

# Reference Aid

(U) Militia Extremist Movement

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1 August 2011

*(U) Prepared by the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A), Homeland Counterterrorism Division, Homegrown Violent Extremism Branch. Coordinated with the FBI Directorate of Intelligence, Domestic Terrorism Analysis Unit, Domestic Terrorism Operations Unit.*

### (U) Scope

(U) Homeland Security Reference Aids, prepared by I&A, provide baseline information on a range of homeland security issues. This product is one in a series of reference aids on violent domestic and foreign extremist groups that assess the nature and scope of the threat they pose to the Homeland. This product is intended to support federal, state, local, and tribal agencies and authorities with responsibilities relating to homeland security to assist in the deterrence, prevention, preemption of, or response to terrorist attacks against the United States. To maintain timely and accurate intelligence, DHS encourages state and local law enforcement to respond with any updated information they may have concerning the status, composition, or activities of violent extremist groups in their jurisdictions.

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## (U) Overview

(U//FOUO) The violent militia extremist movement in the United States is comprised of a collection of distinct, but organized, paramilitary groups that have engaged in violent criminal activities and terrorism-related plots to advance their antigovernment beliefs. Individual violent militia extremists have been convicted of a range of firearms and explosives violations and criminal conspiracy charges. The violent militia extremist movement is a subset of the larger militia movement; many groups and individuals involved in the overall militia movement do not commit criminal or violent acts.<sup>\*,†</sup>

(U//LES) The violent militia extremist movement peaked in membership in 1996 and then steadily declined due to negative publicity after it was erroneously linked to the Oklahoma City bombing and as a result of increased law enforcement scrutiny. After several years of significant decline in membership and violent criminal activity, the violent militia extremist movement has rebounded in the past few years as new groups have formed and new recruits have joined its ranks.

## (U) Background

(U//FOUO) The militia movement in the United States formed circa 1994 in response to the perceived unwarranted and overzealous aggression of federal authorities at Ruby Ridge, Idaho in 1992 and Waco, Texas in 1993. The movement's violent fringe element emerged shortly afterward. During the mid-to-late 1990s, several violent militia extremists were arrested and ultimately convicted of multiple plots to bomb federal buildings, military bases, highways, bridges, and other infrastructure in the United States. More recently, several violent militia extremists have been arrested for possessing illegal firearms and explosives and plotting to kill law enforcement officers.

### (U) Militia Extremists

(U//FOUO) Groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of violence directed at federal, state, or local government officials or infrastructure in response to their belief that the government deliberately is stripping Americans of their freedoms and is attempting to establish a totalitarian regime. These individuals consequently oppose many federal and state authorities' laws and regulations—particularly those related to firearms ownership—and often belong to armed paramilitary groups. They often conduct paramilitary training designed to violently resist perceived government oppression or to violently overthrow the US Government.

(U//FOUO) Factions within the larger militia movement and its violent fringe element often form, disband, or change names in short periods of time and are rife with internal turmoil stemming primarily from disagreements among leaders over missions, focus, and training. Militia members maintain the ability, however, to organize meetings and train within a particular militia group in their own state and to network with other militia groups in neighboring states. Despite the turmoil, some violent militia extremist groups and

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<sup>\*</sup> (U//FOUO) This reference aid focuses on violent militia extremists and includes information on groups and individuals who do not commit criminal or violent acts only to the extent necessary to provide sufficient foundational information for a full understanding of violent militia extremists.

<sup>†</sup> (U//FOUO) Under the Militia Act of 1903, there are official militias created and controlled by the federal and state governments. Each state has two mandatory organized militias, the state Army National Guard and the state Air National Guard. These are both state and federal forces, which at any point can be called up by the President of the United States. Many states also have state defense forces and a naval militia which assist, support and augment National Guard forces. This reference aid excludes any information pertaining to these official militias and instead focuses on unofficial, private militias that have no legal existence codified in law.

individuals have demonstrated the ability to instigate and support violence that targets government officials, institutions, and facilities in the United States.

### (U) Ideology and Objectives

(U//FOUO) Violent militia extremists oppose most federal and state laws, regulations, and authority. Violent militia extremists have also been known to adopt anti-government belief systems found in the violent sovereign citizen and white supremacist extremist movements and form violent militia extremist groups based on this ideology.\*†

(U//FOUO) Violent militia extremists often combine their antigovernment beliefs with various conspiracy theories. Some tout the existence of a despotic “New World Order” (see text box) or cite apocalyptic or “end times” beliefs to support their outlook. Individuals within both the nonviolent elements of the militia movement and the more violent extremist minority profess that militias are the last line of defense in protecting US constitutional freedoms against a federal government that they see as increasingly eroding citizens’ personal rights, property rights, and the right to own firearms.

