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Storming Wombs and Waco: How the Anti-Abortion and Militia Movements Converge

by Sandi DuBowski

In the public's eye, the anti-abortion and militia movements are seen as completely distinct. Most people view the anti-abortion movement as consisting of clinic blockades, murders of abortion providers, and anti-choice legislative and political debates. However, the philosophies and activities of the anti-abortion zealot and the right-wing paramilitary conspiracy theorist are not mutually exclusive. There is increasing evidence of a convergence between anti-abortion militancy and militia activity. Current examples of activities that fall under both anti-choice and militia umbrellas include bomb plots, clinics vandalized by hangman's nooses and bullet-riddled signs, rallies supporting former clinic blockaders turned tax protesters, anti-abortion paramilitary training and networking with white supremacists, and liens placed against judges in reproductive rights cases.

While this intersection of violent anti-choice extremism and the Christian Patriot (see definitions) and militia movements is new to most observers, the relationships are real and merit concern. Within the militia movement generally, gun control or environmental protection safeguards are the primary organizing magnets, and opposition to abortion is often a secondary issue -- assumed but not necessarily acted upon. But in at least 15 states there are disturbing anti-abortion/militia links and incidents. A number of militia leaders have been arrested for blockading women's health centers. Anti-choice activists have been identified as chaplains and leaders of militias and other far-right groups. Operation Rescue fundraiser and Gun Owners of America leader Larry Pratt made headlines when reports linking him to militias and white supremacist groups forced him to take a leave of absence from Pat Buchanan's 1996 GOP presidential campaign.(1)

In one noted case in Wisconsin, a prominent anti-abortion group offered firearms training and a manual on how to arm, train, and indoctrinate paramilitary cells. Wisconsin anti-abortion activists have networked with armed white supremacists in Montana. Women's health centers have been threatened by

far-right groups and militias. As recently as July 1996, an Oklahoma militia leader and two others were sentenced for conspiring to bomb abortion clinics and other targets.

This report underscores the potential for violence posed by anti-abortion/militia links, and how militant anti-choice activists embrace a broad, anti-democratic agenda, often inseparable from the political and cultural milieu of the far right, of which the militia movement is but one expression.

Abortion: Federal Defiance of God's Law

Examples abound of how anti-abortion beliefs are expressed through Christian Patriot activities like militia organizing, tax protests, and standoffs with government officials. Christian Patriots are knit together by their commitment to violence and hatred of the federal government, founded on anti-Semitic conspiracy theories warning of a "New World Order." Hatred is also directed to federal protection of reproductive rights, from the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court case ROE V. WADE through the 1994 Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE). Anti-abortion/militia leaders often cite these protections as evidence of "anti-Christian" tyranny and defiance of "God's law." Extremists who believe that the government has acted illegally to "murder" the "preborn" are using militias or tax protests as a way to push their religious and political agenda.

- Howard Romano, who served more than a year in jail for tax protest, has been fined over \$500,000 for his participation in abortion blockades with Oregon-based Advocates for Life.(2) Romano also conducted target practice with Shelley Shannon four days before her attempted murder of abortion provider Dr. George Tiller in Wichita, Kansas.(3)
- Florida resident Charles Kimmig was arrested for blockading a women's health clinic in 1988.(4) Kimmig attempted to cancel his U.S. citizenship and refused to pay income taxes.(5) Kimmig's arrest in 1994 for threatening IRS officers made him a cause célèbre in some circles.(6) Rescue America regional director Alan Nolan, former O.R. spokesperson Wendy Wright, and anti-abortion activist Eric Olson, who was found guilty of violating FACE, were among those who rallied at the courthouse in support of the jailed Kimmig.(7)
- Joe Holland, the national director of the North American Free Militia, told a reporter, "I have been referred to by some in the press as a 'tax protester.' I cannot support the United States government until such time as it stops carrying out abortions in its murder clinics and stops supporting the national advancement of homosexuals."(8) Abortion and gay-rights supporters "are going to answer for it to God on Judgment Day." Holland threatened a Montana judge with a letter asserting that law enforcement officers will be killed and "sent home in body bags" if they challenge the militia.(9) After Holland also sent the letter to the Montana Attorney General, the IRS, and the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, he was arrested and charged in May 1995 with "criminal syndicalism" for advocating crime and malicious damage or injury to property, violence, or other unlawful methods of terrorism against public officials as a means of accomplishing political ends.(10) Holland pled guilty to that and jury tampering, then challenged Montana's criminal syndicalism law.(11)
- Gordon Sellner, a Montana Christian Patriot, was wounded and arrested after three years in hiding for allegedly shooting and wounding a deputy sheriff.(12) His troubles began when he stopped paying taxes because of the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court's ROE V. WADE decision. His 20-year battle with a government "on the wrong side of God's law" resulted in the IRS seizing his property.(13)

