Barrett itself of knowingly selling these 25 sniper rifles to bin Laden's Al Qaeda. The VPC's point was—and will be until federal law changes—that the gun industry has increasingly manufactured weapons of extreme lethality and it is ridiculously easy for terrorists like Al Qaeda to legally buy these weapons of war in the U. S. civilian market. This is dangerous and risky for American security.

But, most importantly, there is simply no independent evidence that bin Laden in fact obtained his 25 Barrett sniper rifles as part of any U.S. government program. On the contrary, there is substantial, credible evidence that he did not. In addition to the uncontested trial transcript of sworn testimony, that evidence now includes VPC interviews with three former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officials who actually ran the Afghan mujahideen aid program from top to bottom.² Their statements are corroborated by other published reports about the Afghan aid program.

^a The full text of *Voting from the Rooftops: How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles* (October 2001) and *One Shot, One Kill: Civilian Sales of Military Sniper Rifles* (May 1999) is available at www.vpc.org.

So the question remains: if Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda did not get its 25 Barrett 50 caliber M82A1 sniper rifles through the U.S. aid program, how did it get them? The VPC sent a letter by overnight mail on January 10, 2002, to Ronnie G. Barrett, the president of Barrett Firearms Manufacturing, Inc., asking him for any documentation he may have explaining just that. He has not yet replied.

Indeed, the truth is that he may not know how bin Laden got his rifles. In light of all the evidence, the pro-gun organization Second Amendment Sisters, Inc. got the basic facts right in a column attacking the VPC report:

The VPC's star witness in this case is a man named Essam al Ridi, a naturalized US citizen who has admitted to purchasing the rifles...and other equipment in the US and transporting them illegally to the terrorist cells around the world.³

What eludes the ideologues at Second Amendment Sisters—and others in the radical gun movement—is the significance of the first link in this clandestine chain of supplying terror having been an entirely legal purchase of a weapon of war: business as usual in the American gun industry. This series of events fits an established pattern. It is exactly what the Irish Republican Army did to acquire the Barrett rifles it used to assassinate British soldiers and Irish constables, also documented in *Voting from the Rooftops*.⁴ No one has yet claimed that those sales were part of an American freedom fighter aid program. Moreover, Wadih el Hage—a member of Al Qaeda with whom al Ridi associated and who was convicted in the embassy bombings trial—testified before a federal grand jury that he bought firearms, including an AK-47, for the terrorist organization through his brother-in-law, a Texas “kitchen table” gun dealer.⁵

The Barrett Firearms Manufacturing, Inc. Version

In response to what it called “recent news articles accusing Barrett of selling guns to bin Laden,” Barrett Firearms posted on its Internet web site a message containing the following version of events:

What is the truth? Well, during the 1980's it must be remembered that the U.S. was supporting the Afghanistan “freedom fighters” or Mujahedeen in their fight against the Russian invaders. As part of the U.S. initiative, various types of small arms, ammunition and even anti-aircraft Stinger missiles were given to these “freedom fighters” in support of their cause....So how did the Mujahedeen buy this equipment from U.S. companies? Did they walk up to the manufacturer of the Stinger missile, say they were from Afghanistan, hated Russians, and needed a few Stinger missiles to knock some of their planes out of the

sky? Certainly not. Officials of the US government either sent them missiles from their own stock or arranged the sale through the current manufacturer. The latter was the case for the Barrett rifles, but Mr Diaz omitted these facts. If cognizant U.S. Government officials request the support of an arms manufacturer in such cases, should we [sic] to dispute their judgment?⁶

The *Associated Press* wire service also described the transaction as follows, quoting the president of Barrett Firearms, Ronnie G. Barrett:

Ronnie Barrett, president of Murfreesboro, Tenn.-Barrett Firearms, likened sale of the .50-caliber armor-piercing rifles to the supply of the Stinger surface-to-air missiles given to anti-Soviet guerrillas in Afghanistan.

"Barrett rifles were picked up by U.S. government trucks, shipped to U.S. government bases and shipped to those Afghan freedom fighters," Barrett said.⁷

There is a kernel of truth in these well-parsed representations. The U.S. government did in fact supply some Barrett 50 caliber sniper rifles to the Afghan resistance. It just did not supply or authorize the ones bought by bin Laden's Al Qaeda. "We never sold anything to, or bought anything, or otherwise transferred anything to bin Laden in the 80s," according to the man who ran the program on the ground—the former CIA station chief in Pakistan.⁸

What Osama bin Laden's U.S. Agent Testified about the Barrett Rifles

On February 14, 2001, Essam al Ridi, a government witness, testified about various activities he had carried out for Osama bin Laden's organization while he resided in the United States.

