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IS THIS WHAT THE FRAMERS INTENDED?

Economic woes and inflammatory rhetoric feed a resurgence of extremism



By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. With the [arrest of nine top members](#), including “Captain” David Brian Stone and his son, David Stone Jr. on Federal charges ranging from seditious conspiracy to attempted use of weapons of mass destruction, Michigan’s obscure “Hutaree” militia finally got its fifteen minutes of fame. According to the indictment, the group intended to kill a local cop, attack his funeral procession with home-made bombs, retreat to defensive positions ringed with booby-traps, and then lead the popular uprising that was certain to follow.

Was the latest camouflaged band to emerge from America’s underbelly of conspiracy loonies, gun fanatics and all-purpose hate-mongers a serious threat? Or is it mostly a gaggle of poseurs? At present that’s hard to know, yet they apparently fell to the oldest trick in the Fed playbook: [an undercover agent](#). And not just any agent, but one who forged such an intimate relationship with papa and boy Stone that he attended both their weddings.

After spending months training with the Hutarees, secretly recording many hours of incriminating conversation, the mole learned of a chilling plan. It seems that instructions for a “covert reconnaissance exercise” scheduled in April [included the suggestion](#) that “anyone who happened on the exercise who did not acquiesce to Hutaree demands could be killed.” Before that could happen – possibly, before they had all the evidence they sought – the Feds swooped in. Game over.

Although acting as the vanguard of a mass uprising sounds like something straight out of the Commie playbook, Hutarees are hardly lefties. [Inspired by prophecies of an anti-Christ](#), they’ve apparently concluded that their mortal foe is already here, in the form of the Federal Government and all its helpers down to the cop on the beat.

Racist, government-hating, conspiracy-obsessed organizations tend to bubble to the surface during hard times. Based in the industrial belt state of Michigan, the Hutaree drew its members from a region where even poorly-educated persons who were willing to work enjoyed ready entrée into the middle class. No more. Ravaged by market forces and globalization, it's an area that now suffers from the highest unemployment in the U.S.

Still, most people adjust to adversity and move on. But there's no denying the attractiveness of [nativist](#), religiously-tinged philosophies that blame everything on immigrants and minorities. Special contempt is reserved for government bureaucrats who distribute benefits to the ungrateful while leaving the worthy to fight over crumbs. Well, the majority is no longer silent. And what it says is this: those who support the failed system aren't just wrong – they're traitors, in cahoots with a socialistic “New World Order” (some claim, under the aegis of the U.N.) that seeks to enslave God-fearing citizens, and that [only by taking up arms](#) can their threat be forestalled.

Whatever the precise ideology – and it's a jumble of contradictions, with Christianity uttered in one breath and assassination in the next – militias like the Hutaree give angry men an opportunity to assuage their hopelessness, vent their frustration and gain power and status, and all in the time-honored tradition of taking up arms to fight their oppressors.

Of course, there have always been extremists and hate groups. There's also been no shortage of individual fanatics. But when the horrific events of September 2001 brought the country together, shifting the focus to external threats, bitter memories of [Ruby Ridge](#) and [Waco](#) were set aside. Militias virtually disappeared from sight.

Alas, domestic tranquility was not to be. Less than a decade later, with the economy tanking and the U.S. embroiled in wars on two fronts [the country again veered left](#), going so far as to elect a black President. Pundits on the right were overjoyed: step aside, bin Laden – here was a new object of scorn! Chatter about socialist conspiracies returned to center stage.

Danger signals soon appeared. Some were in the form of physical threats to the President, none thankfully carried out. Emboldened, perhaps, by intemperate anti-government rhetoric that drove discourse to new lows, some crazies did go over the brink. In July 2008 [an unemployed 58-year old mechanic](#) walked into a Tennessee church, pulled out a sawed-off shotgun and blasted away, killing two parishioners and wounding six. In a rambling manifesto mailed to a local newspaper he railed against the “liberalism that's destroying America” and vowed to kill Democrats “‘til the cops kill me.”

In November 2008 [the NRA issued a breathless warning](#) that the new President was planning “to ban guns and drive law-abiding firearm manufacturers and dealers out of business.” Gun sales shot through the roof. [Five months later](#) three Pittsburgh police officers lay dead and a fourth was seriously wounded when a jobless 22-year old conspiracy theorist opened fire. A fan of extremist websites, the gunman had told a buddy that he feared Obama was about to take away their guns. “We recently discovered that 30 states had declared sovereignty,” the friend later said. “One of his concerns was why were these major events in America not being reported to the public.”

According to the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) armed militias are on a roll, with an astonishing 363 forming only last year. Their resurgence comes as no surprise. When men openly wearing guns shadow Presidential visits; when [a group](#) ostensibly comprised of current and retired cops and soldiers declares that its members will refuse to confiscate guns or retake any State that withdraws from the Union; and when citizens billing themselves as “[Guardians of the Free Republics](#)” [order Governors to step down](#), it’s clear that a strange malady has taken hold of the body politic. Odd ducks who would otherwise be candidates for the funny farm make bizarre, slanderous pronouncements, and instead of parsing their rantings for evidence of mental illness we’re putting them on the airwaves and treating them as sages.

Just like in the sixties and seventies, when crazed lefties ran around with guns and bombs, extremism has torn the social fabric, encouraging marginal characters to follow their worst instincts. Restrained by the same freedoms that enable the provocateurs, there’s little that police can do. Perhaps some distraction will come up and the wackos will return to their caves before the ship of State founders.

Anger and intolerance are besetting the Republic. Armed bands that have nothing in common with the “well-regulated militias” of the Constitution traipse through the woods of the South and Midwest. No, it’s not what the framers intended, but until the gap between rich and poor narrows and civility comes back into fashion the law of the gun threatens to become the new American way.