- Militia leaders arrested in clinic protests include minister Ian Roebuck and Scott Futterman. Roebuck, former state commander of the South Carolina Civilian Militia, (14) and his two sons were among 400 anti-abortion activists arrested for picketing Palmetto State Medical Center in January 1993. (15) Futterman, arrested for trespassing outside a Tampa clinic in 1989, heads a Florida militia group. (16) He states that unlike the Oklahoma City bombers, "We're not baby-killing wackos. We're out for people's rights." (17)

Storming Waco and the "Womb Compound"

The bloody 1992 standoff between federal agents and white supremacist Randy Weaver, ending in the deaths of his wife and son and a U.S. marshal, and the disastrous 1993 FBI assault on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, added new rallying points for anti-abortion extremists, already hostile to federal law enforcement and the Justice Department. Paul de Parrie is a signer of Paul Hill's Defensive Action petition (which claims it is "justifiable homicide" to kill abortion providers) and the editor of LIFE ADVOCATE magazine. Recently an Oregon judge declared de Parrie a stalker and ordered him to permanently cease contact with a clinic director he had threatened. (18)

de Parrie writes that the government, "drunk on the blood of the innocent...foment[s] a pogrom against all who subscribe to a Judeo-Christian belief system. Using extremists like David Koresh in Waco or Randy Weaver in Idaho...[they portray] anyone who doesn't bow to Pax Americana and the New World Order [as] a subversive." Attacking the federal protection of reproductive rights, deParrie claims "New World Enforcement boss and consummate pro-abortion" Attorney General Janet Reno not only stormed the Waco compound but "authorizes the storming of the womb compound." (19)

Waco, he believes, portends "the prospects of similar 'final solutions' for Christians, patriots, and pro-lifers." (20)

Texas anti-abortion leader Jack DeVault (Major, USAF, Ret.) actually conducted a "reconnaissance mission" at Waco to determine whether "rescuers... should consider attempting a rescue operation... to stop the shedding of innocent blood." (21) He helped gather 60 protesters, including four Operation Rescue activists, to demonstrate at the Waco compound.

During the Branch Davidian trial, DeVault, a convicted abortion clinic blockader, spent his nights in a San Antonio jail. He spent his days on "work release" reporting on the trial to "patriots" through the American Patriot Fax Network and also Radio Free America, a radio program that has hosted "a steady stream" of Holocaust deniers and neo-Nazis for years. (22) In his book, THE WACO WHITEWASH, DeVault proposed forming sheriffs' posses trained by regional militias against "meddling federal agents [who] must be run out of the county."

Rev. W.N. Otwell, a fundamentalist pastor who runs God Said Ministries from a "well-armed compound" (23) in Mount Enterprise, Texas, protested at the Branch Davidian trial and at the Waco compound during the siege and two years later with militia members the day of the Oklahoma City bombing. (24) He led protests outside President Clinton's church to call for his "disfellowship" for his support of abortion and gay rights. (25) He protested a Promisekeeper rally for "race-mixing," claiming America is "the white man's country." (26)

Otwell has repeatedly led his followers at protests at a Louisiana abortion clinic, sometimes dressed in military-style camouflage. (27) Otwell comments on his fight against abortion and its cause, what he calls

"femmejezebels": "I go way back to [Operation Rescue's blockades in] '88 Atlanta. Spent time in jail...I've also been witness to the harlotry of feminism in Fort Worth, Dallas...Chicago, and Tulsa..."(28) In May 1996, he traveled to the Freeman's ranch in Montana to support their armed standoff with the federal government, holding a rally and "a court of divine justice" to bring God's judgment on the federal government.(29)

Larry Pratt: Mainstreaming Militias

Advocacy of militias is not new, although the public's awareness of militia activity has increased, largely due to Waco, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the Freeman stand-off with federal officials. As far back as 1983, Larry Pratt, executive director of Gun Owners of America -- a group founded in the 1970s because the NRA was perceived as "too liberal"(30) -- was proposing well-armed local militias because "anti-Christian governments such as we have in the United States cannot be counted to keep the peace."(31)