In the first place, it is obvious that the whole point of al Ridi's testimony was to describe the beginning and growth of the Al Qaeda terror network. Given that, it defies reason to believe that the government would have put him on the stand to describe his participation in a U.S.-sanctioned purchase on behalf of that very terror network. And, in fact—according to the top people actually involved in the U.S. program of aid to the Afghan rebels—a number of al Ridi's statements are dead giveaways that he was not working with any such U.S. government program.

The first such statement is al Ridi's description of how he sent night vision goggles in the late 1980s to bin Laden's organization, which was then based in Pakistan:

- Q. Can you give us examples of what it is that you did to help from the United States?
- A. The second set of night vision goggles were actually shipped at that time I resided back in the U.S.
- Q. And how many night vision goggles were they?
- A. Eleven.
- Q. How did you ship them from the United States to Afghanistan?
- A. Just as a passenger luggage.
- Q. And who was the passenger that you gave them to?
- A. Wadia.
- Q. Is that Wadih El Hage? [VPC note: a defendant in the trial, later convicted.]
- A. Yes.⁹

This description is crucial. VPC's interviews with former top U.S. government officials established that the U.S. program did not use stray people like al Ridi—an Egyptian emigre and naturalized U.S. citizen—to buy equipment in the United States and ship it to the mujahideen. "We never used guys like this [to get] stuff from U.S. sources," according to the former station chief.¹⁰ "I have no idea who al Ridi is," said a former official who directed the procurement from the United States.¹¹

When the U.S. government bought armaments, it bought them directly from suppliers and shipped them through U.S. facilities to depots in Pakistan. "[The] stuff we bought, if he [Barrett] sold to us, we would have picked up," said the former official who directed U.S. procurement.¹²

Likewise, any night vision goggles sent to the mujahideen by the U.S. government would not have been sent as passenger luggage with private persons like Wadih el Hage. Moreover, all the officials said the U.S. program walled off bin Laden's organization in particular. "We never had any dealing with bin Laden, direct or indirect," said the former procurement official.¹³ Thus, even though al Ridi says truthfully that he was buying this equipment to help the mujahideen, he was in fact free-lancing for bin Laden's organization. He was not working for or with the U.S. government.

With that in mind, here is what al Ridi testified specifically about the Barrett

rifles:

- Q. What else did you ship?
- A. I shipped Barrett rifles, 50 calibers.
- Q. B-A-R-R-E-T-T. How many of those did you ship?
- A. 25.¹⁴

Note that al Ridi testified "I shipped." He did not say, "I arranged to be shipped," or "I asked to be shipped," or any other arguable variant that would imply that he got bin Laden's rifles in cooperation with the U.S. government. He was asked directly "what else did *you* ship," and he answered unequivocally, "*I* shipped" (emphasis added).

Again, it is clear that al Ridi was not acting as part of the U.S. mujahideen aid program here. The VPC interviews established that any Barrett rifles legitimately shipped through the CIA program were picked up, shipped, and distributed by government vehicles and through government facilities, not through random individuals. Al Ridi would never have been in the loop of a transaction under the U.S. Afghan aid program and neither would the Barrett rifles he bought for bin Laden.

Al Ridi testified to yet another action that marks him as a freelance agent for bin Laden, operating outside of the CIA-run program:

- Q. Now, did you ever see the rifles in Afghanistan yourself?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Can you tell us how it came to be that you saw the rifles in Afghanistan?
- A. How what, sir?
- Q. How did it happen that you were in Afghanistan and you saw these rifles?
- A. I received a fax of them having difficulty sighting the scopes on the rifles, so I was asked—
- Q. Can you explain what "sighting the scopes" means?
- A. It's lining the scope with the rifle barrel so whatever you see you'd have a hit. That's as simple as I can put it.