**(U//FOUO) New World Order**  
(U//FOUO) This conspiracy is described by militia members as a plot by a secret cabal of powerful individuals whose alleged goal is to create a one-world socialist government under the auspices of the United Nations. The US Government is seen as collaborating with the New World Order to strip Americans slowly of their freedoms in the takeover, which allegedly would involve establishing large numbers of detention camps for American dissidents.

### (U) Symbols

(U//FOUO) Violent militia extremists have co-opted several common symbols that represent patriotism and a willingness to defend oneself against a tyrannical government. The most popular symbols include a Minuteman holding a rifle with the words “honor,” “defend,” and “liberty,” and the Gadsden Flag with the words “Don’t Tread on Me.” The Minuteman logo is a reference to the American colonial militia that battled British troops during the American Revolutionary War and symbolizes patriotism and militia successes during the war. The Gadsden Flag emerged as a symbol of the colonies in their fight against the British military during the American Revolutionary War. Both the Minuteman symbol and Gadsden Flag image are used widely outside the violent militia extremist movement, and the presence of these symbols alone does not necessarily indicate an association with a violent extremist militia.



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(U//FOUO) Minuteman patch.

\* (U) Sovereign Citizen Extremists: Groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of violence directed at public officials, financial institutions, and government facilities in support of their belief that the legitimacy of US citizenship should be rejected; almost all forms of established government, authority, and institutions are illegitimate; and that they are immune from federal, state, and local laws.

† (U) White Supremacist Extremists: Groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of violence directed at the federal government, ethnic minorities, or Jewish persons in support of their belief that Caucasians are intellectually and morally superior to other races and their perception that the government is controlled by Jewish persons.

## (U) Attack Indicators

(U//FOUO) Violent militia extremists often make verbal or written threats or menacing comments against law enforcement, the judicial system, and other government entities, according to law enforcement reporting. These threats are communicated through the Internet, telephone, and the mail. Past militia extremist-inspired incidents of violence or terrorist plots have emanated from small cells or factional offshoots of larger militia groups, some accompanied by issued claims of responsibility, calls to action, or communiques, or from lone offenders carrying out attacks under the philosophy of leaderless resistance.

## (U) Leadership and Organization

(U//FOUO) Militia extremist groups use organizational structures and ranks similar to those found in the larger militia movement. Militia groups typically adopt a hierarchal organizational structure—often assigning military ranks based on experience, tenure and training—led by a “commanding officer,” but each has its own regulations, requirements, and chain of command. Some militias appoint staff members to conduct meetings, operate Web sites, coordinate training exercises, hold elections, and create militia regulations, policies, and procedures. According to open source reporting, many militias have made concerted efforts to use the Internet to recruit, which has led to an influx of new members and the reengagement of individuals who had drifted away from the movement.

(U//FOUO) Virtually every state has at least one militia group, according to open source reporting, and most states have several. But because of their insular and secretive nature, it is difficult to ascertain how many groups that identify as militias ascribe to violence or have violent extremists in their ranks.

## (U) Active Membership

(U//FOUO) Overall militia membership is difficult to estimate because of the movement’s fragmented, secretive, and evolving nature. In an April 2009 Intelligence Bulletin, the FBI cited a moderate increase in militia groups since the 2008 general elections, although some academic and research organizations have asserted that militia activity has increased dramatically. For example, the Southern Poverty Law Center<sup>USPER</sup> states that the number of US militia groups has increased threefold since 2008, from roughly 40 in early 2008 to approximately 120 today. The degree to which increased identification with militia groups signifies intent to engage in violent activity or to affiliate with the violent militia extremist movement, however, is unclear.

## (U) Training

(U//FOUO) Violent militia extremist units conduct a range of paramilitary training. Field training exercises often are held on a militia member’s private property, in national parks, and at other undisclosed locations. Violent militia extremist groups often engage in joint field training exercises with like-minded groups



(U//FOUO) Militia field training exercise.

from other states. Training topics include wilderness survival, marksmanship, hand-to-hand combat, fire-and-maneuver drills, and small-unit tactics. Some militia group members have demonstrated proficiency in using firearms, operating heavy weapons, and constructing improvised armored vehicles. Violent militia extremists also post videos on the Internet that depict and advocate violent acts, training scenarios, anti-government conspiracies, and a wide range of survival skills.

