

# Right Wing Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Motives, Strategies and Movements



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# Preface

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The American right wing is composed of several overlapping movements. None of them are new actors on the terrorist stage. The most recent are decades old and the oldest have roots that reach deep into the last century. Every decade since the First World War has seen an outbreak of domestic terrorism by the far right. This decade is no different from the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the relations between civil society and domestic terrorists. There is more similarity than difference between the aftermath of Oklahoma City and aftermath of The Order in the mid-1980's: institutional changes, policy initiatives, expressions of surprise, inaccurate and sensational stories in the media, promises that these things will not be allowed to happen again, etc.

If there is any lesson to be learned from the experiences of the last 15 years, it is that no lessons have been learned this century. Right-wing domestic terrorists continue to achieve strategic surprise, co-opt political establishments, attack at times and places of their choosing and retreat into safe havens. They show a remarkable ability to adapt to new policy initiatives. They are also continuing an expansion that has proceeded by fits and starts for several decades.

It is easy to be pessimistic about domestic terrorism. Guarded pessimism is arguably the most realistic outlook for the near future. There will almost certainly be incidents of strategic surprise similar to the Oklahoma City bombing. The past track record of domestic counter-terrorist policies suggests that the misapplication of policies developed for dealing with state-sanctioned use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) could increase the likelihood of WMD attacks by non-state domestic terrorists without either increasing security or diminishing vulnerabilities. Political negotiation, diplomatic, military and criminal justice approaches have not demonstrated adequate effectiveness.

The most fruitful policy initiatives may well be based on public health models. The underlying assumptions of this approach recognize that:

- The American public understands its own interests vis a vis domestic terrorism. Based on historical evidence, it is arguable that past and current institutions do not.
- Transparency and openness are the most effective counters to terrorist subversion and fear-mongering.
- Erosion of civil liberties is a primary goal of right-wing terrorists. Institutional support for civil liberties is the most effective response.
- Terrorist organizational forms are based on networks, not institutions.
- Civil society networks are most effective in dealing with networks in "uncivil society."
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will play a primary role in creating these civil society networks.
- Government's most effective role will be secondary to and supportive of civil society NGOs.
- Policies and programs with spin-off effects involving humanitarian and harm-reduction goals have immediate benefits and minimal downsides.

## WMD Thresholds

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- ◆ Attacks have already occurred
- ◆ Chemical, biological and nuclear materials have been obtained, tested and deployed
- ◆ Thresholds are a thing of the past to right-wing terrorists



Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) have been a constant theme in right-wing terrorist rhetoric for decades. *The Turner Diaries*, a novel which has repeatedly served as a strategy manual of domestic terrorists, was published in May, 1978. It is now in its seventh printing and there are roughly 200,000 copies in circulation.

Domestic right-wing terrorists are and have been the most active, violent and deadly terrorist threat to American lives and property. Mortality due to domestic terrorist actions in the previous decade numbered in the hundreds. That figure roughly doubled this decade. The next decade may see casualties measured in thousands.

The seizure of a 30-gallon drum of sodium cyanide at The Covenant, The Sword and The Arm of the Lord in April 1985 provided clear evidence of WMD intentions and capabilities by domestic right-wing groups. Since that time, there have been incidents involving most of the categories of WMD: large-scale explosives, chemical, biological and nuclear materials. Right-wing terrorists are innovators and early adopters of new techniques and tactics. They are quite skilled at low-tech operations and have been constrained by lack of resources. The Oklahoma City bombing was done for the price of two used cars. If Timothy McVeigh and his collaborators had been able to obtain more resources, the bomb would have been bigger.

The goal of the most violent domestic terrorists is to bring about the battle of Armageddon -- in the most literal and concrete sense.

## Religious Motives

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- ◆ Right-wing terrorism is religiously motivated
- ◆ “End Times” eschatology and post-millennial return makes Apocalypse desirable
- ◆ Dominion Theology views “ungodly” establishments as Satanic abominations to be destroyed



Terrorists of the American far right are not political actors in the conventional sense. Politics are a vehicle for their religious goals. Their religion is not a vehicle for political goals. They are not “shooting their way to the negotiating table.” They literally seek the battle at the end of time. Some see Adolph Hitler as a biblical prophet akin to Elijah and view the Nazi Holocaust as the initial lost battle of the Tribulations preceding God’s new millennial dispensation.

Policymakers’ failure to comprehend terrorist motives has given right-wing actors the advantage of strategic surprise. In numerous incidents, authorities’ surprise and confusion served as an incitement to further violence, diverted counter-terrorists into squandering time and resources, and damaged public confidence in the agencies and institutions responsible for protecting American lives and property.