- Q. So what did you do after you received the fax?
- A. I planned a trip and I went to Peshawar and sighted the scopes for them.¹⁵

The fact that al Ridi went to Pakistan to “sight in” the Barrett rifles is more evidence that the rifles were part of a free-lance transaction. The VPC’s official sources say that if the rifles had been part of the official U.S. government program, any help in “sighting in” the rifles would have come from one of three sources: U.S. special forces, CIA special operations personnel, or Pakistani military personnel. In any event, it would have been ludicrous to fly an Egyptian emigre civilian all the way from the United States to sight the rifles in when competent personnel were on hand in country.

Al Ridi’s testimony also touches on the interesting question of the timing of these transactions, when he is asked to clarify the date of his trip to Pakistan to sight in the rifles:

- Q. Do you recall approximately what year this was?
- A. It's the year of it must have been 1989 because that's the same year where [sic] Sheik Abdallah [VPC note: a bin Laden mentor] was assassinated.¹⁶

Again, this point is significant evidence that al Ridi was operating outside of U.S. channels. Since al Ridi made this trip to Pakistan in 1989, it is likely that the rifles arrived that year too. They therefore were probably bought in 1989 or 1988 at the earliest. But official U.S. aid was already drying up by then. On April 14, 1988, the Soviets signed Geneva accords committing them to withdraw. In conformance with those accords, the last Soviet soldier left Afghanistan on February 15, 1989, and U.S. aid terminated.¹⁷

The officials we interviewed also said this timing signals that the rifles could not have been part of the U.S. program—not only was the program winding down, but any deliveries at this time would have been out of existing stocks, not newly purchased supplies. Their recollection is supported by contemporaneous news reports, which indicate that the official U.S. pipeline was cut back as early as Spring 1988.¹⁸ “The timing [of the al Ridi transaction] doesn’t compute,” said the former station chief.¹⁹

What Former U.S. Officials Say About the Afghan Program

VPC interviewed the three U.S. government officials most directly responsible for the Afghan resistance aid program at the time—the former chief of the CIA’s counter-terrorism center who was also head of the Afghan Task Force, the CIA’s former station chief in Pakistan, and the man who ran the weapons purchases from the United States.²⁰ These three uniformly:

- ! Deny that the U.S. sanctioned or made any transfer of Barrett rifles or any other weapons to Osama bin Laden or his group.
- ! Say that the procedures described in al Ridi’s sworn testimony about bin Laden’s purchase of Barrett rifles indicate that it simply could not have been part of the U.S. program.
- ! Confirm that although “some” Barrett rifles were shipped to the mujahideen, bin Laden’s group was specifically excluded from the program. They insist that the 25 rifles bin Laden bought were not part of the American program of aid to the mujahideen.

The following discussion is based primarily on those interviews. Endnotes indicate additional corroboration from published material. Out of concern for the privacy of those we interviewed, the VPC is not publishing their names. We are confident, however, that professional journalists would know how to contact at least two of them who have been widely quoted in the news media about their respective activities in the Afghan support program.

It is important first to recall that by far the vast preponderance of weaponry sent to the mujahideen was obtained from Warsaw Pact sources.²¹ This was primarily to maintain something called “plausible deniability”—so long as no U.S. weaponry was used in the war, the United States could maintain that it was not involved in the confrontation with the Soviet Union.²² Another reason was pragmatic: weapons from the Warsaw Pact would be compatible with weapons and ammunition the freedom fighters captured from the Soviets.²³

This changed in February 1986 when—in response to the introduction of advanced Soviet helicopters and spetsnaz special forces troops—the Reagan administration decided to allow Stinger missiles and other U.S. supplies to be sent to the Afghan resistance.²⁴

There was enormous political pressure—both from politicians and from organized right-wing interest groups in the United States—to supply the mujahideen with U.S. and other Western weapons suitable for the war from this climactic moment

on.²⁵ According to our interviews with former CIA personnel, that included pressure to provide Barrett sniper rifles. Officials on the ground in Pakistan resisted this idea for two reasons—the .50 BMG ammunition the rifles fired was not compatible with Soviet 12.7mm ammunition,²⁶ and the Afghan mujahideen were familiar with and wanted Warsaw Pact small arms. But a small number of Barrett rifles were eventually bought and shipped to the Afghan mujahideen.

