



FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN
Counterterrorism Analysis Section

1 June 2012

(U//LES) Recent Sovereign Citizen Extremist Targeting of Law Enforcement Highlights Potential for Violence during Traffic Stops

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(U//LES) The FBI assesses with medium confidence,^a based on reliable source reporting and reports from other law enforcement agencies, some sovereign citizen extremists^b are making more specific plans to interfere with state and local law enforcement officers during traffic stops and, in some cases, intentionally initiating contact with law enforcement. The FBI assesses with medium confidence that a shift from reacting to law enforcement scrutiny^{1,2} to targeting police officers indicates an increased interest in harassing and intimidating police and may lead to potentially hostile confrontations.

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(U) Source Summary Statement

(U//FOUO) The analysis in this bulletin is based on FBI reporting, a report from a state law enforcement agency, and limited open source reports. FBI reporting includes information from state and local law enforcement officers and sources with varying degrees of access and corroboration. Open source information is derived from news articles and a sovereign citizen extremist group's Web site. The FBI assesses the overall source set as a reliable basis for identifying (1) some incidents in which sovereign citizen extremists have targeted law enforcement officers and (2) recent plans to respond to legitimate law enforcement action. However, limited information in this bulletin is derived from a pre-case management system containing information that has not yet been corroborated; therefore, the FBI has low confidence in the veracity of information from that database.

^a (U) **High confidence** generally indicates FBI judgments are based on high-quality information or the nature of the issue makes it possible to render a solid judgment. **Medium confidence** generally means the information is interpreted in various ways, the FBI has differing views, or the information, while credible, is of insufficient reliability to warrant a higher level of confidence. **Low confidence** generally means the information is scant, questionable, or very fragmented; it is difficult to make solid analytic inferences; or the FBI has significant concerns or problems with the source.

^b (U) The FBI has identified three categories of sovereign citizens: (1) the FBI investigates "sovereign citizen extremists," identified as individuals or groups that further political or social goals wholly or in part through activities involving force or violence and in violation of federal criminal law; (2) the self-styled "sovereign citizens" who commit criminal offenses such as illegally misfiling documents, fraud, or retaliation against government officials; and (3) individuals or groups—including US persons who consider themselves "sovereign" and outside US jurisdiction—that further political or social goals by engaging in activities protected by the US Constitution.

(U) Targeting Law Enforcement

(U//LES) Some sovereign citizen extremists have recently initiated contact with police officers,^{3,4,5,6,7} which the FBI assesses are attempts to harass officers. This assessment is based on sovereign citizen extremists' past attempts to intimidate law enforcement and ideologically based distrust of government officials. If correct, this suggests a heightened interest among extremists in attempting to harass and intimidate law enforcement.

- (U) In April 2012, Arkansas law enforcement officers pulled over a self-proclaimed sovereign citizen. According to a news report, the man's wife drove to the scene, told officers they had no right to arrest her husband, and said officers were committing "treason."⁸ A struggle began and an officer used a Taser to subdue the man.
- (U//LES) In March 2012, self-described sovereign citizens in California demanded that law enforcement officers fill out a "Public Servant's Questionnaire" during a traffic stop, with space for officers' personal information.⁹ According to an officer of another law enforcement agency, sovereign citizens used the questionnaire to buy time and call others to the scene, who recorded the incident and made unreasonable demands.¹⁰
- (U//LES) During a February 2012 traffic stop in Oregon involving a Republic for the United States of America (RuSA) [*sic*]^c member, the driver of a second vehicle traveled backward on a highway, parked, and became confrontational with the officers conducting the traffic stop, according to an officer of another law enforcement agency. The man, also a RuSA member, continued to approach even after officers ordered him to stop, but the incident ended peacefully.¹¹
- (U//LES) In December 2011, a self-described sovereign citizen followed an Arkansas state trooper and made a series of violations to deliberately initiate a traffic stop. The individual was hostile, and used a Bluetooth headset to speak to an unknown person during the stop. An unidentified driver of a second vehicle arrived at the scene, but the driver did not interact with the officer conducting the traffic stop.¹²

(U) Plans to Target Law Enforcement Officers or Provide Armed Response to "Emergencies"

(U//LES) Some sovereign citizen extremist groups aspire to implement Ranger programs^d and other plans to respond to perceived law enforcement abuses. Given limited assets, the FBI assesses with high confidence complete implementation is unlikely. But the nature of these plans and beliefs that sovereign citizen extremists are legitimate law enforcement officers suggests even small or poorly funded versions of these plans have the potential for violence.

^c (U) RuSA is a sovereign citizen extremist group that claims US officials abandoned the "real" government and secretly replaced it with a corporation and intends to revert the country from *de facto* status to a *de jure* republic based on asset-backed currency, common law, and Christianity. Leaders will provide limited oversight of "free states" and county settlements. RuSA, which claims US Government and international support, intends to wait for what it claims is the government's impending collapse before assuming power.