Within the narrow confines of right-wing theology, there is widespread agreement about articles of faith traditionally regarded as Christian heresies:

- **Millennialism** -- The imminent end of the age and the advent of a new dispensation
- **Post-millennialism** -- Christ’s return will not come until after the battle of Armageddon ushers in a 1,000 year global dominion by victorious “true Christians”
- **Antinomianism** – Believers follow a “higher law” and intentionally violate societal norms.

At the deepest level, actors who deploy weapons of mass destruction are engaged in a sacrificial ritual of mass murder and suicide -- a magical act intended to alter the relationship between God and mankind. “Two-seed” Christian Identity and some Odinist sects incorporate these beliefs with proto-nazi Ariosophanist racial theologies.

## Counter-terrorism is provocative

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Terrorist actors are:


- ◆ well informed about policy initiatives
- ◆ very responsive to new policy
- ◆ organized as flexible decentralized networks
- ◆ able to respond faster than institutions
- ◆ creative and effective propagandists



Counter-terrorism against right-wing actors has been ineffective for several reasons. The far right is organized by networks into movements. Movements have many inherent advantages over institutions. They are amorphous, polycephalous, densely interconnected and intensely competitive. Institutions, on the other hand, are rigidly structured, hierarchical, sparsely interconnected and slow to innovate.

The movements of the far right are informational cultures. They live and breathe facts, rumor and propaganda. They are better informed about law enforcement than law enforcement is about them. There have been numerous instances where law enforcement bulletins were passed to far right groups by sympathizers in law enforcement and incorporated into new propaganda in less than 24 hours. There have also been instances where law enforcement alerts about possible terrorist actions were obtained, distorted and then fed back as disinformation to LEAs and as propaganda to far right supporters.

One of these disinformation attacks involved the Oklahoma City bombing. The Militia of Montana (MOM) distorted an FBI alert regarding possible violence accompanying the sentencing of the World Trade Center bombers. In early February, MOM's Bob Fletcher responded to the FBI alert by warning there would be an attempt to "blow up a city or poison its water supply" in the next few months. Fletcher cautioned his audiences that federal authorities would attempt to blame the militias, but MOM already had "intelligence" that the "real" perpetrators would be Arabs. Rumors based on Fletcher's prediction of a coming incident worked in two ways: the Patriot movement interpreted the first half of the prediction as confirming the widespread belief that militias would "go operational" on March 24 or April 19, 1995 and the FBI heard the second part as implicating foreign actors and discounting militia activity.

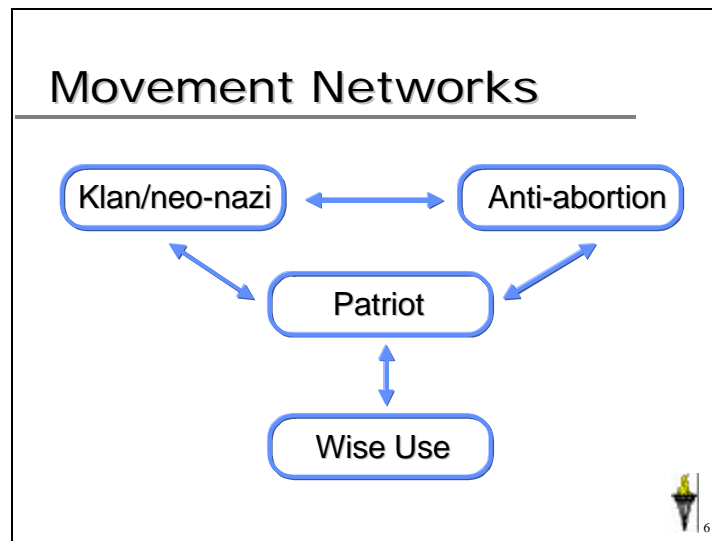
<b>Leaderless Resistance</b>	
<u>Aboveground</u>	<u>Underground</u>
Organizers compete for leadership through propaganda	Action cells translate propaganda into targets and tactics
<p><b>“Leaderless Resistance presents no single opportunity for the            Federals to destroy a significant portion of the Resistance.”</b>            - Louis Beam, 1987</p>	
	

In the wake of the 1986 Ft. Smith sedition trial, Identity leader Louis Beam published a strategic guide titled “Leaderless Resistance.” It lays out a plan for preserving terrorist leaders from arrest and prosecution while maximizing the surprise and violence of terrorist attacks.

Leaderless Resistance has strong similarities to “anarchism of the word” and “anarchism of the deed” terrorist factions of a century ago. It is also very similar to the Sinn Fein / IRA(P) duality in contemporary Ireland. These dualistic movements may be characteristic of the terminal phase of terrorist movements. But they also spawn terrorist actors who are relatively immune to control.