Bin Laden was a presence in the war. But he was part of the so-called “Afghan Arabs,” or non-Afghani volunteers. “The CIA had nothing to do with” bin Laden, the former CIA station chief during the war said in an interview last year.²⁷ In another published interview, the same official said, “We knew who bin Laden was back then. But I stayed pretty much away from the crowd of Gulf Arabs who were doing the fund raising in Peshawar [Pakistan].”²⁸ And in yet another article, he wrote, “Despite what has often been written, the CIA never recruited, trained or otherwise used the Arab volunteers who arrived in Pakistan....The Arabs who did travel to Afghanistan from Peshawar were generally considered nuisances by mujahideen commanders, some of whom viewed them as only slightly less bothersome than the Soviets.”²⁹

It was for these reasons, the VPC’s sources explain, that Osama bin Laden was never the beneficiary of the U.S. program of aid to the Afghan mujahideen. The VPC sources’ version is corroborated by other independent and well-informed authorities. For example, Brigadier Mohammad Yousaf, who at the time in question was head of the Afghan Bureau of Pakistan’s Inter-Service Intelligence, through which all U.S. aid was channeled, notes in his memoirs: “Many additional millions were contributed by Arab organizations and rich individuals, mostly from Saudi Arabia. These funds were channeled directly to the Party of the donor’s choice, usually a Fundamentalist one.”³⁰ And the following description from a recently published book on Osama bin Laden and his organization unequivocally sums the matter up:

There was simply no point in the CIA and the Afghan Arabs being in contact with each other. The Agency worked through ISI [Inter-Service Intelligence] during the Afghan war, while the Afghan Arabs functioned independently and had their own sources of funding. The CIA did not need the Afghan Arabs, and the Afghan Arabs did not need the CIA. So the notion that the Agency funded and trained the Afghan Arabs is, at best, misleading.³¹

So How Did Osama bin Laden Get His Barrett Rifles?

As the VPC surmised in its original report, *Voting from the Rooftops*, Essam al Ridi apparently bought these rifles on the civilian market. By some means unknown

he then shipped them to the bin Laden organization. We can only speculate on whether al Ridi got help in this transaction from the private network of non-government Americans who were actively supporting the provision of military arms to the Afghan resistance.³² Some of these groups were not only active in the United States, but set up offices in Peshawar, Pakistan—the same city from which Osama bin Laden himself was operating at the time.³³ By whatever means al Ridi got the Barrett rifles into the arsenal of Osama bin Laden, the point remains precisely as it was made in the original report, *Voting from the Rooftops*—increasingly devastating weapons of war are freely available on the U.S. civilian firearms market to foreign and domestic terrorists. The design and marketing of these weapons is the dangerous consequence of an industry whose products are free from the basic oversight to which virtually all other consumer products are subject. A nation at war with terrorism indulges these dangerous excesses at its peril.

**Appendix: Executive Summary of
*Voting from the Rooftops: How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden,
other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50
Caliber Sniper Rifles*^b**

Two years ago, in its report *One Shot, One Kill*, the Violence Policy Center warned that the unfettered sale to civilians of military sniper rifles presented a “serious threat to American national security.”³⁴ That report focused particularly on the dangers presented by the 50 caliber heavy sniper rifles, noting that these powerful weapons of war present a “whole new order of threat” by their ability to “knock down aircraft, including helicopters, and punch through concrete block, armored vehicles, and other materials that may be relied upon for executive protection.”³⁵ These devastating features are exactly why Barrett 50 caliber heavy sniper rifles, for example, are in the armories of U.S. Marine Corps snipers and at least 17 other armies around the world.³⁶

The report sparked an ongoing national debate—with the predictable defense of these weapons by their manufacturers, the National Rifle Association, and other elements of the gun lobby. But civilian sales of 50 caliber sniper rifles have not been restrained. This report documents that—to the contrary—the 50 caliber market has exploded. There is an array of new manufacturers, a proliferation of models, and a dramatic reduction in price. Today, 50 caliber rifles are still easier to buy than handguns: a youth of 18 years can legally buy a sniper rifle, but cannot buy a handgun until age 21. The difference from two years ago is that he now has a much broader choice of guns, and the price has plummeted to within easy range of a modest budget.

Most alarming in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon is the 50 caliber’s threat as an ideal tool for assassination and terrorism, including its ability to attack and cripple key elements of the nation’s critical infrastructure—including aircraft and other transportation, electrical power grids, pipeline networks, chemical plants, and other hazardous industrial facilities. *Voting from the Rooftops* documents in detail the following facts and others that underscore the clear and present danger 50 caliber sniper rifles present to all Americans. *It proves beyond doubt that terrorists and other ruthless criminals now have the means, the training, and the motivation to inflict extraordinary harm on America with 50 caliber sniper rifles.*

^b This appendix is comprised from a section of the VPC study *Voting from the Rooftops: How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles*. It therefore contains references to facts and details that can be found in the full text of *Voting from the Rooftops*.