^d (U//FOUO) Members of some sovereign citizen extremist groups, including RuSA, seek to establish a parallel government. Ranger programs will serve as the enforcement arm of the parallel government.

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- (U) In March and April 2012, the RuSA released an American Ranger Plan to stand up full-time, armed Rangers authorized to use deadly force during official duty. Part of the plan details scenarios in which Rangers are authorized to act. Scenarios included negotiating with law enforcement for release of incarcerated RuSA members and using “all force necessary” to extract members from jail if negotiations fail, and responding to traffic stops, evictions, and “roadside piracy.”¹³ RuSA members determined these “scenarios” would not be released to the public, according to a source who has reported reliably in the past.¹⁴
- (U//LES) As of late 2011, sovereign citizen extremists bought out-of-service police vehicles and trained to target police, according to officers of another law enforcement agency.¹⁵
- (U//FOUO) Over the past several years, sovereign citizen extremist groups in Montana and Alaska sought to establish the Liberty Bell Network, a communications system designed to summon numerous armed group members to “emergencies,”^e according to reliable sources.^{16,17,18} In February 2012, a RuSA member in Arizona recommended the group implement a similar system because it worked well in Alaska.¹⁹

(U) Outlook and Implications

(U//LES) Sovereign citizen extremist attempts to harass and intimidate law enforcement officers are not new. However, the shift among some sovereign citizen extremists from reacting to law enforcement, usually during traffic stops, to targeting police officers indicates an increased interest in harassing and intimidating police and may lead to hostile confrontations.

(U//LES) Sovereign citizen ideology and tactics are shared widely over the Internet and in live meetings. Based on lack of reporting regarding sovereign citizen extremists’ intent, the FBI further assesses with low confidence that some sovereign citizen extremists who actively target law enforcement officers are implementing, or inspired by, plans to interfere with legitimate law enforcement officers or summon others to traffic stops.

(U//FOUO) Intelligence Collection Requirements Addressed in Paper: This intelligence bulletin addresses requirements contained in the FBI National Standing Collection Requirements Domestic Terrorism: Sovereign Citizen Extremism contained in USA-TERR-CTD-SR-0023-12.I.A.1A and USA-TERR-CTD-SR-0023-12.I.A.7.

(U) This product has been prepared by the Counterterrorism Analysis Section of the FBI. Comments and queries may be addressed to the Section Chief at 202-324-3000 or via e-mail at FBI_CTAS@ic.fbi.gov.

^e (U//LES) The nature of these “emergencies” is unclear. Because sovereign citizen extremists typically refuse to recognize legitimate law enforcement officers and do not believe they are subject to local, state, or federal laws, these emergencies probably refer to group members who have been pulled over for traffic violations or are otherwise involved in a confrontation with police or government officials.

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(U) Endnotes

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- ¹ (U) News article; Domingo Ramirez Jr.; *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*; “Officer shoots Hurst suspect in gunfight”; 21 July 2011; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED.
- ² (U) FBI; Case information; 10 November 2008; 9 May 2008; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY.
- ³ (U) FBI; Case information; 26 March 2012; January 2012; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY.
- ⁴ (U) FBI; Case information; 7 February 2012; 7 February 2012; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED.
- ⁵ (U) FBI; Case information; 23 September 2011; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE.
- ⁶ (U) FBI; Case information; 6 May 2011; 18 April 2011; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY.
- ⁷ (U) FBI; Case information; 12 April 2012; 1 March 2011; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE.
- ⁸ (U) Newspaper Article; *The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*; “Traffic Stop Lands LR Couple in Jail”; 8 April 2012.
- ⁹ (U) FBI; Case information; 27 March 2012; 20 March 2012; (U) Male Subject Presented a Sovereign Citizens “Public Servant’s Questionnaire” to Law Enforcement During Traffic Violation; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY.
- ¹⁰ (U//LES) San Diego Police Department; Intelligence Briefing; 8 April 2012; “(U//LES) Sovereign Citizen Tactics: Officer Safety Information”; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE.
- ¹¹ (U) FBI; Case information; 16 March 2012; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE.
- ¹² (U) FBI; Case information; 29 December 2011; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE.
- ¹³ (U) FBI; Intelligence Note; 20 April 2012; 1 March 2012; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE.
- ¹⁴ (U) FBI; Case information; 5 April 2012; 4 April 2012; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE.
- ¹⁵ (U) FBI; Case information; November 2011; 27 February 2012; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE.
- ¹⁶ (U//FOUO) FBI; IIR 4 201 0652 12; 1 October 2011; 24 October 2011; “(U//FOUO) Assistance Sought to Establish a Radio-Based Calling Tree System by a Montana-Based Sovereign Citizen Group”; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Source is an FBI employee.
- ¹⁷ (U) FBI; Case information; 9 July 2010; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY.
- ¹⁸ (U) FBI; Case information; 16 March 2011; 10 March 2011; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY.
- ¹⁹ (U) FBI; Case information; 9 February 2012; 3 February 2012; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE.

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