At a 1992 Estes Park, Colorado, meeting convened in response to the Randy Weaver episode, Pratt offered the "armed militia units" of Guatemala and the Philippines as a model for American patriots in the "national struggle for survival."(32) The meeting was convened by Rev. Pete Peters, a leading proponent of the racist, anti-Semitic pseudo-theology of Christian Identity. Listening intently were 150 "militant anti-government zealots...Identity, Posse Comitatus, the Klan, Aryan Nations, Reconstructionists and other fundamentalist Christians, neo-Nazis, tax resisters, Second Amendment advocates and anti-abortion extremists."(33) Pratt has spoken at numerous other white supremacist gatherings, including a Missouri Christian Identity conference days after the Oklahoma City bombing.(34) Rev. Otwell joined Pratt as a speaker at this conference.(35)

Pratt cannot be written off as a fringe extremist. He is a practiced politician who regularly lobbies Congress against gun control. The Capitol Hill newspaper, ROLL CALL, called him "almost a shadow congressman." The Gun Owners of America Inc. Political Victory Fund contributed to 46 GOP House and Senate campaigns in 1994.(36)

Ideologues of the far-right such as Pratt have never been far beneath the surface of the militant wing of the anti-choice movement. In 1990, when Randall Terry took Operation Rescue "underground" to avoid paying court-ordered judgments, Pratt came to his aid. The crisis began when federal agents seized O.R.'s bank accounts in December 1989. O.R. violated an injunction not to block New York City clinics, then refused to pay a \$50,000 fine. One of Terry's aides met Larry Pratt at a "rescue" movement meeting and asked for his assistance.(37) Pratt's Committee to Protect the Family Foundation raised nearly \$150,000 to pay O.R.'s bills, without O.R. ever holding the money.(38) In a series of fundraising letters, Pratt accused the government of "doing the feminists' dirty work with YOUR tax dollars" and praised O.R.'s thousands of "new troops" in the "battle for the unborn."(39) Pratt halted the letters when a judge ruled that the Foundation could be held liable for the fines.(40)

In February 1996, Pratt took a leave of absence as one of four co-chairs of the Buchanan for President Campaign after reports linking him to militias and white supremacist groups became national news.(41) The day after Pratt stepped aside as a co-chair of the Buchanan campaign, he was a guest on Randall Terry's radio show. Terry called him "a man who I consider my friend" and defended him claiming, "it's unbelievable, Larry, what they tried to paint you as. It's literally unbelievable...."(42)

Operation Rescue Leader Now Leads Missouri Militia

A number of elected officials and political candidates show the link between militias and the anti-choice movement. John Moore, founder of the 1st Missouri Volunteers, a militia group, ran for Congress from Missouri; two key campaign issues were his "opposition to gun control and to abortion."⁽⁴³⁾ Moore boasted that he has been collecting and "providing confidential information about those who perform abortions to the pro-life movement."⁽⁴⁴⁾ Elected officials, including anti-choice Missouri State Representative Rich Chrismer and Missouri State Senator David Klarich, have both spoken at two rallies sponsored by Moore's militia.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Chrismer has been arrested at least seven times and convicted at least three times in actions at reproductive health centers.

Tim Dreeste, the north central co-director of the American Coalition of Life Activists (ACLA), is also captain and chaplain of Moore's 1st Missouri Volunteers.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Dreeste, a named defendant in a \$150 million national class-action suit that seeks to stop ACLA from making threats against abortion providers,⁽⁴⁷⁾ was the spokesperson for Pat Buchanan delegates during the 1996 Missouri GOP primaries and is running for MO state representative.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Dreeste, who led contingents in Operation Rescue's (O.R.'s) 1988 invasions of clinics in New York and Atlanta, and was arrested in O.R.'s 1991 "Summer of Mercy" in Wichita, lists his occupation as "full-time pro-life missionary."⁽⁴⁹⁾ Outside an Illinois clinic, he has worn a hat with live shotgun shells in the hatband and warned, "My name is John Hill. You know my brother Paul..."⁽⁵⁰⁾ After Dr. Gunn was murdered, Dreeste carried a sign naming a local physician, "Dr. [name withheld] are you feeling under the Gunn?"⁽⁵¹⁾

Militias have also been politically active through ballot initiatives. Samuel Sherwood's United States Militia Association filed three Idaho ballot initiatives for 1996. One called for capital punishment for anyone who provides an abortion.⁽⁵²⁾

Rev. Matt Trehwella and the U.S. Taxpayer's Party

Other veteran anti-choice activists have strong militia connections and are now active in the U.S. Taxpayer's Party, a national third party that joins anti-abortion extremists, anti-government Christian Patriots, and Buchanan supporters who feel betrayed by the Republican Party. Ernest Brusubardis III, captain of the Wisconsin Militia,⁽⁵³⁾ ran for Wisconsin secretary of state on the U.S. Taxpayers Party (USTP) ticket. Brusubardis was arrested four times in 1991 and 1992 for disorderly conduct and trespassing at Milwaukee-area clinic blockades.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Three of these blockades were led by Missionaries to the Preborn, which made Milwaukee a national center of anti-abortion activity in 1992, leading a three-month clinic siege with more than 1,200 arrests for trespassing and disorderly conduct, at a cost to the city of \$826,671.⁽⁵⁵⁾