- ! ***At least 25 Barrett 50 caliber sniper rifles were sold to Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda terror network.***³⁷ Because sales of 50 caliber rifles are unrestricted and cannot be tracked, there is no way of knowing how many other sniper rifles—whether made by Barrett or one of its many competitors—have been sold to Al Qaeda or other terrorist organizations. However, at least two, and probably more, Barrett 50 caliber sniper rifles were sold to the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which used them to assassinate British troops and Irish constables in Northern Ireland.³⁸ The use of the Barrett sniper rifles in a calculated campaign of terror by assassination in Ireland won them the epithet “supergun” in the press.³⁹

- ! ***A fundamentalist Islamic organization offers a two-week training course at a site within the United States entitled “The Ultimate Jihad Challenge,” which includes “live fire sniper/counter sniper” and “shooting at, thru & from vehicle”—skills that directly enhance the threat from among any who possess a sniper rifle.***⁴⁰ The “Ultimate Jihad Challenge” course is among several advertised on the Internet web site of Sakina Security Services. The company specifically notes that because of strict firearms laws overseas, the training must be done “in our 1,000-acre state of the art shooting range in the United States.” Sakina’s web site features “Jihad Links,” including a link to *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen*, one of the organizations listed in President George W. Bush’s September 24, 2001, order freezing assets of terrorist organizations. The “Ultimate Jihad Challenge,” however, is only the most troubling example of the sniper training that gun industry entrepreneurs freely offer to civilians in the United States.⁴¹

- ! ***Terrorism analysts have warned repeatedly that terrorists may “attempt to engineer a chemical disaster using conventional means to attack an industrial plant or storage facility, rather than develop and use an actual chemical weapon,”***⁴² ***in other words “to transform a target into a weapon by focusing on facilities that handle explosive, toxic, or volatile chemicals.”***⁴³ ***Fifty caliber sniper rifles are ideal tools for many such scenarios.*** Given the Osama bin Laden terror network’s interest in chemical weapon capacity,⁴⁴ and its vicious use of commercial aircraft as flying bombs, this is a grave threat. The public version of this report documents generally how bin Laden’s Al Qaeda and other terrorists who have 50 caliber sniper rifles can turn a chemical target into a weapon of mass destruction, with the potential for thousands of casualties. A restricted appendix that will be made available on request only to Members of Congress, federal officials with anti-terrorism responsibilities, and chief law enforcement officers, examines several

specific scenarios and relates the capabilities of the 50 caliber sniper rifle to those scenarios. *The VPC believes that it is urgent for the public to understand the danger 50 caliber sniper rifles present. But it does not want to give a "road map" to terrorists, even though detailed descriptions of these weapons' capabilities are already available from manufacturer advertising and widely published sniper cult literature.*

- ! ***A 1995 RAND report for the U.S. Air Force specifically warns of the threat that 50 caliber sniper rifles—like the Barretts obtained by Al Qaeda—present to the security of aircraft on Air Force bases.⁴⁵ Applying precisely the same analysis to civil aviation facilities compels the conclusion that the 50 caliber sniper rifles now known to be in the hands of bin Laden and other terrorists are a threat of the highest order to both commercial and private civil aviation.*** This threat extends not only to the destruction of scheduled airliners, but also to civil aircraft serving business executives, celebrities, and government officials. The RAND report notes that its logic regarding air base attacks "would apply equally well to strikes against such valuable, and vulnerable, installations" as "satellite downlink and control facilities, oil pipelines, and port facilities—whose destruction could seriously impede U.S. response to crisis or conflict."⁴⁶

- ! ***50 caliber sniper rifles continue to be found in the arsenals of domestic terrorist and extremist groups, including among others a group in Michigan that planned to kill the state's governor, U.S. Senator, and federal judges, and another in West Virginia that plotted to blow up an FBI facility.⁴⁷*** Insurrectionist rhetoric threatening federal officials and public figures is common on a popular bulletin board catering to sniper rifle owners and enthusiasts.