## (U) Violent Criminal Activity

(U//FOUO) Violent militia extremist criminal activity peaked in the late 1990s, culminating in a series of abortive acts that targeted federal, state, and local law enforcement; federal facilities; military installations; and infrastructure sites including radio stations, bridges, and highways. Following a decline in overall militia activity in the early 2000s, violent militia extremist criminal activity has increased steadily in the past few years, as indicated by an upswing in the number of violent militia extremist members arrested in plots targeting both government officials and private citizens perceived as threatening their way of life. Several violent militia extremists have been arrested or convicted of possessing substantial stockpiles of illegal firearms, ammunition, and explosives. Law enforcement authorities have recovered illegal firearms (including machine guns, sub-machine guns, and automatic rifles), mortars, hand grenades, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) from members of the violent militia extremist movement.

- (U//FOUO) In March 2011, Francis Schaeffer Cox<sup>USPER</sup>—leader of the violent extremist group Alaska Peacemakers Militia<sup>USPER</sup> and self-proclaimed sovereign citizen—and four associates were arrested by state and federal law enforcement officers and charged concurrently in both state and federal court with allegedly conspiring to kidnap and kill a federal judge, state judge, and multiple Alaska law enforcement officers. According to court documents, members of the group allegedly planned to resist any attempt to arrest Cox for failing to attend his scheduled February 2011 trial for a misdemeanor weapons misconduct charge. A federal search warrant executed on Cox's residence resulted in the seizure of operational plans for a tactical assault on a courtroom. During a custodial interview, Cox disclosed he made and tested firearms silencers, sought grenades and C4 explosives, and devised the "241 Plan," which envisioned killing two law enforcement officers for any one militia member arrested. Court documents allege that the group had stockpiled dozens of assault rifles and pistols—some illegal—including one fully automatic assault rifle, two tripod machine guns, at least one grenade launcher, eight pineapple grenades and thousands of rounds of ammunition. Two of the five defendants face additional federal charges of conspiring to kill a federal judge in a separate tax evasion case, as well as the judge's family and an IRS agent. Four of the five defendants are being held without bail on federal charges. All five defendants also face state charges and are being held on \$2 million bail.
- (U//FOUO) Federal law enforcement agents in March 2010 arrested and charged nine members of the Hutaree<sup>USPER</sup>, a small Michigan militia group, with seditious conspiracy, attempted use of weapons of mass destruction, and federal weapons and explosives violations. The Hutaree is based primarily in Michigan, but also has members living in Ohio and Indiana. According to the indictment,

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Hutaree leadership planned to assassinate a law enforcement officer and subsequently conduct a large-scale attack on law enforcement personnel attending the officer's funeral. After this action, Hutaree members allegedly planned to retreat to prepared rendezvous locations where they would wage war against the government and defend themselves with IEDs. Hutaree members reportedly believed such a confrontation would be the impetus for a widespread uprising against the US Government.

- (U//FOUO) In 2007, five members of the Free Militia<sup>USPER</sup> in Alabama were arrested for plotting a machine gun attack on Hispanic individuals in a small town north of Birmingham. A sixth member was charged with possessing illegal weapons and explosives components. According to court documents, federal law enforcement uncovered an arsenal of homemade weapons that included a rocket launcher, 130 hand grenades, and 70 IEDs. The weapons cache also included a machine gun, a short-barreled shotgun and two silencers, 2,500 rounds of ammunition, and explosive components. All six members subsequently pleaded guilty to federal and state firearms charges.
- (U//FOUO) Michigan Militia<sup>USPER</sup> member Scott Woodring shot and killed a Michigan state trooper in Fremont in 2003 as the trooper's tactical unit attempted to serve an arrest warrant on Woodring for alleged criminal sexual conduct. Woodring later was shot and killed when he tried to shoot other police officers attempting to arrest him. Following the shooting, a spokesman for the Michigan Militia asserted that Woodring had been expelled from the group before the violent confrontation took place. Also in 2003, Michigan Militia member Norman Somerville<sup>USPER</sup> was convicted of federal firearms charges in connection with a plot to kill Michigan State Police officers with a .30-caliber belt-fed machine gun to avenge Woodring's death.
- (U//FOUO) In December 1999, federal agents arrested two members of the San Joaquin County Militia<sup>USPER</sup> for conspiring to bomb a 24 million-gallon propane storage facility in Elk Grove, California. According to prosecutors, the men believed the destruction of the facility would cause nationwide chaos, resulting in the overthrow of the US Government. They were indicted and subsequently convicted on charges of conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction, conspiracy to use and possess a destructive device, and violations of federal firearms laws. Law enforcement also recovered assault weapons, hand grenades, detonation cord, blasting caps, fuses, and other bomb-making supplies at the members' homes.

**(U) Source Summary Statement**

(U) The information used in this Reference Aid is drawn from open sources, FBI Intelligence Bulletins, DHS open source reporting, and court filings. The open source information has been corroborated through examination of multiple additional sources and has been found credible. I&A has medium-to-high confidence in source reliability, which extends to judgments and conclusions made in this reference aid.

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