



NATIONAL SECURITY EXPERTS AGREE: 50 CALIBER ANTI-ARMOR SNIPER RIFLES ARE IDEAL TOOLS FOR TERRORISTS

Yet Guns are Less Regulated than .22 Handguns

- As early as 1985, a previously classified National War College strategic study report written by a former Deputy Assistant Director of the U.S. Secret Service warned of the growing threat from large caliber sniper rifles, and in particular the 50 caliber. The 50 caliber "long range weapons pose a significant threat for U.S. National Command Authority figures if used by terrorists or other assailants," the Secret Service official warned in the secret report. "The weapons are more accurate than shoulder fired antitank rockets and, if used against aircraft, immune to electronic counter measures."
- A 1995 RAND Corporation report identified 50 caliber sniper rifles as a serious threat to the security of U.S. Air Force bases. After noting the success of Barrett sniper rifles against light armored vehicles in the 1991 Gulf War, the authors noted, "Such weapons also give light forces a portable and quite deadly option against parked aircraft....These rifles are effective against man-sized targets up to 1,600 meters away and could hit aircraft-sized targets at even greater ranges....It seems only a matter of time before these or similar weapons find their way into the arsenals of potential adversaries, if they have not already done so." The report noted that the civilian infrastructure is similarly vulnerable to such attacks.
- An August 2003 U.S. Army Intelligence training handbook, *A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* specifically identified large caliber sniper rifles, and in particular the bolt-action .50 Armalite AR-50, as a weapon attractive to terrorists for use in assassination. In addition, the handbook noted that 50 caliber sniper rifles allow attacks on "targets that are difficult to get close enough for other weapons" and "can also effectively engage light armored vehicles."
- In a 2004 report on security at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), the RAND Corporation identified snipers using 50 caliber rifles to fire at parked and taxiing aircraft among a list of potential terrorist attacks. The list of attack options was compiled by "considering the historical tendencies and expertise of terrorist organizations, based on information we gained from intelligence organizations." The analysis was unable, however, to identify "any truly satisfactory" security improvement options (SIOs) to protect against such sniper attacks.

- In November 2004, the Homeland Security Center at the University of Southern California—funded by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security— identified 50 caliber sniper rifles as an imminent threat to civil aviation. A risk analysis prepared by the Center states that the long range and power of 50 caliber sniper rifles enable them to “target fuel tanks, passengers, pilots, [and] down aircraft in worst case.” The analysis also noted that Al Qaeda and the IRA have acquired 50 caliber sniper rifles and that they have been used against Coalition forces in Iraq.
- In a May 2005 report to Rhode Island’s attorney general, former National Security Adviser Richard A. Clarke warned about the potential use of 50s by terrorists in attacks on liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals and tankers in the United States, “Weapons and other capabilities needed to conduct an attack on an urban LNG off loading facility or an LNG tanker can be readily obtained in the US, according to US Government reports....Fifty caliber rifles with antiarmor shells are readily available in the US.”
- In April 2006, it was inadvertently revealed on an Air Force base website that government security entities specifically identified 50 caliber sniper rifles as a threat to the oxygen tanks that supply the medical facilities aboard Air Force One.



Despite the clear and present danger that 50 caliber sniper rifles present to homeland security, they are sold under federal law with fewer restrictions than handguns. To effectively keep these weapons out of the hands of terrorists, Congress should act quickly on H.R. 654 legislation that would regulate 50 caliber sniper rifles in the same manner as machine guns.

For more information on the national security threat posed by 50 caliber sniper rifles, see the full VPC report, *Clear and Present Danger: National Security Experts Warn About the Danger of Unrestricted Sales of 50 Caliber Anti-Armor Sniper Rifles to Civilians* at www.vpc.org or contact Kristen Rand, VPC legislative director at (202) 822-8200 ext. 102.