- ! ***An e-mail threat to "kill a well-known political figure" was received by Sniper Country, one of a number of Internet web sites popular among the growing civilian sniper culture.⁴⁸*** Sniper Country says it turned the threat over to the U.S. Secret Service, which reportedly found the threat to have been made by a minor. The web site has since posted a "warning to Minors and Militants" advising that it does not support their activities. Nevertheless, the incident is graphic proof of a danger the VPC warned of in its first report two years ago—the ability of widespread "instructional material available in the sniper subculture to roil troubled minds and teach home-grown terrorists or impressionable juveniles how to use the destructive capabilities of sniper rifles to maximum effect."⁴⁹

This dangerous situation exists because the gun industry is the only consumer product industry, with the ambiguous exception of tobacco, whose products are not subject to basic consumer health and safety regulation. Accordingly, the industry is free to design, make, and market these products with no independent review balancing their benefits against the enormous risk they present.^c

This report discusses in detail the real and growing threats that the 50 caliber sniper rifle in the hands of Al Qaeda and other terror groups can inflict on America in the new age of unrestrained terror in the homeland:

- ! *Section One—The Capability of the 50 Caliber Sniper Rifle* describes the capabilities of the 50 caliber sniper rifle and the highly destructive ammunition for it, readily available on the civilian market. This section is documented by literature from manufacturers themselves, like Barrett Firearms Manufacturing Company, citations from U.S. military manuals, books and other articles written by acknowledged experts, and experiences of civilian gun owners posted on Internet bulletin boards.
- ! *Section Two—The Threats* documents the acquisition of 50 caliber sniper rifles by Al Qaeda and other foreign and domestic terrorist and criminal interests. It proves false the oft-repeated claim that no 50 caliber sniper rifle has ever been used in a criminal incident within the United States, and demonstrates the dangerous link between 50 caliber sniper rifles and criminals.
- ! *Section Three—Tools for Terror* outlines specific dangers that the 50 caliber sniper rifles in the hands of Al Qaeda present to American security. In addition to the assassination danger, which is more or less obvious to the reasonable layperson, this section analyzes the threat that the 50 caliber sniper rifle's anti-materiel capability presents to America's vital infrastructure. The latter threat—designed for war fighting—may be less apparent to the layperson, but it is at least equal to and may exceed the assassination threat, depending on the target of either threat. A restricted appendix to this section is not available to the general public.

^c See the frontispiece to this report for a list of Violence Policy Center publications examining other consequences of America's unregulated gun industry.

- ! *Section Four—Proliferating for Profit* documents the continuing growth of the civilian market for military sniper rifles, and the 50 caliber sniper rifle in particular. It describes the nexus between military development programs and civilian sales of new guns, and the exploitation of U.S. military resources by the National Rifle Association and other pro-gun groups promoting the 50 caliber sniper rifle. It provides background on the sniper subculture, including information on sniper training schools catering to civilians.

- ! *Section Five—The Future is Now* describes the likely future of the civilian sniper rifle market, including new models in other heavy calibers with capabilities equivalent to the 50 caliber sniper rifle that gun manufacturers are bringing to market. It outlines a program for action to lessen the danger 50 caliber sniper rifles present, including most importantly bringing them immediately under the licensing and registration regimen of the National Firearms Act of 1934 (NFA). All other weapons of war, such as machine guns, are controlled in the civilian market under the NFA.

Endnotes

1. Violence Policy Center, *Voting from the Rooftops—How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles* (Washington, DC: October 2001).
2. Transcripts of phone interview notes, and voice mail message in the files of the Violence Policy Center, 7, 28, 29, and 30 January 2002.
3. "Violence Policy Center Has it Wrong Again," downloaded from Second Amendment Sisters, Inc. Internet web site, <http://www.sas-aim.org/states/> on December 19, 2001.
4. Violence Policy Center, *Voting from the Rooftops—How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles* (Washington, DC: October 2001), 30.
5. Transcript of trial, *United States of America v. Usama bin Laden, et al.*, United States District Court, Southern District of New York, February 15, 2001, pp. 753-761. Kitchen table dealers have federal licenses but no place of business, usually operating out of their homes.
6. "A Message From Barrett Firearms Manufacturing Inc. In Response to Recent News Articles Accusing Barrett of Selling Guns to Bin Laden," downloaded from Barrett Firearms Internet web site, www.barrettrifles.com on 31 January 2002.
7. D. Ian Hopper, "U.S. government gave armor-piercing sniper rifles to Afghanistan, bin Laden," *The Associated Press*, 16 October 2001.
8. Transcript of voice mail message, 28 January 2002, in the files of the Violence Policy Center.
9. Transcript of trial, *United States of America v. Usama bin Laden, et al.*, United States District Court, Southern District of New York, February 14, 2001, pp. 555-556.
10. Transcribed notes of telephone interview, 29 January 2002, in files of Violence Policy Center.
11. Transcribed notes of telephone interview, 30 January 2002, in files of Violence Policy Center.