Missionaries to the Preborn leader Rev. Matthew Trehwella emerged as the first anti-choice leader to publicly call for militias.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Trehwella, a signer of Paul Hill's Defensive Action petition, serves on the USTP national committee as a Wisconsin representative.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Trehwella's extreme anti-abortion views predated the Milwaukee blockades and the murder of physicians who performed abortions. NEWSWEEK revealed that "John," a former army reservist and member of the Missionaries (who lived in Trehwella's basement for nearly five months in 1990) kept a journal that included "apparent plans for a guerrilla campaign of clinic bombings and assassinations of doctors."⁽⁵⁸⁾ His deprogrammer said that "Trehwella had brainwashed John so the young man could be wound up and sent out on autodestroy."

The USTP provides Trehwella and others a new forum to express extreme views. At a 1994 USTP Wisconsin State Convention, Trehwella asked, "What should we do? We should do what thousands of

people across this nation are doing. We should be forming militias." He continued, "...There are plans of resistance being made. Churches can form militia days and teach their men how to fight." Trehwella's Mercy Seat Christian Church in Milwaukee holds classes for its members on "the use of firearms...and how to be a good shot."(59)

Trehwella also told his church that "This Christmas, I want you to do the most loving thing... buy each of your children an SKS rifle and 500 rounds of ammunition...." Trehwella, who home-schools his children, boasted of how he teaches his 16-month-old son Jeremiah the location of his "trigger finger." He says, playing with Jeremiah, "Toes, toes, toes, toes...fingers, fingers, fingers. And then I grab his trigger finger and I go `trigger finger.'"(60)

At the 1994 convention, the USTP sold a paramilitary manual titled PRINCIPLES JUSTIFYING THE ARMING AND ORGANIZING OF A MILITIA that cited "legalized abortion" as the first of several reasons why one should "spring immediately and effectively to arms."(61) Another speaker, Jeff Baker, told the crowd, "Abortionists should be put to death. They are murderers."(62)

Networking with "The Freeman"

Rev. Matt Trehwella also is a frequent guest on WVCY, Milwaukee's Christian radio/TV station. This station is being sued by a clinic escort, who is charging WVCY with libel for repeatedly broadcasting the false story that the escort kicked a child during a protest near an abortion clinic.

In retaliation for the civil suit, a WVCY employee filed a \$100 million lien against the escort, a paper terrorism tactic used by Christian Patriots. A lien makes a claim against the target's assets. In the lien, the WVCY employee accused the escort of "genocide against humanity" and working "in complicity with Planned Parenthood and their affiliated abortion clinics to sexually abuse and molest minor girls and adult women."(63)

According to court papers filed in the Wisconsin civil suit,(64) telephone calls were placed between WVCY employees and LeRoy Schweitzer and Rodney Skurdal of Montana. Schweitzer has instructed people across the country on the Christian Patriot tactic of filing bogus liens against those they consider political enemies (such as the Secretary of the Treasury). These liens suggest a prelude to violence. Schweitzer says, "We're not hanging them yet. We don't have enough people to make the arrest, yet....So what we're doing is going after the property first. ...We'll get to the clean-up later."(65)

Schweitzer and Skurdal holed up on a foreclosed ranch they called Justus Township, a Freeman property in Jordan, Montana, before Schweitzer's arrest in March 1996. Skurdal and other "freemen," who did not recognize the legitimacy of the federal government and tried to establish their own court system based on common law, were in an armed standoff with federal authorities that was resolved in June 1996. These white supremacists are charged with conspiracy, bank and mail fraud involving millions of dollars in worthless checks, armed robbery, weapons violations, and threatening to kidnap and kill a federal judge.(66) Schweitzer was also being sued for attempting to purchase \$1.4 million worth of military arms with a fraudulent check, a case that was resolved out of court with a civil default judgment of \$640,340.(67)

Additionally, according to the lawsuit, WVCY formed The National Civil Liberties Legal Foundation (NCLLF) and appointed Missionaries to the Preborn advisor Gene Zimmerman to direct this legal assistance group. Zimmerman, in NCLFF seminars, promoted Schweitzer's strategies of threat and harassment, instructing students how to make common law arrests and place liens against people's assets.