“Other than suicide missions, little can be accomplished at this time. Small cells and lone wolves are the only practical methodology at this time; great bodies evolve from small cells. The most fearsome pack of wolves are a collection of cells. The future is moving quickly toward us. Power is moving toward us also. By jettisoning unwise and un-needed weight, and by being in great shape with strong will, I see little reason why our forces cannot be ready to grab the brass ring of power at a critical juncture in the not-too-distant future. Good Hunting.”

Tom Metzger, White Aryan Resistance leader  
 March 1999 Editorial in *WAR Newsletter* (online)



Four right-wing movements have terrorist factions dangerous enough to be considered a threat to domestic security. Militia organizing and anti-government propaganda about the “New World Order” provided the common issues which enabled the convergence to include so many different and diverse participants.

The two most violent terrorist factions belong to the Klan/neo-nazi and anti-abortion movements. The anti-abortion movement contributed a national network through which terrorists could move with relatively little danger of detection. The Klan/neo-nazis found new allies who eagerly adopted terrorist tactics and simultaneously provided protective coloration.

The Patriot movement is largely motivated by a defensive strategy of “preparedness” -- fraud, forgery, money laundering and black-market arms dealing. The Patriot movement’s broad appeal to the “radical center” of American nativism, cultural intolerance, anti-democratic and anti-federalist sentiment gave them a commanding position in the convergence.


The Wise Use movement is motivated by issues that have little overlap with the two most violent terrorist factions. However, Wise Use possesses strong ties to the Patriots, due to the considerable penetration of both movements by the Moon organization, the original sponsor of Wise Use organizing. Wise Use violence targets environmentalists and federal agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service. There is considerable evidence that Wise Use terrorism is the work of hybrid Wise Use/Patriot actors.

“The network form can strengthen ‘uncivil society’ by enabling subversive radical groups to mount deception campaigns, or criminal syndicates to smuggle drugs, arms or other illicit items. In other words, it is not just the bright sides of each [organizational] form that foster new value systems and shape new actors; the dark sides may do so as well. As Jacobs observes, ‘monstrous moral hybrids’ are possible.”

David Ronfeldt,  
*Tribes, Institutions, Markets, Networks: A Framework About Societal Evolution*

## Overlapping Movements

	Wise Use	Patriot	Anti-abortion	Klan/ neo-nazi
OKC		✓		✓
Atlanta / Birmingham		✓	✓	
Las Vegas		✓		✓
Spokane		✓	✓	✓
Toyabee	✓	✓		



Examples of terrorist actors connected to only one of the right-wing terrorist movements exist, but most of the terrorist attacks in recent years have been by actors who simultaneously participated in more than one movement.


The so-called “militia movement” was actually the convergence of four separate movements triggered by their similar apocalyptic response to the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. False prophecies of Armageddon in the Middle East, followed by the sudden demise of the specter of international Communism energized the far right. The loss of a foreign enemy turned the far right’s relentless search for enemies inward. The result of this about-face was a convergence of right-wing movements into a “meta-movement” with the Patriots in the driver’s seat.

The major vehicles of convergence included:

- **Decentralized network strategies** such as Louis Beam’s Leaderless Resistance and Ron Arnold’s “synthetic movement” strategy for the Wise Use Movement
- **“Anti-government” propaganda** exploiting government misconduct at Ruby Ridge and Waco
- **Anti-abortion alliances** between Identity and Reconstructionist believers committed to terrorist strategies
- **Wise Use and Patriot collaboration** in efforts to establish new governments at the county level (i.e. “New Counties”, “local control” and Catron movements)
- **Fragmentation and loss of political direction** by anti-gun control organizations following passage of the Brady Bill activated large numbers of potential recruits who abandoned centrist organizations like the National Rifle Association for radical militias.

## Right-Wing Movements

	Goals	Targets	Crossovers
<b>Wise Use</b>	Economic	Regulatory agencies Environmentalists	Local control create refuges
<b>Patriot</b>	Racial Secession	Treasury LEAs	Largest Growing
<b>Anti-abortion</b>	Theocratic	Clinics LEAs	Sanctuary
<b>Klan/ neo-nazi</b>	Racial Revolution	Minorities "Race mixers" Federal Govt	Strategy & tactics



Most domestic terrorism incidents in the last decade can be assigned to individuals participating in one or more of these four movements. Due to convergence, right-wing terrorists usually have roles within more than one movement.