12. Transcribed notes of telephone interview, 30 January 2002, in files of Violence Policy Center.
13. Transcribed notes of telephone interview, 30 January 2002, in files of Violence Policy Center.
14. Transcript of trial, *United States of America v. Usama bin Laden, et al.*, United States District Court, Southern District of New York, February 14, 2001, p. 556.
15. Transcript of trial, *United States of America v. Usama bin Laden, et al.*, United States District Court, Southern District of New York, February 14, 2001, p. 557.
16. Transcript of trial, *United States of America v. Usama bin Laden, et al.*, United States District Court, Southern District of New York, February 14, 2001, pp.557-558.
17. Milton Bearden, "Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires," *Foreign Affairs*, Nov.-Dec. 2001, p. 17. According to that journal, "Bearden served as CIA station chief in Pakistan from 1986 to 1989, where he was responsible for that agency's covert action program in support of the Afghan resistance to the Soviet-supported government."
18. "Soviets, Afghan Rebels Pressure U.S. on Arms," *The Washington Post*, 2 October 1988, p. A35; "U.S. Says Pakistan Cut Back on Afghan Arms," *The New York Times*, 17 July 1988, p.8 (U.S. supplied arms were funneled through Pakistan at the time).
19. Transcribed notes of telephone interview, 29 January 2002, in files of Violence Policy Center.
20. Transcripts of phone interview notes, and voice mail message in the files of the Violence Policy Center, 7, 28, 29, and 30 January 2002.
21. For a contemporaneous report on U.S. Afghan policy, see "What Is 'Afghan Lesson' for Superpowers?; U.S. Policy Shifted With Decision to Supply Advanced Weapons," *The Washington Post*, 12 February, 1989, p. A1. For a current retrospective from an insider see Milton Bearden, "Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires," *Foreign Affairs*, Nov.-Dec. 2001, p. 17.
22. "What Is 'Afghan Lesson' for Superpowers?; U.S. Policy Shifted With Decision to Supply Advanced Weapons," *The Washington Post*, 12 February,

1989, p. A1.

23. Milton Bearden, "Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires," *Foreign Affairs*, Nov.-Dec. 2001, p. 17.

24. "What Is 'Afghan Lesson' for Superpowers?; U.S. Policy Shifted With Decision to Supply Advanced Weapons," *The Washington Post*, 12 February, 1989, p. A1; Milton Bearden, "Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires," *Foreign Affairs*, Nov.-Dec. 2001, p. 17.

25. "What Is 'Afghan Lesson' for Superpowers?; U.S. Policy Shifted With Decision to Supply Advanced Weapons," *The Washington Post*, 12 February, 1989, p. A1.

26. Although of "similar shape, size and performance," the Soviet 12.7X107mm round differs in key dimensions from the Western .50BMG round. Ian V. Hogg, *Ammunition: Small Arms, Grenades and Projected Munitions* (Pennsylvania, Stackpole Books, 1998), pp. 31-32.

27. Peter Beinart, "TRB From Washington," *The New Republic*, 8 October 2001, p. 8.

28. "US May Confront Its Own Arms, Experts Say," *The Boston Globe*, 23 September 2001, p. A21.

29. Milton Bearden, "Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires," *Foreign Affairs*, Nov.-Dec. 2001, p. 17.

30. Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *Afghanistan: The Bear Trap* (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2001), 90.

31. Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 66.

32. See, e.g., "Groups Fostered Atmosphere Conducive to Giving Rebels Modern Weapons," *The Washington Post*, 12 February 1989, p. A34; "Soviets, Afghan Rebels Pressure U.S. on Arms," *The Washington Post*, 2 October 1988, p. A35; "Arming Afghan Guerrillas: A Huge Effort Led by U.S.," *The New York Times*, 18 April 1988, p. A1; "Rebels With a Cause; Guerrilla Groups Use Lobbyists to Win U.S. Aid," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 July 1986, p. 4.