WVCY telephone records, according to the lawsuit, show Zimmerman and his assistant calling Skurdal/Schweitzer. Dale Pultz, a Missionary to the Preborn and convicted FACE defendant,(68) used forms identical to Zimmerman's when he imposed a \$700,000 "common law" lien against a judge who jailed him for blocking clinic doors in violation of a state court injunction.(69) Pultz also issued a "Citizen's Warrant for citizen's arrest" against the judge)(70)

The Wisconsin Department of Justice charged him with criminal slander of title, forging the judge's signature, and simulating legal process. Zimmerman and NCLLF sell their forms through THE ANTI-SHYSTER, a far-right publication promoting anti-government conspiracy theories and attacking the legal system.(71)

Learn How to Load Weapons and Organize Against Abortion

Private Christian schools, in addition to some churches and radio stations like WVCY, serve as vehicles to spread anti-abortion views to a wider audience. Rev. Paul Lindstrom's Chicago Christian Liberty Academy is a seedbed of extremism. Jailed for 10 days in 1988 for an Operation Rescue protest at an Atlanta women's health center, Lindstrom urged ministers to join the "rescue" movement because it's a cause "worth fighting for. It's worth dying for."(72) Lindstrom's Christian Liberty Academy students heeded his anti-choice call. They were "among the first to jump into the fray" when an abortion clinic planned to open in their Chicago suburb.(73) Students held a press conference in January 1996 announcing that they will picket and display crosses and an "abortion kill scoreboard" if a heated court battle ends in the clinic opening.(74)

In 1995, Lindstrom held a two-day Symposium on Security and Survival with paramilitary anti-abortion activist Peter Hammond from South Africa. Hammond spoke on "Firearms and self-defense" and "Strategies for Survival."(75) Hammond, author of THE CHRISTIAN AT WAR, said, "The young are the guided missiles that God has placed in our hands and we should not hand them over to the pagans to be educated." He demonstrated how to load and unload automatic weapons so "you can [safely] hand it to your son to play with and strip." It is not known how many Christian Liberty Academy students attended Hammond's talk. But with 500 students in Illinois, a \$1.5 million building, schools in Moscow, Tokyo, and Suriname, and 25,000 families allegedly receiving CLA's home school curriculum, CLA is a worldwide operation training young people in anti-abortion militancy.(76)

Abortion Providers Face Threat of Militia Violence

Violence posed by the anti-abortion and militia movements ranges from frightening rhetoric to bombings. The climate created by militia groups increases the potential for violence generally, and for abortion and family planning providers specifically. For example, a group calling itself the Plainsmen strung up a hangman's noose (representing God's judgment) and hung a steel plate riddled with bullets on the fence of a new Planned Parenthood clinic in Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1995.(77)

Plainsmen leader Larry Ball, who says he lacks the "moral courage" to kill an abortion doctor himself, wrote, "I have become impressed with the increasingly serious talk of civil insurrection against the United States Government... law abiding citizens are coming to the point that they feel like our government punishes the innocent and protects the guilty. These people are forming militia."(78) The Plainsmen, like Paul deParrie, link Attorney General Janet Reno with Waco and abortion, referring to her as "Abort `em or Burn `em Janet."(79)

Last May, a message from Bob Celeste, a leader of the Maine State Militia, was posted on the Internet

addressing "the shootings going on at planned parenthood [sic] abortion mills." It warned that "what planned parenthood should be concerned about is when, when not if, someone trained, skilled and working off not emotion but conviction starts taking them on." (80)

And as recently as July 1996, Willie Ray Lampley, head of the Oklahoma Constitutional Militia, and two others from Oklahoma were sentenced for federal bomb conspiracy charges in a plot to blow up abortion clinics, offices of the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League, gay bars, and welfare organizations with 210 pounds of ammonium nitrate and nitro methane. Lampley was ordered to serve 11 1/2 years in jail, his wife, Cecilia, received 4 1/2 years, and his accomplice, J.D. Baird, 10 years. (81)

Conclusion

The rhetoric of 'wombs and Waco' clearly demonstrates the comprehensive nature of the ideology driving key elements of anti-choice activism. The anti-abortion views of Christian Patriots and the armed right are clear if not always publicly acted upon. Abortion, along with taxes, homosexuality, gun control, and anti-environmentalism, is often a "bridge" issue among religious political extremist factions, as well as a bridge to a wider public from which to recruit. The evidence of overlap and realignment in these movements gives rise to new understanding of both movements, which turn out to be less distinct than previously thought. Abortion serves as one catalyst in the long-term struggle to replace democracy with theocracy, where idiosyncratic versions of God's Law are enforced -- perhaps by a sheriff, perhaps by militias, but certainly by men and certainly by force.

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