**Wise Use** - A network of front groups which provide political support for resource extraction industries like timber, mining, and grazing; polluters; real estate interests; and other opponents of environmental regulation. Wise Use is the least violent of the four movements. Wise Use's importance to right-wing terrorism is due to its considerable influence with government (i.e. control of local governments, "ecoterrorist" hoaxes and subversion of law enforcement agencies.)

**Anti-Abortion** - After the 1977 *Rowe v. Wade* decision, abortion opponents organized into a network devoted to thwarting access to abortion. By the early 1980's, terrorism became a widespread strategy for militant factions. Anti-abortion terrorists have used toxic chemicals, bombs, incendiaries, assassination and are currently using threats of biological agents.

**Klan / neo-nazi** - The oldest and most violent. They comprise approximately one third of militant white supremacists: the overtly racist segment. They are the innovators and advocates of strategy and tactics involving the use of WMD. The Klan and neo-nazi groups have had active paramilitary groups for decades.

**Patriot** - Also based in white supremacy, more numerous than the Klan/neo-nazi movement. Nativist, rather than racist, Patriots portray themselves as "defending the Constitution." The movement resulted from the merger of the extreme anti-communist right with white supremacy during the late 1950's. Beginning in 1992, they drew upon their involvement in Wise Use, anti-abortion and anti-gun control movements to organize paramilitary groups calling themselves "unorganized militias."

## Prognosis

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- ◆ 3-5 years breathing space
- ◆ Terrorists are pessimistic and increasingly desperate/suicidal
- ◆ Y2K panic will highlight susceptible populations and regions
- ◆ Explosives and toxic chemicals are most likely cause of mass casualties



We will see more incidents of the use of weapons of mass destruction by domestic right-wing terrorists in the near future. As in the past four decades, domestic terrorists will be more dangerous than foreign ones. The far right is currently in a state of contraction and consolidation, focussed on millennial preparations. When their prophecies fail, they will need to shift gears to recruitment. When the expansion rate peaks and recruiting slows, the next domestic offensive will be launched.

The most likely forms of WMD threats:

- Conventional explosives, ANFO and fuel/air explosives
- Toxins like cyanide, ricin, organophosphorous agricultural chemicals and other readily obtainable materials
- Industrial chemicals stored and transported in large quantities:
  - flamable/explosive materials like propane, hydrogen or ethylene oxide;
  - toxic gasses like hydrogen sulfide or chlorine;
  - and possibly carcinogens like ethylene dibromide
- Nuclear materials as radiation sources and toxins, but not as explosives.
- Crude biological weapons like soil from anthrax-diseased livestock burials

The greatest barrier to the use of other types of WMD by domestic right-wing actors is the difficulty of obtaining sufficient quantities of material and the scarcity of technical skills required for sophisticated weapons.

Terrorists have occasionally shown great resourcefulness in producing ingeniously crude devices, such as the employment of shaped-charge effects in the Oklahoma City bombing. That tragedy raised the standard for future attacks and increased the incentive for mass-casualty attacks with yet higher death tolls.

## Responses

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- ◆ Public health models will be useful
- ◆ Transparency will secure public support and minimize fear
- ◆ NGOs will lead in the policy arena
- ◆ Non-provocative official policies are essential



Models based on criminal justice, political negotiation and military security have been of limited use. The key strength of right-wing domestic terrorists has been their ability to adapt to and exploit counter-terrorist policies. The most promising new initiatives will be based on the public health model and analogous to successful programs which reduce the harm due to epidemics of contagious disease, drug use, domestic violence:

- **Sanitation** - Eliminating underlying structural and environmental factors which specifically enable, promote and spread terrorist behavior
- **Education** - Public knowledge, understanding and awareness of the situation, combined with reasoned and consistent policies
- **Training** - Preparing all establishment actors to avoid confusion, delays and inappropriate reactions to terrorist propaganda, recruitment, subversion and attacks
- **Monitoring** - Tracking current events to anticipate future developments and identifying new outbreaks
- **Prophylaxis** - Interventions which inhibit terrorists from acting or benefiting from actions
- **Acute intervention** - Immediate actions to counter outbreaks when they occur

Networked non-governmental organizations like human rights groups, churches and pro-democracy groups will lead in developing and applying policies to thwart right-wing terrorism. Government agencies and other institutional actors must recognize how organizational inertia and administrative restraints constrain their own roles to supporting and reactive modes.

Most importantly, official policies should be examined in detail to be certain that they do no harm. Inappropriate actions and over-reactions – such as occurred at Ruby Ridge, Waco, Oklahoma City, Atlanta, the Las Vegas anthrax incident and the proposal for a Continental Defense Command – open sizable windows of vulnerability which domestic terrorists will exploit.

# Appendix

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