33. See, "Abbie Hoffman's Nightmare; The New Generation of Conservative Activists," *The Heritage Foundation Policy Review*, Fall 1987, p. 72.

34. Violence Policy Center, *One Shot, One Kill: Civilian Sales of Military Sniper Rifles* (May 1999), p. 2.
35. Violence Policy Center, *One Shot, One Kill: Civilian Sales of Military Sniper Rifles* (May 1999), p. 8.
36. David A. Shlapak and Alan Vick, RAND, "*Check Six begins on the ground*": *Responding to the Evolving Ground Threat to U.S. Air Force Bases* (1995), p. 51.
37. Transcript of trial, *United States of America v. Usama bin Laden, et al.*, United States District Court, Southern District of New York, February 14, 2001, pp. 18-19; "Al-Qaeda's Business Empire," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (August 1, 2001).
38. Toby Harnden, *Bandit Country: The IRA and South Armagh* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), pp. 354-55; "Arsenal Which Threatens Peace," *Daily Record* (Scotland), 3 July 2001, p. 9.
39. See, e.g., "Provos 'have a second supergun in armoury,'" *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 November 1999.
40. "The Ultimate Jihad Challenge," downloaded from <http://www.sakina.fsbusiness.co.uk/home.html> on September 24, 2001; "Britain Tracing Trail of One More Jihad Group," *The New York Times on the Web*, 4 October 2001; "British Muslims seek terror training in US," *Sunday Telegraph* (London), 21 May 2000, p.5.
41. See, e.g., advertisement for Storm Mountain Training Center in *The Accurate Rifle* (April 2001), p.27; "Killer Course: The Men in Storm Mountain's Sniper Class Don't All Have Their Sights Set on the Same Thing," *The Washington Post*, 13 July 2000, p. C1; "Best of the Best; Arms Training Site Aims to Lure Gun Enthusiasts, Soldiers," *The Virginian-Pilot* (Norfolk), 27 September 1998, p. A1.
42. *First Annual Report of the Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction: Assessing the Threat*, submitted to the President and the Congress on 15 December 1999, reprint downloaded from <http://www.rand.org/organization/nsrd/terrpanel>, p. 28.
43. Chemical Emergency Preparedness and Prevention Office, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *LEPCs and Deliberate Releases: Addressing Terrorist Activities in the Local Emergency Plan*, May 2001, p. 4.

44. "Defense Secretary Warns of Unconventional Attacks," *The New York Times on the Web*, 1 October 2001; "Al Qaeda May Have Crude Chemical, Germ Capabilities," *The Washington Post*, 27 September 2001, p. A18; "Bin Laden terror group tries to acquire chemical arms," *The Washington Times*, 26 September 2001, downloaded from www.washtimes.com; "Bin Laden cohorts said in arms quest; Weapons of mass destruction top list," *The Washington Times*, 15 September 2001, p. A7; "Terror Master Sought Chem Arms; Bin Laden Targeted G.I.s in Gulf," *Daily News (New York)*, 19 November 1998, p. 6.
45. David A. Shlapak and Alan Vick, RAND, *"Check Six begins on the ground": Responding to the Evolving Ground Threat to U.S. Air Force Bases* (1995), pp. 50-51.
46. David A. Shlapak and Alan Vick, RAND, *"Check Six begins on the ground": Responding to the Evolving Ground Threat to U.S. Air Force Bases* (1995), fn. 28, p. 60.
47. MSNBC Cable transcript, "The .50-caliber militia," downloaded from Internet web site <http://msnbc.com/news> on May 15, 2001; Office of Special Investigations, U.S. General Accounting Office, *Briefing Paper: Criminal Activity Associated with .50 Caliber Semiautomatic Rifles*, Number GAO/OSI-99-15R, presented to representatives of the U.S. House Committee on Government Reform, 15 July 1999; Southern Poverty Law Center, *Still At Large: A surprising number of antigovernment fugitives, some of them nationally known, remain on the run*, downloaded from Internet web site <http://www.splcenter.org> on June 18, 2001.
48. "A warning to Minors and Militants," downloaded from <http://www.snipercountry.com/Warning.html> on April 2, 2001.
49. Violence Policy Center, *One Shot, One Kill: Civilian Sales of Military Sniper Rifles* (May 1999), p.19.